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Iran at the Crossroads

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1

The Paradoxes of Politics in Postrevolutionary Iran

Mehrzad Boroujerdi

The way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test Reality we must see it on the tight-rope. When the Verities become acrobats we can judge them.
—Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Anachronistic, bewildering, enigmatic, incongruent, intricate, ironic, multidimensional, paradoxical, permutable, recondite, serendipitous, and unpredictable are among the oftmentioned descriptions of the intellectual and political landscape of Iran over the last two decades. Why has the Iranian intellectual milieu acquired such traits?

In answering the above question, this essay proposes the following points: (a) to understand the subtlety, specificity, and the seemingly contradictory intellectual heritage of contemporary Iran, one needs to develop an ear for the whisperings of irony and an eye for the nuances of paradox which have baptized Iran's revolution over the last two decades; (b) the profound cultural, economic, and social transformations of the postrevolutionary era have endowed Iranian politics with a degree of sophistication and multidimensionality previously unimaginable—consideration of this fact should remind us not to perpetuate the analytical error of the revolution's first decade by attributing the monumental political transformations that have taken place to any leader's words or deeds; and (c) since coming to power in 1979, the clerical establishment and Shii jurisprudence have been ambushed by politics and entrapped in the epistemological labyrinth of modernity.

The Benison of Irony

The paradoxical nature of political truth in contemporary Iran is clearly on display once we look at the following characteristics of the postrevolutionary polity:

- A constitution that simultaneously affirms religious and secular principles, democratic and antidemocratic tendencies, as well as populist and elitist predilections.
- A society in which many cultural, political, and social institutions are Western and modern in pedigree and configuration, yet native and traditional in iconography and nomenclature.
- A "hyperpoliticized" polity that does not benefit from the presence of recognized, legitimate, or effective political parties.
- A theocracy where religion is an axiom of political life and yet secular agents, aspirations, ideas, institutions, language, and motifs continue to survive and—more importantly—manifest their significance in the realms of private and public space.
- A society where the eclectic texture of its popular culture have made the practicality—let alone desirability—of religiously sanctioned statecraft very much doubtful. This reality has led to a gradual but consistent disillusionment with the belief that "Islam is the only [political] solution."
- A clerical leadership that has claimed to protect tradition but has amended and broken numerous age-old religious protocols for the sake of state expediency.
- A society whose Islamic intellectuals resort to the writings of Western thinkers to validate their own "Islamic" critique of the West.
- A citizenry that has come to enjoy an era of intellectual prosperity while living under a politically repressive state.
- A society where women's rights were trampled upon, yet women continued to make serious strides into the educational, cultural, and employment domains, thereby increasing awareness of women's rights and issues at the social level.[1]

There are other bewildering and contradictory trends and structures as well. For example, although many Muslim modernists denounce Western modernity and portray Islam as the solution to all their social ills, the Iranian Shii modernists—who have been the target of attacks by the ruling

clerical establishment—are calling for a secular system of government to rescue religion from becoming even more mercantile and utilitarian. What makes this paradox even more interesting is that "secular Islamists"—another oxymoron—are advocating secularism at a time when many Western experts on Islam argue that Shiism is one of the religions least prone to secularization.[2]

One needs only to survey questions debated by scholarly and political elites to gauge Iran's intellectual barometer during the last two decades. Among the most pressing topics of debate and questioning are the following eight:

(1) *Democracy:* Is democracy merely a method of governing? Can one embrace democracy without adhering to humanism? Is epistemological pluralism the most central pillar of democratic practice? In the case of conflict between democratic rights and sacred law, which should prevail? Should the ballot box supercede religious interpretations in the Islamic Republic? Should leaders and managers be elected by the people or be appointed by religious authorities? Can a religious democracy be formed by simply embracing such Islamic concepts as consultation (*shura*), consensus (*ijma*), and allegiance (*bayat*)? Has there ever been a civil society in Iran? Is the "Islamic Republic" an oxymoron? What is the future of *velayat-i faqih* (rule of the juris-consult)?

(2) *Epistemology and Interpretation of Islam:* Should religion be relegated to the domain of individual consciousness? Should Islamic jurisprudence be subjected to epistemological analysis and hermenutical readings? Would such an exposure lead Muslims toward deism?

(3) *Islam and Ideology:* Is an ideological interpretation of religion possible, desirable, and/or inevitable? Is Islam a political religion by nature? Should professional/administrative competence take precedent over ideological commitment? Is Islam compatible with nationalism? Should the practices and rhetoric of revolutionary activism continue more than two decades after the revolution?

(4) *Islam and Modernity:* Can modernity be overcome? Can modernity be reconfigured? Are there non-Western varieties of modernity? Is it possible for criticisms of modernity to serve as a cultural-historical shortcut to the future for non-Western soci-

eties? Can Muslims borrow anything from the postmodernist criticism of modernity? Should Islam be interpreted in terms of the principles of modernity? If not, how should Islam be interpreted? How can Iranians become modern?

(5) *Islam and the West:* Are secularism and Westernization one and the same? What have been the repercussions of Muslims' and Christians' different and nonsynchronous encounters with modern civilization? Should criticisms of Eurocentric ideologies lead to incrimination of Enlightenment principles? Is selective philosophical borrowing from the West possible? What is Western thought? How do you thwart or create immunity toward Western "cultural invasion?"

(6) *Pluralism:* Is pluralism compatible with religiosity? How can one reconcile the belief in one religion leading to salvation with the diversity of religions? Does Islam allow for pluralism or only coexistence and tolerance? Can there be different ways of reaching the truth? Should religious pluralism be distinguished from sociopolitical pluralism? Does religious pluralism pave the way for secularism? Is religious pluralism an appropriate topic of discussion for the masses or just the intellectual elite? Are clerics the sole trustees of the community?

(7) *Religion and Science/Technology:* Is science a disinterested entity? Does science need philosophy—especially a spiritually endowed Eastern or Oriental one? Is technology merely a tool at the disposal of humans, or is it the embodiment of a new and subjugating metaphysics of being? Is there a future for religion in a world dominated by scientific thought?

(8) *Rights and Freedoms:* Can the social rights of atheists be accepted in a religious society? Should religious minorities benefit from the same rights and freedoms as Muslims? Do freedom and justice oppose one another? Is freedom an Islamic concept? Is there a human rights discourse in Islam? Should the Universal Declaration of Human Rights be accepted? Are there first- and second-class citizens in an Islamic republic? Should heretics and nonbelievers enjoy freedom of expression? Is society's interest and security more threatened by limiting freedom or enlarging it?

These questions illustrate the zest and complexity of the Iranian intellectual community. The disagreements concerning the nature of science, religion, and secularism in the modern world testify to the existing gap between text and practice, ought to be and is, politics and jurisprudence, and local and global. One venue for comprehending these gaps is to examine the relationship between religion and politics.

Cajoling a Muscular State

In addition to the institutions it had inherited from the ancien régime—state ministries, public universities, schools, courts, parliament, and so on—the Islamic Republic felt compelled to manufacture a plethora of assemblies, committees, councils, courts, foundations, and organs to exert its ideological control. The appropriation of the inherited institutions and the invented new organs modified the contours of Iranian statecraft by making the state even more "muscular."[3]

The advantages of having a muscular state became evident in the volatile political ambiance of the early 1980s, as the clerical regime moved swiftly to subdue its opponents. The state could now afford to regard public opposition of any kind as seditious and to restrict or repress any political activity outside its purview. Many of the above organs, usually run by zealous believers, showed no restraints in their power to ingress upon individual and civil rights or to devour civic initiatives and institutions. Overtime, however, as they became arenas for factional infighting, overlapping responsibilities, and conflicting policies, the government decided to consolidate them into more established and bureaucratic agencies. As the system moved from populist agitation toward state consolidation, its statesmen came to rely upon codified laws and bureaucratic procedures. Hence, another paradox was born. Even when the advocates of the interventionist state managed to strip from the constitution many of its democratic and legalistic elements in the name of political expediency, they, nevertheless, came to realize that codified law, bureaucratic rules, and standard operating procedures can be binding. If not already, the clergy may realize in due time that the takeover of the institutions of the modern state has forced them to submit to its implacable logic, bow to its imperious demands, and embrace the alienation that goes with all power.

A more challenging endeavor facing the ruling clerics was how to purify Iranian culture from its non-Islamic traits and make the citizenry's lives compatible with "Islamic" teachings. Most indicators so far point to the fact that the clergy have failed in their social engineering. While the "vice police" roamed the streets of Iranian cities, they failed to funda-

mentally alter the dynamics of private life and discourse in a country where charm, compassion, dignity, grace, and subtlety are considered as given rules of social etiquette. Domestic and familial life may never have been fully secularized in Iran, but it was not about to fall prey to religious extremism or revolutionary hysteria either. People came up with ingenious forms of camouflage and double talk to safeguard their privacy. Moreover, they managed to undermine or at least dilute the severity of the clergy's edicts by resorting to adroit humor, conspiracy theories, cynicism, dissimulation, irreverence, nostalgic rehabilitation of the old regime, perversion of the laws, secrecy, symbolic discourse, and outright dissent.

Resistance to clerical rule by fiat has been most evident among Iran's stoic, and predominantly secular, middle class. As the middle class's economic capital has drastically shrunk in the turbulent postrevolutionary Iran—resulting from the gap between the cost of living and annual wages—they hang on more than ever to their most precious badge of honor—their "habitus."[4] Moreover, this class has used its "cultural capital"—the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next[5]—to subvert the present theocracy. The oppositional behavior of the middle class is a form of resistance to an ideological state that has not been able to deliver on its promises. Meanwhile, due to increasing rates of urbanization, literacy, and bureaucratization of state power, the middle class has been able to perpetuate itself. Apparently, an increasing number in Iran's ruling circle are reaching the conclusion that they need to stop, if not reverse, the process of devaluing and depreciating the cultural capital of Iran's influential middle class. They seem to have realized that the state can no longer afford to ignore the candid calls of a critical mass of secular-minded technocrats, professionals, and industrialists, all of whom are demanding the liberalization of the educational system, relaxation of artistic and cultural restraints, abandonment of cultural xenophobia toward the West, and legal moderation. Moreover, considering the changing demography of the country, they also need to be concerned about the revolution of rising expectations among Iran's increasingly urban, literate, and young population.[6]

Another bone of contention between the clerically dominated state and its secular interlocutors is the issues of nationalism and pre-Islamic Iranian identity. The Islamic regime initially had a troublesome relationship with ancient Persian lineage, customs, traditions, artifacts, and festivals. In their attempt to properly "Islamicize" the cultural reference point of

many Iranians, they felt that they had to fight Western cultural influences, while deprogramming Iranians from any attachment to their notions of pre-Islamic values and ideas. They soon realized that diluting the richness of Persian culture was not an easy task and, therefore, they somewhat relented their cultural offensive against Iran's pre-Islamic traditions and icons. The new leaders reluctantly learned that they had no choice but to coexist with pre-Islamic Iranian culture, symbols, practices, and identity, as Iranians were in no hurry to abandon their collective memory of a glorious past that is still sufficiently attractive.[7] They also had to digest a speedy ideological rapprochement with Iranian nationalism as the war with Iraq broke out in 1980. Those who had lamented nationalism as an insidious ideology for Muslims now had to wrap themselves in its mantle, embrace its iconography, and partake in its passionate discourse. Whereas the war with Iraq enabled the clergy to consolidate their power and subdue their opponents, the hostilities also bolstered Iranians' sense of self-confidence and "national" pride.

The Janus face of the Islamic Republic is most abundantly clear in the cultural realm. The 1979 revolution yielded a flourishing press. By the middle of 1979, more than 260 government-owned as well as independent papers were published in Iran, with a majority devoted to political and social themes.[8] The "spring of freedom," however, did not last more than a few months. The new regime could not tolerate the rampant debates in the pages of the print media about the form, nature, and legitimacy of the new republic and its revolutionary institutions.[9] By 1982, only 66 legally approved papers were in operation.[10] To compensate for the lack of political parties in a society marked by intellectual ferment and an agile generation demanding greater freedoms, however, the clerics had to loosen, at least slightly, restrictions on the press. This is not to suggest that there was a smooth transition to cultural opening. In 1987, Esmail Fassih, one of postrevolutionary Iran's most popular novelists, inaugurated his article on the status of the writer in contemporary Iran with the following witty remark: "In the Bejeweled Land of (traditionally *Shahanshahi*) Persia, a good writer is a dead writer."[11] Furthermore, in his resignation letter of July 1992 as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Hojjatolislam Mohammad Khatami sharply wrote:

> Unfortunately for a while now we are witnessing that in the field of cultural affairs all legal, religious, ethical, and secular norms are being violated. We have gotten way beyond the realm of critique and evaluation (even unfair ones). Nowadays every means is justified in the name of certain ends and

as such the order of things is about to lose its logical and legal relevance. As such, an unhealthy and turbulent atmosphere is about to be created. The most immediate effect of this ambiance is the discouragement and insecurity of fine and distinguished thinkers and artists, even those who are firm believers in the revolution and Islam.[12]

Nonetheless, in due time, Iranian society came to experience an explosion of publications—presently estimated to be around 1,300; a booming translation industry; and a thriving cinema industry.[13] The track record of the press corps demonstrates that they have played a crucial role in shaping Iranian public opinion, producing ideas different from that of the state, making the citizenry conscious of their rights, and enabling people to express their views within the established boundaries.[14] Thanks to the presence of a critical mass of independent papers and literati, Iranians have come to enjoy serious journalism and a lively press. Considering its catalytic powers, the press has the potential to exert further pressure on the state to embark upon political liberalization.[15]

In short, Iran's political barometer indicates that despite its propaganda and bravado, the Islamic Republic has failed to inundate its secular opponents. As champions of a modernist subculture and a secularist discourse, both the nationalist and the leftist forces constitute a formidable alternative to a clerical leadership beset by epistemological and political hazards. The theoretical self-criticism and growing intellectual maturation of these forces, which is reflected in their adoption of indigenous and ingenious new political positions, will most certainly enhance their public fortune and should beget them an ample pool of disciples in a more open political ambiance.[16] We should also bear in mind that, whereas many former Islamists are now defecting to the secularist camp, there have been no consequential defections in the other direction. As such, the fallacious temptation to dismiss the legitimacy of the secular forces and the viability of their discourse should be avoided. Present projections about the withering away of secular thought in Iran may prove as shortsighted as prophecies about the demise of Islam rampant in the 1970s.

Politics Invades the "Republic of Virtue"

The 1979 revolution was the culmination of an invasion of politics by religious forces determined to set up a "republic of virtue." Ironically, however, the materialization of Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of divine rule of jurists (*velayat-i faqih*) entrapped the clerical establishment as well as Shii

jurisprudence in a political quagmire. The new revolutionary elites faced economic and political problems not reducible to or analyzable by means of religious givens. The antiquity and the private character of *shariah* law made it rather ill equipped to deal with the legal and public needs of a modern, stratified, and revolutionary polity. Consequently, the ruling clerics had to invoke the "exigency of the state" argument.[17] The periodic and public invocation of this argument, in turn, further diluted the legitimacy of the theory of *velayat-i faqih.* Not only this central theoretical principle of the Islamic Republic remained a minority position among the highest ranking Shii theologians—a great majority of whom remained apolitical—but it was also repudiated by members of the new politically active class of religious intellectuals. Abdolkarim Sorush (b. 1945), the leading contemporary theoretician of this class, discarded the theory of *velayat-i faqih* in the following fashion:

> The language of religion (and Islam in particular) as reflected in the Qur'an and the hadiths is more a language of obligation rather than right. The tone of the scriptures is one of an all powerful and mighty Lord who commands and prohibits the humans and reminds the believers of their duties. . . . In my view, one of the reasons which has made the comprehension of *velayat-e faqih* and Islamic government difficult for both supporters and followers is this very issue. A government of *velayat-e faqih* is one that is based on duties [obligation or onus] while the mind of the modern man and most of new political philosophies bases government on rights and consent of the citizenry. It is a dangerous and destructive eclecticism when the ruler and the ruled fluctuate from speaking and behaving in accordance with principles of rights and speaking and behaving in accordance with the duty of obligation.[18]

Sorush maintained that modern man is one who has reserved for himself the "right" to obligation (not the "duty" to be obligated) to God. Moreover, he does not recognize anyone's right to claim divineness in politics and government. One of Sorush's colleagues went a step further and argued that the theory of *velayat-i faqih* was the last and most important attempt at (or catalyst for) secularization of Shii jurisprudence.[19] According to him, when a religious system moves toward the formation of a state, it becomes incumbent upon it to modify its religious laws in accordance with the new conditions at hand. A prerequisite for doing so is to prepare a strong digestive system to swallow an entity referred to as the "state."[20] Secularization is the catalyst that enables religion to absorb

the state and, in turn, precipitates the absorption of religion within the machinery of the state. As the state is the guardian of the national interest and as the protection of national interest requires the acceptance of "prudence or expediency" as a principle of statecraft, the theory of *velayat-i faqih* opens the gate for all types of willful and whimsical interpretations of *shariah* or the constitution.[21]

These modernist intellectuals maintain that such a trend has a deleterious impact on religion, because as soon as religion becomes tied up with the material interest and political considerations of a particular group (and, thus, becomes an ideology), its opportunity to develop and progress is diminished. They warn their religious brethren that considering the homegrown and spontaneous nature of the above developments in the Islamic Republic, the process of secularization will be more permanent and irreversible in Iran than in countries where it was induced by the irreligious.[22] As such, they maintain that a secular state is a better alternative to a theocratic system in which religion becomes tainted with the impurities and utilitarian compromises of politics and clerics become mere civil servants.

In the conclusion of his book, *The Constitution of Iran,* Asghar Schirazi echoes some of the same sentiments—albeit from a secular perspective:

> While members of the clergy have held on to their turbans and robes ever more tenaciously, they have at the same time increasingly taken over the offices of state and thus neglected their religious duties. Indeed, they have been transformed into state functionaries. It is not they, the bearers of religious authority, who have conquered the state and subordinated it to the rule of religion. Instead the reverse has happened: the state has conquered the clergy and along with them religion.[23]

Toward a Pensive Politics

The balance sheet of the last 20 years is interestingly bewildering—unprecedented progress juxtaposed against regressive changes. Whereas much of the current scholarship on postrevolutionary Iran has been concerned with the negative traits of this era (human rights abuses, fundamentalism, economic hardships, political violence, etc.), the more positive developments (deep-rooted socioeconomic changes, emergence of a self-defining, vibrant, and critical public discourse) have been more or less ignored or downplayed. I believe an accurate and holistic assessment of the balance sheet of postrevolutionary Iranian politics also requires an acknowledgement of how the tangled realities of social production have had somewhat of a cathartic effect on sociopolitical thought. By way of concluding this essay, I shall present a few examples of these hitherto disregarded positive trends.

One of the most noticeable developments during the last two decades has been the emergence of certain formal processes, institutions, and norms that are real and/or legitimate. For example, voting and elections have become institutionalized as candidates representing narrow but real rival groups compete with one another. Iran's ruling establishment seems to have more or less accepted the results of the electoral process as evidenced by the relatively low instance of voter fraud. While the parliament (*Majles*) operates within very defined parameters, it can no longer be considered as a rubber-stamp institution. Instead, it has become an effective debating chamber and a springboard for airing grievances by parliamentarians who engage in incessant politicking and do not shy away from using procedural rules such as vote of confidence and impeachment to accomplish their agendas. Furthermore, a new generation of political elites—many of whom hail from the provinces and have impeccable revolutionary credentials—has emerged, which is trying to increase its elbowroom in Iran's contentious political world. The incorporation of these and other political constituencies is making Iranian political life increasingly more inclusive. Today, one can argue that political factions in Iran are for real and their disagreements, particularly about cultural issues, are genuine and deeply held. These factions use such legally endowed institutions as the parliament or the press to wage their political/ideological fights or to jockey for power in a system distinguished by its overlapping power centers.

An even more positive omen of political maturity in postrevolutionary Iran is an increasing preference, across the political spectrum, for reformist rather than revolutionary change. This is an extremely important development, considering the historical proclivity of political movements in Iran to have called for the revolutionary overthrow of any governments of which they disapproved. After experiencing two revolutions and numerous other political upheavals in one century, it may now be finally possible to embrace a political culture that advocates the prudence and efficacy of reformist change.

Finally, one can argue that the excesses of the last two decades, which have been exorbitant and tragic in monetary and human cost, also have inadvertently contributed to positive changes in Iran's intellectual milieu.

Today, keen observers of Iranian politics cannot help but notice the changes in the intellectual orientation of some of the most doctrinaire organizations. Leftists as well as Islamic thinkers are questioning the credulity and corrupting influence of ideological thinking. Having freed themselves from the cordon of previously luminous ideologies, many of Iran's intellectuals are now busy articulating serious and sophisticated criticisms of autochthonous and quotidian features of Iranian political life such as authoritarianism, censorship, clientalism, cult of personality, *etatism,* fanaticism, influence peddling, partisanship, and violence. I believe that their earnest demands for accountability, civil rights, democracy, human rights, liberty, a limited state, political heterogeneity, social justice, tolerance, and transparency bodes well for Iran's future.

Notes

1. The following set of educational, employment, cultural, and social facts testify to this claim: (a) By the mid-1990s, females' literacy rate (aged six and over) climbed over 74 percent; girls and women constituted 46 percent of K-12 students; 50 percent of high school graduates; 40 percent of university students; 31 percent of graduates of higher education centers; 38 percent of all students getting MS, Ph.D., or postdoctorate degrees in medical sciences; 18 percent of university faculty; (b) while 65 percent of Iranian women are still housewives, their rate of participation in the economy has steadily increased. This participation rate has been most visible in the service sector, which accounts for over 45 percent of all female employment; (c) women now comprise a notable constituency of avid book readers, buyers, translators, editors, and authors, as well as poets, painters, photographers, art and film critics, actors, screen writers, makeup artists, directors, and cinematographers; and (d) the emergence of an increasingly potent women's movement is subjecting Islamic legal doctrines, patriarchal social practices, and sexist cultural norms to a rigorous feminist critique.
2. The advocates of this approach often mention such features of Shiism as its ideological grievances toward temporal authority, its tendency toward oppositionalism along with its communal, paternalistic, and highly emotional qualities to support their argument. For a criticism of this view, see Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "Can Islam be Secularized?" in M. R. Ghanoonparvar and Faridoun Farrokh , eds., *In Transition: Essays on Culture and Identity in the Middle Eastern Society,* (Laredo, TX: Texas A&M International University, 1994), pp. 55–64.

3. I have borrowed this concept from Fred Halliday. See his essay entitled "Portrait: Mohammad Khatami," *Prospect,* January 1998, p. 43.
4. Pierre Bourdieu has defined "habitus" as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions." He maintains that habitus "could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception." See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 82–83, 86.
5. For Bourdieu's discussion of cultural capital, see Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey, eds., *Power and Ideology in Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
6. In this regard, some of the more salient facts to keep in mind are the following: an urban population rate of 61.3 percent; a private sector that employs over 65 percent of the labor force; a population median age of 19.4 years (1996); and a literacy rate of 79.3 percent. In regard to the last fact, it is particularly noteworthy to remember that almost one-third of Iran's population (20 million) are students and that it has over five million people with postsecondary education.
7. Nor were the clerics, it seems, able to keep Western cultural influences at bay. In their "home territory," many members of Iran's middle and upper classes treated the specter of Western (and particularly American) popular culture—with its dynamic, modern, and youthful qualities—as an invisible guest. In other words, Western cultural traditions and icons may have been driven underground, but its presence could still be felt.
8. *Ayandah,* vol. 5, nos. 10–12 (Winter 1979), pp. 916–21. This was almost twice the number of newspapers and periodicals that were published in 1974.
9. In a famous speech in November 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini denounced the press and rhetorically asked the officials, "Why do you not stop these newspapers? Why do you not shut their mouths? Why do you not stop their pens?" See Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 148.
10. The clampdown on the press was preceded by a few months with attacks on the universities, which began in earnest in June of 1980 with the launching of the Cultural Revolution campaign. The government's eagerness to silence opponents became apparent, as armed gangs of hooligans loyal to

the hardline clergy assaulted campuses with the proclaimed goal of evicting the offices of politically affiliated groups. In 1984, the Minister of Higher Education gave the world a glimpse of the devastating consequences of the cultural revolution by revealing that "3,500 university teachers had been fired or had resigned during the period after the closing of the institutions of higher education." Cited in Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic,* trans. John O'Kane (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), p. 139.

11. Esmail Fassih, "The Status: A Day in the Life of a Contemporary Iranian Writer," *Third World Quarterly,* vol. 9, no. 3 (July 1987), p. 825.
12. "Saranjam Doktor Khatami Raft" [Dr. Khatami Finally Left], *Adineh,* no. 72 (Mordad 1371 [August 1992]), p. 5.
13. For further elaboration of these cultural developments, see Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "Iran's Intellectual Panorama," *Bulletin of the Center for Iranian Research and Analysis,* vol. 11, no. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 22–24.
14. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the facts that the circulation rate of the country's press is now approaching almost three million copies per day, and that the number of *provincial* journals is on the rise.
15. The fact that during the first 20 months of President Khatami's reign, 52 publications were banned temporarily or closed outright and that over 250 lawsuits were filed against various press personalities demonstrates that the ghost of censorship continues to haunt the Iranian press. However, the use of such draconian measures along with the beating and assassination of press personalities also reveals the effectiveness of the press in exposing power brokers and shaping public opinion.
16. For example, a good section of the Iranian leftist movement has engaged in a serious critique of the legacy of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union, armed struggle, and the necessity of a "revolutionary" transformation. They have substituted many of their previously orthodox positions with neoleftist and social democratic positions. Similarly, Iran's monarchists and republicanists have engaged in animated discussions concerning factionalism, pluralism, republicanism, reformism, and the legacy of the Pahlavi dynasty.
17. In this regard, it is worth remembering the following words of the Polish journalist, Ryszard Kapuscinski, who writes: "Although a system may cease to exist in the legal sense or as a structure of power, its values (or anti-values), its philosophy, its teachings remain in us. They rule our thinking, our conduct, our attitude to others. The situation is a demonic paradox: we have toppled the system but we still carry its genes." Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Independent* [London] (September 1, 1991).

18. Abdolkarim Sorush, "Mana va Mabnay-e Sekularism" [The Meaning and Basis of Secularism], *Kiyan* 26 (August-September 1995), pp. 9–10.
19. Jahangir Salehpour, "Farayand-e Urfi Shodan-e Feqh-e Shi'a" [The Secularization Process of Shii Jurisprudence], *Kiyan* 24 (April-May 1995), pp. 20–21.
20. Salehpour maintains that just as it happened in the West at the dawn of the formation of the nation-state, in Iran, as well, political thought has tilted toward an "absolutist state." Although in a peripheral country such as Iran, the Shii anxiety for establishing a powerful state also can be attributed to the unconscious attempt to deal with the problem of underdevelopment (the same way German idealism contributed to the formation of the powerful Prussian state). Ibid., pp. 22–23.
21. As proof of this trend, we can offer the following examples: Ayatollah Khomeini's famous edict that the interests of the state take precedence over even the most important tenants of faith (i.e., prayer, fasting, and hajj); Ayatollah Khomeini's dismissal of Ayatollah Montazeri as his designate heir apparent without first securing the consent of the Council of Experts; creation of *Shoray-e Tashkis-e Maslahat-e Nezam* (Council for Discernment of Governmental Expediency); distinguishing between the position of *Marja-i Taqlid* (source of emulation) and the leader; the appointment of little known Ayatollah Araki as the marja after Ayatollah Khomeini's death and declaring Hojjatolislam Khamenei as the new supreme leader; overnight upgrading of religious titles; and granting the Council of Guardians the power of approbation (*Nezarat-e Estesvabi*).
22. Salehpour 1995, p. 23.
23. Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran,* p. 303.

the hardline clergy assaulted campuses with the proclaimed goal of evicting the offices of politically affiliated groups. In 1984, the Minister of Higher Education gave the world a glimpse of the devastating consequences of the cultural revolution by revealing that "3,500 university teachers had been fired or had resigned during the period after the closing of the institutions of higher education." Cited in Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic,* trans. John O'Kane (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), p. 139.

11. Esmail Fassih, "The Status: A Day in the Life of a Contemporary Iranian Writer," *Third World Quarterly,* vol. 9, no. 3 (July 1987), p. 825.
12. "Saranjam Doktor Khatami Raft" [Dr. Khatami Finally Left], *Adineh,* no. 72 (Mordad 1371 [August 1992]), p. 5.
13. For further elaboration of these cultural developments, see Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "Iran's Intellectual Panorama," *Bulletin of the Center for Iranian Research and Analysis,* vol. 11, no. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 22–24.
14. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the facts that the circulation rate of the country's press is now approaching almost three million copies per day, and that the number of *provincial* journals is on the rise.
15. The fact that during the first 20 months of President Khatami's reign, 52 publications were banned temporarily or closed outright and that over 250 lawsuits were filed against various press personalities demonstrates that the ghost of censorship continues to haunt the Iranian press. However, the use of such draconian measures along with the beating and assassination of press personalities also reveals the effectiveness of the press in exposing power brokers and shaping public opinion.
16. For example, a good section of the Iranian leftist movement has engaged in a serious critique of the legacy of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union, armed struggle, and the necessity of a "revolutionary" transformation. They have substituted many of their previously orthodox positions with neoleftist and social democratic positions. Similarly, Iran's monarchists and republicanists have engaged in animated discussions concerning factionalism, pluralism, republicanism, reformism, and the legacy of the Pahlavi dynasty.
17. In this regard, it is worth remembering the following words of the Polish journalist, Ryszard Kapuscinski, who writes: "Although a system may cease to exist in the legal sense or as a structure of power, its values (or anti-values), its philosophy, its teachings remain in us. They rule our thinking, our conduct, our attitude to others. The situation is a demonic paradox: we have toppled the system but we still carry its genes." Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Independent* [London] (September 1, 1991).

18. Abdolkarim Sorush, "Mana va Mabnay-e Sekularism" [The Meaning and Basis of Secularism], *Kiyan* 26 (August-September 1995), pp. 9–10.
19. Jahangir Salehpour, "Farayand-e Urfi Shodan-e Feqh-e Shi'a" [The Secularization Process of Shii Jurisprudence], *Kiyan* 24 (April-May 1995), pp. 20–21.
20. Salehpour maintains that just as it happened in the West at the dawn of the formation of the nation-state, in Iran, as well, political thought has tilted toward an "absolutist state." Although in a peripheral country such as Iran, the Shii anxiety for establishing a powerful state also can be attributed to the unconscious attempt to deal with the problem of underdevelopment (the same way German idealism contributed to the formation of the powerful Prussian state). Ibid., pp. 22–23.
21. As proof of this trend, we can offer the following examples: Ayatollah Khomeini's famous edict that the interests of the state take precedence over even the most important tenants of faith (i.e., prayer, fasting, and hajj); Ayatollah Khomeini's dismissal of Ayatollah Montazeri as his designate heir apparent without first securing the consent of the Council of Experts; creation of *Shoray-e Tashkis-e Maslahat-e Nezam* (Council for Discernment of Governmental Expediency); distinguishing between the position of *Marja-i Taqlid* (source of emulation) and the leader; the appointment of little known Ayatollah Araki as the marja after Ayatollah Khomeini's death and declaring Hojjatolislam Khamenei as the new supreme leader; overnight upgrading of religious titles; and granting the Council of Guardians the power of approbation (*Nezarat-e Estesvabi*).
22. Salehpour 1995, p. 23.
23. Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran,* p. 303.