

## Editors' Introduction

This issue of *Radical History Review* marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Iranian revolution. The 1979 revolution brought about radical changes in the Iranian political, social, and cultural institutions, reverberated across the globe, and caused rifts and realignments in international relations. The complex and evolving nature of the postrevolutionary dynamics in Iran call for renewed reflections on the roots of the revolution, the processes leading to its victory, and its impact on the Muslim world and the global balance of power.

While this special issue was in production, the tenth presidential election in Iran and its aftermath caught the world's attention. In the following introduction, we speak about how the inherent contradiction in the postrevolutionary constitution became the point of reference on the one hand for the idea of republicanism and on the other for autocratic theocracy. The massive demonstrations against what the former president Mohammad Khatami called a "velvet coup against the people and the republic" has demonstrated that the Iranian revolution remains unfinished and its basic principles continue to be deeply contested.<sup>1</sup> The unanticipated response by hundreds of thousands of members of the electorate and by the allegedly defeated candidates, who refused to accept the fraudulent results, shook the country and generated an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy for the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. It is unclear whether the current protest movement will redirect the revolution toward its original democratic ideals or if its suppression will strip the Islamic regime of its republican core.

The events that followed the establishment of the Islamic Republic—the American hostage crisis of 1979–81, the devastating eight-year war between Iran and Iraq (1980–88), Tehran's ideological and political leverage in Lebanon, recent diplomatic tensions surrounding Iran's development of nuclear energy, and various domestic miscarriages—can obscure the sense of empowerment and euphoria the

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great majority of Iranians experienced in the wake of the revolution. With a fleeting solidarity across class, gender, ideological, and religious lines, the overwhelming majority of Iranians (with the exception of small groups opposing the toppling of the monarchic regime or weary of the mass fervor for radical change) demanded freedom from the political repression that had tightened its grip on the nation since the CIA-sponsored 1953 coup that had overthrown the elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq, and inaugurated the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.

By all accounts, the Iranian Revolution remains an unfinished project. Three decades after the revolution, it is fairly easy to underline the inherent contradictions between the revolutionary movement and its institutionalized manifestations. Whereas the discourse of the revolutionary movement was one of negation, liberty, and justice, the postrevolutionary state was established through the language of “blood and iron” and survival by any means possible. With the collapse of the monarchy in 1979, the coalition that made the revolution possible also vanished. The consolidation of power around a vision of Islamic government known as the *velāyat-e faqih* (guardianship of the [clerical] jurist) denied many participants in the revolutionary movement a share in the emerging postrevolutionary state.

The sudden disintegration of the old regime with its military might shocked both its Western supporters and the clerical leadership of the revolution. The clergy was neither ready to assume power nor able to conceive the organizational structure of the Islamic Republic. An amplified sense of a revolutionary *geist* led to an exaggerated sense of idealism and a determination to realize pure revolutionary objectives. This revolutionary confidence also augmented the resolve of the postrevolutionary state during its initial power struggle. Major competing factions in postrevolutionary politics operated from uncompromising platforms, leading to a state policy of the total annihilation of all ideological opponents and to the decade-long reign of terror. When millions of Iranians chanted in the streets of Tehran and other towns and provinces around the country “Esteqlāl, āzādi, jomhuri-ye Islami” (“Independence, liberty, Islamic Republic”) and “Barābari, barādari, hokumat-e ‘adl-e Ali” (“Equality, brotherhood, Imam Ali’s rule of justice”), they were plainly demonstrating their appreciation for an Islamic allegory of justice and equality. Islam was understood but not spoken of in practical and organizational terms. It was up to the new regime to render the symbolic language of slogans into tangible and immediate realities of state building. Although Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had already outlined the meaning of an Islamic state in his 1971 manifesto *Islamic Rule*, the influence of that document on the formation of the postrevolutionary regime proved negligible.

The revolution created a “new Man [*sic*],” in the Fanonian sense, through a violent process by which people freed themselves from the yoke of a tyrannical regime. In the idiom of the 1968 Paris uprising, initially this had appeared even to many participants in the demonstrations as “demand[ing] the impossible.” But the victory of the revolution unequivocally ended the period of symbolic appro-

priation of Islam by a diverse spectrum of political factions and social groups. As Michael Fischer observed, “political victory requires a spelling out in political and institutional terms of what previously could be left in vague philosophical and moral language.”<sup>2</sup> Thirty years later, building a state that corresponds to the moral and philosophical language of the revolution remains a major point of contestation in Iranian politics.

The institutionalization of an Islamic Republic (Iran’s very first experience of both a republican and a theocratic state apparatus) led to revamping the existing structures of governance and to an adoption of Islamic injunctions as the overarching source of political and legal authority. At the outset, the Islamization of the state adversely affected various religious and ethnic minorities, as well as secular political parties. It significantly curtailed existing women’s rights in regard to family law and diminished the public mobility of many women by implementing a mandatory *hijab* (modest “unrevealing” dress and covering of hair). The process of change has not always been smooth and continues to expose differences in definitions and interpretations of political and religious doctrine. In the past thirty years, there have been vigorous debates and disagreements about the relationship between Islamic injunctions and the promulgated laws of a representative democracy. Even a number of prominent religious leaders questioned the legitimacy and feasibility of the Islamic state and warned against the determination of young Islamists to impose expansive Islamic values and mores onto society.

The contradiction between an Islamic ideal and popular sovereignty has been one of the main sources of conflict in the Islamic Republic—especially after Khomeini’s death in June 1989. In addition to a host of opposition figures from outside the polity, numerous Shi’i clerics have been placed under house arrest, jailed, or even physically obliterated for their dissenting views. Despite the authority that the Islamic injunctions afford the supreme leader and the Guardian Council to exercise the ultimate veto power, elections are regularly held at local and national levels. The postrevolutionary constitution engendered unintended sociopolitical and ideological consequences through its ambiguous references to “Islamic criteria” in defining the limits of public freedom, civil rights, legislation, and economic planning. By locating Islam in the public sphere, not only did the new constitution alter the political apparatus, legal system, education, and gender relations in Iran but it also transformed Islam from an a priori source of legitimacy into a contested body of discourses. In effect, to Islamize the post-revolutionary society, the Islamizers had to struggle continuously over the meaning of Islam and its bearing on specific contemporary social, economic, and cultural issues.

Prior to the establishment of the Islamic Republic and the institutionalization of *velāyat-e faqih*, the Shi’a clergy operated independently from the state, both financially and in their internal organization. Shi’a clerical establishments lacked an ecclesiastical hierarchy through which a dominant interpretation of the Shari’a

(Islamic legal corpus) could be canonized. By extending the scope of traditional juristic authority to include previously unexamined matters of governance, Khomeini revolutionized the existing structures of clerical independence from the state. Far from enjoying consensus, Khomeini's political philosophy scandalized many influential Shi'a grand ayatollahs and the followers of other sources of emulation. They disagreed on legal grounds with Khomeini's formulation that empowered jurists, and they feared that this doctrine would undermine the traditionally pluralist core of Shi'a jurisprudence.

The imposition of religious codes since the outset of the revolution has generated many controversial results and contradictions both within the religious establishment and in civil society. In many respects, the eight-year war (following the Iraqi invasion of Iranian territories in 1980) delayed the manifestation of these contradictions. But they became prominent soon after the end of the war, when internal frictions of the ruling parties and the conflict between the state and a burgeoning civil society became increasingly visible. The deadly stalemate that led to Khomeini's abandonment of his "politics of ultimate ends" and to his reluctant capitulation to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598 ending the war exposed the role of religious leadership to public scrutiny. It was at this juncture that a significant segment of the elite cadres of the revolution began a serious debate over the hitherto unassailable axioms of the Islamic Republic. With this emerging "reform movement," the unintended consequences of the Islamization policies became evident. The new movement began to question the obscurantist attempts to Islamize civil liberties and formal legal rights. In particular, gender relations, both in theory and as a result of women's real gains in economic and social spheres, have become a centerpiece of this movement.

Unprecedented debates on Islamic hermeneutics provided philosophical grounding for questioning the hegemonic role of religion in the public sphere. Many former advocates of *velāyat-e faqih* now questioned the necessity of the absolutist rule of the jurist in a Muslim polity. Remarkable theological innovations and unprecedented ideas regarding the role of jurisprudence in Muslim societies have resulted from these fertile discussions. As one of the main theoreticians of the reform movement in Iran, Said Hajjarian, aptly observes: "The doctrine of *velāyat-e faqih* transformed Shi'ism into a state ideology. However, in contrast to its ostensible appearance in merging religion and the state, and thereby *sacralizing* the political sphere, *velāyat-e faqih* played the role of a catalyst for the *secularization* of the Shi'a juridical establishment."<sup>3</sup> Paradoxically, the establishment of a theocracy seems to have facilitated the secularization of Shi'a jurisprudence. In the early 1990s, a social movement for democratic access to political power and for the right to live independently from unyielding state supervision overtook Iranian politics as a storm that swept Mohammad Khatami to power in 1997. It was then that members of the parliament, community activists, lawyers, and a wider community of religious

intellectuals and journalists were able to openly voice their skepticism regarding the exclusive authority of religious leaders to interpret Islam and to control all aspects of public life.

The postrevolutionary state instituted severe limitations on the manner in which men and women can conduct their lives in public—and to some extent even in private. Yet the adoption of appropriate and religiously sanctioned modes of appearance and conduct provided new ladders of upward mobility for women, enabling them to enter professional niches and the higher ranks of educated groups. Although women's rights are still curtailed in conformity with Shari'a law and women's dress and conduct remain limited by Islamic strictures, their access to education has been steadily improving. As a result the percentage difference between female and male literacy rates has dropped from 23.4 percent in 1976 to 8.3 percent in 2006. In addition to receiving comprehensive primary education, women comprised close to 60 percent of the incoming university students in 2008. Although the state implemented aggressive education programs, particularly in rural areas, the remarkable rise in the number of women in education could also be attributed to the paradoxical effect of the construction of gender-segregated spaces. Religiously sanctioned modes of appearance encouraged parents who otherwise were skeptical of modern education to allow their daughters to attend school. Women have also gained unprecedented prominence on the cultural and literary scene. The cultural industries are domains in which women can be seen in greater numbers than ever before in the history of the country.

Another seemingly startling paradox is evident in the Islamic Republic's approach to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender relations and rights. While homosexual relations, particularly among men, have come under rigorous assault from the authorities, with a number of male homosexuals executed, tortured, and jailed on charges of "immorality" or under alleged rape convictions, the state has been relatively tolerant toward transgendered individuals seeking sex-reassignment surgery, even providing funding for such surgeries. This "tolerance," however, should not be attributed to any underlying acceptance of transgender identities; rather, it is indicative of the state's desire to *normalize* gender relations, whereby heterosexual *males* and *females* are the only categories recognized by Iran's Islamic legal and constitutional codes.

Iranian art cinema has by far been the most internationally recognized cultural product of postrevolutionary Iran. Compared to only three international awards allotted to Iranian movies prior to the revolution, Iranian films have obtained more than three hundred international prizes since 1989. Many of the films that have received prizes at international festivals are not widely seen in Iran, but there is a flourishing market for commercial and popular films serving wide audiences in Iran.

Cultural policies of the revolution have also had their paradoxical implications. The revolutionary government started by setting draconian limits on cultural

imports from the West, most important on movies and music. These curtailments spurred on indigenous productions that initially served the ideological needs of the state but later found their own directions. The censorship of music and entertainment (both domestic and foreign) has been difficult to sustain, particularly in light of the popularity of the Internet, satellite television, and new electronic media. The new channels of dissemination frequently help Iran's thriving underground music industry. Women's voices, their manner of appearance and depiction, and the nature of their interaction with their male counterparts, however, continue to be restricted by rigid limits of censorship. Another important legacy of the revolution and of the Iran-Iraq war is the mass migration of Iranians abroad. Iranian migrants have settled in countries across the globe, but the world's largest Iranian diaspora community is located in the United States. These patterns of migration and settlement have led to new literary and artistic phenomena attesting to emerging forms of Iranian transnationalism. These communities have generated cultural articulations that examine and reinterpret their relationship to their homeland in a *mélange* of nostalgia and radical critique.

No single issue of a journal can provide comprehensive coverage of the initial domestic and international reception of the 1979 Iranian Revolution or its subsequent manifold social, cultural, political, economic, religious, ideological, and foreign-policy consequences, which were also shaped by a host of other post-1979 domestic, regional, and global developments. The editors of this issue are pleased to be able to include a selection of essays by leading researchers in the field that examine select themes related to the outbreak of the revolution, its reception, and its consequences inside and outside Iran, offering new critical insight into various often neglected dimensions of the revolution and the postrevolutionary state and providing the latest scholarship on topics covered.

The feature articles section of the journal begins with Ervand Abrahamian's study of the social composition, characteristics, and tactics of the crowds participating in mass demonstrations in opposition to the autocratic state from 1978 to 1979 that culminated in the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty (r. 1925–79). Providing a detailed and extremely helpful chronology of the mass protests and the state's reaction to these protests, he demonstrates the dynamic nature of the revolutionary mass movement, which drew support from a broad socioeconomic spectrum of the primarily urban population, and the crowds' articulation of a range of grievances against the state that were eventually harnessed by Khomeini, who emerged as the unifying and charismatic symbolic leader of the revolutionary movement while still in exile. Above all, Abrahamian stresses the primarily urban composition of the revolutionary crowds (chiefly working and lower middle classes), their reliance on informal (neighborhood or university) networks, and the crowds' principal recourse to nonviolent tactics.

The Iranian Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic resonated in different ways throughout the Middle East and beyond.

While most studies of Iran's international relations during this time have tended to focus on relations with the United States or Western European states, Hanan Hammad's essay makes a major contribution to our broader understanding of the coverage of the revolution in other parts of the Middle East by focusing on commentaries in the Egyptian press (with Egypt also serving as both the initial and final location of exile for the Shah [d. July 1980] after he left Iran in January 1979). She shows that the Iranian Revolution, coinciding with the relaxation of the Egyptian state's restrictions on the oppositional press (by Anwar el-Sadat), was covered by the Egyptian official, Islamist, Marxist, and liberal press, always with an eye to Egypt's own domestic political configurations, as well as in the framework of the contrasting political perspectives in Egypt concerning the 1979 peace treaty with Israel and Egypt's close alliance with Washington and the Shah (in the framework of the Cold War). The Marxist and the Islamist press appeared to welcome the revolutionary movement, while the liberal press adopted a more equivocal stance given the role of the clergy in the revolution, and the official press denounced the revolution as a machination of outside powers. Hammad further outlines how the establishment of the Islamic state in Iran and its execution of former officials, its suppression of other political factions, its persecution of the Bahā'īs, the clashes between the postrevolutionary state and Iran's Sunni religious-ethnic minorities, and the Islamic Republic's changed relations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) led to an increasingly critical stance in the pages of the officially tolerated Egyptian Marxist and liberal press. These developments also initiated a more ambivalent stance in the Islamist press, with some Islamist commentators castigating the Iranian Shi'i state's treatment of minority Sunni groups, others considering the new Iranian state's policy of political executions and the persecution of the Bahā'īs contrary to Islamic principles of tolerance, and still other Islamists attempting to rationalize many of the policies of the Islamic Republic and placing greater emphasis on the state's attempts to introduce "Islamic economics" and so on.

Mahdi Ahouie's essay focuses on President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's refutation of the Holocaust as a "myth" and his simultaneous statements that even if the Holocaust had occurred (though contesting the extent of the event) it was perpetrated by Europeans and was subsequently utilized by Zionists and their Western allies as a rationalization for the Zionist colonization of Palestinian territories. In regard to the denial of the Holocaust, Ahouie considers such statements as "quite unprecedented in Iran," while he sees the linkage between the Holocaust and the Israeli state as having had intellectual-political precedents in Iran (in both Islamic and secular-leftist discourses) dating back to 1948. He traces Ahmadinejad's anti-Zionist diatribes to earlier Iranian Shi'i commentaries on Israel and Zionism rooted in the religious conflict between Islam and Judaism, to the influence of Marxist anti-imperialist thought after the 1960s in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to the influence of European anti-Semitism.

The final feature, by Nima Naghibi, examines the intersections of the revo-

lution, memory, and trauma in autobiographical memoirs by Iranian women in the diaspora, which have enjoyed great popularity in the West in recent years, particularly in the United States, which she contributes in part to a “colonial desire to unveil the simultaneously eroticized and abject Muslim woman” and a “civilizational discourse” of universal human rights that has been manipulated by certain groups as a justification for U.S. neo-imperialism in the aftermath of 9/11. In the remainder of the essay, she examines the rapid proliferation of Iranian diasporic women’s autobiographies as a new postrevolutionary transnational literary genre and elucidates the multiple ways in which these biographies negotiate the Iranian Revolution as a key moment of “trauma” in the lives of the authors, by variously portraying the revolution as an event of dispossession and exile from an original idyllic “national” and “childhood” home.

In the “Curated Spaces” section, Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi interviews Taraneh Hemami, who curated the 2008 multimedia installation exhibit *Theory of Survival* in San Francisco. Hemami describes the exhibit, the title of which was based on a 1969 pamphlet by the Iranian revolutionary-Marxist Amir Parviz Pouyan, as an attempt both to foreground the diversity of participants and aspirations during the Iranian Revolution and to capture the experience of defeat, disillusionment, demise, and exile of those revolutionary participants and ideologies that subsequently found themselves under attack by the postrevolutionary Islamic state. She stresses that many Marxist activists during the revolution and earlier followed Pouyan’s refutation of survival under autocracy and were willing to give their lives for a just and egalitarian future society, commenting: “What I find interesting is theorizing the survival of an ideology which itself refuted the theory of survival.” The next article in this section—by Ghamari-Tabrizi, with accompanying photographs by Melissa Hibbard and Hamid Rahmanian—examines the role of the volunteer militia (*Basij*) and the Revolutionary Guards veterans of the Iran-Iraq war in Iranian society and politics after 1988. Ghamari-Tabrizi points out that these veterans, many of them disabled or suffering from the continued effects of exposure to chemical weapons, had participated in the war not only to defend their country’s territorial sovereignty but also to defend and solidify the postrevolutionary Shi’i state’s espoused religiously sanctioned, antiseccular, and anti-Western social and moral values. However, with the end of the war, these veterans would find the state, under the presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, gravitating toward a platform of free-market economy and the relaxation of certain restrictions on “morality” and modes of entertainment and public conduct. Ghamari-Tabrizi then traces the emergence of two distinct ideological-political camps in the ranks of the veterans in reaction to the new post-1988 social, political, and economic transformations: those veterans who “sought to advance their cause through theological interventions in promoting religious and political pluralism” and the “absolutists,” who “raised the flag of Islam and designated themselves as the only true Muslims genuinely committed to revo-



lutionary ideals,” with the former group throwing their weight behind the reformist political camp that came to power during Khatami’s presidency (1997–2005) and the latter group gaining their moment of victory with the election of Ahmadinejad as president in 2005.

In the “Reflections” section, a number of leading scholars in the field, from across disciplines and with a diverse range of ideological perspectives and methodological groundings, were invited to reflect on particular dimensions and consequences of the revolution in the past thirty years. Minoo Moallem challenges what she regards as the dominant Western historiographic model of, and epistemological approach to, gauging the success or failure of revolutions in accordance with particular definitions of modernity that narrowly define freedom according to Western standards and fail to appreciate the manifold nuances of social and political dynamism in postrevolutionary Iranian society and politics and its modes of self-empowerment grounded in religious concepts of rights and discursive paradigms. In the case of Iranian women, for example, she argues that while the Islamic Republic imposed certain restrictions, the conditions created by the revolution and the discourse of Islam itself at the same time “have effectively integrated women as citizen-subjects in the Islamic state, allowing political negotiations around gender and women’s issues.” This rejection of the prevalent Western historiographic and sociological recourse to opposing absolutes of secular/religious or modern/antimodern is taken up in a different context by Saïd Amir Arjomand in his essay on theoretical conceptualizations of revolutions and the dominant “anatomy of revolution” paradigm that sees revolutions as going through certain stages: “the typical cycle of the rule of the moderates (1979–80), taken over by the radicals (1981–88), and finally a ‘Thermidorian’ return to more moderate rule.” According to such a narrative, Arjomand argues, the Iranian Revolution would have entered its final phase with the presidencies of the pragmatic moderates Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–1997) and Khatami (1997–2005). Such a narrative paradigm can only regard the presidency of the hard-line Islamist Ahmadinejad (2005–) as a historical anomaly. In effect, according to the anatomy-of-revolutions model, this ostensibly anomalous development in Iranian revolution, in addition to the clerical leadership of the revolution itself, places the Iranian Revolution outside the boundaries of “modernity” and “modern” revolutions. Instead, Arjomand demonstrates that revolutions assume a dynamic developmental logic of their own, with accompanying and shifting matrices of power irreducible to a particular model.

Djavad Salehi-Isfahani also takes on essentializing and totalizing accounts of the revolution by turning our attention to the conditions of the rural poor in post-revolutionary society. Emphasizing that the 1978–79 revolutionary movement consisted primarily of urban participants, Salehi-Isfahani rejects totalizing accounts of the abject failure of the revolution to transform society for the better, underscoring the major improvements in the living standards and, particularly, in the self-image

of the poor rural population. He highlights the policies of the state that have brought about major “improvements in basic health, education, and infrastructure” and, once again, shows that the seemingly antimodern religious character of the Islamic Republic has actually served as a harbinger of modernization policies in the social realm. For example, “Another aspect of Iran’s revolution, its Islamic ideology, . . . made it easier for religiously conservative families to send their girls to school.”

The remaining “Reflections” essays focus on literary, artistic, cultural, and intellectual currents in postrevolutionary Iran. Kamran Talattof discusses not only the proliferation of literary output after the initial lull following the revolution, despite the persistence of censorship, but also new creative literary styles and the existence of widespread criticism of postrevolutionary state and society by many authors and poets in allegoric styles, as in the case of magic realism. Moreover, he highlights the emergence of new literary genres, such as the poetry and literature of war following the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, and above all the dominance of women as both producers and consumers of literary works due to the rapid increase in literacy rates and the burgeoning women’s rights movement, whose social concerns have found resonance in many works of literature. In addition, Talattof discusses the growth of satirical as well as children’s literature, the spectacular expansion of journalistic activities, the notable increase in translations of Western books, and the increase in the number of literary awards and book fairs after the revolution, without discounting the many hurdles and travails experienced by authors, poets, and journalists, such as the “chain murders” of many writers and intellectuals in 1998, in addition to censorship. The highly dynamic and vibrant nature of Iranian postrevolutionary literature is also examined by Persis Karim, who devotes particular attention to works by authors in diaspora communities, including works in both Persian and other languages. She, too, stresses the much greater visibility of women writers and the “increase in female readership” both in Iran and in Iranian diaspora communities, while simultaneously pointing to the greater availability to a non-Iranian readership of works by Iranian-born authors writing in the diaspora. Karim shows that, in addition to emergent literary themes such as exile and hyphenated Iranian identities, the freedom of expression afforded diasporic women writers has resulted in new styles of “self-disclosure,” particularly in the case of autobiographical memoirs also discussed earlier by Naghibi.

M. R. Ghanoonparvar reflects on both [Iranian] Persian fiction and cinema, more specifically on the “intellectual” and “socially engaged” trends. He outlines the highly overt political nature of literary works in the initial postrevolutionary period, which saw a brief opening in the freedom of expression, followed by the postrevolutionary state’s imposition of renewed censorship, which resulted in a return to allegoric forms of social and political criticism in literary and cinematic works, albeit with new stylistic adoptions. Tracing the origins of certain trends to prerevolutionary styles, Ghanoonparvar contrasts the magic realist style of sociopolitical criti-

cism with the “escapist” trend in postrevolutionary literature that seeks instead to provide readers with a release from the realities of daily life. He, too, discusses the rapid proliferation of autobiographical works and their wide appeal to readers after the revolution, as well as the emergence of war literature and film, the increase in stories and films focusing on the lives of children, and the new genre of diasporic literature, often overlaid with “themes of nostalgia, cultural assimilation, and split identity.” Ghanoonparvar further examines the increase in the number of women film directors and films addressing women’s lives in society, again underscoring the highly dynamic, prolific, and complex nature of the postrevolutionary cultural scene. Mazyar Lotfalian also reflects on the vibrant developments in Iranian visual culture after the revolution, focusing specifically on painting, cinema, TV, and the annual Shi’i rituals of commemorating the battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of the third Shi’i imam in 680 AD. Among other key themes, he draws attention to the role of technology, the market, and the domestic and international dissemination of Iranian visual culture, produced both inside Iran and in the diaspora. Lotfalian also highlights the centrality of Islam as a motif in the production and exhibition of Iran-related visual culture by Iranian-born artists and by museums outside Iran (either in an affirmative explanatory fashion or in the form of critiques of Islam), particularly after 9/11. Above all, he argues that Iranian artistic productions have, as never before, attained contemporary international recognition since the revolution.

The final essay in this section, by Ali Mirsepassi, investigates Iranian intellectual-philosophical trends since the revolution. Stating that the Iranian Revolution “called into question the precept that modernization brings secularization,” Mirsepassi examines the impact of the revolution on Iranian intellectual currents. The unified revolutionary mass movement against the autocracy soon gave way to the consolidation of power by the Islamic faction and the clampdown on other political groups and ideological orientations, as well as the postrevolutionary state’s violent imposition of certain moral values, and emerging rifts within the Islamic ranks. These developments, Mirsepassi maintains, undermined many former certainties and “spread a mood of nihilism[;] it also engendered an ongoing endeavor among Iranian intellectuals and the general population to reevaluate old beliefs and certainties while imagining new ones in light of all that has taken place.”

The one common thread in postrevolutionary intellectual currents, according to Mirsepassi, has been the centrality of divergent categories of “the West” as a referential framework, with some intellectuals calling for a complete overhaul of Iranian society and culture through the complete adoption of Western Enlightenment values of rationality and subjectivity, other intellectuals calling for a mediated adoption of Western rationality and values to complement Islamic rational philosophy and values (as in the case of some reformists who supported the presidency of Khatami), and still another group, affiliated with Ahmadinejad, calling for a further distancing of Iranian society from Western values—the latter relying heavily

on Western antimodernist intellectual currents articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Michel Foucault, which are redolent of the “decline of the West” paradigm. Mirsepassi concludes that both the strictly pro-Western and the anti-Western intellectuals advance nihilistic worldviews marked by a “disconnection from the existing world of practical reality,” as reflected in the economic, social, and political concerns of the populace at large.

Finally, in her review essay, Niki Akhavan compares two recent books on postrevolutionary culture and media. Aptly calling her essay “contested narratives of the present,” Akhavan illustrates how Mehdi Semati’s edited volume, *Media, Culture, and Society in Iran: Living with Globalization and the Islamic State* (2007), offers a nuanced analysis of the subject by highlighting the contradictions and inter-connectivities of the Iranian state and society. By contrast, Akhavan argues, Nasrin Alavi’s *We Are Iran: The Persian Blogs* (2005) establishes a rigid binary between an Iranian society and an Iranian blogosphere that is almost entirely opposed to the monolithic, theocratic state.

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— Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, Mansour Bonakdarian, Nasrin Rahimieh, Ahmad Sadri, and Ervand Abrahamian

### Notes

1. Official Web site of former president Khatami, [www.khatami.ir/fa/news/910](http://www.khatami.ir/fa/news/910) (accessed July 14, 2009).
2. Michael Fischer, *From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 184.
3. Said Hajjarian, *Az shāhed-e qodsi tā shāhed-e bāzāri: ‘Urfi-shodan-e din dar sepehr-e siyāsāt (From the Divine to the Bazaar Witness: The Secularization of Religion in the Sphere of Politics)* (Tehran: Tarh-e No, 2001), 83.