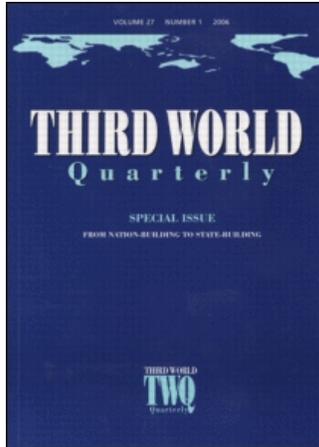


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# The Pluralistic Momentum in Iran and the Future of the Reform Movement

ARSHIN ADIB-MOGHADDAM

**ABSTRACT** *This article explores the pluralistic momentum in Iran. It challenges the state-centric approach to Iranian politics, arguing that contemporary Iranian reformism manifests itself as a trajectory, yet original and indigenous, political culture that feeds into the political process in a bottom-up manner—from society to the state—not the other way around. Assessing the theoretical, methodological and empirical implications of this hypothesis, the article outlines the contours of Iran's reform movement and its interaction with the country's diverse civil society. As long as Iranian politics is driven by the pluralistic momentum, it is claimed, Iranian reformism will elicit political results and—to highly dissimilar degrees—will continue to provoke the silent subservience of central institutions of the state.*

The City, then, in which people aim through association at co-operating for the things by which felicity in its real and true sense can be attained, is the excellent city, and the society in which there is a co-operation to acquire felicity is the excellent society; and the nation in which all of its cities co-operate for those things through which felicity is attained is the excellent nation. In the same way, the excellent universal state will arise only when all the nations in it co-operate for the purpose of reaching felicity. (Abu Nasr Farabi)<sup>1</sup>

At the end of its fifth national congress in November 2003 the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), one of the main reform parties in Iran, issued a strategic communiqué referring to the seventh parliament (*majlis*) election as 'a turning point in the reforms movement of the country' and emphasising that the survival of the movement depends on the presence of those who favour 'the mentality of reforms at the polls'.<sup>2</sup> A turning point it was: the IIPF's candidates barred, major legislation delayed, the trust of Iran's younger generation lost, the reform movement had to accept that for the time being institutionalised power was proving to be stronger than the calls for change articulated by Iran's burgeoning civil society. Consequently, on 1 February 2004, a date symbolically chosen to coincide with the return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Tehran 25 years earlier, 120 Iranian members of

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parliament resigned in protest at the mass barring of candidates from the 'Seventh Islamic Consultative Assembly' election.<sup>3</sup> In their declaration to the then *majlis* speaker, Mehdi Karroubi, they proclaimed their unwillingness 'to be present in a parliament that is not capable of defending the rights of the people and which is unable to prevent elections in which the people cannot chose their representatives'.<sup>4</sup> In a speech entitled 'Advocating the Republic' at Tehran's Amir Kabir University, Mohsen Armin defended the election boycott:

The Islamic Revolution took place with the Islam propagated by Ali Shariati, late Ayatollah Morteza Motahari and the late Imam Khomeini. If we replace it with the Islam of the dignitaries, we will face the situation we are facing right now... Islam in the Islamic Republic comes from the hearts of the people which is separate from the Fiqh-oriented Islam.<sup>5</sup>

But the election boycott turned out to be self-defeating. Without the parliamentary mandate, the reformers failed to solicit piecemeal compromises from the ruling clergy, which was the initial aim of the strategy advocated by Said Hajjarian.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the Guardian Council, which functions as a 'Supreme Court' in charge of vetting the candidates for the parliamentary elections, won out, the chaperones of Iranian conservatism took over and the *majlis* lost its popular mandate for political and socioeconomic change.<sup>7</sup>

The recent, ninth presidential election dealt another blow to the IIPF. Despite its alliance with the semi-official Iran Freedom Movement, a group founded in the 1960s by the late Mehdi Bazargan and currently headed by Ibrahim Yazdi, the first foreign minister of the Islamic Republic after the revolution in 1979,<sup>8</sup> the party failed to mobilise support beyond the intelligentsia and student population. In retrospect, it did not come as a surprise that the chief candidate of the IIPF, Mostafa Moin, received a disappointing share of the vote.<sup>9</sup> With the defeat in the ninth presidential election, the reformers lost their last bastion of institutional power, indicating a constant demise of the movement since the parliamentary elections in June 2000. In that year reformers controlled the executive and legislative branches of the government, as well as the municipal councils.<sup>10</sup> Yet, despite the popular mandate, they failed to meet the demands of the electorate. The economy of the country remained stagnant, the socioeconomic gaps within Iranian society widened and cultural freedoms remained blocked. The mixed results of the reformers were conceded by Mohammad Khatami in his 47-page philosophical 'letter for the future' addressed to Iran's youth amid growing disappointment with the pace of reforms: 'We do not pretend that our attempt to defend the rights of the people have succeeded in every domain', he proclaimed. But he maintained nonetheless that there 'have been changes of such an extent in social, cultural and political relations that it is impossible to return to the period of before the reforms'.<sup>11</sup>

The previously unknown Islamic Iran Developers Council (Etelaf-e Abadgaran-e Eslami) capitalised on the widespread discontent with Khatami in the municipal elections in 2003, winning the majority of seats in Tehran. The members of the Council promptly elected Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as

major in April 2003. A year later the Abadgaran, together with the second major neo-conservative party, the Society of Devotees of the Islamic Revolution (Jame-e Isargaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami), won the largest number of parliamentary votes, including most of the seats in Tehran.<sup>12</sup> Pragmatic in their economic outlook and restrictive with regard to cultural and social issues, this new breed of Iranian conservatives successfully merged shrewd political brinkmanship *vis-à-vis* the country's clerical elite with an agenda of 'Islamic socialism' aimed at the majority, lower-income strata of the Iranian population.<sup>13</sup> It was thanks to the successful implementation of this dual strategy—mobilising the right wing of Iranian politics on the one side and appealing to the lower-middle class of Iranian society on the other—that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was able to take the ninth presidency of the Islamic Republic in June 2005.<sup>14</sup>

### The structure of Iranian reformism

If we would measure the success of Iran's reformers by their own standards, we would need to accept the dismal prospect that the reform movement is dead. There are many signs that point in that direction: the announcement by the new minister for culture and Islamic guidance, Mohammad Hossein Saffar-Harandi, that the ministry will block the activities of non-governmental associations as well as newspapers that 'attack' religious values; the banning of four websites focusing on women rights in recent months ([www.womeniniran.org](http://www.womeniniran.org), [irwomen.com](http://irwomen.com), [www.iftribune.com](http://www.iftribune.com) and [www.womeniw.com](http://www.womeniw.com));<sup>15</sup> the campaign to tighten the censorship regime of the internet by contracting the Iranian company Delta Global;<sup>16</sup> the arrest of Mojtaba Saminejad and Afshin Zareh and the prolonged detention of human rights lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani, as indicated in the quarterly human rights report from the 'Defenders of Human Rights Centre' in Tehran which is directed by Noble Laureate Shirin Ebadi;<sup>17</sup> and the destruction of a Sufi meeting house in Qom by Basij forces.<sup>18</sup>

However, Iranian reformism has more depth than its contemporary institutional infrastructure reveals. If we were to reduce the movement to the party manifestos of the IIPF, the Organisation of the Islamic Republic's Mojahedin (Sazeman-e mujahedin-e enqelab-e eslami) or the third largest reformist organisation, the Solidarity Party (Hezb-e hambastegi), we would neglect the history and intellectual breadth of Iranian reformism. Those with some insight about the domestic politics of Iran would agree that the reform movement is rooted in—and nurtured by—an increasingly pluralistic civil society.<sup>19</sup> To put it in more rigorous terms: contemporary Iranian reformism manifests itself as a trajectory, yet original and indigenous, political culture that feeds into the political process in a bottom-up manner—from society to the state—not the other way around.

A quick look at some of the speeches of former President Mohammad Khatami and the manifestos of Iran's main reform parties reveals that they are heavily influenced by the thoughts of key contemporary Iranian intellectuals such as Mohammad Mojtabeh Shabestari and Abdol-Karim Soroush. It

is beyond the scope of this paper to outline the political philosophies of these two thinkers.<sup>20</sup> Suffice it to say that many young clerics and activists are attracted to the critical, philosophical reading of Islam advocated by Soroush and Shabestari.<sup>21</sup> What is important for our line of argument is that the ideas of both thinkers are part of a pervasive culture of reformist thought that transcends the confines of the state. One may say that the intellectual tradition carried forward by oppositional Iranian intellectuals on the one side, and the burgeoning infrastructure of NGOs, professional unions and grassroots advocacy organisations on the other, has fostered a de-monopolisation of the political process and thus, *ipso facto*, has led to a 'pluralistic momentum'.<sup>22</sup> It is this pluralistic momentum, I think, that engenders the imperceptible driving force of contemporary Iranian reformism.<sup>23</sup>

### The pluralistic momentum and the state

Let me explain. The central characteristic of the pluralistic momentum in Iran is that the clerical establishment can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client social strata. Pluralism engenders competition, state policies have to be 'sold' to an audience that is no longer obliged to 'buy' from one source. In this 'market situation' the monopoly on political power is dissected. As a result, institutions and elites operating within the domain of the state have to organise themselves in such a way as to mobilise their respective constituencies. They enter into a competitive situation with other groups who follow the same political rationale. It was one of the rather more remarkable aspects of the presidential election in summer 2005 that the candidates, including Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, scarcely employed Islamic imagery or reference to the political will of Ayatollah Khomeini to further their agenda. Political allegiance in contemporary Iran, it appears, is primarily no longer directed at the institution of the Leader. It is not the approval of the *Rahbar* that political parties struggle for. It is *public* opinion that matters.

In the second place, all institutions attached to the state are under pressure to produce 'results', especially in the economic sphere. In turn, the pressure to produce results in a competitive situation engenders the rationalisation of policies. This explains why both reformers and conservatives advocate economic growth, private ownership, and public participation in the political and cultural process. In a pluralistic situation where political parties become marketing agencies of the state, reform ceases to be a monopoly of the self-declared reformist parties. In other words, the reform agenda is of necessity intrinsic to the political process, comprising all state institutions; it transcends the mono-causal conservative–reformist divide because the functioning of the whole state apparatus depends on the participation of the public. Public relations with the client social strata, lobbying, fund-raising, involvement with the secular economy—in all these aspects of the humdrum affairs of the state, the Islamic Republic is dependent on the civil society of the country. In such an interactive situation it appears to be impossible (for conservatives and reformers alike) to sell policies to a population of consumers without taking their wishes concerning the content of those policies into account. I am not

claiming that the institutions within the domain of the state have conceded their formal powers, they have retained them, of course. But the pluralistic momentum has ‘functionally differentiated’ the *Machtkonsens* (power consensus) among the political elites in Iran. During the first decade of the Islamic Republic it was Ayatollah Khomeini who authoritatively expressed that consensus. His legitimacy, albeit not total, was sufficiently massive and durable to maintain the political elites within the revolutionary framework (the Islamic Republican Party was the most influential manifestation of the power consensus dictating Iranian domestic politics in the first decade of the revolution). That framework expanded after Khomeini’s death in 1989 once and for all. Not that Iran emerged as a ‘republican democracy’ in the Habermasian sense.<sup>24</sup> But the differentiation of the revolutionary polity into competing factions has contracted the ability of the state to conduct politics in the consensual mode.

### **The pluralistic momentum and Iranian society**

A comprehensive account of Iran’s painful post-revolutionary transformation process has to move beyond an analysis of the state. It is the active civil society of Iran that constitutes the momentum of the country’s pluralistic situation, not the government. The pluralistic momentum, emerging from below, negates the binary and total opposition between political ‘masters’ and ‘slaves’ at the root of state–society relations. Where there is pluralism there is critique, defiance and opposition exercised from innumerable points within society. The pluralistic momentum hence is not something that can be channelled, redirected or hermetically contained by a political faction or stratum of society. There is no single locus, no unitarian institution, no ideational agent, no sacrosanct HQ to be conquered. The pluralistic momentum in Iran is, by definition, an omnipresent, yet polymorphous phenomenon.

True, the demands articulated by activists, students and intellectuals do not, by themselves, determine the substantive contents or direction of political and socioeconomic reforms. They simply generate the dynamic that change is possible. However, there are some other factors in Iran’s contemporary societal situation which have substantive influence on the character of this change. Insofar as the highly educated Iranian population has access to the instruments of modern mass communication, their preference settings will reflect this. This is an important prerequisite for the emergence of a pluralistic society. The ability to choose and to evaluate alternative world-views requires the freedom to go beyond ‘state-manufactured facts’. Such freedom depends on socioeconomic conditions which provide access to alternative world-views, not least through the means of education and modern mass communication.<sup>25</sup>

There is a common theme to the foregoing: Iran’s oppositional civil society on the one side and the technological opportunities that are available to the highly educated population of the country on the other have provoked the de-monopolisation of Iranian politics. The mass distribution of ideas through the internet and satellite television, for instance, have de-emphasised the importance of the state-controlled media and have, quite literally, penetrated

the Iranian living room with a whole new set of ideas, values, norms and world-views.<sup>26</sup> In this struggle does the state not yield its function as the monopolist of political ideas? Does its ability to impose upon society the renunciations and restrictions not atrophy under the pressures of a ‘cumbersome’ population which is no longer bound to accept a single ideology?

I think the Iranian state has lost its monopoly over the political culture of the country to other sources of political thinking, to a whole series of intellectuals, film-makers, women activists, student leaders, and so on, who all represent the realities of Iranian society far better and—crucially—far more effectively than the state does.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the contemporary Iranian state cannot fulfil the central goal expressed in article 3 of the Constitution, that is, ‘raising the level of public awareness in all areas, through the proper use of the press, mass media, and other means’, because the pluralistic situation has created new outlets for the dissemination of news and information. ‘One should not be misled by the continuity in the regime’s ideological language and some features—such as the handful of intellectuals of the pre-revolutionary years who continue to be revered: Ahmad Shamlu, Mehdi Akhavan Sales, Nima Yoshij, Forough Farrokhzad, Ali Shariati’, Fariba Adelhah remarks. ‘Society has become differentiated and more complex, and none of the actors can hope any more for a monopoly over it.’<sup>28</sup> In other words, the Iranian state is no longer the only authoritative representative of the country’s political reality. Somehow the entire balance of power is changing. And it seems to me that it is the new, post-revolutionary generation that is slowly imposing the political realities on the establishment, and not the other way around.<sup>29</sup>

### **Understanding the pluralistic momentum and the morphology of Iranian reformism**

The pluralistic momentum, then, refers to more than ‘organisational pluralism’, that is to more than ‘the existence of a plurality of relatively autonomous (independent) organisations (subsystems) within the domain of a state’.<sup>30</sup> The pluralistic momentum in post-revolutionary Iran transcends the domain of the state; it exists in a decentralised, diffuse fashion and is located in innumerable discourses permeating Iranian society. Let us not, therefore, try to find out who generates the pluralistic momentum in Iran. Let us ask, instead, how it affects state–society relations, how it translates opposition into political practice and how it differentiates the power consensus among the ruling elites. In other words, rather than ask ourselves what the state has done to foster reforms (eg the ‘Khatami effect’), we should try to investigate the manifold empirical manifestations of opposition and critique within Iranian society.<sup>31</sup> What, for instance, is the common theme between the resignation letters of the Friday prayer leader of Isfahan, Ayatollah Jallaleddin Taheri, who resigned in 2002, of the members of the Iranian parliament who protested to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 2003, or of Mohammad Ali Abtahi, who resigned as Khatami’s vice president and chief of staff in 2004? Which factors led to the judiciary’s decision to ban torture and solitary confinement in 2004,

the unprecedented acknowledgement by the same ministry that Iranian prisoners continue to face physical, psychological and sexual harassment thereafter and the introduction of jury trials for press offences?<sup>32</sup> How does the critique of the highly successful Iranian cinema translate into cultural preferences? And how are cultural artefacts such as norms of proper behaviour, moral obligations and ideological inhibitions reified in the first place? Capturing these instances of civil opposition in Iran amounts to nothing less than a critical approach to Iranian politics.

Such an understanding alerts us to a second methodological precaution. The pluralistic momentum in Iran is not a commodity that can be possessed by this or that group; there is no engine that can be localised here or there. It must be analysed as a 'gliding' phenomenon that is in constant motion. A trajectory of its infinitesimal movements requires analysis of the multifarious discourses, ideas and political cultures that constitute the Iranian polity. Therefore, I study the pluralistic momentum in Iran in the way Michel Foucault studied power.<sup>33</sup> Such an approach avoids identifying some single locus of the pluralistic momentum, such as 'the state' or 'the ruling elites'. It does not analyse it in terms of the interests and motives of political parties and institutions in a top-down fashion—from the 'ruling classes' to the 'proletariat' as Marxists suggest. Instead, it focuses as much as possible on the vehicles of the pluralistic momentum in Iran: students, non-governmental organisations, women's-rights activists, writers, poets, intellectuals, film-makers, etc. It pays attention to processes of differentiation, reification, deconstruction, theorisation and other ideational sources of reform emanating from Iranian civil society. It establishes, in short, a genealogy of reform emancipating 'the local', ie Iranian society *vis-à-vis* 'the whole', ie the state.

With this understanding of the pluralistic momentum as a background, one may assert that a dynamic element is introduced into Iran's state–society relations that is intrinsically anathema to the very idea of conservatism and traditionalism. I have argued elsewhere that this competition manifests itself in the fight between an intellectual and scientific (enlightened?) world-view and a theocratic or clerical (orthodox?) one.<sup>34</sup> The late Edward Said understood this dynamic years ago, when he observed that Iran 'is in the throes of a stunningly energetic debate about law, freedom, personal responsibility, and tradition that is simply not covered by Western reporters'. 'Charismatic lecturers and intellectuals, clerical and nonclerical alike', he elaborated 'carry on the tradition of Shariati, challenging centres of power and orthodoxy with impunity and, it would seem, great popular success'.<sup>35</sup> The existence of an active counterculture does not necessarily mean that there will be drastic changes or that the principle of 'unchangeable laws of the Islamic revolution' will be surrendered ideologically, but the possibility of change is there once and for all. What we are currently observing in Iran, I would hence assert, is not the demise of reformism. It is a dispute about how to exploit that possibility of change for political gains. There may be a 'communicative lag' between the demands for reforms by Iran's civil society on the one hand and the acceptance of these demands by the state on the other, but the dynamics of societal preferences continuously exert pressures on the policy-making process

of the government. Does this political culture not make it increasingly difficult to maintain the revolutionary ideals as unchanging verities? Even the most outspoken critics of the clerical establishment in Iran, such as Mohsen Kadivar, Akbar Ganji, Hashem Aghajari, Said Hajjarian, Alireza Alavitabar, or Abdollah Nouri, have answered this question with a tentative yes. They might differ on the strategy with which to reinterpret the Islamic Republic, but they agree on the basic premise that the Iranian system can be reformed from within. 'The transition to democracy', argues Akbar Ganji in that regard, 'is like a game of chess where dictators are sitting on one side and democrats on the other. We must enter the game and use all the pieces in order to check and mate the opponent.'<sup>36</sup>

I think that the reforms implemented during the 17 years since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini provide enough evidence to conclude that the Iranian state is capable of changing and that it is quite innovative in its efforts to legitimate these changes on the level of theological theorising.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately these changes have been provoked by the people of Iran, who have repeatedly and successfully lifted the sacred canopy laid out by their conservative opponents. Yet the plurality of resistances to an all-encompassing, sacrosanct meta-narrative is not provoked by a single institution, a political party, or even a set of ideological currents. The pluralistic momentum has engendered change in an irregular fashion and the instances of resistance have appeared at varying strengths: confined and definitive (the sit-in by Iranian parliamentarians in the *majlis* in February 2004), symbolic and defiant (the repeated hunger strikes of Akbar Ganji), satirical and humouristic (the *Mowj* satire describing a young man's fictional encounter with the Imam *Mahdi*), tentative and hermetic (the protests of hundreds of former agents of Iran's dreaded pre-revolutionary secret service SAVAK to demand back-wages in 1999), legal and righteous (the human rights campaign led by Noble Laureate Shirin Ebadi), artistic and imaginative (the movies of Abbas, Kiarostami, Dariush Mehrjui, Jafar Panahi or the Makhmalbafs), and overwhelming and violent (the student demonstrations in the summer of 1999). These are but a few empirical instances of the pluralistic momentum in Iran that have led to a differentiation of Iranian politics. As long as the country's civil society is driven by this momentum, it seems to me, Iranian reformism will elicit political results and—to highly dissimilar degrees—will continue to provoke the silent subservience of central institutions of the state.

## Notes

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- 1 From 'Mabadi ara ahl al-madinat al-fadilah' (The Perfect State), in Seyyed Hossein Nasr & Mehdi Aminrazavi (eds), *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, Vol 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p 126.
- 2 Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), 11 November 2003.
- 3 For a comprehensive analysis see Dilip Hiro, *The Iranian Labyrinth: Journeys Through Theocratic Iran and its Furies*, New York: Nation Books, 2005, esp ch 2.
- 4 Agence France Press (AFP), 1 February 2004.
- 5 IRNA, 4 February 2005.

- 6 For a critique of this strategy, see Akbar Ganji, 'The struggle against sultanism', *Journal of Democracy*, 16 (4), 2004, pp 38–51.
- 7 See Morad Saghafi, 'The new landscape of Iranian politics', trans from French Kaveh Ehsani, *Middle East Report*, available at <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer233/saghafi.html>, accessed 10 December 2005.
- 8 Leading members of the IFM, such as Reza Alijani, Hoda Saber and Taghi Rahmani, have been in prison since 2003.
- 9 The results of the first round of votes were announced on 18 June 2005. Rafsanjani won with 21% of the votes, hence failing to secure an absolute majority (above 50%) which, according to the electoral law in Iran, would have sufficed to form the government. Moin came in fourth, securing only 14% of the vote.
- 10 For an analysis of the ascendancy of Khatami and the Islamic–democratic movement in Iran, see Ray Takeyh, 'God's will: Iranian democracy and the Islamic context', *Middle East Policy*, VII (4) 2000, pp 41–49, at [http://www.mepc.org/public\\_asp/journal\\_vol7/0010\\_takeyh.asp](http://www.mepc.org/public_asp/journal_vol7/0010_takeyh.asp), accessed 4 May 2002.
- 11 'Khatami justifies years in office', BBC, 3 May 2004, at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3681153.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/3681153.stm), accessed 8 December 2005.
- 12 For the emergence of the Isargaran, see Bill Samii, 'Iran: a rising star in party politics', Radio Free Europe (RFE), 8 November 2005, at <http://www.payvand.com/news/05/nov/1060.html>, accessed 2 December 2005.
- 13 The campaign themes of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—social equality, cracking down on elite corruption, redistributing Iran's oil and gas income and returning to the spiritual ideals of the Islamic revolution—were especially effective in the urban, working-class districts of Iran's major cities. He did not primarily market himself on the radio and television like the other candidates (reformers and conservatives alike). Rather than solely relying on official media outlets, he used recorded messages which were transmitted to the streets of Tehran and other major cities through loudspeakers.
- 14 Ahmadinejad secured a landslide victory, winning 62% of the vote, with Rafsanjani taking only 36%. For a balanced analysis of Ahmadinejad's election victory, see Kamal Nazer Yasin, 'Iran: new direction?', *Middle East International*, 3 August 2005, at <http://meionline.com/features/390.shtml>, accessed 1 December 2005. See also Mark Gasiorowski, 'The causes and consequences of Iran's June 2005 presidential election', *Strategic Insights*, IV (8) 2005, at <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2005/Aug/gasiorowskiAug05.pdf>, accessed 21 November 2005. For complementing views, see Doug Lorimer, 'Iran: a vote against neo-liberalism', *Green Left Weekly*, 6 July 2005, at <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2005/632/632p14.htm>, accessed 11 December 2005; and Patrick Seale, 'Iran's election may provide an Islamic role model', *The Daily Star* (Beirut), 11 July 2005, at [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=10&categ\\_id=5&article\\_id=1664](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=1664), accessed 11 November 2005.
- 15 It should be added in parenthesis that the authorities also temporarily banned the conservative news website Baztab.com, which belongs to the former Commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Rezaei, a supporter of Ayatollah Khamenei and close confidant of Iran's intelligence community.
- 16 For a comprehensive analysis of Iran's internet surveillance regime, see Opennetinitiative, *A Country Study: Internet Filtering in Iran 2004–2005*, at <http://www.opennetinitiative.net/Iran>, accessed 21 November 2005.
- 17 'Ebadi protests Iran human rights violations', IAFP, 31 December 2005.
- 18 'Iranian reformist speaks out against sectarian violence', *Financial Times*, 22 February 2006.
- 19 See Ali M Ansari, 'Continuous regime change from within', *Washington Quarterly*, 26 (4), 2003, pp 53–67, at [http://www.twq.com/03autumn/docs/03autumn\\_ansari.pdf#search='Continuous%20regime%20change%20from%20within](http://www.twq.com/03autumn/docs/03autumn_ansari.pdf#search='Continuous%20regime%20change%20from%20within), accessed 15 December 2005. See also Ali R Abootalebi, 'Civil society and Iran's quest for democracy', *Iran Analysis Quarterly*, 1 (1), 2003, pp 2–5, at <http://web.mit.edu/igj/IAQ/IAQSUMMER.pdf#search='Civil%20Society%20and%20Iran%E2%80%99s%20quest%20for%20democracy>, accessed 12 November 2005.
- 20 For a comparative analysis of Soroush's thoughts within an Islamic context, see Bernhard J Trautner, 'The clash *within* civilisations: Islam and the accommodation of plurality', *InIIS Working Paper No 13/99*, Institut für Interkulturelle und Internationale Studien, University of Bremen, at <http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~bjtraut/clash/clash.pdf>, accessed 12 November 2001.
- 21 See further Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, trans and ed Mahmoud Sadri & Ahmad Sadri, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Valla Vakilli, *Debating Religion and Politics: The Political Thought of Abdol Karim Soroush*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997; Laura Secor, 'The democrat: Iran's leading reformist intellectual tries to reconcile religious duties and human rights', *Boston Globe*, 14 March 2004, at [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/03/14/the\\_democrat/](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/03/14/the_democrat/), accessed 15 March 2004; and Robin B Wright, 'Two visions of reformation', *Journal of Democracy*, 7 (2) 1996, pp 64–75, at [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_democracy/v007/7.2wright01.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v007/7.2wright01.html), accessed 23 February 2000. For Shabestari's ideas, see Farzin Vahdat, 'Post-revolutionary discourses of Mohammad Mojtahed

- Shabestari'; and Mohsen Kadivar, 'Reconciling the terms of mediated subjectivity', at <http://www.kadivar.com/Htm/English/Reviews/Paper-01.htm>, accessed 14 November 2005.
- 22 For a list of Iranian NGOs, including websites, see Syma Sayyah, 'A short note on NGOs in Iran', at <http://www.payvand.com/news/03/jan/1114.html>, accessed 14 November 2005. There are also constructive efforts to link the work of NGOs operating in Iran with the diaspora. Here, the Iranian Alliances Across Borders (IAAB) and the Iranian Studies Group (ISG) have recently launched a project which aims to attract Iranians in the diaspora 'who are looking for opportunities to intern/volunteer in the service of Iranian civil society'. See <http://www.project-connection.org>.
- 23 I am drawing on sociological theory here. See Peter L Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, London: Anchor Books, 1967; and Berger, *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, London: Anchor Books, 1969.
- 24 'According to the republican view', Jürgen Habermas argues, 'the political opinion- and will-formation occurring in the public sphere and in parliament obeys not the structures of market processes but the obstinate structures of a public communication oriented to mutual understanding... This dialog conception imagines politics as contestation over questions of value and not simply questions of preference.' Jürgen Habermas, 'Three normative models of democracy', in Ronald J Terchek & Thomas C Conte (eds), *Theories of Democracy: A Reader*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, p 238.
- 25 For a discussion of some of the sociological indicators mentioned, see *Critique's* special issue in collaboration with the University of Tehran. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 14 (1), 2005.
- 26 Indeed, with an estimated 100 000 active Iranian blogs, Persian is now (together with French) the second most common 'blogging language' after English. See *Time*, 9 May 2005.
- 27 I have discussed the impact of these changes on Iranian foreign policy elsewhere. See Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, 'Islamic utopian romanticism and the foreign policy culture of Iran', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 14 (3), 2005, pp 265–292; and Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A Cultural Genealogy*, London: Routledge, 2006, esp chs 3 and 4.
- 28 Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, trans Jonathan Derrick, London: Hurst, p 177.
- 29 It should be noted that the post-revolutionary generation in Iran comprises both reformist groups who have contributed to the election victories of the Khatami presidencies and (neo)conservative forces who have contributed to the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. For our line of argument it is important to note that in both instances the electorate voted for the 'outsider', that is for the candidate who was perceived to act in opposition to the establishment.
- 30 See Robert Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs Control*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982, p 5.
- 31 For Khatami's ideas see his *Hope and Challenge*, Binghamton, NY: State University of New York, 1998; and Khatami, *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society*, Canberra: Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, 2000.
- 32 'Iran report says rights violations common in prison', Reuters, 23 July 2005; and 'Iran to hold jury trials for press offences', AFP, 5 October 2005.
- 33 See Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, Vol 1, trans Robert Hurley, London: Penguin, p 92ff; and Foucault, 'Two lectures', in Michael Kelly (ed), *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998, pp 17–46.
- 34 Adib-Moghaddam, 'Islamic utopian romanticism', p 286.
- 35 Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, p 580.
- 36 Ganji, 'The struggle against sultanism', p 51.
- 37 See further Ansari, 'Continuous regime change from within'; Mehrzad Boroujerdi, 'The paradoxes of politics in post-revolutionary Iran', in John L Esposito & RK Ramazani (eds), *Iran at the Crossroads*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, pp 13–27; Katajun Amirpur, 'Gibt es in Iran noch einen Reformprozess?', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 23 February 2004, pp 18–24; and Mehdi Parvizi Amineh, 'Demokratisierung und ihre Feinde in Iran', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 23 February 2004, pp 25–28.