UC Santa Cruz
UC Santa Cruz Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
Modernity, Secularism, and the Political Iran

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4bm1d2b3

Author
Mohamadi, Omid

Publication Date
2016

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

MODERNITY, SECULARISM, AND THE POLITICAL IN IRAN

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

POLITICS
with an emphasis in FEMINIST STUDIES

by

Omid Mohamadi

December 2016

The Dissertation of Omid Mohamadi is
approved:

_____
Professor Vanita Seth, Chair

_____
Professor Megan Thomas

_____
Professor Anjali Arondekar

_____
Professor Minoo Moallem

_____
Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Table of Contents

List of Figures

<u>Abstract</u>

Modernity, Secularism, and the Political in Iran

by

Omid Mohamadi

In the last decade, theorists in anthropology and other disciplines have
vigorously critiqued commonplace distinctions between secularism and religion.
Highlighting how secularism is a form of Western epistemology, such theorists have
argued this distinction is deeply problematic because it obscures secularism's historical,
political, and cultural particularity.

My dissertation argues Iran is well situated to engage in this debate because its
political terrain brings into relief how discussions of secularity and religiosity often fall
back on an irresolvable dichotomy wherein secularism is defended without qualification
or religious authoritarianism is ignored altogether. In an effort to move out of this
impasse, my dissertation critiques the presumed neutrality of secularism without
defending a thoroughly undemocratic Islamic Republic.

Through an examination of three sites within Iranian politics since 1979, I show
how alternatives to both secularism and undemocratic forms of Islam are already present
in Iran. The first site that I explore is the contemporary Iranian women's movement,
specifically the One Million Signatures Campaign, which seeks full gender equality within
the laws of the Islamic Republic. I argue that the internal logic of rights and a specific set
of socio-political conditions that arose out of the revolution in 1979 made the newly
fostered cooperation between Islamic and secular feminists within this campaign
possible. Utilizing critiques of rights by poststructuralist and postcolonial feminists, I

arrive at a critical endorsement of women's rights in Iran that calls for nurturing more radical political imaginaries by not treating rights jurisprudence as the apex of social justice struggles.

My second site focuses on the politics of time and its role in the 2009 post-election uprising as a further example of the porous boundary between secularism and religion in Iran. After surveying the history of Iran's three dominant calendars and the forty-day mourning cycle of Shi'ite Islam in the last century, I argue the Islamic Republic is founded on temporal simultaneity, a non-secular organization of time wherein past, present, and future are enfolded into one dynamic moment. I conclude that during the 2009 uprising, protesters initiated a crisis of legitimacy for the regime by reconfiguring temporal markers that comprise this symbolic foundation of the contemporary Iranian state.

My final site is the visual culture in the Islamic Republic as well as Western understandings and depictions of it. I argue such analyses of artistic production in Iran by Western observers rely on a particular understanding of the state, religion, and art as discrete categories wholly separate from one another. This argument is twofold, the first part of which is a historical survey that shows how the relationship between art and the state in Iran over the last sixty years has been co-constitutive. On the basis of this history, I then explore contemporary Iranian street art, both sanctioned and illicit, to show how this convergence of art and the state has continued to unfold in the Islamic Republic. I show how the boundaries between culture and the state have not calcified under the current regime but remain dynamically in flux, albeit different ways than in the previous historical epoch.

Lastly, I trace how the politics of secularism and religion both consolidates and frays the public/private divide within these three sites. Given this fact, the question of what to do with secularism and religion in Iran is ultimately a question of what to do about the divide between the private and public spheres. Taking up the issue of the double-bind structuring the public/private divide, I conclude my dissertation by surveying the ethical-politico limitations and possibilities of these alternative political imaginaries in Iran.

Since the beginning of my graduate studies at UCSC, Vanita Seth has significantly influenced, shaped, and molded my intellectual outlook. I could always count on going into her office with a mess of jumbled ideas and poorly written pages only to come out with a clear, coherent blueprint for going forward. Attentive to every aspect of this dissertation, from the minutiae of my argument within a particular chapter to the implications of my project for the larger academic field, it is Vanita's mentorship that has made so much of this work possible.

I am so thankful for the wonderful friends who have sustained me throughout this process: Sandra Harvey, Claire Lyness, Steve Araujo, and Sam Cook- a family which has now grown to include Megan Martenyi and Cassie Ambutter whose orbit I have come into towards the end of my time at UCSC. I am so incredibly lucky to inhabit this community that has provided a safe haven from the neoliberal-inspired forms of precarity and uncertainty that make graduate student life at times seemingly untenable, especially within a public institution. You all continue to be an unending source of support, strength, solidarity, and care- for which I am forever grateful.

To family and friends in Iran, thank you so much for both your support from afar and your hospitality during visits which have unfortunately been much too infrequent. I hope I have offered a rendering here that adequately conveys the complexity of day-to-day life, both past and present, within Iran- especially the long shadow of a revolution that has loomed across families, generations, and continents. To my grandparents, whose ability to withstand the loss of a child, a decade long war, a revolution, being separated from my immediate family by thousands of miles, and countless other tumultuous events has given me strength to have hope for the future.

While I am deeply saddened that my grandfather is not here to witness the finishing of this dissertation, the memory of his kind and gentle spirit remains. It is to him that this work is dedicated.

Thank you to the Liptons and Koguts, especially to Bonnie and Peter, for your support and encouragement over the years- I am honored to be a member of your lovely tribe. To my extended family, to the Noels and Kisers thank you for being an unwavering source of support throughout my journey from community college through this moment and beyond. To my sister, Mina, you have done much, much more than simply ensuring I could handle studying in a noisy environment once I left for college. Your encouragement has helped to keep me going in this difficult process and your razor-sharp wit and intelligence has kept me on my toes.

To my parents, words are unable to express how grateful I am for everything you have done for me. I know I did not take the most traditional of paths to get to here but you have given me unconditional love, care, and support along the way. You gave us a nurturing home within which love traversed and bridged cultural difference, which in many ways is the ethical foundation of the intellectual and political template for this dissertation. Thank you so much for everything.

And finally, to Rachel- thank you so much for you love and care over many, many years. You have always supported me even when this process has not been easy on you, especially given the long hours and time apart. You are the stabilizing and grounding force that has made every thing possible. I am so incredibly fortunate and lucky to have you in my life, I am looking forward to being your partner in crime in whatever adventures await us.

Introduction
"Neither Secularism Nor Islamic Republic"

Since September 11th, 2001 there has been a specter haunting the hegemonic global political imaginary, the specter of Islam. In the summer of 2014, this phantom grew to epic proportions when the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)[1] declared the establishment of a global Caliphate following its dramatic military offensives across northern Iraq in which it captured the cities of Samarra, Mosul, and Tikrit. Since these military victories, ISIL has carried out atrocities against Yazidis, Shi'ites, and Christians as well as initiating violently undemocratic modes of governance within its newly acquired territories. The rise of ISIL has unfolded against the backdrop of the inspiring, frustrating and often harrowing aftermath of the uprisings collectively known as the Arab Spring. On the surface, the repercussions of these uprisings were at least partially demarcated by political tensions between secular and Islamic factions in Tunisia as well as outright conflict between them in Egypt, Syria and Libya. Reverberations of the uprisings in the Arabian Peninsula have also manifested, again on a superficial level, as sectarian divisions between Sunnis and Shi'ites in Bahrain and Yemen. For those subscribing to the framework in the West, these tumultuous events have provided enough evidence for a clash of civilizations narrative to make Samuel Huntington smile smugly in his grave.[2]

The general mood of hostility, wariness, and antipathy toward Islam in Western public discourse that has emerged in response to these events has only worsened with the large numbers of refugees fleeing the war-torn landscapes of Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and other Muslim-majority countries. Although beset by election losses,

far-right parties such as Le Pen's National Front, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, and the Freedom Party of Austria as well as the successful Brexit campaign in England have mobilized against perceived incursions of Muslim refugees into the West. Nobert Hoffer, presidential candidate for the Freedom Party of Austria, has stated that "we must stop this invasion of Muslims" and Alexander Gauland of Alternatives for Germany party averred that "Islam is not a religion like Catholic or Protestant Christianity but a faith linked intellectually with a takeover of the state."[3] Unsurprisingly, such rhetoric ignores the lingering effects of colonialism and continued forms of imperialism in contributing to the crisis as well as the fact that the majority of refugees have fled to neighboring countries in the Middle East.[4]

In the last decade, however, it is not just conservatives and foreign policy hawks who have been troubled by what they perceive to be the threats allegedly posed to Western values and civilization by Islam. Many authors and commentators whose work has been given the label of New Atheism and who identify as progressive liberals have demonstrated a pronounced Islamophobia.[5] Sam Harris, a prominent figure within the movement, has stated not only that "mainstream Islam itself represents an extremist rejection of intellectual honesty, gender equality, secular politics, and pluralism" but also that "in Islam, we confront a civilization with an arrested history."[6] In addition to comparing a Muslim Texas teenager to ISIL following his arrest for bringing to school a homemade clock mistaken for a bomb, Richard Dawkins has also excoriated fellow liberals for allegedly giving a free pass to Islam: "Liberal about everything else, but then this one exception, 'Its their culture.' Well, to hell with their culture!"[7] Comedian Bill Maher, a fervent supporter of the movement, has compared Islam to the Mafia in that

both putatively kill their members for leaving and when queried about Islam's gender politics, responded: "Talk to women who've ever dated an Arab man. The results are not good."[8]

These arguments also significantly overlap with those of some liberal feminists in Europe and America who have singled out Islam as a primary impediment to gender equality and women's emancipation. The Bush administration's invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, for example, found an unlikely source of support when the Feminist Majority Foundation used its "Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan" campaign to portray the violent invasion as an imperative step in the liberation of Afghani women.[9] Some progressive feminists in France have forged similarly odd political alliances in their support for a 2004 ban on veils and other "conspicuous religious symbols" in schools as well as for the 2011 ban burqas in public. "The veil is a symbol of the oppression of a sex," prominent French feminist Elisabeth Badinter has stated, "Putting a veil on the head, this an act of submission. It burdens a woman's whole life."[10] Such debates surrounding the veil have continued with current controversies over the burkini and have taken on different political valences in the midst of renewed hostility towards French Muslims after the spate of terrorist attacks in recent years.[11]

There are other members of the progressive left who while careful to distance themselves from such pronounced hostility toward Muslims have nonetheless expressed ambivalence over the compatibility of Islam with their progressive aims. While careful to note that Muslims are a 'harassed minority' and that ISIL does not represent Islam as a whole, political theorist Michael Walzer argued in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo massacre: "Despite all of these qualifications, it is true without a doubt that the 'jihad of

the sword' is very strong today, and it is frightening to non-believers, heretics, secular liberals, social democrats, and liberated women in much of the Muslim world. And the fear is entirely rational."[12] As evidenced by their statements, some liberal commentators such as the French feminists described above or the New Atheists converge with far-right European political parties in their characterization of Islam as the enemy of Western civilization and values. For Walzer and liberal secularists more wary of such unwitting political alliances with those on the conservative end of the political spectrum, they are left in a political malaise wherein they want to both accommodate and critique Islam but cannot foresee a way to do either without forsaking at least some of the progressive values they uphold.

The amorphous specter of Islam these political commentators find so threatening has also been concretized in another specific form: the Islamic Republic of Iran. Even though the regime has been a source of confusion and fear since its instantiation following the revolution in 1979, it has once again been brought to the fore of global politics due to the War on Terror as well as the recent rapprochement between the United States and Iran. Some have argued that Iran, especially if it is armed with a nuclear weapon, poses a far greater danger than ISIL owing to its longer transnational reach and that it is a much larger state whose borders are historically settled.[13] Aside from highlighting the purported political and military advantages it holds over ISIL, however, these assessments of Iran are informed by an implicit and far more existential anxiety. While the horrific and arresting violence of ISIL has cultivated an understandable sense of immediacy within the international community, its territorial and political fortunes continue to waver by the day and its future lies undetermined.

Iran, on the other hand, is (at least formally) a fully realized Islamic state wherein governance is securely ensconced and rooted in the country's Shi'ite clerical establishment. It has brutally and undemocratically carried out its unique form of *velayat e fiqh* or "Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist" for over three decades while withstanding the forces of a decade-long war, internal political unrest, and devastating economic sanctions. A religious state that in the modern era was not supposed to be and which was produced by an equally unthinkable revolution, nonetheless endures.

As will be discussed in more detail below, the figure of Islam more generally and Iran in particular has also loomed over recent academic debates, especially within secular studies or what has been problematically labeled "the postsecular turn."[14] Charles Taylor argues Islam not only helps to bring into relief the historical intertwinement of secularism and Christianity but also forces us to take seriously our communitarian responsibilities to all regardless of religious difference.[15] In revisiting his earlier theorization of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas has similarly admonished secular citizens to be more understanding of their religious counterparts.[16] Other scholars have been far more critical of secularism itself, such as Talal Asad who uses Islam as a reference point and lens to highlight disparate forms of political violence enacted by secularism.[17] Similarly, Saba Mahmood has used an Islamic women's piety movement to critically interrogate secular conceptions of agency and has also shown how secular governance has deepened the marginality of religious minorities in Muslim-majority Egypt.[18] Finally, while not necessarily echoing the Islamophobia of the New Atheists, secular critics of these authors have pointed to countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran as proof of the redemptive value and necessity of secularism.[19]

While this dissertation focuses on the complex dimensions of contemporary Iranian politics, it is thoroughly engaged with these critical assessments of secularism and grapples with the central theoretical questions they raise. Although not always referenced directly, the imprint of Asad and Mahmood's interventions in particular will be readily evident in the proceeding chapters since their work is crucial to any multi-dimensional rendering of Islam that fully accounts for its vast discursive landscape. Indeed, this project takes up their call to fight and dismantle geopolitical narratives positing Islam as the harbinger of the impending demise of freedom, equality, and pluralism. This analytic imperative, moreover, will be coupled with a critical interrogation of those who argue such freedom, equality, and pluralism is only possible within the narrow confines of liberal secularism.

At the same time, however, one cannot ignore the fact that the government of Iran uses its particular interpretation of Islam to justify its use of violence against its citizens that is so extreme as to constitute state terrorism. For example, it must never be forgotten how during the mass execution of tens of thousands of Leftist political prisoners by the Islamic Republic over the course of five months in 1988, each prisoner (after being reassured they were not in danger) was asked just before their unforeseen execution: "Will you publicly recant historical materialism? Do you believe in God? Will you sign an affidavit that you believe in God, the Prophet, the Holy Koran, and the Resurrection?"[20] Given the critiques of the secularism voiced by Asad and Mahmood, which I argue hold and are correct, what does one do about a geopolitical space like Iran wherein an authoritarian regime is informed, sustained, and grounded in a particular religious tradition? This question effectively leaves one at an impasse with no viable way

forward, as the seemingly only response is the rhetorical equivalent of throwing one's hands up: Secularism is fundamentally and perhaps fatally flawed, irrevocably and preemptively severed from any expansive instantiations of social justice as a consequence of its normative investments and yet, I do not want an Islamic Republic.

Even though it will not always be addressed directly in the chapters that follow, this impasse lies at the heart of this dissertation. To be abundantly clear, this dissertation is not an attempt to either resolve the tensions between religion and secularism or provide a comprehensive framework in which such a resolution would be possible. Given the magnitude of these questions any attempt at a complete resolution or a systematic framework is a fool's errand. More to the point, a single answer would not be desirable given that it would by definition flatten difference and thereby ignore the historical and cultural contexts of the geopolitical sites in question. This project will therefore strive to move out of this impasse by taking a step back and analyzing moments in Iranian politics wherein the boundaries between religion and secularism as well as the private and public spheres has either broken down or remains in flux. These moments, however, are often not self-evident and require an adjustment of the usual lenses by which secularism and religiosity are understood in the West. Rather trying to impose a theoretical solution, this dissertation will instead use the interventions of secular studies scholars to see these dimensions of Iranian politics on its own terms without capitulating to those terms. My central argument, in other words, is that small, preliminary steps forward from this impasse are already present in Iran- it is just a matter of being able to see them.

While these contributions of secular studies scholars will be an animating provocation, this dissertation is fundamentally about Iran and its political history over the last three decades that has inspired sorrow, anger, violence, tragedy, courage, resilience, and most audaciously of all, hope. Many hard truths such as the mass executions in 1988 have been littered across the historical record of Iran during the last three decades and have left deep, lingering scars. I have been confronted directly with such wearying effects of violence, inflicted both from within and from outside the country, during trips to Iran when family and close friends would talk in contemplatively melancholic terms about the need for a national truth and reconciliation committee to go hand in hand with any potential reform or revolution. As the 2009 uprising has attested to, however, such reform or revolution always seems to inhabit the realm of the probable and possible, even if glimpses of them are fleeting. In the pages that follow, these painful and incredibly complex moments within contemporary Iranian history will not be shied away from for the sake of intellectual convenience but will serve as enduring reminders of the very real political stakes of these seemingly abstract theoretical questions.

As this dissertation aims to illustrate, Islam more generally and Shi'ism in particular cannot be reduced to its contemporary incarnation in the Iranian state. It is a multivariate, vibrant, productive and sometimes-paradoxical socio-cultural force that has not only shaped contemporary Iran but also has been itself influenced and remolded by the country's political currents. To adequately capture this dynamism, however, it is imperative that the exploration of questions around secularism and religion that follows not come at the expense of Iranian history and politics. This dissertation, in other words

is not an exercise of social theory that treats contemporary Iran as a passive medium upon which to bluntly impose secular studies frameworks in an effort to answer the questions they raise. Rather, this project will strive towards a robust analytical reciprocity in which the geopolitics of Iran helps to lay bare the political stakes and limitations of these theoretical frameworks while at the same time the interventions of these scholars can help us see past the surface of Iranian politics.

Secular/Religious, Public/Private

Before explicating the arguments of secular studies scholars who will inform this project, it will be helpful to first briefly rehearse the standard narrative of liberal secularism that they, to varying degrees, critique. While the commentators referenced at the outset of the chapter differ sharply in their political affinities, their anxieties and fears of over the alleged threat Islam poses is not the only thing they have in common. Despite the significant diversity of opinion regarding whether Islam can coexist with 'Western values' and what its 'proper place' within Western societies ought to be, the very terms of this debate precondition the available political responses. As evidenced by the comments above, this debate is founded upon an assumption that political life is structured by a set of two overlapping dichotomies, that between secularism and religion as well as that between the private and public spheres. This debate, in other words, both draws on and contributes to a shared narrative of liberal secularism. Given that this liberal secular framework is so ingrained within commonplace Western discourse that it has been effectively naturalized and thereby rendered invisible as a political construct, it will be worth excavating here its central tenets: a separation between church and state,

the secularization of remaining vestiges of religion in the public sphere, a presumption that the public sphere is a neutral, value-free space, and finally, the burden placed on individuals to leave 'conspicuous' forms religious affiliations in the private sphere.

Central within this liberal conception of the secular is the separation of church and state, a concept rooted in John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration.* Locke's treatise was written forty years after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which ended to over a century of bloody warfare that included disparate conflicts between different Christian denominations and European countries as well as the English Civil War. Positing religious tolerance as the central way by which to maintain peace, Locke argues that the state is to be concerned only with 'civil concernments', chiefly life, liberty, and property. "All civil power, right, and dominion, is bounded and confined to the only care of promoting these things," Locke states, "And that it neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of souls."[21] Locke reinforces this division between the church and the state by asserting, "as the magistrate has no power to impose, by his laws, the use of any rites and ceremonies in any church; so neither has he any power to forbid the use of such rites and ceremonies."[22] Within Locke's framework, the public sphere is a secular civic space formally separate from religious influence while the private sphere offers an enshrined space to carry out one's individual religious practices free from harassment and persecution.

To be sure, this liberal secular mandate that Locke was among the first to systematically lay out has varied significantly in its interpretation and implementation in conjunction with the emergence of the nation-state over the last several centuries. As Joan W. Scott succinctly argues, for example, "in France, the state protects individuals

from religion; in America religions are protected from the state and the state from religion."[23] In the U.S. the state's formal role is relatively passive in that it is, arguably, encouraged not to act: it shall *not* establish an official religion *nor* impede the exercise of it. As evidenced by the ongoing opposition to the legalization gay marriage from religious conservatives, for example, clearly what constitutes the state impeding the exercise of religion continues to be a matter of fierce debate in the U.S. In France, however, the state is formally called upon to actively protect the secular public sphere and the individuals comprising it from what are deemed encroachments from religion in the private sphere. Legitimated by the claim of universality, finally, the French state posits this intervention as a neutral response and a corrective measure- a raison d'état frequently evoked during its regulation of the veil.

These different variants of secularism, which inform the disparate characterizations of Islam discussed above, are nonetheless bridged by a common barometer for measuring the finite ways in which religiosity can appear in the public sphere. Craig Calhoun has noted that within liberal conceptions of political secularism, "religious arguments have a legitimate place in the public sphere only to the extent that they can be rendered in (ideally rational) terms that are not specifically religious."[24] In other words, religion can acceptably inhabit the public sphere only if it in effect secularizes itself. That is, different instances of religiosity must come with the recognition that they are taking place on foreign soil and that their passport can be instantly revoked if they do not abide by the secular norms structuring the public sphere. To use again the example of gay marriage in the U.S., this was a lesson that county clerk Kim Davis in Kentucky learned the hard way when her claim to religious freedom in

denying marriage licenses to gay couples was nullified by her simultaneous invocation of "God's authority" in her decision.[25]

There is a further layer of liberal conceptualizations of the secular, namely that the burden of maintaining the public/private divide does not just fall on the state or the church but also on private individuals. While written in reference to French secularism or *laïcité*, Joan W. Scott's insights are instructive for secularism more broadly. "That religion should be one of a number of values an individual espoused; it was a private matter that must be readily separated from one's public life," Scott states in rehearsing commonplace notions of the secular, "Individuals were autonomous, in this view, with no obligations other than to themselves; their choices did not define them but were expressions of the rational beings they already were."[26] There is, in other words, a presumption that individuals can and should check their religious beliefs at their front door before entering the public sphere. Once again religiosity is secularized, as it becomes a set of beliefs that individuals possess and can therefore transfer or alienate. A prerequisite for being identified as an autonomous, rational individual within liberal secular political arrangements is therefore a bifurcated subjectivity. Finally, there is a normative pressure to maintain this dual identity given that "unless individuals could be divided between public (secular) commitments and private (religious) ones, they did not qualify for membership in the republic."[27]

There is a final dimension to this rendering of secularism that is intertwined with Enlightenment notions of progress and modernity. Often identified as the 'secularization thesis,' its proponents laud the inevitability of not only social, political, and cultural progress but also the centrality of secularism within this historical process.

In addition to the removal of religion from different institutions of public life and the attendant privatization of religion, Talal Asad, citing Jose Casanova, describes a further tenet of this thesis as the belief in "the declining social signification of religious belief, commitment, and institutions."[28] Secularism is thus at once synonymous with modernity and a vehicle for its unfolding. Modernity is present and robust, in other words, when a firm boundary between the public and private spheres is not only a foregone conclusion but also when religious affinities begin to fray in the face of expanding secular, public Reason. But what of the forms of religiosity that do not adhere to liberal secular conceits and that endure in the face of their inevitable march of progress? For those subscribing to the secularization thesis, these instances of religiosity, once again in Asad's words, "merely indicates the existence of a widespread revolt against modernity and a failure of the modernization process."[29] These forms of religiosity are therefore obstacles to modernity that must and will eventually be overcome.

For some of those subscribing to this framework, such as the commentators cited at the opening of this introduction, Islam is such a threat is because it represents a rejection of this secularization thesis in its traversal of the hallowed separation between the public and private spheres. Often upholding ISIL, Iran, and Saudi Arabia as the worst offenders, Islam is posited as being synonymous with an inherent inability to maintain a separation between mosque and state. In other words, there is no neutral public sphere to speak of in these and other Muslim-majority countries. The wearing of veils in French schools and/or burqas in its streets similarly reflects the alleged difficulty by which Islam navigates the separation of the public and private spheres in Western countries. The veil and the burqa, moreover, for some represents an attempt to impart

specific Islamic values onto a public sphere that is otherwise free of particular, 'cultural'

values. Islam, whether it is inside or outside of the West, is thereby an impediment to

modernity at best and an active threat to liberal, democratic, and secular values at worst.

Secularism, Religion, and the Public/Private Divide: A Reprise

This assessment of Islam, however, is not shared by all proponents of secularism

and the attendant separation between the public and private spheres. Though informed

by different understandings of what the character of public sphere has been and what it

ought to be, Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor have nonetheless offered similar

appraisals of the ethical imperatives facing secularism in confronting religious

difference.[30] While Habermas does not reject the secularization thesis outright, he does

argue there has been a 'post-secular' shift in consciousness. For Habermas, secular

citizens must shift with this transition toward the postsecular and engage in a

'complementary learning process' in order not to "confuse the neutrality of a secular

state in view of competing religious worldviews with the purging of the political public

sphere of all religious contributions."[31] At the same time, however, he cautions that this

form of openness toward religiosity in the public sphere "must not succumb to leaving

the door wide open for revisions that would undermine the principle [of secularism]

itself."[32]

Charles Taylor has also taken up this postsecular ethos, albeit with greater critical

bite and insight into the normative architecture of secularism. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor

illustrates not only the co-constitutive character of secularism and religion but also how

the emergence of secularism was accompanied by the shift from 'porous' to 'buffered'

forms of subjectivity.[33] Ever the communitarian, Taylor has elsewhere pushed back against the Rawlsian "fetishization of the favored institutional arrangements" within secular societies which he argues leads to unduly rigid modes of governing the public sphere.[34] Besides the discriminatory forms of policing such rigidity enacts, such institutionalism ironically damages the very public sphere it is seeking to protect since it erodes trust between citizens of different faiths and beliefs. Wryly noting how we are "condemned to live an overlapping consensus," Taylor nonetheless views four goals of secular liberal democracy (liberty, equality, fraternity, and civic harmony) as ideals worth striving toward.[35] The hitch, however, is that such goals must be pursued through what Taylor labels a 'revisionary polysemy' wherein secular states are not "bulwarks against religion" but instead "attempt to shape their institutional arrangements not to remain true to hallowed tradition but to maximize the basic goals of liberty and equality between basic beliefs."[36]

While these arguments by Habermas and Taylor represent one thread within the secular studies literature, there is a second thread of argumentation far more critical of secularism as well as the dichotomy between the public and private spheres it presumes. Talal Asad has provided one of the most substantive and thorough critiques of these epistemic underpinnings of secularism. Rather than taking the public sphere as apriori good, Asad reminds us that it is "a space *necessarily* (not just contingently) articulated by power" and that "everyone who enters it must address power's disposition of people and things, the dependence of some on the goodwill of others."[37] Both secularism and the public sphere are therefore ineluctably bound to different matrices of power, the most salient of which is the liberal nation state. Within this particular arrangement of power,

however, there exists an inherent tension between 'religion' and secularism: "On the hand, objects, sites, practices, words, representations-even the minds and bodies of worshippers-cannot be confined within the exclusive space of what secularists *name* 'religion'…On the other hand the nation-state requires clearly demarcated spaces that it can classify and regulate."[38] Given the intertwined nature of secularism and Christianity, this tension is more acutely felt by religious minorities whose practices do not conform to hegemonic understandings of religion and thus cannot be relegated to what is deemed the private sphere. As Asad notes in reference to the French veil debate, for example, a Muslim woman in France who is denied the right to wear a veil in school has her subjectivity effectively cleaved in half as the French state prevents her from simultaneously fulfilling a commandment from God and receiving full benefits and protections as a citizen.[39]

Saba Mahmood has raised similarly rich and substantive criticisms of secularism's political conceits. The Islamic women's piety movement of Egypt and its ethical comportment Mahmood chronicles in *Politics of Piety*, for example, challenges a central hallmark of secularism, "namely, the process by which religion is relegated to its own differentiated sphere, its influence curtailed to those aspects of modern life that are deemed either 'private' or 'moral'."[40] Mahmood has most recently argued the tensions between two pillars of secularism, religious liberty and minority rights, that has imperiled religious minorities in Egypt grows out of a public/private divide that separates religious beliefs from religious practices.[41] The separation of church and state that presumes a firm boundary between the public and private spheres, Mahmood argues, is contravened by the fact that "modern governmentality involves the state's intervention and regulation

16

of many aspects of socioreligious life, dissolving the distinction between public and private."[42] In other words, the distinctions between church and state as well as that between the public and private spheres are regularly traversed by the state that formally relies on these very distinctions.

As evidenced by the survey of their work above, the secular studies literature features interventions that while critical seek to redeem secularism (Habermas, Taylor) and also authors who highlight how the marginalization of religious subjects is enshrined within its epistemic scaffolding (Asad, Mahmood). While his major engagement with these questions predated these works, William E. Connolly has in effect managed to navigate this schism. Connolly argues that "the secular division of labor between 'religious faith' and 'secular argument,' where faith and ritual are to be contained in a protected private preserve and rational argument is said to exhaust public life, suppresses complex registers of persuasion, judgment, and discourse operative in public life."[43] To be clear, Connolly forthrightly argues that "secularism needs refashioning, not elimination."[44] For Connolly, an ideal refashioning would entail a culture wherein "participants are called upon neither to leave their metaphysical baggage at home when they participate in various publics nor adopt an overarching faith acknowledge by all parties who strive to promote the common good."[45] Through this 'ethos of engagement' Connolly acknowledges how the public/private divide flattens and rips apart the dense layers of selfhood, especially for those whose religious rituals and traditions are either socially illegible or deemed a threat. Thus Connolly splits the difference by engaging in a project of preserving secularism but does so with a radical pluralist ethos imbued with a deep understanding of its lurking political violence.

17

Even though these interventions by Connolly may offer a bridge, the differences between these two different threads of argumentation must not be glossed over as they directly relate to the political stakes surrounding secularism and religion that will animate this dissertation. It is important to recall that Asad's point about the public sphere being an articulation of power was a direct critique of Habermas's rendering of it.[46] Asad also finds Taylor's concept of the 'buffered self' inadequate "because what matters is not simply disconnection of the body-self from the world, but the multiple ways in which body and the world have come to be severed or yoked together."[47] Mahmood has leveled two central critiques of Habermas's formulation of the "postsecular": 1.) The underlying assumptions in the temporal demarcation of *post-* which "suggests that there is something unexpected and novel about the persistence of religion in the present"; and 2.) Borrowing from Charles Taylor, the related and implicit 'subtraction theory' of religion that preserves a binary view of secularism and religion "wherein the secular is assumed to be that which remains after religion is taken away."[48] While Mahmood credits Taylor's *A Secular Age* for "its authoritative dismantling of the idea that religion and secularism are antithetical worldviews," she critiques his neglect of how non-Christian traditions have historically shaped Latin Christendom and thus argues that he delineates "an account of Christian secularism that remains blind to the normative assumptions and power of Western Christianity."[49]

There have also been strident criticisms of the secular studies literature writ large from scholars writing outside its borders, critiques that have been focused in particular on Mahmood and Asad's interventions.[50] A special issue of *boundary 2* entitled "Antimonies of the Secular" was dedicated in its entirety to such a critique, the first part

of which featured contributors outlining why they were not a 'post-secularist'.

Uncritically lumping together all of the aforementioned works under the heading of

'postsecular,' Aamir R. Mufti criticizes Asad for disingenuously claiming to disavow

liberalism while secretly relying on 'liberal ways of thinking about Islam."[51] Melinda

Cooper dramatically compares Asad to Salafism (an ultra-conservative branch of Sunni

Islam) since both "share a desire to purify his object of study of all merely cultural

interpretations" and characterized Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* as "a now classic apologia

for such right-wing female activism."[52] These comments were echoed by Bruce Robbins

who stated "the kind of case made by Mahmood for her pious women could be made as

easily for, say, a fascist youth movement" and argued the anti-authoritarianism of

postsecularists was "disingenuous, since its effect is to make room for appeals to a divine

authority, which outranks all others."[53]

Other contributors to this edition offered more sober critiques of the

implications of the arguments made by Asad and Mahmood for women and queer

subjects. While supportive of interventions such as those by Jasbir Puar that illuminate

how an endorsement of queer rights can be an alibi for empire, Nikita Dhawan states she

is "extremely disquieted and troubled by the silences on and lack of critique of

homophobia and heterosexism in diasporic and postcolonial contexts."[54] Dhawan

argues further that "even as we condemn the privatization of religion and support the

claims of religious actors to the public realm, the privatization of nonnormative sexual

practices by religious and minority communities and their representatives is simply-

ignored within critical discourses."[55]

In sum, the critiques of secular studies literature more generally and of Asad and Mahmood in particular are: They universalize as well as essentialize religion and secularism, they are apologists for the violence of Islam (especially with regard to women and queer subjects), they ignore the specific political contexts of the geopolitical sites they study, and they rely on the very epistemic frameworks they are critiquing. Most of these critiques, with the exception of that levied by Dhawan, are couched in hyperbolic rhetoric that misses entirely the nuances of the aforementioned theoretical interventions and are not attentive to important differences within the secular studies literature. At the same time, however, one cannot dismiss the ethical anxiety at the core of these critiques as they are informed by a set of legitimate, enduring, and vexing political concerns. It is undeniable, for example, that there is continued violence against women, queer subjects, and religious minorities within Islamic geopolitical contexts. Dhawan's argument is especially important as she highlights the lurking potential to ignore a reproduction of the private/public divide with regard to sexuality even while critiquing that divide and the political violence it enacts on religious minorities.

It is here that one arrives at the impasse that was discussed at the outset of this introduction, an impasse wherein a thorough critique of both secularism and geopolitical contexts such as Iran leaves little room in which to proceed politically. However, part of the issue with this impasse is that the fraught relationship between secularism and religiosity is framed and queried in the abstract. Such abstract theoretical terms tend toward a unitary, singular answer to these exceedingly difficult questions, an answer that is quickly contravened by the lived experiences of secularism and religiosity in different cultural, political, economic, and social contexts. My dissertation, in contrast, will take

these pertinent though abstract theoretical questions and think through them in the specific context of contemporary Iranian politics. The conclusions drawn here will reflect most closely Iran's recent political history and, I hope, help to envision alternative political futures. While applying these conclusions to other geopolitical contexts must therefore be qualified and delimited, this dissertation will strive to use the lessons gleaned from Iranian politics to open new avenues of inquiry for thinking about religion and secularism more broadly.

Islamic/Republic

Iran is particularly useful for thinking through these overwrought questions as its political landscape speaks to the messiness of what in abstraction seems like clear-cut divisions: the presumed separation between religion and secularism as well as that between the public and private spheres. Any analytic endeavor that wishes to adequately capture this messiness and dynamism, however, must be grounded in a historiography of Iran, not merely its history. When considering the history of Iran during the last century, it is worth recalling Hayden White's concise critique of those following the well-trodden path of positivism when assessing historical facts: "What is at issue here is not, What are the facts? but rather, How are the facts to be described in order to sanction one mode of explaining them rather than another?"[56] Perhaps as a testament to the cogency and longevity of White's argument, this may seem a banal and straightforward point. But in the case of Iran, how its history is understood and narrativized is of paramount importance because it conditions the political possibilities of its past and for its present and future. As Hamid Dabashi has argued, "Iranian history in the last two hundred years

can only be told only in terms at once domestic to its internal developments and yet regional and global in their causes and consequences."[57] A critical historiography is therefore the necessary starting point for offering an analysis that eschews a dogmatically secular reading of Iran and which can slide into the Islamophobia described earlier. It is also an important defense against the historical narrative the Islamic Republic tells of itself and of the revolution in 1979, thereby disrupting the potential of relapsing into an uncritical essentialism.

There is another reason why contemporary Iran is helpful for thinking about the political relationship between religion and secularism, one that has been touched on by scholars whose work, broadly speaking, is located inside or at the periphery of the field formation of Iranian studies. These scholars, more specifically, point to a founding contradiction of the contemporary Iranian state that is enshrined in its name: the irreconcilability of republican and Islamic political orders fused into a single nation-state. "The *Islamic Republic* is a categorical contradiction in terms- it is neither a *republic* nor *Islamic*," Hamid Dabashi argues, "It is not a republic because it is a theocracy; it is not Islamic because Islam (Shi'ism in particular) cannot be in power without instantly discrediting itself."[58] Dabashi states further, in more dire terms, how "this paradox is the central dilemma of the Islamic Republic, in which it is trapped and from which it has no escape, except dismantling itself."[59] Mehrzad Boroujerdi similarly describes this founding contradiction of the Islamic Republic as manifesting in "a constitution which simultaneously affirms religious and secular principles" as well as in "a theocracy where religion is an axiom of political life and yet secular agents, aspirations, ideas, institutions, language and motifs continue to survive."[60]

As Dabashi's somewhat tautological definition reveals, the problem with such characterizations of the putative founding paradox of the Islamic Republic is that the underlying concepts and the relationship between them are not critically interrogated. The concepts of religion, secularism, theocracy, and republicanism are taken as self-evident social facts. More problematically, this framing preserves a binary logical wherein secularism is diametrically opposed to religion and they are thus only socially and politically affected by one another in moments of conflict. This is not to dismiss out of hand the possibility that this contradiction exists as the following chapters will illustrate how the tensions between different forms of secularism and religiosity is an immensely productive force in Iranian politics. Rather, it is to critique and caution against taking this tension or the larger conceptual categories for granted. When one begins to analyze these concepts and their political lives in contemporary Iran, it becomes immediately clear that they are not static. They are dynamic, co-constitutive, shifting and more often than not, fleeting.

In providing a multidimensional account of these concepts related to the entanglement of secularism and religion in contemporary Iran, this dissertation will put secular studies and Iranian studies into conversation with one another. With notable exceptions, there are few mentions of, let alone sustained engagements with, the ideas of secular studies by scholars of Iran.[61] Similarly, Iran receives scant attention from those offering critical perspectives on secularism. The interventions of secular studies, particularly those highlighting the discursive nature of and the often-neglected power asymmetries between secularism and religion, are nonetheless indispensible for understanding contemporary Iranian politics. Put simply, these insights enable an

understanding of religiosity in Iran in its myriad forms (especially those outside of the state) on its own terms without succumbing to essentialism. As previously mentioned, however, the larger questions at play here cannot come at the expense of Iran's history and geopolitical context. The chapters that follow are therefore indebted to rich the contributions of Iranian studies scholars that help to envision more ethical political futures for Iran. The critical impulse here is not one of dismissal but, to cite Wendy Brown, as "a way of caring for and even renewing the object in question."[62]

With this approach in mind, I want to briefly touch on the concept of the public/private divide in relation to Iran and the aforementioned impasse around how to proceed politically as well as ethically given the forms of violence enacted by both religion and secularism. The public/private divide is in effect the site of this impasse since the spectrum of critique and political possibility for either secularism or religion converges in this location. Recall how Taylor, Habermas, and Connolly in different ways sought to reconfigure or refashion the public sphere to make it more inclusive while Asad and Mahmood located the public/private divide as a source of socio-political inequality. It should also be noted that through their critiques of this literature, contributors to the "Antimonies of the Secular" edition of *boundary 2* fall back on this private/public divide in their defense of secularism, which is no small irony considering many of these authors are critical of liberalism as well. Seen through this vantage point, the impasse of 'neither secularism nor Islamic Republic' is on basic level an impasse around the public/private divide: whether or not to endorse it in the face of a repressive state, when and where to either endorse or critique it, how to not flatten difference when invoking it, whether it always promotes inequality, if it does lead to the attainment of a

social good whether to keep striving for more radical futures, and finally, whether it can be dynamic enough to withstand the messy currents of political life given its attachment to the law.

Similar to those adhering to liberal secular frameworks in trying to ascertain the compatibility of Islam with 'Western values', for many scholars who study Iran the existence of a public sphere is taken for granted. More specifically, the political portrait often rendered is of two competing public spheres: a secular public sphere grounded in the republican tradition that is squelched and suffocated by an Islamic public sphere constructed in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Surely, the relationship between these two public spheres is not always antagonistic and can converge, as evidenced perhaps by the Reformist Movement of the late 1990's led by former President Mohammad Khatami. These convergences, however, are assumed to be short-lived because they not only pull in opposite political directions but also are informed by fundamentally different epistemological frameworks. Consequently, on the basis of this assumption the character of the public sphere in Iran continues to be articulated along such bifurcated lines.

A closer examination, however, will reveal that a dichotomous understanding of Iranian public life cannot hold because the concept of the public/private divide itself is not settled in Iran. As attested to by the recent (or any) docket of the United States Supreme Court, Iran is not novel in this regard as the boundaries of the public/private divide are always shifting and transforming within its geopolitical environment. Iran is unique, however, for the particular socio-political processes by which the public/private divide is unsettled and resettled, processes that are rooted in the multifaceted

engagements between Marxism, liberal nationalism, Shi'ism (in all of its different political forms), feminism, and empire. This last element is of especial importance since even though the country was not formally colonized, the Enlightenment project and its political iterations came to Iran, in the words of Hamid Dabashi, "through the gun barrel of colonialism."[63] Acknowledging this colonial legacy is significant because it casts light on the violence intrinsically linked to Enlightenment conceptions of freedom secured in part through the public sphere. It also undercuts any attempt to posit Shi'ia Islam, as the Islamic Republic often does, as a wholly monolithic and distinctly Iranian rejection of Western modernity since, as Minoo Moallem argues, "Iranian modernity is defined in significant ways by the constructions of race and gender found in the traveling notions that accompany the civilizational imperialism of Western modernity."[64]

In other words, the political currents of Shi'ism in Iran have in many ways absorbed some of the conceits of Western modernity and its ways of seeing the world. The political outlook of Shi'ism was considerably different following the 1906-1911 Constitutional Revolution than when Shi'ism was made the state religion of Iran during the Safavid dynasty (1501-1732), historical shifts that while distinct continue to the inform the Islamic Republic as a whole. Liberal, secular nationalists who emerged a substantive force during the Constitutional Revolution were similarly shaped and molded by their Islamic counterparts, some of whom were allies while others were antagonists. Finally, Iranian Marxism was also constituted within this political field and sometimes converged with Shi'ism in their respective critiques of empire, as the first chapter will illustrate in reference to the women's movement. It is upon these complex philosophical

26

and political engagements that the public/private divide in contemporary Iran is founded and reconstituted.

Part of what makes the Islamic Republic such a vexing case for critics of secularism and liberalism more broadly, however, is its inconsistent encroachments upon what might be deemed the private sphere. Take for example the fact that homosexuality is punishable by death, a sentence that has been carried out on numerous occasions, and yet, as Afsaneh Najmabadi has eloquently analyzed, the Iranian state does not formally criminalize transgender subjectivity and will actually help pay for gender affirming surgery.[65] The positionality, to borrow a term from Linda Alcoff, of Iranian women is another case in point.[66] As will be discussed in the first chapter, the family law of the Islamic Republic reaffirms the sanctity of the private sphere by enshrining men as the head of the household and thus (mostly) beyond legal reproach. At the same time, however, mandatory veiling and gendered organizations of public space have weakened the private/public divide by encouraging pious women and/or those from conservative households to enter into public life in a much more robust way. In what is effectively an inversion of the French anti-veil mandate, for some Iranian women there is no conflict between fulfilling a commandment from God and one's duties as a citizen. There is also, however, an inversion of the social and affective cost, one that in this instance is disproportionately shouldered by secular and non-observant Iranian women.

It is this dynamism and messiness inherent within Iranian political landscape that offers a glimpse of how to extricate one's self from the impasse between secularism and religion. The issue, more specifically, is that the understandable first impulse when simultaneously persuaded by the secular studies literature and confronted by religious

27

authority in a country like Iran remains trapped within a binary framework. The political

peril of such a dichotomous approach has been critiqued by Manav Ratti, who argues:

> "Postsecularism emerges in that precarious space of risk. The
> postsecular is caught in a double bind between religion and
> secularism. It cannot be captured through dichotomies like
> 'neither religion nor secularism.' If it emerged in such stark an
> easy dichotomies then the intricacies and subtleties of
> postsecularism's arguments, potentials, cautiousness, and debates
> would devolve to become something like 'religionists versus
> secularists,' with a series of banal phrases clustering around it."[67]

While departing from Ratti's endorsement of the concept of the 'postsecular' for the

reasons Mahmood outlined above, the following chapters will take seriously his cautions

against redeploying binaries in the attempt to move past them.

Before previewing the argument of the chapters that follow, I want to touch

briefly on the scope of this dissertation. As will be evident, the proceeding chapters rely

primarily on English language sources and analyses of Iran within the United States and

Europe. This was an intentional choice on my part for a couple of reasons, the first of

which is practical. It is exceedingly difficult and actually dangerous to conduct research

in Iran that is animated by the questions of secularism and religion that this dissertation

is, especially given the critiques of the Islamic Republic levied here. To be sure, the time

I have spent in Iran prior to and during my graduate studies have informed and shaped

the arguments contained herein. But direct, on the ground research also has less bearing

on a type of project such as this dissertation given that I am not about disputing the facts

around aspects of Iranian politics as such but rather critiquing how they are framed and understood both within the West and by the Islamic Republic. Moreover, much of the events and objects of study are based in or around Tehran due to the centrality of the city and that it is an important source of intellectual, political, and artistic production in Iran. This obviously delimits the scope of this dissertation and I will therefore not make definitive assertions about all aspects of Iranian politics or sweeping statements about what all Iranians think about politics inside their country. Instead, the chapters that follow will trace the politics of reading Iran in various ways and how it helps us rethink the impasse between secularism and religiosity more broadly.

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation, set on the stage of the ethical and political considerations of the aforementioned scholars offering critical perspectives on secularism, is in many ways is about the unintended consequences of the 1979 Revolution. Attempts by the Islamic Republic to assert its complete authority over both public and private life along the lines of its version of revolutionary Shi'ism has in many cases backfired and led to a loosening of its symbolic grip, often through the very socio-cultural constructs that serve as the foundation for the regime. While by no means an exhaustive list, the following chapters will focus on three political sites and moments wherein the boundary between religion and secularism as well as that between the public and private is especially blurred: 1.) The rights discourse of the Iranian women's movement; 2.) The politics of time in Iran, especially during the 2009 post-election uprising; and 3.) The visual culture of the Islamic Republic and the genres of public art including murals and graffiti. These sites and

moments also are important focal points because in many ways they outpace our conceptual vocabularies for describing them and thereby force a reconsideration of existing binaries between public and private, religion and secularism. Most importantly, the productive capacity of central cultural, social, and political forms within these sites (rights, time, and art, respectively) will be especially emphasized since it is what drives the dynamism of Iranian politics.

The first chapter analyzes the contemporary Iranian women's movement, specifically the One Million Signatures Campaign that seeks full gender equality within the laws of the Islamic Republic. As will be evidenced by its central text entitled *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* and comments by feminists who contributed to it, the campaign reflects a broader shift within the movement towards more substantive cooperation between Islamic and secular feminists. I will argue that this recent cooperation was made possible by the internal logic of rights and two socio-political conditions that arose out of the revolution in 1979: 1.) The eradication of the radical Left from Iranian politics; and 2.) A crisis of Shi'ite authority initiated by the Islamic Republic itself. Through a reappraisal of the historiography of the women's movement, however, it will also be shown how the cooperation between secular and Islamic feminists has not translated necessarily to an ideological or epistemic unity. Drawing on critiques of rights frameworks by poststructuralist and postcolonial feminists, I conclude by calling for a critical endorsement of women's rights in Iran that does not treat rights jurisprudence as the apex of social justice struggles and which simultaneously nurtures more radical political imaginaries.

The second chapter focuses on the politics of time and its role in the 2009 post-

election uprising as another facet of Iranian politics defined by a porous boundary between secularism and religion. Drawing on the history of Iran's three dominant calendars and the forty-day mourning cycle of Shi'ite Islam in the last century, I argue that understanding the politics informing these organizations of time is crucial to understanding the contemporary Iranian state. More specifically, I show how various iterations of the Iranian state have all utilized, were partially created through, and were often frustrated by different organizations of time. On the basis of this history, the central argument of this chapter is that the Islamic Republic is founded on temporal simultaneity, a non-secular organization of time wherein past, present, and future are enfolded into another in one dynamic moment. I conclude that during the 2009 uprising, protesters initiated a crisis of legitimacy for the regime by reconfiguring temporal markers that comprise the symbolic foundation of the Islamic Republic.

The third chapter will explore the visual culture of the Islamic Republic, specifically genres of public art including graffiti and government-sponsored murals. Examples of such work that will be focused on are the surrealist murals of Mehdi Ghadyanloo and the graffiti stencils by guerrilla artist Black Hand as well as forms of graffiti and murals commissioned by the government. These works will be assessed against the historical backdrop of art in Iran following the revolution in 1979, which will show how art was constitutive of the Islamic Republic. Through tracing how these forms of street art can both compliment and wreak representational havoc on the hegemonic visual landscape, however, it will also be argued that the inherent interpretative ambiguity of art has the potential to open and refract the dominant socio-political imaginaries of Iran. By extension, these facets of Iranian visual culture are one

process by which the public/private divide is ossified, broken down, and reconstituted. Given the uncertainty surrounding its audience and the opaqueness of their meanings, the potential of these forms of street art to reorient these imaginaries remains robust, elusive, and ultimately, unpredictable.

The conclusion will revisit the larger political questions around secularism and religion more broadly discussed here in reference to these forays into Iranian politics. These questions will be tailored and amended to reflect the lessons gleaned from the aforementioned political sites and moments in Iran. While the first chapter argues for a critical and contingent endorsement of the Iranian women's equal rights discourse, does this mean that rights frameworks can potentially offer a way out of the binary of 'neither secularism nor Islamic Republic'? If that is the case, than how can a simultaneous substantive and radical critique of the law be made without imperiling these kinds of political futures? How does the recognition of multiple and intersecting axes of time help to better account for complex and seemingly contradictory elements of the public sphere in Iran? Can visual art provide a medium for adequately representing and understanding aspects of Iranian politics that trouble or surpass our conceptual vocabularies for describing them? Even though these questions will not be answered in their entirety since they are well beyond the scope of the conclusion, I will address them in the hopes of shining light on some potential steps forward out the political and ethical quandaries of secularism and religion.

[1] In Iran and in the larger Arab world, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is known by the acronym Daesh (*al Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham*). The English translation of this Arab acronym is direct except for the final word *al-Sham* which can mean 'the Levant,' 'Greater Syria,' 'Syria,' or Damascus. The geographical ambiguity inherent in the term *al-Sham* is thus the source of the inconsistency of the two English acronyms (ISIS and ISIL). *Daesh* is often construed as a pejorative word by the group bearing its name given that depending on its conjugation it can mean 'to trample down and crush' or 'a bigot who imposes his views on others'. Given the ire elicited by using the term *Daesh*, Iran makes a point of using the term any chance it gets. See Zeba Khan, "Words matter in 'ISIS' war, so use 'Daesh,' " *The Boston Globe*, October 9, 2014, Accessed, April 2016, https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2014/10/09/words-matter-isis-war-use-daesh/V85GYEuasEEJgrUun0dMUP/story.html.

[2] See, for example: Robert W. Merry, "The West and Islam: The Clash of Civilizations is underway, and Muslims intend to win," *The Washington Times*, November 16, 2015, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/16/robert-merry-clash-between-west-and-islam/ and Jordan Schachtel, "Ben Carson: The West is Facing A 'Clash of Civilizations' with Fundamentalist Islam," *Breibart News Network*, December 3, 2015, http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/12/03/ben-carson-west-facing-clash-civilizations-fundamentalist-islam/

[3] Anthony Faiola and Stephanie Kirchner, "Islam is Europe's 'new fascism,' an other things European politicians say about Muslims," *Washington Post*, June 7, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/07/ten-things-outspoken-european-politicians-are-saying-about-islam/.

[4] See: Rawan Arar, Lisa Hintz, and Kelsey P. Norman, "The real refugee crisis is in the Middle East, not Europe," *Washington Post*, May 14, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/14/the-real-refugee-crisis-is-in-the-middle-east-not-europe/. Iraq is an especially representative example as it hosts over 200,000 refugees while coping with 3.9 million of its citizens being internally displaced. See: Amnesty International, "Syria's Refugee Crisis in Numbers," February 3, 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/02/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/

[5] An intellectual and political movement first emerging in the early 2000's, New Atheism has been distinguished from earlier incarnations of atheism for its self-proclaimed and vehement hostility to religion itself. Victor J. Stenger, a staunch advocate for the movement, has argued, reflecting the avowed positivism of the movement, that "the most unique position of New Atheism is that faith, which is belief without supportive evidence, should not be given the respect, even deference it obtains in modern society." See: Victor J. Stenger, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2009), 15. The most emblematic works of this movement are from four authors who have been dubbed rather ironically "the Four Horseman of the Non-Apocalypse": Sam Harris, *The End of Faith, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004); Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2006); Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam

Press, 2007); Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great* (New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc., 2007). It should be noted that some commentators have rejected characterizations that New Atheism is actually new, such as Reza Aslan who argues that the movement is a continuation of earlier forms of anti-theism. See: Reza Aslan, "Sam Harris and 'New Atheists' aren't new, aren't actually atheists," *Salon.com*, November 21, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/11/21/reza_aslan_sam_harris_and_new_atheists_arent_new_arent_even_atheists/.

[6] Sam Harris, "The Reality of Islam," *Samharris.org*, February 8, 2006, https://www.samharris .org/blog/item/the-reality-of-islam.

[7] See: Tara John, "Richard Dawkins Compares Ahmed the Clockmaker to ISIS Killer," *Time*, November 25, 2015, http://time.com/4126983/richard-dawkins-ahmed-mohamed-isis/; and Melissa Leon, "Bill Maher and Richard Dawkins Slam Muslims: 'To Hell with Their Culture'," *The Daily Beast*, October 10, 2015, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015 /10/03/bill-maher-and-richard-dawkins-slam-muslims-to-hell-with-their-culture.html.

[8] Dean Obeidallah, "Bill Maher's Muslim Problem," *CNN*, October 7, 2014, http://www. cnn.com/2014/10/07/opinion/obeidallah-maher-muslim-comments/.

[9] For a critical analysis of the Feminist Majority Foundation's latent imperialist and Orientalist tendencies within this troubling chapter of its history, see: Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind, "Feminism, The Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75 No. 2, (2002), 339-354; and Ann Russo, "The Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid: The Intersections of Feminism and Imperialism in the United States," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 8:4, December 2006, 557-580.

[10] Norma Claire Moruzzi, "A Problem with Headscarves: Contemporary Complexities of Political and Social Identity," *Political Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 653.

[11] For a succinct account of the recent Islamophobia in France see: Nick Riemer, "The Roots of Islamophobia in France," *Jacobin*, August 29, 2016, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/08/burkini-ban-islamophobia-valls-france-secularism-islam/

[12] Michael Walzer, "Islamism and the Left," in *Dissent*, Winter 2015, https://www.dissentmagazine .org/article/islamism-and-the-left

[13] See: Moshe Ya'alon, "Why Iran is More Dangerous than Islamic State," *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 2016, http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-yaalon-iran-threat-20160929-snap-story.html; James Warren, "Iran is more dangerous to Iraq than ISIS, terror experts tell U.S. Senate panel," *New York Daily News*, March 24, 2015, http://www.nydaily news.com/news/politics/iran-dangerous-iraq-isis-u-s-terror-experts-article-1.2160637 and Ron Kampeas, "Israel envoy: Nuclear Iran 'a thousand times' more dangerous than Islamic State," *The Times of Israel*, September 19, 2014, http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-envoy-nuclear-iran-a-thousand-times-more-dangerous-than-islamic-state/.

[14] In keeping with Saba Mahmood's cogent critique of the term, I will be using secular studies in lieu of the category of postsecular. This critique will be discussed in detail further in the introduction. See Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[15] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[16] See: Jürgen Habermas, " 'The Political': The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology*, in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds. Eduardo Medieta and Johnathan Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 15-32; Habermas, "Notes on a Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Volume 25, Issue 4, (Fall 2008): 17-29; Habermas, "On the Relation between the Secular Liberal State and Religion," in *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Routledge, 2005), 339-350; and Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 14, no. 1 (2006), 1-25.

[17] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[18] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* ((Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[19] See: "Antimonies of the Secular: A Special Issue," *boundary 2*, ed. Aamir R. Mufti, Vol. 40 No. 1 (Spring 2013).

[20] Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 212.

[21] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990), 19.

[22] *Ibid*, 47.

[23] Joan W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[24] Craig Calhoun, "Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere," in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 77.

[25] Dawn Ennis, "Kim Davis is Back in Court, Defiant as Ever," *Advocate*, January 20, 2016, http://www.advocate.com/marriage-equality/2016/1/20/kim-davis-back-court-defiant-ever.

[26] Scott, *Politics of the Veil*, 125.

[27] *Ibid*, 125.

[28] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 181.

[29] *Ibid*, 182.

[30] For Habermas' conception of the public sphere and the role of communicative action within it, see: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989); and *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). For Taylor's argument regarding the public sphere, see: Charles Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds. Eduardo Medieta and Johnathan Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 34-59. For other discussions of the public sphere by Taylor, see: Taylor, "The Public Sphere" and "Public and Private," in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Taylor, "Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Taylor, "The Politics of

Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Religion*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-74; and Taylor, "Modernity and the Rise of the Public Sphere," in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Vol. 14, ed. Grethe B. Peterson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 203-260.

[31] *Ibid*, 28.

[32] Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," 28.

[33] For Taylor, the 'porous self' was a type of subjectivity within and emblematic of the 'enchanted earlier world' wherein "the boundary between the self and other is fuzzy, porous" which "has to be seen as a fact of *experience*, not a matter of 'theory,' or 'belief'," Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 39. Simply put, "God is not an option in the enchanted world" as "things and agencies which are clearly extra-human could alter or shape our spiritual and emotional condition,"41, 40. The 'modern, buffered self', in contrast, is type of subjectivity wherein "the possibility exists of taking a distance, disengaging from everything outside my mind,"38. A fully bounded self, this type of subjectivity "can form the ambition of disengaging from whatever is beyond the boundary, and of giving its own autonomous order to its life,"38-39. In this discussion of the historical shift between these two types of subjectivity, Taylor is effectively revisiting his earlier arguments on the emergence of the modern selfhood. See: Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[34] Charles Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds. Eduardo Medieta and Johnathan Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011),41.

[35] *Ibid*, 46.

[36] *Ibid*, 56.

[37] Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity,* 184.

[38] *Ibid*, 201.

[39] Talal Asad, "Trying to Understand French Secularism," in *Political Theologies: Public Religion in a Post-Secular World*, eds. Hent de Vries and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 494-526. For an engaging and deft study of these fraught political dynamics within the relationship between French secularism and French Muslim citizens informed by Asad's interventions, see: Mayanthi L. Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

[40] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 48.

[41] See: Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report*, especially Chapter 4.

[42] *Ibid*, 4.

[43] Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 20.

[44] *Ibid*, 19.

[45] *Ibid*, 185.

[46] Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 183-184.

[47] Talal Asad, "Thinking About The Secular Body, Pain, and Liberal Politics," *Cultural Anthropolgy*, Vol 26, Issue 4 (2011), 657-675.

[48] Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report*, 22.

[49] Saba Mahmood, "Can Secularism Be Other-wise?," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 282-299.

[50] While there are more immanent critiques of Mahmood and Asad that takes their interventions seriously and work within the terms of their respective engagements, I will focus on criticisms that reject these very terms since it will bring into sharper relief the political stakes of such debates. For an example of an immanent critique of Mahmood and Asad, see: Judith Butler, "The Sensibility of Critique: A Response to Asad and Mahmood," in *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, 95-130.

[51] Aamir R. Mufti, "Why I am not a Postsecularist," *boundary 2*, Vol. 40 No. 1 (Spring 2013), 19.

[52] Melinda Cooper, "Why I am not a Postsecularist," *boundary 2*, Vol. 40 No. 1 (Spring 2013), 27, 28.

[53] Bruce Robbins, "Why I am not a Postsecularist," *boundary 2*, Vol. 40 No. 1 (Spring 2013), 62, 63.

[54] Nikita Dhawan, "The Empire Prays Back: Religion, Secularity, and Queer Critique," *boundary 2*, Vol. 40 No. 1 (Spring 2013), 191-192. See also: Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[55] *Ibid*, 210.

[56] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 134.

[57] Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 29.

[58] *Ibid*, 217.

[59] *Ibid*, 218.

[60] Mehrzad Bouroujerdi, "The Paradoxes of Politics in Post-Revolutionary Iran," in *Iran at the Crossroads*, eds. John L. Esposito and R.K. Ramazani (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 13.

[61] Exceptions include: Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and The Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Catherine Sameh. "Discourses of Equality, Rights, and Islam in the One Million Signatures Campaign in Iran," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12:3-4 (2010): 444-463; and Ali Mirespassi, *Democracy in Modern Iran: Islam, Culture, and Political Change* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), especially pages 55-63.

[62] Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), x.

[63] Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted*, 46.

[64] Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 33.

[65] See: Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). For an analysis of sexuality more broadly in Iran, including queer desire, see: Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[66] Alcoff defines positionality, in reference to gender identity but applicable more broadly, as consisting of two main points: "First…that the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; but, second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place were a meaning can be *discovered*,"434, Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis of Theory," *Signs*, Vol 13, No. 3 (Spring 1988), 405-436).

[67] Manav Ratti, *The Postsecular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion, and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), xxii.

<u>Chapter 1</u>
The Iranian Women's Movement:
Hybridity, Rights, and Political Imaginaries

Over the last fifteen years and despite all odds to the contrary, there has been a dramatic and powerful resurgence of the women's movement in Iran. Given the movement's century-old history, however, what has surprised many observers of Iran is not its mere existence and continued vitality but that its current incarnation is demarcated by a historic unity between secular and Islamic feminists. A central medium of this unity is the One Million Signatures Campaign that seeks equal rights for all Iranian women within the laws of the Islamic Republic. To understand it on its own terms, this chapter will delve into the central text of the campaign, specifically its central text entitled *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* that elucidated the campaign's argument for equal rights and its strategies for attaining it.

In order to fully ascertain the complex politics of this campaign, however, it will be necessary to supplement this analysis with testimonies of activists themselves who came together to demand rights despite having radically different ethical-politico frames of reference. Through these cacophonous voices it will be readily apparent that the Iranian women's movement is a dynamic political movement that appeals to (and also challenges) multiple sites simultaneously. It will also be clear just how variegated the broader political topography of Iran is given that its political discourses and practices simultaneously elude and reaffirm tropes of secularism, religion, theocracy, gender, modernity, tradition, and rights.

Given its confounding of any neat categorization, it is not surprising that scholars analyzing the campaign have sought to reign in on this conceptual chaos in their assessment of its formation and continued political viability. In parsing through the political dimensions of this campaign, these scholars draw on (and thus contribute to) a predominant historical narrative wherein the Iranian women's movement is posited as undergoing a historic unity after being plagued by internecine ideological conflict for over a century. Despite their varying perspectives, there is nonetheless a general consensus that the rights discourse of the campaign offers an ideological reconciliation (however fragile and amorphous) between secular and Islamic feminists. Some have even come close to suggesting that this rights framework reflects the transcendence or sidestepping of ideology altogether. Seen against the historic backdrop of the movement that they draw on, lastly, there is a further insinuation that this unity between Islamic and secular feminists is the seemingly inevitable conclusion of this history.

Even though the current instantiation of the Iranian women's movement cannot be thought of outside of its history, this narrative often elides how the imaginaries, strategies, outlooks, and ambitions of Iranian feminists have historically overlapped and been absorbed by one another- often unintentionally or unwittingly. In an effort to chip away at the seeming inevitably of the current unity between secular and Islamic feminists, the third section will focus on how this unity was engendered by the internal logic of rights themselves under two contingent historical circumstances. I will argue, more specifically, that two central facets of rights (its empty, hollow form and the claim of equality under the law) coupled with two historical developments following the 1979 Revolution (the erasure of the radical Left from Iranian politics and a crisis within Shi'ite

40

authority) are responsible for the coalition that has convened around a rights-based activism over the last decade.

At the same time, however, the congealing effects of rights should not be overstated. More specifically, the current rights framework of the women's movement should not be treated as a site of ideological coherence but rather as a complicated, productive, and dense socio-political mess. The concluding section will therefore argue that many scholars either neglect the more robust political hybridity of the Iranian women's movement (currently) housed in the form of rights (by treating it as bounded and by flattening differences within the coalition) or locate its emergence at too late of a historical juncture. To be clear, this argument will not be a repudiation or disavowal of these rich analyses of the women's movement. Rather, it is a caution against jettisoning its multifaceted and diffuse political imaginaries in offering support for the rights campaign-even at the risk of that movement's fracturing. Even in the face of continued violence and repression by the Islamic Republic, rights should not be upheld as the apex of progressive or emancipatory politics. We must strive in our analyses to make room for the more expansive demands for social equality and economic justice in Iran that the women's movement has historically and continues to agitate for, even if, in Judith Butler's words, those are "impossible demands."[1]

The One Million Signatures Campaign and 'Pragmatic Feminism'

In the summer of 1997, Iran was reeling from the controversy surrounding the torture and murder of nine-year-old Arian Golshani at the hands of her father and stepbrother. After her parent's divorce a few years prior, Arian had initially been

41

remanded into the custody of her mother until she turned seven when custody was automatically granted to Arian's father as per Iranian law. According to Shirin Ebadi, an attorney representing Arian's mother who would go on to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her human rights work in Iran, Arian was kept in "dungeonlike conditions" and "weighed only thirty-three pounds, her arms had been broken several times and plastered with makeshift casts at home and after her schoolteacher called her father to inquire about the cigarette burn marks all over her body, she was kept home from school for months."[2] Despite such brutality, the local family court refused to remove Arian from her father's custody despite several pleas by her mother. The abuse continued unabated for two more years when Arian was finally taken to a hospital in the summer of 1997 where she fell into a coma and succumbed to her injuries. Arian's family was eventually convicted for her murder, with her stepbrother sentenced to death while her stepmother and father each received a sentence of one year.[3]

The abuse case of Arian Golshani caused a public outcry in Iran and her name quickly became a metonym for the dramatically gendered inequalities of the Islamic Republic's legal system. For many Iranians, the case encapsulated the gendered disparities not only informing divorce and custody laws but also laws governing *diyeh* (financial compensation given to victims), as Arian's mother would have received twice as much financial restitution if Arian had been a boy. Faced with a growing uproar over the Golshani abuse case, the Iranian state amended its child custody laws in 1998 to allow mothers to regain custody of their children if they can prove the father is an unfit parent. According to Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, the conditions by which the father can be considered unfit now include: child abuse, 'harmful addiction' to

drugs, alcohol, and other conditions.[4] Despite such amendments, however, such

conditions could also be used against the mother in custody cases wherein the burden of

proof still rests heavier on them regardless of whether they are seeking or defending

custody of their children.

Even though Iranian feminists saw these amendments to Iran's child custody

laws as a necessary first step, they continued to put pressure on the government to

reform the law even further. In 2002, following five years of legal wrangling, the

Guardian Council (a powerful branch of the Islamic Republic comprised of six *faqihs* or

experts in Islamic law and six jurists specializing in other areas of law) amended the child

custody law to allowing mothers to retain custody of both male and female children until

the age of 7.[5] As was the case four years prior, such legal change was bittersweet for

Iranian feminists in that they were successful in initiating some tangible change in the

violently stubborn Islamic Republic while the inherently gendered inequality of the law

nonetheless remained intact. Although the legal change produced was incremental, this

moment demarcates a substantive shift in the political outlook and strategies of Iranian

feminists. While by no means the sole cause, more specifically, the Arian Golshani case

and its aftermath embodied a turning point within the Iranian women's movement

toward a strategy of legal reform that seeks equal rights and protections for women

within the law of the Islamic Republic.

After several years of legal challenges by Iranian feminists that targeted specific

manifestations of discrimination within the law, the Iranian political stage was ripe for a

system-wide challenge to all forms of juridical gender discrimination. On June 12, 2006,

a small group of female activists attempted to gather for a peaceful demonstration in

Tehran's *Haft-e Tir* Square, a bustling square that has historically been the stage for wide-scale protests, pitched street battles, and revolutions. This rally was a continuance of feminist activism and legal challenges from not merely the past decade but also the past century as it commemorated the 1906 Constitutional Revolution that enshrined the demand for equality for women into the Iranian political landscape. During the previous week, these activists distributed throughout Tehran a pamphlet entitled *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* that explicated the legal discrimination Iranian women faced and their strategy for ending it.[6] As will be discussed in more detail shortly, Zanestan (an online journal and a crucial node of the feminist network in Iran) stated the rally would demand "a ban on polygamy, equal rights to divorce for women and men, joint custody of children after divorce, equal rights in marriage, an increase in the minimum legal age of marriage for girls to 18, and equal rights for women as witnesses."[7]

Despite the fact that the protest was violently dispersed before it began and its lead organizers were imprisoned, this rally was a catalyst for the One Million Signatures Campaign, a grassroots campaign that would not only re-enliven the women's movement but would also help recast the discourse of women's rights in Iran. On August 27, 2006, after months of intensive strategizing and organizing, women's activists formally commenced the Million Signatures Campaign. Echoing the organizing themes of the earlier rally and over a century of activism, the campaign demands equal rights for women and an end to all forms of gendered discrimination in Iranian law. According to the campaign's website, more specifically, the Million Signatures Campaign is a petition-based campaign that "aims to collect one million signatures in support of changes to discriminatory laws against women" and that "will provide education on legal issues to

the public and especially to women, raise public awareness, promote collaboration

between groups demanding equality between men and women, and document

experiences."[8] While the petition is one of many gender-issue campaigns that emerged

during this turn toward legal reform by the Iranian women's movement in the last

decade, this chapter will focus exclusively on the Million Signatures Campaign because

its comprehensive scope and dynamic constituency offers rich terrain for analyzing the

contours of the women's rights discourse in contemporary Iran.[9]

A central document of the Million Signatures Campaign that explicates its

argument for equal rights under the law and strategic vision for attaining them is the

pamphlet distributed prior to the June 12, 2006 rally entitled *Effect of Laws on Women's

Lives*. In this pamphlet, Iranian feminist activists target a wide swath of the Islamic

Republic's legal code that they argue are explicitly discriminatory or which tacitly

encourage violence against women. With regards to marriage laws, the campaign

condemns not only the legal marriage age for girls that is set at thirteen (for boys it is

fifteen) but also "the condition of the father's consent" that women must obtain prior to

marriage. Describing 'the condition of the father's consent, *Effect of Laws on Women's

Lives*, argues that "The first step a woman must take in marriage, according to the

existing Law, is to satisfy the 'condition of the father's consent'; if a father doesn't want

his daughter to marry, she — even if she is a forty-year-old university professor — can

never marry, unless approved by the courts."[10] For activists of the Million Signatures

Campaign, the marriage of young girls (which often end in divorce) are the direct result

of this legal coupling of the father's consent with the low legal marriage age for girls.

The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives also highlights and critiques the gendered double standards informing Iranian divorce laws that have led to devastating economic consequences. In addition to the higher burden of proof shouldered by Iranian women during divorce cases and the fact that men can divorce a wife at will, the pamphlet also focuses on *mehr* and how it obstructs the path to divorce for many Iranian women. According to the document, *mehr* can be defined as follows: "A 'gift' that a husband promises his wife at the time of marriage. It is specified in the aghd which is a pre-nuptial agreement. A wife is entitled to request her husband give her mehr at any time after they get married, and he must give it to her at that time. If a man divorces his wife, she is also entitled to her mehr. Unlike dowry, mehr is not given to the brides parents, but rather to the bride herself, and remains her property for ever."[11] Despite these rules governing *mehr*, Iranian women are often pressured or forced to forfeit their *mehr* when asking for their husband's legally required consent for divorce. As the Million Signatures Campaign highlights, Iranian women may also be threatened with being forced to relinquish their *mehr* by husbands who themselves are seeking a divorce but do not want to be seen as having initiated it.

As the Arian Golshani abuse case discussed at the outset of this chapter has painfully illustrated, the issue of child custody heightens the high cost paid by Iranian women in divorce cases. Following the success of Iranian feminists in alleviating some of the inequality informing child custody laws, the age at which children are to be remanded into the custody of their father is equal regardless of gender (age seven for both boys and girls) and children can now be removed from their father's custody in cases of abuse. Needless to say, however, the fact that children must be removed from

their mother's custody at a particular age still persists. Moreover, as *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* also makes clear, when women have custody of their children it is not unfettered: "If a mother (with her own money) does buy a house for her child with the father's permission, the father can sell or rent this house whenever he wants, and the mother has no right in this matter. Or, if a mother's child is sick in hospital and needs to have surgery, it is the father who has to give permission for the surgery to be done; without the father's signature the mother cannot ask the doctors to do surgery on her child."[12]

Another focal point for the Million Signatures Campaign was the issue of polygamy, specifically that the law allows for men to have four *aghdi* (permanent marriages) and an infinite number of *sighehi* (temporary marriages). *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* argues that the law allowing for multiple partners "along with the lack of possibility of divorce by women and the power in law that has been given to men have caused many problems in family relationships; with it's extreme seen in the incidence of spouse-killings."[13] This legal sanctioning of polygamy also further compounds and exacerbates the socio-political consequences surrounding divorce. Iranian women, more specifically, can be pressured to agree to a husband's request for a second marriage or risk divorce and the attendant problems such as a forfeiture of their *mehr* and/or custody of their children.

While it focused on marriage, divorce, and polygamy, the campaign also sought to redress other laws that were either explicitly discriminatory or that encouraged violence against women. Such outright discriminatory laws includes those setting the age of criminal responsibility at nine for girls and fifteen for boys and those governing the

familial transfer of citizenship. *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* notes how "according to the law of Iran, the citizenship of a woman does not transfer to her child" and therefore children with a foreign father "do not have a right to live or go to school in Iran".[14] Even more disturbing are the cases in which "a woman who marries a foreign man even loses her own Iranian citizenship."[15] The consequences of Iranian women jeopardizing and/or being unable to transfer their citizenship if they marry non-Iranian men have become especially acute in the last decade as the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan by the United States has led to an influx of over 800,000 refugees in Iran since 2001, making it one of the largest external refugee populations in the world.[16]

  The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives also highlighted explicitly discriminatory laws that legally defined a woman's worth to be half that of a man: *diyeh* or blood money (men receive double the compensation as women if they are a victim of a crime) and bearing witness in court (women are not always allowed to testify and when they do, their testimony is worth half that of a man's and to be accepted the testimony usually must be confirmed by a man).[17] The campaign argued that similar to the laws governing divorce in Iran, laws dictating inheritance (sons receive twice as much compensation as daughters while wives with children receive one-eighth of the total inheritance in addition to the fact that women can *never* inherit land) also imperiled the economic standing of Iranian women. The pamphlet also took the bold step of noting the government's complicity and how it stands to gain in inheritance cases wherein a woman is the sole inheritor: "If a man dies and has no inheritor other than his wife, she inherits only one fourth of the price of his property and wealth. The rest of the money/wealth

will belong to the government, meaning, the government is closer to that man than his wife with whom he has lived an entire life time."[18]

Lastly, the Million Signatures Campaign also demanded a reform of laws that it argued supported honor killings, whether by officially sanctioning them or by setting horrendously low maximum sentences. The official sanctioning of honor killings is evident in the law that "gives a man permission to kill his wife whenever he sees her in bed with another man."[19] As *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* makes clear, however, this particular scenario only counts for a minority of honor killing cases: "90 percent of the men who have killed their wives did it because of mistrusting their spouse and imagined offenses. When these men were asked whether they were sure of their spouse's infidelity, they all indicated that they were not absolutely certain about this and they had only suspected their wives."[20] The tacit sanctioning of honor killings is evident, the pamphlet argues, in other cases such as those involving children wherein "according to the law, a father and paternal grandfather will not be held responsible" and if, for example, "a father kills his daughter for suspecting her (of corruption) or any other reason, he will be exempt from the standard punishment for murder, and the court can only sentence him to a maximum 10-year jail term."[21]

After completing its survey of discriminatory laws, *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* concludes the Million Signatures Campaign's argument for equal rights by clarifying its stance toward Islam. The secular activists initiating the campaign, more specifically, took strides to emphasize that not only was the campaign not in opposition to Islam but also argued that progressive currents of Islam could and should actively be involved in the campaign. Referencing the tradition of dynamic jurisprudence within Shi'ite Islam,

the pamphlet stated unequivocally not only that "requesting for change and correction of these discriminatory laws is in no way opposing the foundations of Islam nor is it damaging to the pillars of religion."[22] The document also concluded by citing several religious leaders who have previously called for equal rights for women in Iran. Reflecting their ethos of engaging Islam, the campaign ends with an especially pertinent quotation from Ayatollah Mousavi Bojnordi: "Islam in no way differs from Human Rights and it cannot be said that one gender has eminence and the other doesn't. Human rights in an Islamic society have meaning. Rights are for mankind and regardless of gender. God has considered these rights for human beings."[23]

The Million Signatures Campaign and its demand for equal rights as explicated in *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* reflects a shift within the Iranian women's movement during the last decade in which there has been a renewed focus on legal reform. While secular feminists were largely responsible for initiating this shift in strategy, Islamic feminists were initially reticent to lend their support given the heavy costs one inevitably incurs by directly challenging the Islamic Republic. Once the campaign begun, however, Islamic feminists reconsidered these earlier reservations and stood alongside their secular counterparts to demand a reform of the laws. Shahla Sherkat, an immensely influential Islamic feminist and founder of *Zanan*- one of the first women's magazine in Iran, explained her endorsement of the campaign in a 2007 interview: "I do not believe in the division of women. Calling this reformist, and that secular and this religious or conservative, for example, does not help. We have complex and interrelated problems and it is best for us that no divisions are made. We are all trying to focus on the goals that aim towards consolidating women's rights. In the future when we resolve these

problems we will have enough time to divide ourselves into numerous groups."[24] Sherkat

ends with a defiant challenge to the Islamic Republic that she argues "tends to terminate

the social and personal freedoms of women": "I always say that the women's movement

is advancing but silently, without a sound. This is why I am optimistic; no force can stop

this movement. Perhaps some areas may lag but it cannot be stopped and will not

retreat."[25]

In their explanation of the dynamics within the One Million Signatures

Campaign between its secular and religious components, secular activists also echoed the

sentiments of Sherkat. Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, a prominent secular activist and co-

founder of the campaign, gave a robust argument in defense of the campaign in a

monograph entitled *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside*

Story. In her book, Khorasani describes the current generation of Iranian feminists

involved in the campaign as "circumstantial feminists" who "are not, by and large, a

group that first asks whether or not something is Islamic before deciding what to make

of it."[26] Explicating her analysis further, Khorasani states these feminists "are not anti-

Islamic, but they have distanced themselves from struggles over political and religious

authority (the Islamic Republic claims both), and they base their activities on their

practical demands rather than on concerns about identity or ideology."[27] Khorasani,

however, also takes a parting shot at Islamic feminism in her explanation of how such

openness to Islam only goes so far, specifically how secular activists distance themselves

from 'official ideology' and their bottom up approach "sets them apart from the 'Islamic

feminism' that seeks official blessing from the male ruling elite of the Islamic Republic,

and is willing to value ideological correctness over the primary demands of women."[28]

Other secular feminists involved in the campaign have given similar analyses of the relationship between secular and religious activists in the campaign, though with less hostility towards their Islamic counterparts. Jelve Javaheri, another secular activist and founder of the campaign, affirms Khorasani's description of the feminism animating the campaign as 'situational' or 'action-oriented feminism'. "By action-oriented feminism," Javaheri explains, "I mean that we have to analyze the situation and daily realities and act accordingly, while not losing our values."[29] In the same interview, Javaheri argues that one of the campaign's positive features is its ability "to integrate the discourse of equality into people's religious discourse" and claims rather boldly how "the Campaign is the first social action that has been able to articulate the issue of women's rights and Islam so broadly among people."[30]

In a separate interview, another secular activist and organizer for the campaign Sara Loghmani expressed similar views by noting how basic demands for gender equality have enabled the campaign to draw strength from its internal ideological differences. "We definitely view these differences as positive because the campaign's demands and goals do not take into account the demands and goals of any one particular group or social class," Loghmani explains, "The discriminatory laws affect all women, be they Turk or Gilaki, Baluchi or Kurd, Sunni or Shiite, literate or illiterate, young or old, rich or poor. All women suffer equally from injustice and discrimination. As a result, the campaign has little opposition among people."[31]

It also worth noting the role of Iranian men in the One Million Signatures Campaign, who have helped collect signatures, organize, and who have written impassioned arguments in support of the campaign. In an essay expressing his support

for the campaign, Kaveh Mozzafari (Jelve Javaheri's husband and a male activist in the campaign) highlights the radical edge of the campaign lying underneath its demand for equal rights. "Although the title of this Campaign suggests an immediate attention to re-evaluation of the law for gender equality, the ultimate goal of the campaign is to stabilize the ground for collaboration and cooperation between women," Mozzafari argues, "This Campaign offers a substantial alternative to the existing binary gender divide, and the reductive and simplistic assessments of social powers in our country. Social realities, especially those left over from the archaic patriarchal relationships, are so complex that the best way to approach them is to dismantle them completely. The Campaign to Change for Equality has fully understood the significance of this reality."[32]

The support and involvement of Iranian men in the One Million Signatures Campaign, however, has incurred the wrath of the Islamic Republic in specifically gendered ways. In an interview, Amir Yaghoub-Ali, a member of the Men's Committee of the One Million Signatures Campaign who was sentenced to a year in prison for collecting signatures for the campaign, gave the following description of his encounter with security forces who were confused at best and suspicious at worst of the motives behind his activism:

> "They had no concept or understanding of why a man would be involved in the women's movement. When you have an identity (as a student activist or…) other than a women's rights activist, first they assume that you have entered the women's rights field for ulterior motives, and you constantly have to explain that being involved in women's rights is not incongruous with activities in other movements…

Once they get past that, they look at you as someone who has entered the women's movement due to your "sexual problems," and they take this very seriously. They were constantly mocking me, saying "as men, why are you involved this?" They kept insinuating that we are so incapable of having relations with the opposite sex that we have to enter the women's movement. Or they thought that by being involved the women's movement we are betraying men."[33]

Despite its discriminatory laws, however, the Islamic Republic was violently equal in its response and crackdown of the Iranian women's movement following the founding of the campaign. All of those cited above (Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Sara Loghmani, Sara Loghmani, and Kaveh Mozzafari) and other activists were all imprisoned for their work on the campaign. Shahla Sherkat, who had been imprisoned for four months in 2004 after attending a conference in Berlin, was not spared punishment (thus evidence of the contentious relationship between Islamic feminism and the Islamic Republic) as her magazine *Zanan* was finally shut down by the state after it was charged with "endangering the spiritual, mental and intellectual health of its readers, and threatening psychological security by deliberately offering a dark picture of the Islamic Republic."[34] While *Zanan* was able to make a comeback in 2014, it remains unclear how long it will be allowed to continue and if it is shuttered for a second time whether Sherkat may face a greater punishment depending on the given mood of the Islamic Republic.

Even though the One Million Signatures Campaign has had some successes despite such repression, the most systemic challenge by the state it faced was the

Ahmadinejad Administration's 2007 "Family Protection Act."[35] While this deceptively named law, dubbed the 'anti-family bill' by feminist activists, would allow women to serve as judges and levied prison sentences for men marrying girls younger than the legally allowed age, there were many amendments snuck into its pages that would set back many gains the Iranian women's movement was striving toward. The most controversial of such amendments was a clause that would allow for men to have multiple wives without the consent of the first wife which was so controversial that many moderate members of the Iranian parliament who had previously given tepid consent to Ahmadinejad's policies voiced strident opposition to it.[36]

While the One Million Signatures Campaign has not achieved all of its goals and aims as of the writing of this chapter, it continues to fight and push for equal rights for Iranian women in the face of continued government repression and often-staggering odds. Following the 2009 post-election uprising, many activists who were involved in the campaign also partook in the demonstrations against Ahmadinejad's heavily contested reelection and many feminists joined the Green Movement that grew out of these protests. Such wide-scale participation in the 2009 post-election demonstrations has also resulted in the imprisonment (or re-imprisonment in many cases) and exile of many activists who have played a central role in the campaign. Given this thinning of its leadership within Iran and the continued intractability of the government despite the election of the 'moderate' President Rouhani, the campaign and other facets of the women's movement have struggled to make further gains in their demand for equal rights.

The import of the One Million Signatures Campaign for both Iranian feminism and politics more generally, however, extends beyond the immediate political gains and losses that are endemic to social movements. As evidenced above by the text of *The Effect of Laws on Women's Lives* and by the testimony of activists themselves, the campaign and the rights framework it inhabits offers a glimpse into the incredibly messy socio-political terrain of the Iranian women's movement in particular and in Iran more broadly. Secular and Islamic feminists have come together to demand equal rights while simultaneously referencing and embodying profoundly different ethical frames of reference for those rights. It is also very apparent that the Shi'ite clergy in Iran is equally heterogeneous, as shown in the stark contrast between Ayatollah Mousavi Bojnordi's interpretation of Islam as synonymous with human rights and the Islamic Republic's official invocation of God in its ruthless crackdown on activists demanding those rights. Through these cacophonous voices, in other words, one can see how the Iranian women's movement is a dynamic, modern political movement that appeals to (and also challenges) multiple sites simultaneously. Taken more broadly, one can also see in this moment how the tropes of secularism, religion, theocracy, gender, modernity, tradition, and rights are simultaneously affirmed and confounded by the divergent political languages of Iran.

Historiography and the Iranian Women's Movement

Given such daunting complexity, many scholars of the Iranian women's movement have sought to reign in this conceptual chaos by situating the campaign and the contemporary equal rights discourse firmly in its historical context. For many

observers of Iranian politics and Iranian feminism in particular, the 'situational' or 'circumstantial' feminism of the campaign is the culmination and amelioration of a century-long ideological struggle within the women's movement. More specifically, the rights-based activism by Iranian women over the last decade is presented the embodiment of a historic unity between feminists from across the ideological spectrum. Seen through the lens of this unity, scholars highlight the facets of this rights framework that trouble the boundaries of both secularity and religiosity to argue that this reconciliation extends into the realm of ideology itself- and possibly beyond it. Before turning to these analyses of the contemporary rights discourses within Iran, however, it will be necessary to briefly rehearse the shared historical narrative of the Iranian women's movement on which such analyses are built.

The Iranian Women's Movement: Ideological Conflict and Reconciliation

While some trace the roots of the Iranian women's movement to the prominent but sporadic role of Iranian women during the Tobacco Revolt of 1891-92, there is a general consensus amongst scholars that the activism of Iranian women first emerged as an organized movement during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911. As Mansoureh Ettehadieh has argued, "the origins and development of the women's movement in Iran go back to the early twentieth century when the constitutional revolution of 1906 was in the making" and was a "dynamic and spontaneous movement unparalleled until the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79."[37] Janet Afary has similarly noted how "some women joined the wave of revolutionary activism rather than wait for the male leadership to offer them institutional support."[38] Scholars including Afary,

Ettehadieh, Haideh Moghissi, Hamideh Sedghi, and Parvin Paidar also point to women's education as the primary battlefront and (relative) success of women's activism during the revolution.[39] Even though the revolution of 1906-1911 was clearly not successful in alleviating gendered inequalities it forever changed the political landscape of Iran by enshrining the place of an organized women's movement within it.

Within this narrative, the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 was also a watershed moment for Iranian history in general and the women's movement in particular because it dramatically restructured the socio-political topography of Iran along three main ideological lines: Islamism (noting of course the vast political differences amongst its adherents), Marxism/socialism, and liberal-nationalism. While these categories certainly do not capture the entire Iranian political spectrum (as Iranian anarchists and Kurdish nationalists will be quick to point out), these ideological divisions have dominated the socio-political imaginary of Iran for over a century. Haideh Moghissi has also highlighted how women's groups active during this period such as the liberal *The Patriotic Women's League* in addition to the Marxist *Women's Awakening* and *The Messenger of Women's Prosperity* strengthened groups and parties that were ideological counterparts but male-dominated.[40] According this historical narrative, these ideological strains took their distinct forms as consequence of not only regional and global politics but also through successive domestic revolutions, coups, and political crises. These divergent ideological factions have come together to topple old political orders and have actively fought against one another in the creation of new ones. As something actively constitutive of and constituted by this ideological terrain, the Iranian women's movement has never been homogenous or monolithic.

This vibrant, independent women's movement, however, was quickly subsumed by the state feminism of the monarchical regimes that grew out of the power vacuum created by the dissolution of the Constitutional Revolution. During the iron-fisted rule of Reza Shah (1925-1941), the contemporary Iranian nation-state was born through his 'modernizing' reforms that consolidated the power of the state and extended its reach into all sectors of Iranian society. As Parvin Paidar highlights, citing Reza Shah's decrees that mandated unveiling and desegregated public space, during this period "for the first time women became a focus of state policy" and "women's emancipation was considered an important aspect of national progress."[41] This form of state feminism, however, came into full bloom during the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1963-1978) when his "White Revolution" featured the Family Planning Law of 1967 that strove to reform inequities surrounding child custody, polygamy, divorce and the legal age for marriage. A central institution of the Shah's state feminism was the Women's Organization of Iran, an organization led by the Shah's sister, Princess Ashraf, that sought to involve Iranian women in the changes initiated by the White Revolution.[42] Needless to say, this state feminism was not only strongly critiqued by Islamic and Marxist feminists but also by liberal-nationalist feminists who were at odds with one another over whether to support measurable cultural reform ushered in by a regime that was also very clearly authoritarian.

Iranian women once again were at the forefront of another revolution in 1979 when the massive discontent and rage against the Shah's brutality and cultivation of socio-economic inequality reached its zenith, marking the end of twenty five hundred years of monarchy in Iran. It must be emphasized that contrary to commonplace

historical narratives and that of the Islamic Republic itself, the revolution in 1979 was not an Islamic one but featured Iranians from all sectors of society and from across the political spectrum- it was labeled an "Islamic Revolution" only after the fact. "Women from all walks of life-religious, secular, urban, rural, middle and lower class, young and old- supported and participated in the Iranian Revolution," Sanam Vakil has observed, "During the post-revolution consolidation period, women also voted in the government referendum in favor of Islamic government."[43] This substantial role of Iranian women in the 1979 Revolution forced the nascent Islamic Republic to implement relatively progressive programs such as family planning and literacy programs (which successfully raised the literacy rate of women) alongside its more draconian policies that were heavily gendered. While the Islamic Republic certainly kept and instituted a majority of those harsh policies, it nonetheless had to navigate around one of its most active and dynamic constituencies: Iranian women.

Even though they root the One Million Signatures Campaign in the larger trajectory of Iranian history, scholars of the Iranian women's movement argue the contemporary demand for equal rights has emerged as a consequence of two specific consequences of the revolution in 1979. The first consequence was a socio-political friction resulting from the push and pull between the activism of Iranian women and consolidation of power by the Islamic Republic. Parvin Paidar, Hamideh Sedghi, Sanaam Vakil, Janet Afary, Amir Mehryar, Gholamali Farjadi, and Mohammad Tabibian all argue, more specifically, that this friction is the result of a central contradiction arising from the 1979 Revolution's aftermath: a drastic downturn in the juridical-politico status of Iranian women *and* a substantial increase of their presence in the public sphere.[44]

Through a combination of policies instituted by the Islamic Republic either as a matter of principle, political expediency or both, more Iranian women than ever before entered into careers and led more public lives. This was especially the case for more pious women and/or women from more religious households, as mandatory veiling and public forms of gender separation allowed them to move more freely in public spaces (while simultaneously curtailing the mobility of women who did not wear the veil). Such widespread entry of women into the public sphere, however, was accompanied by a comprehensive denial of their legal and social equality with Iranian men. Seen against this backdrop, the contemporary demand for equal rights within the Islamic Republic was not a historical fluke but rather the protracted consequence of the political contradictions set in motion by the Islamic Republic itself.

The second consequence of the 1979 Iranian Revolution that scholars point to as having shaped the current juridical demands by Iranian feminists is the gradual unification of the women's movement. Like other activists and revolutionaries of varying ideological stripes who worked together to overthrow the Shah only to bitterly fight against one another in the pursuit of their divergent political futures, the women's movement in Iran splintered following the revolution in 1979. These ideological divisions ossified even further with the victory of the specific Islamist factions led by Khomeini and by the subsequent consolidation of power by the Islamic Republic. Marxists more generally and Marxist feminists in particular were violently erased from Iranian politics in the 1980's by way of exile, prison, and execution. Liberal-nationalist feminists were forced into the shadows not only by the emerging Islamic Republic but also by their liberal-nationalist male counterparts who did not want to focus on

"particular" issues such as women's rights during the Iran-Iraq War. Islamic feminists, alienated from these other feminist groups through the processes above, were themselves split between those allied with the Islamic Republic and those who actively fought against it.

The aforementioned contradiction at the heart of the Islamic Republic ultimately alienated some of these Islamic feminists from the state and led them to return to the women's movement (broadly construed) as a space from which to pursue their socio-political aspirations. Liberal feminists followed a similar path in the late 1990's, when their jubilation over the election of Mohammad Khatami quickly dissipated and turned into a sense of despair and betrayal as the reforms he promised no where near came to fruition. Faced with these setbacks, Iranian feminists set aside their ideological differences and regrouped to find alternative forms of resistance. What emerged was the 'situational' or 'pragmatic' feminism that was cited above by the activists of the One Million Signatures Campaign that putatively focused on issues faced by all Iranian women equally and, as Victoria Tahmasebi-Birgani, Catherine Sameh, Janet Afary, Sanaam Vakil, and Negin Nabavi have gestured to, a relative unity of the Iranian women's movement.[45] It is such historical and political conditions that helped make the One Million Signatures Campaign possible. While clearly the Million Signatures Campaign was not the cause of this relative unification of the Iranian women's movement, scholars argue that the open socio-political platform also led many (though certainly not all) Islamic feminists to join the campaign and thereby not only continued but dramatically expanded this unprecedented unity of the Iranian women's movement.

Despite their significant differences in approach and the conclusions they draw, the scholars cited above all share and contribute to the historical narrative of the Iranian women's movement outlined thus far. The founding event of this narrative is the 1906-1911 Constitutional Revolution, a pivotal moment in Iranian history that inaugurated not only the women's movement as an organized force but also its tripartite ideological character. Alongside the ebb and flow of formal gender equality during the state feminism of successive monarchies and the emergence of an Islamic Republic, feminists were at odds with one another over not only what constituted equality but also over their broader socio-political visions for the country. As a result of the domestic consequences of the 1979 revolution and the geopolitical events surrounding it, Iran feminists grew increasingly disenchanted with the ideological groups they closely identified with as their male compatriots foreclosed avenues for gender equality. According to this historical narrative, most importantly, ideological divides within the women's movement that had been unbridgeable for over a century have diminished significantly during the last decade as Iranian feminists have rallied together under the banner of 'situational' or 'pragmatic' feminism in a renewed push for juridical gender equality.

The One Million Signatures Campaign: Beyond Ideology (?)

I have dwelt so extensively on this rich historical tapestry diligently woven by scholars of the Iranian women's movement because it is the dominant lens through which the contemporary rights framework of the women's movement as exemplified by the One Million Signatures Campaign is viewed. Drawing on the recent and unprecedented unity of Iranian feminists cited above, scholars of the women's

movement writing in the last decade have argued that this rights framework is distinct from its previous historical incarnations due to its blurring and/or transcending of the boundaries between secularism and religiosity. While their arguments diverge around its precise contours and origins, these scholars also all use the categories of secularism and religiosity (even when explicitly attempting to move beyond such categorization) as a common barometer by which to measure the ethical and political viability of this contemporary rights framework. Put crudely, some animating questions of this literature in reference to the Million Signatures Campaign and this rights discourse are: How much secularism? How much religion? Or, when assessing the ethical and political purchase of this alternative political project: How far from secularism and how far from religion?

While not all of the scholars here discuss directly the Million Signatures Campaign, their work comprises a relatively coherent literature due to their focus on the ideologically amorphous character of the demand for equal rights recently put forward by the Iranian women's movement. Looking at the post-2009 election crisis, which will discussed in more detail in the next chapter, Victoria Tahmasebi-Birgani has argued that facets of the Iranian women's movement such as the campaign is "neither strictly Islamic-traditional nor a flight towards a Western-style liberalism."[46] Explicating her argument further, Tahmasebi-Birgani suggests that "one can see the democratic aspirations coexisting alongside more traditional forms of social organizations, behaviours, and practices."[47] Sanaam Vakil has noted how the One Million Signatures Campaign has not merely called for cooperation with more religious activists but has also bolstered efforts by Islamist women in their "reinterpretation of Shariah laws regarding women supporting alternate modes of female activism."[48] Paraphrasing the remarks by

one of the campaign's organizers, Janet Afary highlights that "unlike secular feminists who opposed religion as a source of gender norms, and Islamic feminists who tried to fit feminism within an Islamic framework, this generation saw Islam, 'whether one likes it or not,' as part of people's lives and accepted it as a reality."[49] Rebecca Barlow has similarly argued that the campaign "draws on the most efficient aspects of both secular and Islamic feminism, discarding the more problematic aspects of each"[50]

Other scholars of the contemporary rights framework of the Iranian women's movement have described this dense entanglement of secularism and religion more explicitly as a form of socio-cultural hybridity. In *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran*, Arzoo Osanloo explores "the productive relationship between the hybrid state and conceptualizations of women's rights" and emphasizes the need to attend to "the complex historical process of Iranian state formation and its relationship to subject making."[51] As a study of at the discourse of juridical rights in Iran during the last decade, the central claim of her monograph is that "we are seeing an instance of liberalism and liberal values, but in a very novel context, an Islamic Republic."[52] Osanloo ends her analysis of this rights framework by stressing the necessity of seeing "the critical moments in which women articulate their rights in the fluid hybridity of multiple ideologies of law, of transnational legalities, as opposed to the outside discourses that set the only acceptable parameters as international and Western law."[53]

In *Discourses of Equality, Rights and Islam in the One Million Signatures Campaign in Iran*, Catherine Sameh both utilizes and critiques Osanloo's arguments regarding the hybrid rights discourse of the Iranian women's movement. After describing how the campaign was organized around an "'Islamic Human Rights' framework," Sameh argues

that activists within the Million Signatures Campaign "emphasize the indigenous or local character of their struggle and push the state to live up to its promise of being a rights-securing, just, and modern Islamic state."[54] Reflecting Sameh's emphasis on the local context of the campaign, this 'Islamic Human Rights framework' is posited as the consequence of the contentious relationship between the Islamic Republic and women's activists. This rights framework, in other words, is an indigenous and feminist re-interpretation of a rights discourse already localized within Iran.

It is that this juncture of her argument that Sameh critiques Osanloo's approach, specifically her understanding of hybridity for under-theorizing the transnational circulation and localization of rights discourses. More specifically, Sameh asserts that Osanloo's "framework of hybridity assumes that two distinct discourses have come together to form something new."[55] In contrast, Sameh argues that "Islamic human rights discourses do not so much weld together discourses of Islam and discourses of rights as they produce new discourses that emerge from multiple *grammars* of concepts."[56] Put succinctly, Sameh summarizes Osanloo's argument as follows: there are two separate discourses (secular liberalism and Shi'ite Islam) and what has emerged in Iran is a third, hybrid version (the 'Islamic human rights framework'). Underlying this argument is an insinuation that the two original strains from which this hybrid version emerged are left intact and remain (for the most part) separate from not only one another but from the hybrid discourse. Sameh, in contrast, is arguing that the hybrid 'Islamic human rights framework' did not manifest from the combination of two *separate* discourses but rather grew out of a more complex socio-political collage. The 'original' discourses of secular rights and Shi'ite politics were already irrevocably altered in their

encounter with one another following the revolution of 1979 and thereby cannot be found in their 'original' form, especially when a new hybrid discourse emerges.

While Sameh and Osanloo differ their approach and conclusions, they nonetheless share a general consensus with the aforementioned scholars that the contemporary rights framework of the women's movement reflects and has grown out of the recent unification of secular and religious feminists. More specifically, they interpret this historic reconciliation as a cue that the underlying ideological divisions have fallen by the wayside to make room for a renewed juridical demand for equality that is free of partisan baggage. Consequently these scholars build on and compliment the historical narrative of the Iranian women's surveyed above, often without explicitly referencing it. Seen within the confines of this historical narrative, the contemporary rights framework of the women's movement is the seemingly inevitable and necessary culmination of a century-long struggle that has been demarcated by ideological strife and reconciliation. Taken to its logical conclusion, this narrative comes quite close to suggesting the contemporary rights framework of the Iranian women's movement embodies the transcendence of ideology itself.

Rights As a Unifying and Contingent Medium

While the larger history of the Iranian women's movement is absolutely necessary for understanding the contemporary demand for rights, to understand the recent and *relative* unity of women's activists one must also look at the internal logic of rights themselves and their ability to either imperil or strengthen social movements. Put another way, this chapter is asking could the recent cooperation between different facets

of the women's movement have been possible without this rights framework? Could it

have existed in another form, as a non-juridically based political project? Even though

these questions cannot be fully answered here due to their scope and complexity, I will

gesture toward an answer by focusing on two specific aspects of juridical rights that are

integral in holding together the coalition of Iranian feminists that transverses religious

and secular lines: 1.) The hollow and empty character of rights; and 2.) Their claim

of/demand for equality under the law. Although there are many other elements and

nuances, this section will focus on these two particular facets because they are points of

continuity between different interpretations of rights and are the inescapable foundation

on which rights frameworks are built irrespective of whether they are liberal-secular or

Shi'ite-Islamic in their interpretation.

Turning now to the first of these characteristics, rights can be considered hollow

and empty since they are void of any specific content until the moment of their

application. This particular characteristic of rights is one of its most dynamic, for it

affords rights a degree of flexibility in that a myriad of political views and constituencies

can demand and lay claim to them. It should be noted that laying claim to rights often

goes beyond simply demanding them but often, as is the case in Iran, includes

reinterpreting and re-inscribing them within one's own socio-cultural and political

vocabularies. As was shown above in the comments by Ayatollah Mousavi Bojnordi, for

example, some Islamic feminists and their Islamic supporters ground the ethical

purchase of equal rights by positing them as the extension of not only the secular demos

but also as the will of God.

This inherent flexibility of rights, however, comes with a price as those seeking or laying claim to rights must (at least for the duration necessary to attain them) reduce their incredibly complex political projects, ambitions, and imaginaries into a legalistic claim against the state to take or refrain from taking action. Therein lies the paradox around the inherent vacuity of rights: while its unitary, singular legalistic structure greatly delimits and flattens the form politics can take, it not only allows for but can often encourage rich, complex and seemingly counterintuitive socio-political coalitions. Rights, in other words, are demarcated by a robust one-dimensionality that forecloses more expansive political futures while simultaneously serving as a dense socio-political transfer point.

This characterization of rights as empty and hollow, however, is not to imply that this particular juridical form is somehow outside of politics and history. Without stepping into an irresolvable debate over whether rights are inherently Western or not, it is clear that their particular legalistic structure and outlook on the world bears an especially large imprint of Euro-Atlantic norms and values. This being said, the rather paradoxical political life of juridical rights cannot be fully gleaned by parsing through what specific aspects of the Iranian women's demand for rights are Western and which parts are not. This would also be an extension of the debate over where the boundaries between secularism and religiosity lie in their rights-based political platform. The more interesting question, rather, involves the effects of rights, specifically regarding its productive capacity to usher in new individual and collective subjectivities. To understand this productive capacity and the tension at the heart of rights, it will

important to turn now to a second facet of rights that structures its hollow and empty character: a claim to equality under the law.

Since scholars such as Wendy Brown and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have already eloquently critiqued the political and ethical paucity of a liberal-juridical conception of equality,[57] I will not repeat their arguments here but will instead focus on the effect this demand for equality under the law can have on those calling and organizing for it. This demand can be deceptively counterintuitive, for on the surface it seems like straightforward call for an end to discrimination in the law and the equal protection of/from the state. However, the discursive flip side is that in demanding this one in effect subjugates oneself to the law that is by definition implicated in if not directly responsible for the violation or discrimination in question. Setting aside the prickly ethical questions of this legalistic self-subjugation, this demand for the to law apply equally to everyone can have productive effects on the activist coalitions themselves. The demand for equality can refract back into the coalition agitating for it and produce a leveling effect that shores up what is often a fragile unity between the different members of the coalition who are informed by radically different socio-cultural and political traditions. In other words, since every aspect of the coalition posits themselves as equally subject to the law and the rights ideally afforded by it, neither part of the coalition can lay greater claim on rights or equality under the law than any other.

For the scholars cited above, the rights-based activism of Iranian women in the last decade is animated by a vibrant agonism in which conflict between secular and religious activists may be ever present but does not debilitate or implode the larger political project. This agonism, however, could not be sustained without the balancing

70

act between the two aforementioned constituent and interlocking parts of juridical rights. As previously mentioned, the demand for equality under the law refracts back onto the activist groups demanding rights and prevents (up to a point) one side's claim to those rights from superseding all of the others. The inherent flexibility of rights afforded by its empty form gives this coalition a strong pliability with which it can withstand constant negotiations and compromises without completely breaking. While the amorphous ideological character of this rights-based activism necessitates such flexibility, if it is too fluid this political project can stall or unravel into its constituent parts. The adherence to the law entailed in the demand for equality, precisely because it delimits political engagement to a juridical form, arrests the flexibility inherent to the empty rights form just enough to congeal the divergent threads whilst still preserving its dynamism. The imaginary of the contemporary Iranian women's movement that seems to baffle equally the boundaries of secularism and religiosity, in other words, would not be possible without these two integral facets of juridical rights.

The question that remains, however, is why now? Why did this particular demand for equal rights emanating from the contemporary Iranian women's movement produce such substantive cooperation across secular and religious lines while earlier incarnations did not? As has been discussed, the demand for equal rights by and for women has been a part of the formal Iranian historical record for at least a century. The contemporary blurring of secularism and religiosity, however, was in large part initiated by a rights discourse shaped by the hope, promise and harrowing aftermath of the 1979 Revolution. More specifically, the answer to the questions above lies in two further historical consequences inextricably tied to the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution: 1.) The

violent eradication of the radical Left from the socio-political landscape of Iran and 2.) A

crisis of authority within Shi'ite Islam. These two crucial historical developments, in

other words, coupled with the two aforementioned elements of juridical rights are what

enabled and cultivated the coalition that sprung out of the rights-based activism of

Iranian feminists during the last decade.

It cannot be stressed enough how the absence of the radical Left following the

1979 Revolution has impacted the socio-political form of the women's movement. The

absence of a radical Left to critique if not dismiss outright the ethical and political

purchase of this rights-based project has enabled it to flourish and develop its own

ideological compass. It is worth speculating how different this project may have been if

it were to engage in such critique, specifically whether it would have anchored the

women's movement in existing political forms and thereby undercut its innovative

capacity to form coalitions across ideological divides. There is also a more immediate

legacy that has shaped this politics, namely the political violence perpetuated by and

inflicted on the radical Left before, during, and after the Revolution. Such violence

includes both the "Guerrilla Era" of Iran that lasted from the 1971 Siakhal armed

uprising against the Shah until the 1979 Revolution and the extremely violent purging of

the radical Left by the Islamic Republic that culminated in the 1988 mass-execution of

political prisoners.[58]

Given the legacy of this political violence, it is perhaps unsurprising that the One

Million Signatures Campaign and other facets of the Iranian women's movement

demanding equal rights are expressly nonviolent. Even though they have shifted tactics

to forms of direct confrontation, the Million Signatures Campaign and other activist

platforms have been emphatic in its rejection of armed insurrection. By explicitly

refusing to fill the vacuum of armed opposition created in the wake of the radical Left's

eradication, these activists have greatly bolstered the ethical and political viability of their

alternative socio-political projects. This nonviolent strategy, however, is much more

than just a guard against state reprisal and a strategic attempt to gain outside support. As

can often be the case more generally, political violence in Iran during the last century has

sharpened and hardened ideological divisions during moments of crisis. The coalitional

politics of the Iranian women's movement comprised of divergent and sometimes-

conflicting epistemological investments could therefore easily fray under the pressure of

a violent uprising. The main danger with foregoing a nonviolent strategy is not merely

that it would lead to factionalism (which nonetheless threatens coalitional politics more

generally) but that it also would prematurely arrest the flexibility of rights and thereby

thwart their political aspirations. In sum, this contemporary demand for equal rights by

the Iranian women's movement has been able to attain the its wide scale due in part to

its nonviolent stance in a political landscape still haunted by a specter of the radical Left.

As was also presented at the outset of this chapter, this contemporary demand

for rights is being articulated by a new generation of Islamic women who inundated the

Iranian public sphere following its restructuring by the Islamic Republic. While these

socio-political developments will not be rehearsed at length here since they have already

been discussed, the discontent of Islamic activists regarding their juridical and political

subordination reflects a larger crisis of authority within Shi'ite Islam in Iran following the

1979 Revolution. As scholars such as Hamid Dabashi have argued, more specifically,

"Shi'ism is the quintessence of Islam as a religion of protest and can only remain valid

and legitimate as long as it posits itself as a revolutionary project" and the moment "that Islam (Shi'ism) becomes a dominant (state) ideology it contradicts itself."[59] While Shi'ite Islam as the de facto or de jure religion of the Iranian state is certainly not a new development, it has up until the 1979 Revolution never been officially the sole basis for the state itself. As such, it had to contend with not simply endorsing or critiquing but actually implementing state policies. Needless to say, the Islamic Republic's policies have cultivated intense discontentment amongst great numbers of its original constituency, let alone those opposed to it in the first place.

In addition to the absence of a radical Left, this crisis of authority also helps explain the particular ways in which this equal rights demand has blurred the boundary between religiosity and secularism. This crisis, more specifically, caused some adherents of Shi'ite Islam in Iran (including many Islamic feminists) to seek out more democratic interpretations of their faith. They sought to loosen the grip of the Islamic Republic's exclusive claim to Islam and find alternative political avenues through which they could distance themselves from the state without relinquishing Islam. While there clearly have been democratic renderings of Shi'ite Islam in the past, the particular democratic interpretations that emerged following the 1979 Revolution were painfully aware of the dangers that manifested when a singular reading of Shi'ite Islam became the foundation of state policy. This in turn led some activists away from focusing on Islam as a form of statecraft and toward a more open engagement with the law (including laws they may deem to be more secular) as the source of ethical politics. It was this return to the law, especially its pluralistic outlook that does not entirely disavow Shi'ite Islam, in the

aftermath of the 1979 Revolution that laid the foundation for the juridically-based project of the Iranian women's movement.

Hybridity, Historiography and the Iranian Women's Movement: A Reprise

These two developments arising out of the 1979 revolution, the eradication of the radical Left and a crisis of authority in Shi'ite Islam, are important reminders of the contingency informing the ability of rights to cohere together seemingly counterintuitive political coalitions. It is imperative, in other words, that the congealing effects of rights are not overstated. I do not want to insinuate that if the necessary historical conditions are present in Iran that rights frameworks-by virtue of the two characteristics above-automatically creates such a coalition nor to imply that this rights discourse embodies a stable and continuous ideological reconciliation. In contrast to the aforementioned scholars of the contemporary Iranian women's movement who treat this rights framework as a site of political coherency, this section will therefore explore how, crudely put, this discourse is the site of a very complicated socio-political mess. More specifically, it will be shown how the inherent hybridity of the contemporary Iranian women's movement and Iranian politics more broadly precludes this rights discourse from being neatly bounded and consistent throughout.

To make this argument, it will be necessary to revisit the broader historical narrativization of the Iranian women's movement that has its hallmarks ideological strife and reconciliation. While it is undeniable that the movement has been plagued by internecine conflict, this narrative can elide how the imaginaries, strategies, outlooks, and ambitions of Iranian feminists have overlapped and been absorbed by one another-

often unintentionally and unwittingly. At the same time, this rendering of the

movement's history also softens the ideological divisions between Iranian activists that

nonetheless continue to endure despite their current cooperation. Moreover, this

narrative also obfuscates the institutional continuity (and sometimes discontinuity)

between different instantiations of the Iranian state over the last century. As a result,

many scholars either neglect the more robust political hybridity of the Iranian women's

movement (currently) housed in the form of rights by either treating it as bounded and

by flattening differences within the coalition or by locating its emergence at too late of a

historical juncture.

In turning now to the historical narrativization of the Iranian women's

movement and its impact on how its contemporary rights discourse is viewed, it will be

productive to bring in Homi Bhabha's theorization of hybridity. Referencing divisions

within contemporary Marxism and feminism, Bhabha reminds us that the different

positions within them are "always a process of translation and transference of meaning":

"Each objective is constructed on the trace of that perspective that it puts under erasure;

each political object is determined in relation to the other, and displaced in that critical

act."[60] Rather than lamenting or dismissing this process as instances of sectarianism

wherein radical thought and practice turns on itself, Bhabha suggests it reflects the

inherent messiness of socio-political life more broadly. This process of negotiation, in

Bhabha's terms, emphasizes the "structure of *iteration* which informs political movements

that attempt to articulate antagonistic and oppositional elements without the redemptive

rationality of sublation or transcendence."[61] Most crucially, this open-ended process of

conflict and rearticulation should not be construed as a breakdown of the political ambitions and imaginaries in question as they can be the source of their renewal.

Bhabha clarifies his arguments above through the example of the 1984-1985 National Union of Mineworkers' strike in England. In particular, Bhabha focuses on how the experience of women involved in the strike overlaps with and yet cannot be fully enfolded into any neat narrative concerning the class struggle (which in that instance posited the revolutionary subject as male) *or* a liberal model of feminism (which neglects class dynamics altogether). "There is no simple political or social truth to be learned, for there is no unitary representation of a political agency, no fixed hierarchy of political values and effects," Bhabha argues, "Here, the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* (unitary working class) *nor the Other* (the politics of gender) *but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both."[62]

As will be discussed momentarily, Bhabha's formulation of this neither/nor subject position has clear resonances with the coalition currently at the fore of the Iranian women's movement. This is especially the case for Islamic feminists, whose complex politics (noting of course the differences within this broad umbrella) stands at the intersection of feminism and Islamism-thereby troubling both categories. In grappling with such hybridity, however, it is important to also remember Bhabha's caution not to stifle its dynamism in our analysis of it: "The challenge lies in conceiving of the time of political action and understanding as opening up a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction."[63] Given the exciting

possibilities for Iran (and perhaps beyond) opened by the women's movement, the impetus to categorize its rights discourse or identify its constituent parts is more than understandable. At the same time, however, in so doing one should be careful not to excise the larger political imaginaries of the movement that cannot be wholly captured by this rights discourse.

When brought to bear on the predominant historical narrative of the women's movement, Bhaba's conceptualization of hybridity allows for a greater excavation of the complex relationships Iranian feminists had with one another in addition to their engagement with different instantiations of the state. In an effort to show how these complicated political constellations not only endure within the movement but also how they are not wholly subsumed within the contemporary rights framework, I will now return to the historical narrative of the movement outlined in the second section. Since it would be beyond the scope of this chapter to show these complicated dynamics within every moment of this history, it will be prudent to focus on two aspects of this history that are instructive examples: 1.) The mobilization of and by Iranian women during the Iranian Revolution in 1979; and 2.) The institutional continuity, and discontinuity, between different incarnations of the Iranian state before and after that revolution.

While scholars have pointed to the very divergent political positions of Iranian women during their participation within the revolution of 1979 that later caused the movement to splinter, what is not discussed is how these forms of activism often overlapped. One example of such layered activism (which embodies Bhabha's characterization of political action as a 'process of translation and transference of meaning') pertains to the idealized feminine subject venerated by the Shah that was

pilloried equally by Islamic and Marxist feminists who in turn offered coinciding revolutionary reconfigurations of gender identity. As Minoo Moallem argues in *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister*, "what connected various forms of oppositional gender and class identifications- from Islamic to Marxist and socialist- was a Westernized or 'Westoxicated' (euphoric intoxication and poisoning by the West) notion of femininity associated in the *gharbzadeh* woman as the locus of sexual objectification, consumerism, and imperialism."[64] This model of femininity, Moallem explicates, was replaced with "a combative model of femininity in the discourses of the various oppositional groups."[65] While these idealized forms of femininity used to counter those of the Shah are not unproblematic, they were not were simply promulgated by male activists as a way to mobilize Iranian women. These oppositional organizations of gender, rather, were also actively shaped and taken up in convergent ways by Iranian women throughout the revolution and during the reconsolidation of the Iranian state.

It is also imperative to underscore that the complex political constellations (liberalism, Marxism, and Islamism) through which Iranian women carried out the revolution in 1979 were themselves composed of disparate and heterogeneous elements prior to this historic moment. Once again, Islamic feminism offers a strong case in point for, as Moallem argues, it "is itself a product of the modern temporalization of nationalism, liberalism, and humanism."[66] Islamic feminism, moreover, did not simply spontaneously appear in the lead-up to the revolution, as its intellectual roots stretch back to the complex interplay between Islamism and liberalism during the 1906-1911 Constitutional Revolution. Within this historic moment, leading Shi'ite clerics entered the social and intellectual fray at opposite sides of the political stage. While clerics such

79

as Seyyed Mohammad Tabatabai argued that a constitutional polity is not only permissible under Islam but is in fact preferred, others such as the pro-monarchist cleric Sheykh Fazlollah Nuri condemned the constitutional revolution and its political aspirations as being inimical to Islam. To be sure, the pro- or anti-constitutionalist positions of these clerics do not neatly correspond to a condemnation or support for the emancipation of Iranian women. This was especially clear with regards to women's education, for while Nuri stridently opposed demands for women's education, Tabatabai was also wary of the societal impact of such changes (though he did encourage his daughters to learn how to read and write).[67]

As active participants within the Constitutional Revolution, Iranian women had to contend not only with attitudes toward women's emancipation that were hostile at worst and tepid at best but also navigated attempts to foster or prevent a reconciliation between Islam and liberalism. By inhabiting political spaces that were simultaneously within and outside of these larger political categories, women pursuing Islamic constitutional alternatives (however marginally or informally) thereby laid the foundation for the liminal politics other Iranian women would espouse during and after the revolution in 1979. Proto-Islamic feminists within the Constitutional Revolution also engaged with and absorbed not only the critiques of liberal constitutionalism offered by Marxists but also to the alternative spaces outside of liberalism created by these radical imaginaries. As was mentioned above, the influence of Iranian Marxism on Islamic feminists would be even more evident in the anti-imperialist critiques of the Shah that was shared across the political spectrum during the 1979 revolution.

In addition to these shared forms of activism and overlapping imaginaries, the aforementioned narrative of the Iranian women's movement also elides the institutional continuities and reconfiguration of the state before and after the revolution in 1979. Scholars of the movement do discuss at length the hybridity informing, and often paralyzing, the Islamic Republic- specifically its fraught attempts to merge an electoral republic with the principles of *velayat e faqih* ("Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist"). However, what is neglected is how even though the Islamic Republic reconfigured (and in some cases overhauled) the monarchical state, it nonetheless maintained some of the institutional spaces created by the state feminism of the Pahlavi era. In both the Pahlavi monarchy and Islamic Republic, more specifically, the state claimed as part of its mandate an exclusive entitlement to the imposition of a specific model of femininity. "Both unveiling and reveiling," Minoo Moallem argues, giving an important example of this institutional continuity, "created sites where the history of state intervention in the performance and perpetuation of particular forms of femininity was imprinted on female bodies."[68]

Although how each state clearly differed in its interpretation of its self-given mandate, another important feature of this institutional continuity is that women played an important role in the implementation and enforcement of these policies. As was discussed above, the National Organization of Women in Iran (NOWI) was one avenue by which the Pahlavi state made its case for its reforms to family law and the expansion of women's education. Coordinating its programs with its members at the grassroots level, the NOWI attempted to reach a wide swath of Iranian women across social classes. While the NOWI advocated economic self-sufficiency, the ideal of femininity it

espoused was one thoroughly inflected (albeit in a relatively quiet way) with the Shah's programs that marshaled tropes of progress, modernity, and nationalism. Some members of the NOWI, however, eventually turned their backs on the Pahlavi regime in 1978 when they became part of the revolutionary groundswell against the Shah.

Within the Islamic Republic, Iranian women continue to play an integral role in such explicitly state-led policing of gender norms. While they are now a much feared and integral though unofficial aspect of the state's security apparatus, the *Basij* were initially civilians who volunteered to fight during the Iran-Iraq War. The *Basij Sisters* were an all female regiment within the larger *Basij* organization that, according to Janet Afary, "received military training, organized, rallies that boosted the morale of the troops, and engaged in more conventional support work, such as cooking for the soldiers, mending their clothes, and preparing their medicine."[69] Another important facet of the Islamic Republic's promulgation of particular gender identifications is the Zeinab Society that was founded in 1986. As Sanam Vakil has noted, although it promotes a out a wide range of "national political, cultural, social, and ideological activities for women," the militant group has garnered a infamous reputation "for advocating conservative restrictions on female clothing and banning male/female fraternization."[70] Most recently, in an unprecedented show of force, female *Basij* militia members were an active part of the government crackdown following the 2009 post-election protests-especially in suppressing resistance against Iranian women who protested against the regime.[71]

These examples of the overlapping activism by Iranian women during the 1979 revolution and the institutional linkages between different incarnations of the state

provide important complications to the narrative of the women's movement cited above. In turn, these complications raise three specific issues for analyses of the rights frameworks that were discussed above. The first pertains to how Victoria Tahmasebi-Birgani, Sanam Vakil, Janet Afary, and Rebecca Barlow have all charted the multifaceted character of this contemporary demand for rights. More specifically, they trace how the contemporary women's movement takes from both liberal feminism and Islamism in its departure from both. The issue is that these arguments presume a liberalism and Islamism that is left not only intact but also apart from the hybrid discourse emanating from them. While disagreeing with her reading of Saba Mahmood's 'grammar of concepts', I am borrowing from and concurring with Catherine Sameh's assertion that "Islamic human rights discourses do not so much weld together discourses of Islam and discourses of rights as they produce new discourses that emerge from multiple *grammars* of concepts."[72]

A related issue is that the model of hybridity employed here is too neat and bounded, a model wherein there is a lurking insinuation that this hybrid rights discourse has managed to smooth over any tensions left over from this fusion of liberalism and Islam. Even though scholars acknowledge that differences between activists may remain, such differences are posited as seemingly only existing in the day-to-day interactions between activists while the hybrid rights framework itself is seemingly without tension. If not implying that such a rights framework transcends the discursive differences that endure between Islamism and liberalism, the scholars above (Sameh included) at the very least suggest the contemporary women's movement in Iran is in a space wherein any ideological friction is put on hold. By neglecting the contingent and

fraught undercurrent of rights discourses, the critical impetus here seems to be to excavate the proper conditions by which the rights-based project of the women's movement may be preserved. As previously mentioned, the violently gendered inequality structuring the Islamic Republic clearly necessitates such an excavation. The question that is still not addressed let alone asked, however, is what are the costs incurred in perpetuating this particular rights framework and, given these costs, it is worth preserving?

In fairness, the characterization that such activism sidesteps any lingering ideological tension also stems directly from activists themselves. While the testimonies of activists involved in the One Million Signatures Campaign surveyed at the outset of this chapter reflected their profoundly different ethical frames of reference, they all emphasized the need for a 'situational' or 'circumstantial' feminism. It will be helpful to recall Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani's assertion that such feminists "are not anti-Islamic, but they have distanced themselves from struggles over political and religious authority (the Islamic Republic claims both), and they base their activities on their practical demands rather than on concerns about identity or ideology."[73] Such 'circumstantial' feminism, however, obscures the disparate ideological lineages that determine the conditions of possibility for these seemingly mundane 'practical demands'. Ideological differences, in other words, cannot be checked at the door because they are not simply a matter of individual choice or intention. This is not to imply that these activists are being disingenuous or that they are ignorant of their larger political environment. Rather, it is to highlight how any assertion of the ideological continuity or stability of this

hybrid rights framework risks depoliticizing the broader discursive terrain of the women's movement.

A third and final issue is that many if not all of the scholars locate the hybrid politics of the movement at too late of a historical juncture. Locating this rights-based activism within the more recent history of Iran, more specifically, is problematic because it neglects the contribution of the radical Left in shaping such hybrid politics. As was previously discussed, the critique of liberalism offered by the radical Left both hindered and bolstered at different times previous demands for equal rights. Marxist feminists not only converged with Islamic feminists in the reconfiguration of gender norms but also in so doing accentuated the militancy of Iranian women across the political spectrum. Even though the radical Left has in effect been forcibly disappeared from Iranian politics today, it nonetheless continues to shape the contemporary rights framework of the women's movement through its presence that is defined by its absence. The reaction by the Islamic Republic to the One Million Signatures Campaign was also shaped in part by its experiences with Marxist revolutionaries prior and during its consolidation. When juxtaposed alongside the Left's inability to take seriously and engage certain Islamic groups during the revolution in 1979, the ability of the contemporary women's movement to suture together a coalition comprised of Islamic and liberal activists may pose an even greater threat to the Islamic Republic than lingering challenges posed by Marxists immediately after the revolution.

<u>Wither Rights?</u>

These issues surrounding analyses of the rights-based activism of the Iranian women's movement are not a matter of quibbling over its historic periodization or an exercise in semantics over the proper definition of hybridity. Rather, these issues raise important questions regarding what a more robust understanding of hybridity allows us to see regarding the rights framework of the women's movement- specifically its potential to either nurture or foreclose more expansive political futures. A recognition of how the activism of Iranian women and different incarnations of the Iranian state have historically overlapped, in other words, not only helps explain how the inner logic of rights made the recent coalition between Islamic and liberal feminists possible but also foregrounds the wider political expanse of the movement cannot be wholly contained within its representational confines.

In order to not lose sight of these more complex political constellations, it is imperative to understand these political forms in terms closer to Bhabha's conceptualization of hybridity- as more diffuse, fleeting, generative, and open-ended. We must also be careful not to stifle the dynamism of political movements in our analyses of them and to continually remember, once again in Bhabha's words, that "the challenge lies in conceiving of the time of political action and understanding as opening up a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction."[74] In their analyses of the contemporary rights discourse, the arguments of the scholars cited above are limited by what is in effect their rush to cobble together a unity of the social contradiction posed by the coalitional politics of the women's

movement. By treating the putative reconciliation of secularism and religiosity embodied within this coalition as a historical inevitably, such narratives risk upholding rights jurisprudence as the end of that history, as the apex of emancipatory and progressive politics in Iran.

Acknowledging such hybridity is important because it guards against relapsing into binaries when wrestling with the impasse of secularism versus religion discussed in the introduction. While I have argued that the ideological differences between self-identified secular and Islamic feminists has not been resolved through their rights framework, their divergent outlooks are also not wholly separate or diametrically opposed since they were constituted in a political field inflected with all of the political legacies each has inherited. In other words, the various secular positions in the women's movement have been configured in some way by the political currents of Shi'ism in Iran and vice versa. When assessing the rights frameworks of Iranian feminists, it therefore may be more pertinent to ask not what aspects of it are religious and which are secular but rather, what does one do about rights more broadly within this context? More importantly, does their demand for juridical equality augment or delimit more radical and substantial forms of equality? How do we reconcile this rights discourse that effectively brings the public to bear on the private sphere (thus politicizing it) while continuing to rely on a public/private divide that is latent with other forms of gendered subordination? Or to put it another way, does this rights framework settle for the liberal conceits upon which all rights demands are at least in part tethered to?

To address these questions, it will be helpful to bring in Sara Ahmed's analysis of feminism's critical ambivalence toward rights. Critiquing Western feminism's over-

determination of the case of female genital mutilation while also arguing it is still a feminist issue, Ahmed offers an alternative that would strike the balance between these positions: "A more mutual engagement would require that one 'give up' the power to authorise what are the 'proper objects' of feminist dialogue precisely by giving up one's power to author what constitutes women's rights. Such a refusal of authorisation presupposes a recognition that 'women's rights' is a sign which is up for grabs- open to being re-defined- rather than belonging to an already existing political and legal subject."[75] Ahmed also strongly emphasizes the contingent nature of rights in stating that "women's rights do not precede their articulation in specific contexts: the event of women's rights marks out boundaries which can only be concealed by assuming such rights are self evident."[76] These insights by Ahmed help bring into relief how, simply put, context matters and that when engaging with a geopolitical space from outside of it, one must be prepared to take an ethical and political leap of faith.

I am suggesting, in other words, that it is possible to critically support the One Million Signatures Campaign by also nurturing and continually making room for the movement's more expansive political imaginaries - both past and present. This includes political positions, such as those of Islamic and Marxist feminists, which do not conform to a liberal logic in their critique of capital and empire. Such positions are especially important since rights fail to address inequalities and economic subordination engendered by capital, in large part because they were brought into being through property rights and modes of production endemic to capital itself. It is also worth remembering that Iran encountered the Enlightenment humanism undergirding juridical rights through its encounter with empire. This convergence is what Hamid Dabashi

describes as "the quintessential paradox of the Iranian encounter with colonial modernity" that was gestured to in the introduction: "The European Enlightenment modernity that was meant to liberate Iranians from darkness and set them free…and encourage them to 'have courage to use their own intelligence,' denied them that very agency by bringing the Enlightenment message to them through the gun barrel of colonialism."[77]

In light of its ethical lapses and aporias, rights discourses and practices in Iran must therefore be approached, in Spivak's terms, through a "persistent critique of what one cannot not want."[78] This includes inhabiting rights discourses without capitulating to its political conceits and the limits they place on the conditions of possibility for more radical alternatives. Given the high costs of endorsing such demands for equal rights in Iran, to say nothing of the even higher costs of pursuing more radical paths, in the words of Wendy Brown, "it makes sense at times not to be bashing rights-discourses but rather work to the side of it, to pursue justice projects in other vocabularies."[79] As observers of the Iranian women's movement we must therefore take heed not to inadvertently squelch the vocabularies of existing or emergent social justice projects. We must support (though equally critically) any unpragmatic feminisms 'demanding the impossible' that might emerge from the movement alongside or in contestation with other self-described 'pragmatic' instantiations- even at the risk of fracturing or failure.

[1] For the video and text of Judith Butler's speech given at an Occupy Wall Street on October 23, 2011 on the blog of Verso Books, see: Kishani Widyaratna, "If hope is an impossible demand, then we demand the impossible'-Judith Butler at Occupy Wall Street video." *Versobooks.com*, October 24, 2011, http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/765-if-hope-is-an-impossible-demand-then-we-demand-the-impossible-judith-butler-at-occupy-wall-street-video

[2] Shirin Ebadi, *Iran Awakening* (New York, NY: Random House, Inc. 2006).

[3] Despite the severe sentence, Arian's mother eventually stayed the execution of Arian's stepbrother. See: Ebadi, *Iran Awakening*, Pg. 126.

[4] Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, "Gender Inequality and Discrimination: The
Case of Iranian Women," March 8, 2013, http://iranhrdc.org/english/publications/legal-commentary/1000000261-gender-inequality-and-discrimination-the-case-of-iranian-women.html#20.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] The Feminist School [Iran], "In Honor of August 27: The Third Anniversary of Campaign
Face-to-Face Approach, The Symbol of Struggle in the One Million Signature Campaign, An Interview with Ms. Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani," August 26, 2009. http://www.feministschool. com/english/spip.php? article327.

[7] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Is Time on Iranian Women Protester's Side?," *Middle East Report*, June 16, 2006, http://www.merip.org/mero/mero061606.

[8] Given the dangers of openly organizing in Iran under the existing government, the Million Signatures Campaign has a large online presence and uses its website as a central platform for mobilizing its supporters.

[9] Other gender-issue campaigns that emerged from the Iranian women's movement during this time include: The Stop Stoning Forever Campaign, the Women for Equal Citizenship Campaign, the National Women's Charter Campaign, the Young Lawyers Campaign for Gender Equality in Family Law, Mothers for Peace, and Mournful Mother's Campaign.

[10] One Million Signatures Campaign [Iran],"Effect of Laws on Women's Lives," August 28, 2006, http://we-change.org/site/english/spip.php?article41.

[11] *Ibid*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, as of October 2011 there are over 882,000 refugees in Iran (840,000 of which are Afghani and the remaining 42,000 are Iraqi). See: United Nations High Commission for Refugees. "2014 UNHCR Country Operations Profile- Islamic Republic of Iran," http://www.unhcr.org /pages/49e48 6f96.html.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Effect of Laws on Women's Lives*

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Asharq Al-Awsat, "Inside Iran: An Interview with 'Zanan' Magazine's Editor, Shahla Sherkat," May 11, 2007, http://www.aawsat.net/2007/ 05/article55262756.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story English Edition* (Women's Learning Partnership, 2009), 49.

[27] *Ibid*, 49.

[28] *Ibid*, 50.

[29] Nahid Keshavarz, "From a Reading Group to the Campaign for One Million Signatures: An Interview with Jelve Javaheri," *One Million Signatures Campaign [Iran]*, December 30, 2007, http://wechange.org/site/english/spip.php?article196

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Sasan Ghahreman, "The Campaign for One Million Signatures: A Grassroots Effort, Interview with Sara Loghmani," *One Million Signatures Campaign [Iran]*, November 2006, http://we-change.org/site/spip.php?article282.

[32] Kaveh Mozzafari, "A Transcendental Campaign," trans. Shole Irani, http://we-change.org/site/spip.php?article409.

[33] Hosseinzadeh Mahboubeh, " 'This is the Price that as a Man Seeking Equality I am Willing
to Pay': An Interview with Amir Yaghoub-Ali," *One Million Signatures Campaign [Iran]*,August 6, 2008, http://wechange.org/site/ english/spip.php?article315.

[34] Nina Ansary, "Iranian Women's Magazine Zanan Makes a Comeback," *Women's eNews*, May 28, 2014, http://womensenews.org/story/media-stories/ 140528/iranian-womens-magazine-zanan-makes-comeback#.VI4hXGTF_OR.

[35] One such success was a 2006 amendment to the citizenship law that allowed women married to foreign men to pass on their citizenship on to their children if the child is 18 and the father is Muslim. See Sanam Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction* (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 186.

[36] *Ibid,* 188.

[37] Mansoureh Ettehadieh, "The Origins and Development of the Women's Movement in Iran, 1906-41." In *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 85.

[38] Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009),128.

[39] See: Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*; Mansoureh Ettehadieh, "The Origins and Development of the Women's Movement in Iran, 1906-41."; Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994); Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Parvin

Paidar*, Women and the Politic Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[40] Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, 34-36.

[41] Parvin Paidar*, Women and the Politic Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 103.

[42] An excellent synopsis of the activities and aims of the Women's Organization of Iran can be found in Janet Afary's *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 211-215.

[43] Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, 45.

[44] See Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Politic Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*; Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*; Sanaam Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*; Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*; and Amir Mehryar, Gholamali Farjadi, and Mohammad Tabibian, "Labor-Force Participation of Women in Contemporary Iran", In *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, eds. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

[45] See: Catherine Sameh. "Discourses of Equality, Rights, and Islam in the One Million Signatures Campaign in Iran," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12:3-4 (2010): 445; Janet Afary *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*;, Sanaam Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*; and Negin Nabavi, "From 'Reform' to 'Rights': Mapping a Changing Discourse in Iran, 1997-2009", In *Iran: From Theocracy to the Green Movement*, ed. Negin Nabavi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[46] Tahmasebi-Birgani. "Green Women of Iran: The Role of the Women's Movement During and After Iran's Presidential Election of 2009," 80.

[47] *Ibid,* 80.

[48] Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, 180.

[49] Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 371.

[50] Rebecca Barlow, *Women's Human Rights and the Muslim Question: Iran's One Million Signatures Campaign* (Kindle edition, chapter 5).

[51] Arzoo Osanloo, *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) 8.

[52] *Ibid*, 205.

[53] *Ibid*, 208.

[54] Catherine Sameh. "Discourses of Equality, Rights, and Islam in the One Million Signatures Campaign in Iran," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12:3-4 (2010): 445.

[55] *Ibid*, 452.

[56] *Ibid*, 452.

[57] In her analysis, Wendy Brown excavates and critiques the following aspects of liberal-juridical rights: 1.) The individuating and individualistic logic (i.e. that rights are demanded collectively but conferred individually); 2.) The obfuscation and perpetuation of material forms of inequality through such logic; 3.) The inability of juridical rights to address, let alone redress, the myriad forms of inequality and oppression tailored to and constitutive of the complex nodes of subjecthood; and 4.) How rights discourses and practices themselves not only contribute to subject production but also the regulation of those subjects, both in existing and emergent modalities of power. See: Wendy Brown, "Suffering Rights as Paradoxes," *Constellations* 7, no. 2 (2000). Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak's critique of rights focuses on its geopolitical manifestation in human rights discourses. For Spivak, one conundrum of human rights discourses and practices is that the clamor for human rights that is intended to redress specific socio-cultural and political injuries elicits help from the very structures of power that created such injuries in the first place. While acknowledging the potential for human rights frameworks to combat Eurocentrism, Spivak is especially critical of its emphasis on 'singular and spectacular' abuses of human rights. The mundane, everyday violations and subordinations inflicted on subaltern subjects, Spivak argues, are ignored and even rendered invisible by this normative human rights model. See: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Use and abuse of human rights," *boundary 2*, Vol. 32, no. 1 (2005).

[58] For an excellent analysis of this traumatic period in Iranian history see Ervand Abrahamian's *A History of Modern Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[59] Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted*, 217.

[60] Homi Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010 [1994]), 39.

[61] *Ibid*, 38.

[62] *Ibid*, 41.

[63] *Ibid*, 37.

[64] Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and The Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 77.

[65] *Ibid*, 77.

[66] *Ibid*, 183.

[67] For a succinct overview of the contention and overlap between the clerical positions during the Constitutional Revolution see Paidar's*, Women and the Politic Process in twentieth-century Iran*, pages 60-67.

[68] Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and The Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 70.

[69] Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 297.

[70] Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, 79.

[71] Hayyan Nayouf, "Iran's Basij Sisters suppressed election protests," *Al Arabiya News*, August 5, 2009.

[72] Sameh. "Discourses of Equality, Rights, and Islam in the One Million Signatures Campaign in Iran,", pg 452. I disagree with Sameh's call for "troubling the idea that one grammar of concepts is historically distinguishable from one another"(452). While I agree with the spirit of Sameh's argument, I think one should be wary of flattening difference too much in critiquing its reification. Sameh also argues that Talal Asad and Mahmood "do not theorize the ways in which discourses circulate transnationally and then become 'localized' through specific cultural practices"(452). This statement undercuts her previous argument because here she is in effect saying that there *is* historically a set of distinguishable grammar of concepts- those inside and those outside of Iran, for example- but they become indistinguishable once they settle in their local contexts. The phrasing of her argument, in other words, suggests that 'local' geopolitical spaces such as Iran are outside or separate from the larger transnational circulation of discourse. In sum, she inadvertently reproduces the binary logic and reification of difference she is seeking to trouble if not undo.

[73] Khorasani, *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story*, 49.

[74] *Ibid*, 37.

[75] Sara Ahmed, *Differences that Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 38.

[76] *Ibid*, 36.

[77] Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 45-46.

[78] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Inside Out in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 46.

[79] Wendy Brown, "Rights, Tolerance, and Waning Sovereignty: An Interview with Wendy Brown". Interview with Illan rua Wall. *Irish Left Review.* September 20120. http://www.irishleftreview.org/2010/09/20/rights-tolerance-waning-sovereignty-interview-wendy-brown/.

Chapter 2
The Politics of Time in Iran

In 2009, the Islamic Republic found itself in the midst of a severe political crisis that reverberated across Iran and which, for a brief moment, left the government reeling from an uprising that quickly cascaded out of its control. The celebratory mood of the Islamic Republic that February as it commemorated the thirty year anniversary of the revolution that brought it power quickly evaporated that following June when the reelection of then President Ahmadinejad was met with dismay, allegations of voter fraud, and fierce outcry. Spontaneous street protests erupted in the days following the elections, eventually morphing into a full-fledged social movement by the end of the summer. Following a waning of protest activity in the fall, Tehran was again stage for fierce street battles in December during the observance of Ashura, an annual holiday that memorializes the massacre of Imam Hussein and his followers during the Battle of Karbala in 680. This event would prove to be a pivotal moment in the crisis as both the government and demonstrators presented their divergent political visions through the same paradigm of Karbala.

While some observers of Iran where either confused by this mobilization of religious imagery and symbolism on the part of demonstrators or ignored it altogether, other scholars took these instances of religiosity seriously as sophisticated forms of resistance. This chapter will argue, however, even such nuanced accounts of the crisis nonetheless frame religion in utilitarian and secular terms as something either strategically wielded by protesters or manipulated by the government to retain authority.

Consequently, they could not see or fully explain the more diffuse and amorphous political dimensions of religiosity in Iran. One such dimension is time, as these scholars were unable to reconcile how some of the religious symbolism seemed to reorient and conflate references to the past, present, and future.

In an effort to move beyond this framing, temporality will be the focal point of this chapter as it is one site of the variegated entanglements of religion, secularism, and politics in Iran. My central argument, more specifically, will be that in order to fully understand role of religiosity in the 2009 uprising one must recognize a unique feature of the Islamic Republic: that its symbolic architecture is organized around temporal simultaneity, a non-secular organization of time wherein past, present, and future are enfolded into another in one dynamic moment. While this temporal constellation is unique, it is a further example of how different iterations of the Iranian state have historically been informed and impacted by the politics of time. Before explicating what temporal simultaneity is and how it is a cornerstone of the Islamic Republic, I will therefore first survey the political history of Iran's three hegemonic calendars, the forty day mourning cycle of Shi'ism and Islamic messianism in the last century.

On the basis of this argument, the final sections will offer a critical rereading of the uprising in 2009 that lays bare the political stakes of taking Islam seriously as a formative socio-cultural force. This chapter is asking, in other words, what does it mean to understand protest and acts of resistance without subordinating Islam to politics? If Islam and the forms of politics in Iran (within the regime, the opposition, and the grey area in between) are indeed co-constitutive, what are the ways of not capitulating to a secularizing impulse when reading these moments of political upheaval? Animated by

96

these questions, it will be shown how the political conditions of possibility have been shaped in part by this religiously inflected understanding of time at the core of the Iranian state since 1979. The political stakes of this analytical recalibration, as will be argued, are incredibly high and fraught given that the political conflict of 2009 provided an ephemeral and short-lived glimpse into an Iran without an Islamic Republic. Consequently, any assessment of religion's role in this moment entails a normative appraisal of the 'proper place' of Islam within such a speculative future. This chapter, however, pushes back against any ascription of Islam to a fixed place by highlighting its discursive and dynamic imprints on Iran's larger political landscape. The door must be left open, in other words, to the fact that ethical alternatives to the Islamic Republic are structured, nurtured, and made possible by the political imaginaries engendered by the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, including those informed by Islam itself.

Ashura 2009: Tehran

On December 27, 2009 thousands of Iranians gathered in Tehran to commemorate Ashura, one of the holiest days of the year for Shi'ite Muslims that marks the Battle of Karbala (680 CE) in which Imam Hussein ibn Ali (grandson of Prophet Muhammad) and his followers were massacred by the army of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah, the reigning caliph of the Umayyad Caliphate. Even though, as Hamid Dabashi rightly argues, "it took decades, if not centuries, for the theological positions of the Sunnis and the Shi'is to coagulate and contradistinguish themselves," the Battle of Karbala and (from the Shia vantage point) the martyrdom of Hussein greatly facilitated this split.[1] A central protagonist/antagonist in this historic moment was the people of Kufa, a small

97

town in what is now Iraq, who initially pledged to join Hussein in his revolt against the Umayyad Caliphate but, after incurring the wrath of the local governor, abandoned him and his followers. Ashura rituals, consequently, are deeply imbued with themes of tragedy, guilt, betrayal, defiance, and martyrdom.

The Ashura observances in Tehran that December were carried out in the tumultuous aftermath of the presidential elections that took place earlier in the year. On June 12, 2009 millions of Iranians cast their votes in the country's presidential election that was largely a contest between incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the reformist candidate. The official results announced later that evening amongst widespread allegations of voting irregularities and outright fraud declared Ahmadinejad the winner in a landslide. The peaceful protests against these results that erupted throughout Iran sowed the seeds of the Green Movement and led to the largest demonstrations the country had seen in over a decade. The protests were violently suppressed by the Iranian state, as Basij militia members wielding batons and other weapons brutalized protesters. Those arrested for demonstrating faced exile, long prison sentences, torture, and even execution. These events were not without consequence for the Iranian state, which was shook down to its core as the Islamic Republic lost any remaining semblance of being a republic.

After a lull in protest activity during the late summer and fall, on December 27, Tehran was once again the site of fierce clashes between demonstrators and the government during Ashura observations. Overshadowing these protests was the recent passing of Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, the most senior Shi'ite cleric in Iran at the time who was a *marja taghlid* (source of emulation) and an outspoken critic of the

regime who had previously been placed under house arrest. After a falling out with

Khomeini over the execution of thousands of political prisoners by the Islamic Republic

in 1988, Montazeri remained a steadfast critic of the regime and voiced support for the

civil rights of all Iranians- especially for Iranian women and Baha'is. It should be noted,

however, that Montazeri was also instrumental in forging not only the idea of *velayat-e*

fiqh ("guardianship of the Islamic jurist") but also was responsible for the violent

consolidation of power through Islamic militias directly after the revolution.[2] After the

disputed re-election of Ahmadinejad, eighty-seven year-old Montazeri took the bold step

of issuing a fatwa against the Islamic Republic and labeled the Supreme Leader

Khamenei illegitimate for his role in suppressing protests through force and other means

that he stated was tantamount to "working against religion."[3] Following Montazeri's

death on December 19, massive crowds gathered in the holy city of Qom (the spiritual

and intellectual heart of Shi'ite Islam in Iran) on December 21 for his funeral while

others gathered in other Iranian cities to pay their respects. In reporting his death,

however, the Islamic Republic did not use his title of Ayatollah and referred to him only

as "the cleric of rioters."[4] Condolence banners outside of Montazeri's house were torn

down by hardliners and brief skirmishes broke out when the government tried to deter

mourners from reaching the holy city to attend his funeral.[5]

It is within this fraught religious and political context that the Ashura protests

took place on December 27, which coincidentally was also the seventh day after

Montazeri's passing (an important marker in the forty-day mourning period of Shi'ite

Islam). The earlier use of force against those mourning the death of Montazeri had

angered an expansive swath of the Iranian population, including many in southern

Tehran (a traditional source of support for the regime) who poured onto the streets to commemorate Ashura through protest alongside thousands of other Iranians.[6] One of the deadliest days since the June 20th demonstrations, security forces and Basiij militia members caught protestors off guard with unexpected force and violence. However, protesters were equally fierce in defending themselves and were especially angered by the regime's use of force during the month of Muhurram when committing acts of violence are forbidden. In a departure from earlier confrontations, some protesters actually fought back against the regime with rocks and batons stolen from security forces, some of whom had their uniforms stripped while others refused orders to kill demonstrators.[7] The atmosphere was charged with the religious valences of the day, as protesters not only shouted "Death to Khamenei!" but also cast Khamenei in the most despised role within the Karbala narrative of Hussein's martyrdom by chanting, "This is the month of blood, Yazid will fall!"[8]

With potentially dire implications for its remaining religious legitimacy, the Islamic Republic swiftly suppressed the protests and condemned them within the same Ashura narrative. Ahmadinejad, in an inverse reference to Ta'zieh (the Shi'ite passion play that is a crucial feature of Ashura observances and which reenacts the martyrdom of Hussein and his followers), called the protests a 'theatre play run by the Zionists and Americans': "The Iranian nation has witnessed many plays of this kind: a play ordered by the Zionists and Americans, who had purchased the tickets to this play and were the only audience of this play."[9] Ali Larijani, speaker of the Iranian parliament at the time, advocated for the "harshest punishment" to protesters "disrupting" Ashura commemorations and labeled them an insult to Imam Hussein.[10] Some clerics gave a

similarly grave interpretation of events, such as Ahmad Alamolhoda who ominously told protesters to repent or risk being treated as a *mohareb* or enemy of God (a charge that carries a potential death sentence).[11] To be sure, these sentiments were not just restricted to members of the regime as a few days later on December 30, hundreds of thousands of government supporters rallied throughout Iran with billowing green and black flags of support for Khamenei and Imam Hussein-a clear provocation to Iranians who criticized Khamenei through the narrative of Hussein's martyrdom only days earlier.

Reading Religion: Utilitarianism, Strategy, and Resistance

For many observers of the 2009 political crisis in Iran, the Ashura observance in Tehran embodied the character of the larger conflict as they posited it as a political crisis wrapped in a garb of religious signification and contestation. At the core of these tumultuous events, in other words, was a religious state trying to hold on to power by consolidating its hegemonic interpretation of Islam, the foundation for its putative political legitimacy, in the face of mounting political opposition. In this vein, according to these scholars, the religious symbolism and imagery of the protests can be construed as a deft strategic move that not only enables protesters to deflect charges of being irreligious but also to make their demands more palatable to a broader, and perhaps more religious, audience in Iran.

This narrative, which will be discussed in more detail shortly, is one of many that were marshaled to make analytic and political sense of the 2009 post-election uprising in Iran. Unlike some who offered apologias for the Islamic Republic that dismissed protesters writ large as secular, Westernized elites, the scholars whose work will be

surveyed below took seriously the mobilization of religious imagery and symbolism within the protests.[12] In so doing, they emphasized the layered nuances of secularism and religion within the crisis and eschewed any simple dichotomy between them. As will be shown, however, despite such analytic care, religion within this narrative was presented in largely utilitarian and secular terms as something that is either wielded by protesters in a strategic move to gain legitimacy or manipulated by the authorities to retain control over the devolving political situation. Consequently, scholars subscribing to this narrative are unable to account for not only the full complexity of the 2009 post-election demonstrations but also the political imaginaries engendered and foreclosed by religion more broadly in Iran since the 1979 Revolution.

The core argument of this narrative is that through aesthetic tactics and forms of resistance, protesters eroded the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic by reclaiming the religious symbols of Shi'ite Islamic and the 1979 Revolution.   In *Thirty Years Later: Iranian Visual Culture from the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Presidential Protests*, Elizabeth L. Ruah highlights a crucial symbol to such reclamation: a hand print (each finger representing the five immediate members of the Prophet Muhammad's family), often represented as soaked in blood to invoke and draw a link between the historical present and massacre at the Battle of Karbala. "By cloaking the 2009 protests in Islamic and Shi'i symbolism, the Green Movement used the Islamic Republic's political imagery as visual weaponry, destabilizing the religious claims of the state and seriously undermining the regimes politico-religious legitimacy," Rauh argues, "The Green Movement at once boldly asserted its own rightful inheritance of the 1979 Revolution and reclaimed the Shi'i persecution narrative of Karbala to build popular support consensus and

mobilization against all odds."[13] Handprints that had once adorned protest banners

demanding the removal the Shah during the 1979 Revolution made a reappearance in

2009 as protesters against the Islamic Republic graffiti-stenciled them onto the concrete

walls of Tehran and recast them with a green hue to demand their vote be counted.

Another source for the reclamation and reconfiguration of religious symbolism

by protesters during the 2009 uprising, according to this narrative, is through the literal

and metaphoric dimensions of martyrdom. Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh has argued that

after elections, "the opposition movement has seized control of the Karbala paradigm"

and "have used the trope of martyrdom in order to force the state to acknowledge them

as legitimate Shia citizens."[14] More specifically, protesters "insisted on their own

sacrificiability" and in so doing condemned "the state in accordance with the terms of its

own Shia-derived juridico-moral codes."[15] Other scholars such as Michael M. Fischer

have noted how it is not just religious Iranians who have used the Karbala narrative as

political strategy: "In 1977–79, the Karbala Paradigm was used as a mobilizing device by

the religious factions of the revolution to inject morality and social justice as the goals of

politics; today it is the 'secularists' who are using the Karbala Paradigm to claim both

politics and morality from the assertion of monopoly control over interpretation of

Islam by clerics and their allies and followers, an interpretive control that is explicitly

antidemocratic and antirepublican."[16]

A further tactic and potent symbol employed during both the 1979 Revolution

and the 2009 post-election tumults is the shouting of "Allah-o-Akbar" from rooftops. A

familiar refrain that accompanied the toppling of the Shah, chants of "Allah-o-Akbar"

once again became the sonic backdrop of political mobilization as Iranians met in furtive

gatherings on their apartment rooftops under the relative safety of darkness to quickly

shout the slogan and disappear back inside before security forces could identify which

building it came from. "The chant of 'Allahu akbar' and other gestures and words have

been used for thirty years to sustain the political imagination of the revolutionary state,"

Setrag Manoukian states in *What Is This Place? Crowds, Audio-vision, and Poetry in Postelection

Iran*, arguing further that, "Redeploying them to question the elections, crowds challenge

the order of things through its own vocabulary."[17] This strategy, in other words, had the

potential to put the Islamic Republic in a double political bind of being placed on the

defensive by protesters who claimed God to be on their side while being unable to

accuse those shouting the slogan of being a threat to national security or of being un-

Islamic for proclaiming "God is Great!"

As the analyses above suggest, those subscribing to this particular narrative take

great care to avoid a flat reading of these events in 2009 as a simple reproduction or

continuation of the 1979 Revolution. At the same time, however, these observers of

Iran have difficulty reconciling the reemergence of politico-religious symbolism of

Shi'ism and the 1979 Revolution with the protesters who claim this immediate and

distant past for themselves while agitating for alternative political futures. "Their

demonstrations have thus opened a door to Iran's past as well as the future," Fred

Halliday argues, "Another slogan of the epic popular tide of 1978-79- marg bar facism,

marg bar irtiija (death to facism, death to reaction)- may yet contribute with the marg bar

dictator of the marches of 2009 in a way that heralds the end of the demagogic clique

that now rules Iran."[18] Elizabeth L. Ruah similarly evokes a sense of the past melding

with the present to reorient the future in her concluding remarks, which fall under a

heading entitled "the future of the past." Borrowing a phrase from Houchang E. Chehabi, Ruah argues that the 2009 protests reflects the "cyclical eternal return of revolutions, in the sense that revolutions tend to reenact paradigmatic events to the past while establishing new histories" and that "the Green Movement's reference to past battles and revolutions is undoubtedly a highly self-aware and historicized assertion."[19]

Other scholars subscribing and contributing to this narrative have also highlighted how such historical references of the 2009 demonstrations unfold on an incredibly complex temporal terrain. "The chant finds its force in referencing the revolution as an ongoing event rather than as a past that has already ended," Manoukian argues in reference to chants of "Allah akbar" without mention of Khomeini (a clear provocation against the regime), "To cite it is not to return to or reenact the revolution. It is to be contemporary in Agamben's sense, to open up the present toward a different past and future."[20] For Manoukian, this simultaneous repositioning of the historical present through a reclamation of the past "makes the distinction between religious and secular irrelevant" and by implication opens the door to a future that can better reconcile religiosity and secularism by disavowing any binary opposition between them.

Like Manoukian, other scholars have looked to Agamben to smooth the seeming temporal inconsistencies of the protests, arguing the collision of past, present, and future reflect the 'split vision' of the 2009 demonstrations. Melinda Hinkson, referencing Agamben by way of Manoukian, draws on Agamben's understanding of the contemporary wherein "persons have the courage to grasp something unknown, which sits outside of chronological time, in terms of an as yet unrealised potential."[21] This position of sitting outside of chronological time, which Hinkson tacitly suggests is

arrived at through a claim to be inhabiting/reenacting both the historical present and the past, affords protestors a novel glimpse of a future: "No longer simply immersed in the intensity of the here and now, protestors have a kind of split vision – they act also in the interests of tomorrow, in support of a future whose aspirational form remains, as yet, unclear."[22] Drawing on this notion of a 'split-vision', Elizabeth J. Yarbakhsh suggests that martyrdom has a similar temporal quality of being "of a specific time and standing out of time."[23] More specifically, Yarbakhsh argues that "although fixed in a particular time and space, martyrs reference past martyrdoms (stretching back to Hosayn, and including martyrs of the 1978/1979 revolution, and those of the Iran-Iraq war) while also being sacrificed in the cause of an undecided future."[24]

As evidenced by these analyses, scholars highlighting the symbolic overlap of the 2009 demonstrations and the 1979 Revolution construe religion in Iran in liberal, utilitarian and ultimately secular terms. The very language by which religion and religious imagery is described attests to this (emphasis added): Yarbakhsh's characterization of the protesters as having "*seized control* of the Karbala paradigm,"[25] Manoukian's statement that rooftop chants of "Allah Akbar" *redeploys* this strategy of the 1979 Revolution and in so doing *challenges* "the order of things through its own vocabulary,"[26] Rauh's assertion that "by *cloaking* the 2009 protests in Islamic and Shi'i symbolism, the Green Movement used the Islamic Republic's political imagery as visual weaponry,"[27] and finally in Fischer's argument that "it is the 'secularists' who are *using* the Karbala Paradigm to *claim* both politics and morality *from* the assertion of *monopoly control* over interpretation of Islam by clerics."[28]

Even though these analyses strive for nuance and certainly succeed in attending to it relative to other accounts of the 2009 uprising, they nonetheless collapse the multi-dimensional facets of religion by construing it in such instrumentalized, utilitarian, and secular terms. While some of these scholars are otherwise aware of the role of subject formation within these tense political exchanges, these renderings presuppose a fully agentic subject who consciously chooses to adopt a political strategy that in this particular moment takes a religious shape and tone. Religious symbolism and imagery within this narrative are thus reduced to empty signifiers that serve as a medium by which protestors convey their political demands. There is also a lurking binary wherein this strategic adoption of religious symbolism by protestors is sharply juxtaposed to zealotry and fervent belief in Islam held by the state and its staunchest defenders who clashed with them. In other words, despite their best intentions to the contrary these scholars inadvertently reproduce the logic of the very analyses of the 2009 post-election crisis they are critiquing wherein protestors are depicted as secularized Iranians, who in this instance happen to be using religious imagery.

The inability of scholars contributing to this narrative to reconcile the seemingly disparate temporal markers of the 2009 demonstrations is a direct extension of this secularized interpretation of religiosity. As evidenced by their remarks above, for these scholars there is a sense of uncanny temporality animating the 2009 post-election protests. More specifically, the demonstrations are posited as embodying a return of/to the past in a form recognizable and simultaneously illegible that cleaves open the historical present to demand a different future. This analytic gesture is reflected in Yarbakhsh's argument that the trope of martyrdom within the protests is "of a specific

107

time and standing out of time"[29] and in Melinda Hinkson characterization of the protesters as inhabiting a space that "sits outside of chronological time".[30] These observations on the alleged temporal incongruities of the protests, however, grow out their aforementioned analyses that construe religion in secular terms. More specifically, the view that conflicting references to the same markers of past, present, and future somehow remove the demonstrations from time itself reflects how these analyses are informed by a secular understanding of time. As will be discussed in more detail, the simultaneous presence of the past, present, and future are paradoxical and conceptually illegible only if a secular rendering of time as empty and homogenous is presumed.

By raising these critiques, my intent is not to dismiss these rich analyses but rather to query what is elided and neglected by such a secularized reading of the religious dimensions of the 2009 post-election protests in Iran. The central claim of this narrative, in other words, is not incorrect for it is undeniable that within the demonstrations there were self-identified secularists who used religious symbols as a part of their larger political strategies against the regime and who reconfigured them in the process. The further implication of this narrative, that the government retained and consolidated its authority by intentionally wielding religious imagery and rhetoric, is also readily apparent given the aftermath of the crisis. Such narrativization, however, becomes increasingly limited when it goes no further in attending to the complex entanglement of religion and politics within this moment. This is problematic on two fronts, the first being the more general ethical issue of not understanding the varying dimensions of any form of religiosity on its own terms and the political consequences that arise as a result. The second issue is more specific to Iran, for this secularized

108

reading of religion within the 2009 post-election protests is unable to see let alone explain a novel feature, perhaps the most novel feature, of the Islamic Republic: that temporal simultaneity (wherein past, present, and future are enfolded into one another in one dynamic moment in time) has risen, officially, to the level of statecraft itself.

Understanding the politics of time in Iran is therefore crucial in rendering a more well rounded portrait of the uprising in 2009 because this specific instantiation of time is a symbolic cornerstone of the Islamic Republic and was dramatically fractured through this political crisis. As will be discussed, given that the hegemonic politics of time since 1979 has been more explicitly religious, understanding it not only provides a more robust picture of the contemporary Iranian state but also shows how religion has helped shape the conditions of possibility for politics in Iran more broadly. Ascertaining the full scope of this alternative form of temporality, however, is only possible by not capitulating to secular understandings and organizations of time. This chapter is asking, in other words, what happens if the cultural forms of Shi'ism in Iran, especially Ashura rituals, are read from a vantage point that does not presuppose an understanding of history and politics as structured by empty secular time? How might these moments and socio-cultural modalities be reread?

Before unpacking what temporal simultaneity is, how it is distinct from a secular conception of time, and how it is an integral aspect of the Islamic Republic's architecture, it will be important to first situate it against the larger historical entwinement of time and the state in modern Iran. This history will be crucial for striking the necessary balance of highlighting the novelty of this temporal constellation within contemporary Iran while not over-determining it. More specifically, this history

will show how even though the Islamic Republic is contingent upon a rather unique organization of time, the different manifestations of the Iranian state in the last century have all utilized, were partially created through, and were often vexed by, the politics of time. In the brief recitation of this history that follows, however, the inherent messiness of both temporality and the Iranian state must also be underscored. While there have been clear instances of the state trying to use or control particular organizations of time to its advantage, focusing only on this fact offers a one-dimensional rendering of such history. More specifically, the relationship between time and the Iranian state must be understood as co-constitutive in character since each has been a source of the other's reconfiguration, rebirth, and, sometimes, undoing.

A Brief Historiography of Time and the State in Iran

The most readily apparent entanglement of the state and time in Iran, and thus an apt starting point for this history, is the calendar, of which three are hegemonic: Iranian (Pre-Islamic), Islamic and the globalized Christian. Prior to the arrival of Islam into Iran in the seventh century A.D., the solar-based Zoroastrian calendar was inflected with Zoroastrian, Indic, and Greek influences.[31] As Stephen P. Blake states, however, "with the defeat of the Sassanids by the Umayyads in 637 and the slow conversion of the populace from Zoroastrianism to Islam, the Islamic temporal system slowly absorbed and replaced the Zoroastrian."[32] In contrast to the Zoroastrian, and the later Christian/Gregorian calendar, the Islamic calendar is lunar based and its chronological foundation is the Prophet Muhummad's *hijra* or migration from Mecca to Medina (given the disagreement over his precise date of birth after his death, it was decided to base the

110

Islamic calendar on this integral moment). "The inaugural day of the new era, however," Blake also notes, "was not the actual date of the prophet's emigration but was rather the first day of the lunar year in which it took place. Thus 1 Muharram AH I was 16 July 622."[33] Consequently, the abbreviated chronological demarcation for any given Islamic calendar year is *AH* (*anno Hegirae* or "the year of the Hijra").

While other calendars existed and sometimes flourished alongside it, the Islamic calendar remained the official calendar until the twentieth century following the 1906-1911 Constitutional Revolution. Though it was little more than a rubber-stamp parliament for the ascendant monarchy of Reza Shah, on February 11, 1924 the fifth Majlis instituted sweeping social changes that laid the groundwork for the modern Iranian state- including a revision of the official calendar in Iran. As Ali M. Ansarai notes, the Majilis established "the Iranian solar calendar (still dated from the flight to Medina) as the official calendar complete with Iranian (Zoroastrian) month names."[34] Though the pre-Islamic New Year (on the March 21 equinox) once again became the official start of the year, the imprint of the Islamic calendar nonetheless endured as "1343 (AD 1925) in the Muslim lunar calendar became 1304 in the new Iranian solar calendar."[35] As will be discussed momentarily, while it would be tinkered with and it would lose its place as the sole official calendar, these changes to the pre-Islamic calendar instituted by Reza Shah remain in place to this day.

The next change to the official calendar of Iran occurred when, in a fit of monarchical arrogance, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi sought to purge any remaining Islamic influences from the Iranian calendar that his father reformed in 1925. Iranians woke up one morning in 1976 to find themselves flung over a thousand years into a mythical

nationalistic past/future, as the foundation for the Iranian calendar was no longer

Muhammad's travels from Mecca to Medina. Rather, the monarchy "supplemented the

Muslim calendar, including Reza Shah's solar model, with a new imperial calendar which

allocated 2,500 years for the presumed length of the Iranian monarchy and another 35

years for Muhammad Reza Shah," renowned Iranian historian Evrand Abrahamian

states, "Thus Iran jumped overnight from the Muslim year 1355 to the imperial year

2535."[36] Needless to say, especially given the growing murmurs of revolution, many

Iranians expressed disbelief and dismay at the changes. As Hamid Dabashi has

highlighted, many members of the Shi'ite clergy were stridently critical of the changes

and Ayatollah Khomeini, in exile in Najaf, Iraq at the time, "considered them the clear

indications of the anti-Islamic designs of the regime and forbade Iranians from using the

new calendar."[37]

It is thus no surprise that the calendar was one of the many symbolic registers

that were tapped into and reconfigured in the consolidation of the Islamic Republic

following the revolution in 1979. Like the pre-Islamic calendar that was infused with a

religious chronology and the shifting resonances of calendars more generally in Iran, the

Islamic calendar once again came to the political forefront but only after it was put

through a revolutionary sieve. "In the pre-revolutionary calendar, the Shi'a year was

divided into cyclical episodes of remembering the initial charismatic effervescence of the

originating force of Shi'ism in Islamic history," Hamid Dabashi argues in *Theology of*

Discontent, "Added in the post-revolutionary Iranian calendar is a set of another,

renewed, collective remembrance of the updated charismatic effervescence. The June

1963 uprising, the day Khomeini returned, the ten days of 'the morning twilight' when

the Islamic Revolution dawned, etc.: all the collective registrations of just one moment of creative effervescence that has spelled the terms of the new enchantment- to the last until the next."[38]

With the change to a reinvigorated Islamic calendar, the fate of non-Islamic calendars have waxed and waned according to the shifting political ground in the decades following the 1979 Revolution. In the tense and thoroughly militant early years of an Islamic Republic under siege from neighboring Iraq, Khomeini's government heavily policed the observance of *Nowruz*, the pre-Islamic New Year. As Ervand Abrahamian chronicles in *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*, celebrations of *Nowruz* by political prisoners were banned and allowed at different times as part of the Islamic Republic's intense campaign of psychological warfare it carried out inside its prisons during the 1980's.[39] *Nowruz* celebrations once again took place more openly with the loosening of social prohibitions following the election of President Mohammad Khatami in 1997 but were discouraged with the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005. The contemporary situation of Jews left in Iran is complex and often precarious- while they face intermittent discrimination (often in regards to employment and education) and a dwindling population (from 100,000 in the 1970's to 30,000 today), they are able to follow the Jewish calendar relatively unimpeded.[40] Similarly, Armenian Christians have been able to follow their calendar without much interference by Islamic Republic. During Christmas, there are banners put up on the streets lining the St. Sarkis Armenian Church in Tehran that celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and President Hassan Rouhani has even recently used his twitter account to wish Christians of the world a merry Christmas.[41] The complexity of

calendrical universe of Iran has continued unabated and has in fact deepened following the revolution in 1979.

An organization of time in Iran related to its multidimensional calendrical system that has had an equally tumultuous impact on the state is the forty-day mourning ceremonies of Shi'ite Islam. The roots of the forty-day mourning ceremonies (*arba'in*) stretch back to the reign of the Umayyad Caliphate during the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Karbala and the massacre of Hussein and his followers. According to Ali J. Hussain, "on the return from Yazid's court at Damascus back to Medina, the prisoners of Husayn's camp insisted on taking a route via Karbala once again, in order to pay their respects at the grave of Husayn" and "reached Karbala forty days after the battle."[42] When Hussein's followers arrived at the grave, other followers were already there mourning those killed in the Battle of Karbala-including Hussein's sister, Zaynab, who gave an impassioned defense of her brother and a withering condemnation of those responsible for the killings. Some accounts of Zaynab's speech have also commented that she "recited such a moving oration that she brought even the Umayyad troops guarding the prisoners to tears."[43]

While some aspects of this narrative may be apocryphal, they are the foundation of Shi'ite mourning rituals that infuse the fortieth day after death with liturgical expressions of loss, and sometimes, defiance. With the formal institutionalization of Shi'ism into Iran by Shah Isma'il, founder of the Safavid Dynasty, in 1501, these mourning ceremonies gradually seeped into the religious and social landscape of Iran. The observance of Ashura not only took on increased significance but was also reshaped

in the process as new rituals such as the shabih, or ta'ziyeh (the dramatic re-creation of the events of the Battle of Karbala) came to accompany commemorations of the event.[44]

These elaborate public observances of Ashura (such as the one detailed at the outset of this chapter) would remain relatively separate from everyday and, relatively, more private mourning practices until the outbreak of the 1979 Revolution. On June 5, 1963, the Shah's soldiers opened fire on a demonstration in Qom, one of the holiest cities in Iran, and killed thousands of protesters. As Charles Kurzman argues, whether inspired by the proximity of the June 5 demonstrations to Ashura commemorations a few days later or by other political exigencies, this was the first expressly public and political use of the forty-day mourning ceremony: "The Islamist movement changed the ritual by calling all Muslims to honor the deceased; by organizing large-scale mourning ceremonies around the country; and by transforming grief recovery into grief-based mobilization."[45] What resulted roughly a decade later was a cascading amalgam of grief, mourning, defiance, and mobilization. Events such as the January 9, 1978 shooting of seminary students outside the house of reformist cleric Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari in Qom sparked a memorial gathering forty days later, on February 18, which given the Shah's propensity for live ammunition, would itself become the basis for another memorial demonstration and the cycle would march on. Appalled and enraged by the regime's violence, more and more Iranians would join the protests as another link in the chain of mobilization was added.

While Iranians across the political spectrum, from liberal nationalists to Marxists, would partake in these protests, Khomeini and his followers situated the events firmly within the historical and spiritual arch of Karbala. As Janet Afary and Kevin B.

115

Anderson argue, "Khomeini kept reminding the public of the glories of martyrdom, of what Hussein had done for Islam, and of the need to give one's life for the sake of the Iranian Revolution", with Khomeini espousing that "our blood is no more precious than the blood of the martyrs of Karbala."[46] Even though many Iranians may have looked slightly askance at such a dramatic rendering of events, Khomeini's framing is worth noting nonetheless because it part of the scaffolding on which the Islamic Republic is built. Moreover, while the form of the forty-day mourning ceremonies can be traced to a longer historical lineage of Shi'ite Islam in Iran, the specific and shifting content of these cycles during the 1979 Iranian Revolution also reflected its contemporary geopolitical context. The Islamic intellectuals who influenced the revolution, such as Ali Shar'iati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad, were themselves influenced by the anti-Enlightenment thought of Martin Heidegger and the anti-imperialist arguments of Frantz Fanon, among others.[47] Consequently, it is not surprising that Khomeini also infused these forty-day mourning demonstrations with anti-imperialist rhetoric- putting the U.S. and British legacy of colonialism on par with Yazid.

To round out this history of time in Iran, it will be helpful to quickly touch on an integral aspect of Shi'ite culture that serves as a further temporal reference point informing both Ashura commemorations and the calendar it is housed within: Islamic eschatology. The messianism of Islam is embodied in the figure of the *Mahdi* ("guided one") who according to the hadith will rule and create a just society prior to the Day of Judgment. Whereas the Sunni tradition holds that the *Mahdi* is the successor of Muhammad who is yet to come, the Twelver Shia tradition (the dominant branch of Shi'ism in Iran) believes that their twelfth Imam, Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Askari, is

116

the Mahdi who went into occultation (*ghaybah*) in 256 AH/873-874 CE where he will remain until Judgment Day.[48] Until that point, "the last imam exists in a hidden or spiritual form [occultation] and continues to offer guidance to the community through the legal scholars."[49] Arguably, the most expansive interpretation of this role of legal scholars in relation to the Twelfth Imam is Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of *velayat e faqih* ("Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist"), which became the cornerstone of the Islamic Republic. More specifically, Khomeini shook off any remaining vestige of Shi'ite quietism in his assertion that religious judges had a divine right to earthly rule by virtue of the fact that their authority is on par with that of Muhammad and the Imams.[50] The clergy were thus the rightful stewards of earthly, political rule to guide believers until the return of the Mahdi.

The Islamic Republic: Temporal Simultaneity as Statecraft

The relationship between time and the state in Iran during the last century, as shown by this history, is incredibly complex and often fraught. While the Islamic Republic has inherited this historical legacy, it is also structured and sustained by a different organization of time than earlier incarnations of the Iranian state. This distinct temporal constellation informing the contemporary Iranian state has in turn been one medium through which religiosity has shaped the conditions of possibility for politics following the 1979 Revolution. Like other historical relationships between time and different iterations of the Iranian state, the political possibilities and foreclosures bequeathed by the religiously inflected temporal inheritance of the 1979 Revolution are diffuse, amorphous, and often counterintuitive. As will be discussed in the following

117

section, the political imaginaries engendered and imperiled by this temporal framework during the 2009 post-election uprising must therefore be understood in a similar light- as simultaneously conforming to and confounding the intentions of the state and the protesters.

Before returning to these temporal dimensions of the 2009 political crisis, it will be necessary to define temporal simultaneity and explore how it structures the Islamic Republic. The theorization of temporal simultaneity that follows is indebted to Walter Benjamin's concept of messianic time, rearticulated by way of Benedict Anderson, who describes messianic time as encapsulating "a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present" wherein "the word 'meanwhile' cannot be of real significance."[51] Messianic time also stands in direct contrast to 'empty homogenous time' which, again in Anderson's restatement of Benjamin's theorization, is "tranverse, cross-time, marked not only by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar."[52] In this spirit, the Islamic Republic is informed by and predicated on a structure of temporal simultaneity wherein past, present, and future are not only given equal weight but are also enfolded into one another in a singular yet incredibly dense place in time. To flesh out the temporal simultaneity of the Islamic Republic, I will now turn to the three overlapping grids of intelligibility that correspond to the chronological nodes of its past, present, and future: the Battle of Karbala, the historical present (then the 1979 Revolution), and the return of the Hidden Imam.

As shown in the history above, the Battle of Karbala and its evocation of the martyrdom of Hussein and his followers was an animating paradigm (though not the only one) of the 1979 Revolution and the cornerstone of the Islamic Republic. Not only

118

did the refrain of "Everywhere is Karbala, every month is Muhurram, and every day is Ashura" ratchet up the historical import of the revolutionary moment but the forty-day mourning periods commemorating protesters killed by the regime also inextricably tied to the aftermath of the Karbala massacre to the historical present as then embodied by the revolution in 1979. There was, in other words, a fluid and reciprocal symbolic exchange between the past and present wherein the past greatly facilitated the ethical imperative to act in the historical present and the political violence of the present highlighted how the struggle for justice initiated by the Battle of Karbala was not yet complete. It is important to underscore how the past and present were treated as equivalent (though not entirely synonymous) in this moment- they existed side by side, shown in Khomeini's entreaty to Iranians that "our blood is no more precious than the blood of the martyrs of Karbala."[53]

The melding of past and present that coalesced with other forms of mobilization to topple the Shah was also integral to the consolidation of the Islamic Republic. This was especially the case following the invasion by Iraq in 1980, when tropes of martyrdom drawn on by the incipient government relied heavily on an equivalence of the past with the present. A potent example is The Central Martyr's Museum in Tehran that displays the personal items and sometimes-grim mementos of Iranians who died during the revolution in 1979 and in the Iran-Iraq War. These physical items are strongly inflected with the Karbala narrative, such as a thin green banner proclaiming "*Oh Hussein the Persecuted One!*" wrapped around soldier's helmet, which for Christiane Gruber illustrates how the Iran-Iraq War "was couched as a new Karbala, and the blood shed by

its neo-martyrs became an extension of past events and the necessary transfusion of life into a community facing potential moral and/or physical destruction."[54]

Enfolded into this dynamic interplay between the past and present is the future, which as described above manifested through what was then a novel interpretation of Islamic eschatology in the form of *velayat e faqih* ("Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist"). As the allegedly rightful stewards of Iranian society until the return of the Mahdi and Judgement Day, the Islamic Republic grounded its power on a claim to be enacting and building a future of justice that would pave the way for this return. This future, however, can arrive at any moment and thus it remains an active trope in the parlance of Iranian politics alongside references to Karbala and the historical present. When Iran's Revolutionary Guards began making inroads into Lebanon following its invasion by Israel in 1982, the general commanding Iranian forces in the region stated "the Islamic combatants of Iran would soon be praying with the oppressed Iraqi nation in Karbala" and "God willing, the ground would be prepared for the appearance of Imam Mahdi, the Hidden Imam."[55] In recent years, former President Ahmadinejad stated he had unequivocal proof that the U.S. was preventing the return of the Hidden Imam[56] and described how the Hidden Imam sat in the audience during his speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006 and "drenched the place in a sweet light."[57]

One should be careful not to misread this folding of past, present, and future into a simultaneous moment as an indication this organization of time is therefore static and flat. While simultaneity is clearly a geopolitically specific organization of time, this does not mean that the Islamic Republic and its supporters is or views itself to be wholly

120

separate from other historical events that are typically narrativized within empty homogenous time. By extension we must, for example, take Ahmadinejad's statements above seriously as a particular way of being in the world and also as a form of statecraft rather than dismissing them (as is often done) as the ridiculously superstitious ravings of an extremist president in an already rogue nation. Here it is important to recall Dipesh Chakrabarty's reminder that "disenchantment is not the only principle by which we world the earth" and that the "supernatural can inhabit the world in these other modes of worlding, and not always as a problem or result of conscious belief or ideas."[58] Larger historical events, in other words, are not the exclusive purview of empty homogenous time as they are absorbed through the temporal simultaneity of Shi'ite Islam (and other temporalities). The present is not subsumed by either an endless repetition of the Battle of Karbala or by the anticipation of the Hidden Imam's return. Rather, there exists a dynamic and reciprocal relationship wherein the past, present, and future are made legible and brought into being through their close proximity to one another.

This caution against such a secular reading, however, should not be construed as a nativist argument that posits the temporal structure of the Islamic Republic as the discursively monolithic Other of linear secular time that is beyond analytic engagement and ethical reproach. Clearly, the Islamic Republic has used these overlapping grids of intelligibility to consolidate and extend its power. These temporal reference points continue to be a wellspring for the Islamic Republic's domestic and foreign propaganda networks, shoring up a profoundly undemocratic vision of Iranian society and Islam more generally. However, an argument against privileging empty secular time and a critique of the Iranian state are not mutually exclusive as, once again in Chakrabarty's

121

words, "these other ways of being are not without questions of power or justice."[59]

Presuming such mutual exclusivity risks mistaking any form of religiously inflected temporal simultaneity as somehow interchangeable with an undemocratic and dogmatic politics. If anything, a critique of the regime's violent foreclosures of many other ways of being in the world can be more potently articulated if it takes seriously the terms on which the Islamic Republic understands itself.

Such an instrumentalist reading of time in Iran also risks falling into the narrative the Islamic Republic tells of itself, namely that the tripartite temporal reference points it draws on are wholly Islamic (specifically Shi'ite) in nature. As the history of time and the state in Iran detailed above has shown, this view is difficult to sustain given that this temporal structure emanated from a much more complex and heterogeneous socio-political collage. Entailed in this view is also a parallel presumption that in opposition to the Islamic Republic's temporal framework is an equally uniform and discursively stable instantiation of secular time, a presumption that has been critiqued by William Connolly who highlights how the disjunctive tempos of modernity have created multiple temporalities of secularism.[60] Put simply, the question of time in Iran is not an either/or proposition- its wielding in the service of violent ends coincides with and, as will be discussed below, is also stymied by the amorphous character of temporality more broadly. Time, whether in the Islamic Republic or elsewhere, is a rich discursive terrain that creates and excludes multiple possibilities for the historical present and future through history.

To conclude this section, it will be worth ruminating briefly on the implications of this temporal simultaneity and how it troubles existing theorizations around time and

the nation-state. In his well-traveled thesis, Benedict Anderson argues that empty

homogenous time was the epistemological cornerstone of the nation-state: "The idea of

a sociological organism moving through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue

of the idea of the nation, which is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down

(or up) history."[61] Anderson clarifies this integral part of his argument in stating that

"the very possibility of imagining the nation" only emerged once "a conception of

temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable" lost their "axiomatic

grip on men's minds."[62] To put it a third and final way through Dipesh Chakrabarty's

restatement and subsequent critique of this thesis that focuses on the role of

imagination: "Benedict Anderson has made an enormously suggestive use of the word

'imagination' to describe the roles the novel, the newspaper, the map, the museum, and

the census play in creating the empty, homogenous time of history that allows the

different parts of a nation to exist all at once in some nationalist imaginary of

simultaneity."[63]

Given that it is informed not by empty, homogenous time but rather by temporal

simultaneity, the Islamic Republic as a nation-state and Iran more broadly troubles and

in some respects inverts Anderson's thesis. More specifically, Anderson's foundational

argument is that the necessary precondition for a nationalist, communal simultaneity was

the jettisoning of temporal simultaneity. For the Islamic Republic, however, temporal

and nationalist/communal simultaneity are coextensive with one another. In his remarks

on Ashura and its enduring importance for the Iranian nation found in a government-

published compendium, for example, Khomeini has stated:

"Keep the Ashura alive as your country will become invulnerable with its maintenance.

What gives us the unity of the word, which became the key to our success, are these lamentation and mourning gatherings and these meetings for the promotion and propagation of Islam. The Master of Martyrs provided an instrument for the nation to congregate easily.

The harmony that exists in the nation in respect of the saga of Karbala (the Ashura epic) is the noblest political issue in the world… If we conduct it well, all hearts shall unite. We are victorious because of this coordination and harmony and we ought to appreciate it. Let our youth be attentive to this point."[64]

Khomeini's remarks reflect how the Islamic Republic as a nation-state is made possible not by the severance of history and cosmology, as Anderson argues, but rather by their intertwinement. Other convergences of history and chronology that endure in spite of empty homogenous time have similarly been highlighted in critiques of Anderson by postcolonial scholars, such as Partha Chatterjee, Homi Bhabha, and Talal Asad, who view empty homogenous time not as an immutable social fact but rather as a fleeting and yet powerful construct against which other temporalizations are judged for their inability to be subsumed under its chronological mandate.[65] On the one hand, Iran is a geopolitical space is like any other in that the social life of time within its borders (both physical and discursive) is messy, complex, and sometimes paradoxical- thereby unable to be housed within empty homogeneous time. On the other hand, however, the Islamic Republic is unique in that its rejection and inversion of empty homogeneous time has been elevated to the level of the state itself.

Religiosity, Temporality & The 2009 Uprising: A Reprise

With the larger history of time in Iran and the relatively novel temporality informing the Islamic Republic in mind, I will now return to the 2009 post-election uprising. As was discussed above, some scholars highlighted how demonstrators used religious symbols as a tactic by which to wrest legitimacy and authority away from the government. Again, the underlying claim of this narrative is not incorrect for an undeniable facet of the 2009 demonstrations was the ubiquitous presence of competing, conflicting, and overlapping instances of religious symbolism. Consequently, the religious narrativizations and symbolism highlighted by the scholars above (including the Karbala paradigm and the attendant trope of martyrdom that also inform Ashura rituals, shouts of 'Allah Akbar' from rooftops and others) will also be the focus of this section but will be read through this larger historical backdrop. What happens, more specifically, when such discursive framings are viewed through the politics of time in Iran more generally and the Islamic Republic in particular? How does a different understanding of time allow for a more substantive and comprehensive appreciation of the political imaginaries engendered by religion in Iran that infused the post-election uprising in 2009?

To answer these questions, the trope of resistance must be addressed as it unifies the disparate characterizations of religion within Iranian politics in instrumentalist, liberal, and secularized terms. The scholars cited above celebrate the seemingly strategic wielding of religious imagery and symbolism by protesters during the 2009 post-election demonstrations as sophisticated and counterintuitive forms of resistance. One cannot get away from the fact that such narrativization is not untrue, for these demonstrations

and the attendant confrontations with the government by protesters were indeed acts of resistance. However, to put it bluntly, resistance is not synonymous with or a shorthand for secularity. Resistance can not only grounded and articulated through different religious traditions but can also grow out of a socio-political constellation that does not ascribe to a secular/religious divide. Consequently, further questions that need to be addressed are: What does it mean to understand protest and acts of resistance without subordinating religion to politics? How can we read forms of resistance during the 2009 uprising as an example of the specific co-constitutive character of religion and politics in Iran?

The challenge of any critical rereading of the events of the 2009, therefore, is to not instrumentally reduce religion to a tactic or strategy because in so doing, one thereby secularizes it. Doing so not only flattens the discursive complexity of religion but also resistance itself. If only viewed through this caricature of resistance, religion in this instance is reduced to a mere political strategy that is easily shed when it no longer proves useful. Rather than understanding religion co-constitutive with politics in that both give one another meaning and shape, religion is construed as only having value and meaning when it is putatively subordinated to politics. By implication, to continue 'holding' onto religion when it no longer proves useful (i.e. when the political costs prove too high) crosses over into zealotry-which was allegedly the exact modus operandi of the Islamic Republic during the political crisis.

The complex politics of time helps to address all of the questions above because its layered and disparate forms in Iran brings into relief how not only the line between secularism and religion is blurred but also how it troubles the conception of the public

126

sphere as a singular, bounded political space. Given that a critical re-reading in this vein of all the entanglements between religion and politics within the 2009 crisis is beyond the scope of this chapter, it will be prudent to focus on the temporal dimensions. As discussed above, there has been a dynamic interplay between temporality and the state in the last century in Iran. The temporal simultaneity informing the Islamic Republic, which is an extension of and departure from this history, became a further catalyst of the political crisis in 2009 when it became un-tethered from its roots in the contemporary Iranian state. More specifically, demonstrations such as the Ashura commemorations in December 2009 deepened the political crisis when it inadvertently reconfigured each node (past, present, and future) of this tripartite temporal simultaneity.

As the Islamic Republic learned the hard way, temporality can be cannot be wielded in the service of instrumental ends. This fact was reflected in how Ashura demonstrators understood themselves to be fighting for Hussein and to be of his lineage while simultaneously situating the Islamic Republic as Yazid. This symbolic reorientation by protesters was evidenced by the chants that accompanied their mobilization, especially the chant of "This is the month of blood, Yazid will fall!" which placed Khamenei in the most despised role within the Karbala narrative of Hussein's martyrdom.[66] There were also chants such as "Ya Hossein, Mir Hossein" which played on the overlap between the name of the Shi'ite Imam martyred in Karbala in 680 and the opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Musavi.[67] Ashura rituals were also the medium through which some demonstrators processed the unfolding events and either shifted some of their political views or at least felt emboldened to publicly display them, as evidenced by the gradual appearance of green fabric (a symbol of the opposition) in

127

Ashura commemorations held in areas of Tehran that have been traditional sources of support for the regime.[68]

While some protesters were spurred into action in partially as a result of being denied the right to mourn the passing of Ayatollah Montazeri just prior to Ashura, his *fatwa* against the regime gave this reconfiguration of the Karbala narrative by protesters an even greater ethical and spiritual purchase. Montazeri's *fatwa* opened the door for the excavation of other alternative historical inheritances by the demonstrators, such as that of the 1979 Revolution and the attendant demand that they-rather than the clerics- be the new custodians and arbiters of the historical present to pave the way for the return of the Mahdi. The condemnation of the demonstrations by the Islamic Republic, in response, were equally couched in the Karbala narrative and in its ominous reminders that it was the sole custodian of Shi'ite Islam prior to Judgment Day- thereby making the election results within the historical present a moot point. In other words, while the monopoly of violence held by the Islamic Republic was certainly not usurped in 2009, its claim to be the sole embodiment of Iran and Islam's past, present, and future was further eroded and degenerated.

At first glance, this critical rereading of these events may seem similar to the narrative critiqued at the beginning of this chapter, albeit with an emphasis on the politics of time. As has been stressed, however, it is not the content of the events in 2009 that are at issue but how these events are framed and understood. The scholars above who noted how protestors simultaneously referenced the past, the present, and the future were nonetheless unable to reconcile these temporal markers into a coherent analytic framework. Recall Fred Halliday's argument that "demonstrations have thus

opened a door to Iran's past as well as the future,"[69] Elizabeth L. Ruah's highlighting of

how the demonstrations reflected the tendency of revolutions "to reenact paradigmatic

events of the past while establishing new histories,"[70] Setrag Manoukian's suggestion the

protests "open up the present toward a different past and future,"[71] Melinda Hinkson's

praise of the demonstrators for having "the courage to grasp something unknown, which

sits outside of chronological time, in terms of an as yet unrealised potential"[72] while

noting how this leads to a "split-vision," and finally Elizabeth J. Yarbakhsh's argument

that martyrdom has a similar temporal quality of being "of a specific time and standing

out of time."[73]

Given the politics of time since the 1979 Revolution, however, a coterminous

reference to the past, present, and future does exist in one relatively cohesive framework:

the temporal simultaneity ushered in by the Islamic Republic. These scholars are unable

to see this temporal constellation because they privilege empty, homogenous, secular

time that is, again in Benedict Anderson's words, "transverse, cross-time, marked not

only by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock

and calendar."[74] The thought that there could exist prior to 2009 in Iran an organization

of time imbued with religious and cultural meaning does not even factor as a possibility.

In other words, these scholars mistake cause for effect as temporal simultaneity is not a

political novelty created out of the protests but rather the demonstrations grew out of a

political environment already structured by temporal simultaneity. Again, this is not to

imply that temporal simultaneity is the only framework of time inhabiting and shaping

contemporary Iranian politics. As the larger history of time and the state in Iran over the

last century has shown, the novel temporal scaffolding of the Islamic Republic

significantly coincides with (though is not wholly reducible to) secular and pre-Islamic Iranian organizations of time.

To bring into relief how these temporal frameworks makes difficult to talk about a discrete or monolithic public sphere in contemporary Iran, it will be helpful to briefly discuss Sarah Sharma's argument that the model of the public sphere theorized by Habermas, as described in the introduction, is founded on "a temporal requirement of the public (i.e. that the public have time to devote to matters of governance)."[75] The central issue, according to Sharma, is that this awareness of time is under-theorized and does not account for time's role in subject formation: "Public-sphere theorizing is conditioned upon a particular politics of time that is about the *pace* of one's time rather how its citizens or denizens are *constituted* in time."[76] To avoid the bourgeois conceits, a necessary corrective when analyzing the public sphere is to therefore focus on the 'political economy of time' in which different "bodies are valued temporally and made productive for capital."[77] Finally, Sharma calls for the enactment of a 'temporal public" through "a radical politics of time and space that hinges upon temporalizing the spatial categories of democracy" which entails "politicizing how we inhabit time [that] leads to reimagining time as a collective struggle."[78]

While these interventions by Sharma are important for its highlighting of the temporal assumptions embedded into conceptions of the public sphere, her argument is still entrapped within the logic of empty, homogenous time that also structures the Habbermasian public sphere. Despite housing and constituting multiple subject positions that experience, there is only one conception of time within her account- it is singular and universal. Time is something that can be marked, tracked, and self-evidently

recognized as well as instrumentally wielded. The public sphere, by extension, while dynamic and shifting, is also presented here as a unitary entity. In other words, the public sphere and time in both Sharma and Habbermas's framing are not only interlinked but are also empty signifiers that can be accorded meaning only through the unfolding of politics in the present. There is simply no discursive or political space for alternative ways of understanding or inhabiting time.

In contrast, as this chapter has established, there are multiple and overlapping temporal imaginaries that have shaped politics in contemporary Iran. If the public sphere is indeed shaped and enacted by time, a point on which I would agree with Sharma, then what happens if there are multiple forms of temporality animating the social field? What happens to the public sphere? Given their intermingled relationship, if time were not a monolith then it would seem that public sphere could also not be understood as a bounded and discrete totality. The public sphere in Iran, seen from this vantage point, is consequently fractured and disjointed by virtue of the multiple temporal forms inhabiting and constituting it. More often than not, theorists such as Habermas may view such fragmentation as a danger to consensus at best and a signal of the public sphere's failure at worst. It is imperative, however, it understand the Iranian public sphere on its own disparate terms and not try to subsume these parts into a coherent conceptual narrative.

As the protests of 2009 have shown, moreover, the fluid and contingent nature of these aspects of the public sphere have eroded binaries between secularism and religion as well as the political violence they often entail. Without romanticizing it or treating it as an unproblematic social fact, this lack of cohesion is laden with political and

democratic potential. Recall Dipesh Chakrabarty's reminder, by way of Heidegger, of the value in construing history in 'a nontotalizing manner': "To see the present as radically not-one and thus plural is to see its 'now' as a state of partial disclosedness, without the suggestion or promise of any principles- such as *dharma*, capital, or citizenship-that can or will override this heterogeneity and incompleteness and eventuality constitute a totality."[79] To see 'the public sphere', 'secularism', or 'religion' in the context of Iran as a totality or as completely discrete entities thus risks overriding and flattening the existing plurality of its political landscape. Recognizing the different temporal arrangements of Iran is therefore crucial because it is one mode of guarding against this totalizing historical frame.

Finally, it is worth reiterating that the events of 2009 represent a profound irony of Iranian politics wherein the political cosmology of the Islamic Republic laid the groundwork for the reconfiguration of its own temporal constellation by presenting such a totalizing view of history. Since 1979, the Islamic Republic attempted to lay sole and simultaneous claim to the past (the Battle of Karbala and the 1979 Revolution), the historical present, and the future (by presenting itself as the true custodian of Iran and Islam until Judgment Day). What was distinct about it its attempts to manage the political crisis in 2009 by recourse to these temporal nodes was that it went disastrously awry, owing in part to thirty years of undemocratic policies, the enduring legacy of the Iran-Iraq War, simmering tensions left over from the revolution in 1979, the crippling economic impact of sanctions and austerity programs, and many other factors- not least of which includes the Islamic Republic's clumsy election tampering. The question of why this particular moment and this particular election triggered such an extensive crisis,

132

given that Iran has dealt with these issues for years, is too complex to delve into here. The pertinent lesson is that despite the overwhelming material forms of power at its disposal, the dynamism of time as a salient political and symbolic force proved it was too diffuse to be wielded by the Islamic Republic for its own ends.

While the politics of time confounded and vexed the violently banal exercise of state power during the 2009 uprising, this is not to imply that protesters intentionally caused these conditions. Once again, it is crucial not to subsume these events into a resistance paradigm that is synonymous only with intentionality and secularity. Rather, the reconfiguration of temporal simultaneity by protesters in 2009 should be understood more robustly as, in the words of Saba Mahmood, not a case of "doing and undoing, consolidation and subversion" but as an example of norms being "lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated."[80] Demonstrators did not set out to engage in their own exercise of temporal simultaneity through a concerted, sustained attack on the symbolic resources of the Islamic Republic. This way of marking time is not a strategy or tactic but rather is one of many political languages in Iran through which protestors in 2009 articulated their respective negotiations of Shi'ite ethics and politics within the Islamic Republic. Temporal simultaneity, in conversation with other temporal constellations and cultural forms, is one of many ways of worlding in Iran that engender, foreclose, and help make sense of the socio-political landscape. Consequently, a focus on the temporal dimensions of the 2009 uprising not only provides a more expansive understanding of the state but also enables us to see the more amorphous, counterintuitive, and unintentional politics of religion in contemporary Iran.

Conclusion: A Critical Exit (?)

As has been argued, attending to the politics of time in Iran enables a more substantive understanding of religion that does not conform to tropes of intentionality and resistance. The question that remains, however, is why does this matter? More specifically, what are the political stakes and consequences of ignoring these more amorphous and complex facets of religion within Iran's socio-political landscape? In other words, the critical rereading of the uprising in 2009 and the role of religiosity within it is not presented here as a matter of analytic quibbling that argues for a correct interpretation simply for the sake of it. Rather, given that this tumultuous moment in Iranian history offered a fleeting glimpse of a potential alternative to the contemporary state, embedded into any analysis of religiosity within this political conflict is an implied normative claim of what role religion *can* and *should* play if the Islamic Republic ever reaches its dénouement. This relates directly, therefore, to the impasse of 'neither secularism nor Islamic Republic' detailed in the introduction as the amorphous quality of time traverses both sides of this binary and undoes it as a result- thereby gesturing to possible futures beyond it.

To answer the questions above and to help illuminate these lurking normative claims, I want to draw on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's appraisal of what radical political imaginaries can and should do given the global hegemony of liberal humanism. Spivak argues "the critical exit is *in* liberal individualism, if that is our dominant historical moment, even as *we* are in it." [81] "The critical (deconstructive/genealogicoethical) being can activate this exit within, without *full* hope (which may include having *some* hope) in teleological change, and therefore without letting up," Spivak states, explicating further,

"That may be the name of ethical living, with some hope in working for political change."[82]

Spivak is arguing here that radical alternatives to liberalism must contend not only with liberalism's material forms of hegemony that manifest through globalized circuits of capital and state sovereignty but also its disparate and hegemonic political imaginaries. Liberalism is an unavoidable fact, in other words, because its promotion of particular ways of being in the world and foreclosure of others continues to actively shape the globalized present. Those seeking to inhabit ways of living in the world that either do not conform to or which threaten this hegemony face a double bind in that one's agency in doing so is simultaneously constituted and curtailed by these very modalities of power. Radical critics of liberalism thereby not only have no choice but to go through liberalism in pursuing their alternative political imaginaries but also as a result will be unable to fully extricate these alternatives from its socio-cultural vestiges of liberalism. The 'critical exit' therefore entails an understanding of this fraught position while still nurturing hope for political change even if it ultimately comes in a form that is neither entirely recognizable nor desirable. The politics of this critical exit is therefore demarcated not by blanket resistance, defeat, or capitulation but rather by constant, consistent, and indefatigable negotiation.

While it was certainly meant for an altogether different geopolitical context, Spivak's conceptualization of this 'critical exit' can be used to lay bare the political stakes inherent in a more robust accounting of religion in Iran. As discussed above, construing the religious symbolism of the 2009 uprising as a sophisticated tactic of resistance implies that religion is like any other political strategy that can be left behind once it no

135

longer proves fruitful. Even though these scholars seem to earnestly support the religiosity of the demonstrators, such an endorsement is nonetheless tied to a perception that Shi'ite norms are being inverted and resisted in the process. A central implication of this framing, consequently, is that the critical exit out of the Islamic Republic and into a more democratic political arrangement is through rather than in Shi'ite Islam. Although the distinction between 'through' and 'in' may seem trivial, it carries tremendous political import. When the critical exit is framed as 'through' it implies that Islam is something to be borne for the duration necessary to establish a different political arrangement than that of the Islamic Republic. This not only implies that this is normatively a good thing but also that such a move beyond Islam is wholly possible. Religion from this vantage point is merely a tactic, a means toward a political end rather than end in it of itself.

What happens, however, if the critical exit out of the Islamic Republic is understood in terms closer to Spivak's original meaning, as in Islam? This means Islam is not a stage on the path toward a more democratic Iran but is something that gives shape to that path and whatever political futures lie at its end. This would also suggest that Islam in Iran is incredibly complex and variegated, so much so that it cannot be reduced to either the states alleged claim over it or the protesters' articulations of different political futures. It is much more than that, especially considering how Shi'ite Islam has helped bring into being the socio-cultural constellations informing contemporary Iranian politics- for the better and for the worse. In other words, if in the (unfortunately) unlikely event that the Islamic Republic was to fold tomorrow this would not mean that somehow Islam would somehow recede and disappear from the cultural stage. The cultural residues and vestiges of temporal simultaneity would endure, albeit in

136

a different form, since the conditions of possibility for politics were in part created out

of it.

Moreover, the secular alternatives to the Islamic Republic also takes on a

different form than in the West not just because it is in part a product of Iranian history

more broadly but also because it is informed by and must also contend with the

discursive constellations of religion and time in Iran since 1979. Consider the counter

example of how some secularists in the West may express disease at public and

overwrought Christmas celebrations but do not register that the organization of time

they rely on (i.e. the year 2016) is ultimately a Christian framework of time. With

perhaps the exception of Jews, Muslims, and other religious minorities in the West, such

a Christian way of marking time is not even seen as such. The presence of this particular

organization of time, however, does not prelude radical and alternative imaginaries from

sprouting, as Marx's work can attest to (Benjamin's critique of him in this regard

notwithstanding). Why should Iran and Islam be any different? Why should an Islamic

marking of time be any less dynamic and capable of engendering heterogeneous cultural

forms?

As these questions gesture towards, I am suggesting that Islam is and can

continue to be a discursive wellspring for a dynamic, counterintuitive, and complex

politics. It is imperative, in other words, not to reduce the political potentiality of Islam

more generally and Shiite Islam in particular to the specific form of the Islamic Republic.

Most importantly, if read only as a tactic or form of resistance, religion clearly failed as a

strategy given that the Islamic Republic was able to withstand the political crisis of 2009.

However, if religion is understood more robustly a constitutive political force and if one

considers how significantly the symbolic foundation of the Islamic Republic was shaken, this narrative of failure is difficult to sustain. Beyond the intentions or aspirations of those involved in the uprising in 2009, the political imaginaries of Iran have been split wide open and will continue to facilitate the shifting cultural landscape.

[1] Hamid Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (MA: Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011), 43-44.

[2] Fischer, Michael MJ. "The rhythmic beat of the revolution in Iran." *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 3 (2010): 503.

[3] Muhammad, Sahimi, "Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's Fatwa," *PBS*, July 12, 2009, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009 /07/grand-ayatollah-montazeris-fatwa.html.

[4] BBC News, "Crowds Gather to Mourn Reformist Iran Cleric Montazeri," December 20, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middleeast/ 8423319.stm.

[5] Robert Tait, "Funeral of Iranian Cleric Montazeri Turns into Political Protest," *The Guardian*, December 21, 2009, http://www.theguardian .com/world/2009/dec/21/ iran-funeral-ayatollah-montazeri-protest.

[6] Robert F. Worth and Nazila Fathi,"Police Are Said to Have Killed 10 in Iran Protests," *The New York Times*, December 27, 2009, http://www. nytimes.com /2009/12/28 /world/middleeast/28iran.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

[7] Robert Tait, "Nine deaths in bloody clashes at Ashura mourning ceremony in Tehran", *The Guardian*, December 27, 2009. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/ 27/iran-protests-tehran-ashura-ceremony

[8] Robert F. Worth and Nazila Fathi,"Police Are Said to Have Killed 10 in Iran Protests."

[9] CNN, "Iran's President Plays Down Ashura Protests," December 29, 2009, http://www. cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast /12/29/iran. protests.larijani/.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Parisa Hafezi, "Hundreds of Thousands at Pro-Government Rallies in Iran," *Reuters*, December 20, 2009, http://www. reuters.com/ article/2009/12/30/us-iran-rallies-idUSTRE5BT16O20091230

[12] Within the broader literature on the Green Movement in Iran, there is a very small but vocal contingent of scholars who have defended the actions of the Islamic Republic during and after the elections. Alex E. Torbat, for example, vehemently denied any vote-rigging took place and argued that "the election in Iran depicted a class struggle between those who live comfortably in modern urban centers and want Western style social life versus impoverished people in rural areas and smaller cities who seek better life in the traditional Islamic culture." See Akbar E.Torbat: "Iran's Presidential Elections, Islamic Populism and Liberation Theology," Centre for Research on Globalization, June 28, 2009, http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context= va&aid=14143. In an retrospect a year after the 2009 elections, Ismael Hossein-zadeh denied that any election fraud took place and downplayed the role of a violent governmental crackdown in the stalling of the Green Movement. Celebrating the Ahmadinejad administration's Hossein-zadeh then argues that an "important factor that has played a critical role in the decline of the 'green movement' has been its class character, its inability to relate or attract the masses of the lower-middle, poor and working classes." See: Ismael Hossein-zadeh, "Iran's Presidential Election One Year Later–Why the Greens Failed." *Middle East Online* (June 15, 2010), http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=39561.   James Petras, joining the chorus of those denying that any vote tampering took place, has similarly lamented how "the Western media

ignored the class composition of the competing demonstrations – the fact that the incumbent candidate was drawing his support from the far more numerous poor working class, peasant, artisan and public employee sectors while the bulk of the opposition demonstrators was drawn from the upper and middle class students, business and professional class." See: James Petras, "Iranian Elections: The 'Stolen Elections' Hoax." *Centre for Research on Globaization*, June 18, 2009,http://www.globalresearch.ca/ iranian- elections-the-stolen-elections-hoax.

[13] Elizabeth L. Rauh. "Green Movement Thirty Years Later: Iranian Visual Culture from the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Presidential Protests." *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 1324.

[14] Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh. "Green Martyrdom and the Iranian state." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 28, no. 1 (2014), 85.

[15] *Ibid*, 85.

[16] Michael M. Fischer. "The Rhythmic Beat of the Revolution in Iran." 513.

[17] Setrag Manoukian. "Where is this place? Crowds, Audio-vision, and Poetry in Postelection Iran." *Public Culture* 22, no. 2 (2010): 246.

[18] Fred Halliday, "Iran's tide of history: counter-revolution and after," in *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future*, eds. Nader Hashemi, Danny Postel (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2010), pg 58-59.

[19] Ruah, "Green Movement Thirty Years Later: Iranian Visual Culture from the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Presidential Protest," 1339.

[20] Setrag Manoukian, "Where is this place? Crowds, Audio-vision, and Poetry in Postelection Iran," 246.

[21] Melinda Hinkson. "Image-Encounters with the Techno-Mediated Other: regarding post-election Iran on youtube." *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 16, no. 4 (2011): 137.

[22] *Ibid*, 137.

[23] Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh, "Green Martyrdom and the Iranian state," 82.

[24] *Ibid*, 82.

[25] Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh,"Green Martyrdom and the Iranian state," 85.

[26] Setrag Manoukian, "Where is this place? Crowds, Audio-vision, and Poetry in Postelection Iran," 246.

[27] Elizabeth L. Rauh,"Green Movement Thirty Years Later: Iranian Visual Culture from the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Presidential Protests,"1324.

[28] Michael M. Fischer, "The Rhythmic Beat of the Revolution in Iran," 513.

[29] Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh, "Green Martyrdom and the Iranian state," 82.

[30] Melinda Hinkson," Image-Encounters with the Techno-Mediated Other: regarding post-election Iran on youtube," 137.

[31] Stephen P. Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam: Calendar, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 52.

[32] *Ibid,* 53.

[33] *Ibid* 10.

[34] Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 77.

[35] Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 83. The thirty-nine year discrepancy is due to the conversion between the lunar and solar based calendars.

[36] *Ibid*, 152.

[37] Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.*
(New York: NYU Press, 1993), 471-472.

[38] *Ibid*, 487.

[39] Ervand Abrahamian*, Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*, 167.

[40] See: Michael Theodoulou, "Jews in Iran Describe a Life of Freedom Despite Anti-Israel Actions by Tehran," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 3, 1998. http://www.csmonitor .com/1998/0203/020398.intl.intl.3.html and Jason Rezaian, "Iran's Jewish community reflects a complicated relationship with Israel," *Washington Post*, October 2, 2013, http: //www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/irans-jewish-community-reflects-a-complicated-relationship-with-israel/2013/10/02/e531039e-2ac4-11e3-b141-298f46539716story.html

[41] Maysam Bizaer, "Iran's Christians celebrate Christmas", *Al-Monitor,* December 28, 2014, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/12/iran-christians-armenians-christmas-rouhani.html#.

[42] Ali J. Hussain, "The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbala", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2005, pp. 80.

[43] *Ibid*, 80.

[44] *Ibid*, 85.

[45] Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
2009, 55.

[46] Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 65.

[47] For an intellectual history of the Iranian Revolution, see Ali Mirsepassi's *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Mehran Kamrava's *Iran's Intellectual Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Dabashi's *Theology of Discontent*.

[48] Abdulaziz Sachedina, "A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imamite Imam," *Studia Islamica*, No. 48, 1978, pp. 109.

[49] Tamara Sonn, *Islam: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd,, 2010)*,* 96.

[50] Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic.* Berkeley: University of California, 1993, http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft6c6006wp/.

[51] Benedict Anderson*, Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006 [1983]), 24.

[52] *Ibid*, 24.

[53] Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, 65.

[54] Christiane Gruber, "The Martyrs' Museum in Tehran: Visualizing Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Visual Anthropology*, No. 25, 2012, pp. 81.

[55] Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 135.

[56] *PBS Frontline,* "Ahmadinejad has proof US trying to stop Hidden Imam," December 6, 2009, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/12/ahmadinejad-has-proof-us-trying-to-stop-hidden-imam.html

[57] Amir Taheri, *The Persian Night: Iran Under the Khomeinist Revolution* (New York: Encounter Books, 2008), 276.

[58] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008 [2000]), 111.

[59] *Ibid*, 112.

[60] William Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist.*

[61] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 26.

[62] *Ibid*, 36.

[63] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 174.

[64] "The Ashura Uprising in the Words & Messages of Imam Khomeini," Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works-International Affairs Department (Tehran: Iran, 1995), 73. http://english.sahartv.ir/media/pdf/The%20Ashura%20Uprising.pdf

[65] Partha Chatterjee argues contra Anderson, that "people can only imagine themselves in empty homogenous time; they do not live in it" and "empty homogenous time is not located anywhere in real space- it is utopian." Borrowing phrasing from Michel Foucault, Chatterjee also contrasts the ephemeral utopia of empty homogenous time with heterotopia- "the space of modern life" in which time is "heterogenous, unevenly dense." See: Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) 6-7. In a similar vein, Homi K. Bhabha critiques Anderson for missing "that profound ambivalence that Benjamin places deep within the utterance of the narrative of modernity." Such ambivalence, which in Bhabha's words is garnered as "the pedagogies of life and will contest the perplexed histories of living people, their cultures of survival and resistance," introduces "a non-synchronous, incommensurable gap" that interrupts and haunts the deployment of empty homogenous time in the world. See: Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010 [1994]), 231. Talal Aasad, lastly, argues that "the temporalities of many tradition-rooted practices (that is, the time each embodied practice requires to complete and to perfect itself, the past into which it reaches, that it reencounter, reimagines, and extends) cannot be translated into the homogenous time of national politics." Asad also calls for a greater appreciation of 'simultaneous temporalities' (or messianic time, in Benjamin's terms) that are demarcated by "differences between horizons of expectation and spaces of experience-differences that continually dislocate the present from the past, the world experienced from the world anticipated." See: Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 179.

[66] Robert F. Worth and Nazila Fathi, "Police Are Said to Have Killed 10 in Iran Protests."

[67] Hatef Baghi and Colin Freeman, "Iran's Green movement prepared for street protest against hardline regime mullahs," *Telegraph*, December 26, 2009, http://www.telegraph .co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/6891257/Irans-Green-movement-prepared-for-street-protest-against-hardline-regime-mullahs.html.

[68] Robert F. Worth and Nazila Fathi, "Police Are Said to Have Killed 10 in Iran Protests."

[69] Fred Halliday, "Iran's tide of history: counter-revolution and after," in *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future*, eds. Nader Hashemi, Danny Postel (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2010), pg 58-59.

[70] Ruah, "Green Movement Thirty Years Later: Iranian Visual Culture from the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Presidential Protest," 1339.

[71] Setrag Manoukian, "Where is this place? Crowds, Audio-vision, and Poetry in Postelection Iran," 246.

[72] Melinda Hinkson. "Image-Encounters with the Techno-Mediated Other: regarding post-election Iran on youtube,"137.

[73] Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh, "Green Martyrdom and the Iranian state," 82.

[74] *Ibid*, 24.

[75] Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 13.

[76] *Ibid*, 13.

[77] *Ibid*, 14.

[78] *Ibid*, 142.

[79] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 249.

[80] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 23.

[81] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Inside Out in the Teaching Machine,* 49.

[82] *Ibid*, 49.

Chapter 3
Art & The Islamic Republic

In the last several years, on the heels of a solidified diplomatic deal between the West and the Islamic Republic concerning the latter's nuclear program, art has emerged a surprising site in which tentative rapprochements between the two sides is slowly beginning to unfold. The lifting of sanctions by the United States has enabled Iranian artists to more substantively enter the international art market, leading some to herald a coming renaissance for Iranian art.[1] The Tehran Museum of Art in turn has signaled that it would be opening the doors to its basement vault that houses the most extensive collection of American and European art outside of the West, thereby allowing them to be shown outside of Iran. Many in the West, however, were surprised that this collection of artwork in particular has survived unscathed for the last three decades the Islamic Republic has been in power. There has also been much confusion over other intersections of art and the Iranian state, such as the transformation of Tehran into an art gallery and the anti-ISIS cartoon contest held by the Islamic Republic. For Western observers, these examples reflect the seemingly contradictory relationship between art and the contemporary Iranian state.

This chapter will argue, however, that these assessments of Iran rely on a particular understanding of the state, religion, and art as discrete categories wholly separate from one another. My central argument, more specifically, is that this understanding of art, religion, the public sphere, and the state as separate entities does not hold in the Islamic Republic. This argument will be twofold, the first part of which will entail a historical survey of the co-constitutive relationship between art and the state

in Iran over the last sixty years. Different iterations of the Iranian state in last five decades have used, with varying degrees of success, art to weather the divergent impulses of their respective political outlooks and to manage the social tensions that have resulted. At the same time artistic genres, in turn, have benefitted from state patronage while at other times its fortunes plummeted with changing political tides that privileged and ushered in further genres of art.

On the basis on this history, this chapter will then explore contemporary Iranian street art, both sanctioned and illicit, to show how this convergence of art and the state has continued to unfold in the Islamic Republic. Contrary to the expectations of Western observers of Iran, the boundaries between culture and the state have not calcified under the current regime but remain dynamically in flux, albeit in different ways than in the previous historical epoch. Furthermore, a central argument of this chapter will be that not only has the overlap between art and state continued but also that such overlap does not automatically nor necessarily land in the government's favor. As will be shown, the very existence of graffiti and surrealist works of art (regardless of how they are interpreted) are evidence of how there are tears and fractures in the process by which the Islamic Republic attempts to curate its own self-image.   While this chapter is effectively calling for the relationship between art and the state in Iran to be understood in the context of its recent history, this is not intended as merely a corrective exercise. The conclusion will therefore trace how these facets of Iranian history force a rethinking of how the relationship between art, religion, and the state is to be understood.

Reading Art in Iran

In early May 2015, the mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf, garnered international attention by mandating that the proclamations and advertisements adorning the city's 1,500 billboards be replaced with famous works of art.[2] Large-scale prints from a wide array of Western and Iranian artists such as Henri Matisse and Bahman Mohassess were displayed in vivid colors and provided for many in Tehran a welcomed disruption of the gray concrete cityscape. The project, entitled "A Gallery As Big As a Town," was set to last ten days and was touted by officials as offering a brief respite from the consumerism typically featured on the billboards (much to the chagrin of paid advertisers). Though pleasantly surprised by what they perceived to be an anomalous moment of cultural opening, many Western media outlets were quick to pinpoint the alleged reason for the program. The New York Times, highlighting the mayor's two unsuccessful presidential campaigns over the past decade, characterized Ghalibaf as a "canny and ambitious politician" who may be preparing for another presidential bid by using such displays of Western art "to position himself as the right man for the times" amidst the recent rapprochement between Iran and the United States.[3]

This transformation of Tehran into an art gallery was accompanied at the end of the month by another geopolitical entanglement of the arts and the state when the Islamic Republic hosted an international anti-ISIS cartoon contest. In late May, artists from over forty countries visited Iran to commemorate the display of their work in cultural centers throughout Tehran with intentions of showing the work in Iraq and Syria.[4] According to Masoud Shojaei Tabatabaei, an artist who organized the event and who is aligned with hard-line members of the government, the contest was intended to

expose ISIL's "true nature" and argued that "*Daesh* [ISIL] tries to associate itself with Islam, but in essence it has no idea about Islam."[5] While the contest was met with bemusement and surprise by the Western media, it was also condemned for cartoons that depicted the United States and Israel as responsible for creating ISIL.[6] Though the cartoons included in the contest were varied in their representations of the group, many featured macabre imagery including ISIL fighters bathing in a bath of blood and having their brains replaced with sticks of dynamite as they enter into a battlefield. Through such images, the Islamic Republic not only sought to portray itself as the proper custodian of Islam but also, without any trace of irony, denounced the use violence by ISIL in the name of Islam.

In late January 2016, President Hassan Rouhani took a tour of Rome and met with Italian officials in the first official visit by an Iranian president to Europe in sixteen years. While many took notice of Rouhani laughing earnestly with Pope Francis and the conspicuous absence of alcohol at state receptions, what really raised eyebrows during the trip was the covering of nude statues during the Iranian president's stroll through Rome's internationally renowned Captioline Museums.[7] Italians across the political spectrum were enraged by the diplomatic gesture and the furor grew to such an extent that the Italian government denied authorizing the cover up and the Iranian government denied asking for it. The former mayor of Rome and culture minister Francesco Rutelli characterized the decision to cover up the artwork "total idiocy and a cultural sacrilege" and asserted "you can't erase history."[8] A columnist for the left-leaning newspaper *La Stampa* described it as an "act of cultural submission" and stated the gesture was intended "to ensure that Mr. Rouhani did not have a hormonal shock and rip up the

147

freshly signed contracts with our Italian industries."[9] As if to highlight the seemingly

retrograde nature of the whole affair, Reuters bookended its article on the controversy

with a story of the 16th century painter Daniela da Volter who was mocked by his

contemporaries for being commissioned by the Vatican to paint loincloths on

Michelangelo's statues in the Sistine Chapel and who "went down in art history with the

nickname 'breeches maker'."[10]

     As will be discussed below, some observers of Iran were especially surprised by

the potential for some of the large collection of Western works of art housed in the

basement of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMOCA) to be shown

internationally. This collection, which includes works from Picasso, Warhol, Pollock,

Monet and others, was amassed by Empress Farah Diba Pahlavi, Reza Shah Pahlavi's

wife, just prior to the revolution. Taking advantage of the 1973 oil crisis that led to a

depressed international art market while increased revenues for the Iranian state, the

Empress Pahlavi enlisted the help of her cousin, architect Kamran Diba, to not only

design the museum but also to help procure the works of art.[11] Despite the fact that it

was prone to ostentatious displays of wealth that provoked the ire of many Iranians, the

monarchical regime uncharacteristically exercised prudence by buying these works of art

in relative secret in the years prior to the museum's opening. While it changed hands

following the revolution, the museum's existing collection of art that has been preserved

virtually in its entirety since is not only valued between $3-12 billion but is also the

largest collection of Western works of art outside of Europe and the United States.[12]

     The collection began to receive some attention by the Western media following

the inauguration of Mahmood Ahmadinejad a decade earlier, coverage that largely

expressed fears of what would happen to it when he came to power. Recalling the

Empress's role in collection's founding, Christopher de Bellaigue asserted in *The*

Guardian "that so much of Farah remains, even today, is testament to the humane good

sense that underpinned many of her public endeavours."[13] While de Bellaigue

acknowledges that "she was prone to bad lapses of judgment" such as being a "willing

accomplice in a grotesquely vainglorious commemoration of Iran's monarchy", his tone

makes it abundantly clear that the Pahlavi Empress has bequeathed Iran with an

unparalleled cultural and artistic legacy.[14] Furthermore, de Bellaigue is surprised by the

collection's survival following the 1979 Revolution but is jaded about the intentions

behind it: "The art was saved, probably for commercial reasons, but it remained mostly

unseen, while museums put on edifying shows of religious and revolutionary art."[15]

Writing a few years after the Ahmadinejad Administration came to power, Lara Setrakian

of *ABC News* offered a similar assessment of the curious endurance of the collection in

spite of the Islamic Republic. While noting that the collection was sequestered in the

basement in part for practical reasons such as threat of art theft, Setrakian also stressed

that there were "ideological" reasons as well: "Conservative Muslim ideology-- a

powerful governing force in Iran- has played a similarly forceful role in keeping the

pieces underground. Aside from the anti-Western overtones of Revolutionary Iran many

of the pieces are considered too racy for a conservative Muslim society."[16]

     Especial attention has been paid to the collection in more recent years following

the solidification of the nuclear deal between the United States and Iran in the summer

of 2015, which initiated speculation about the possibility of the artwork leaving its

basement confines. Even in this moment, however, a familiar historical narrative

mirroring that of de Bellaigue above is once again deployed to make sense of such an

extensive collection of Western art within the Islamic Republic. Writing for *The*

Telegraph, Lizzie Porter rehearses this history of TMOCA just prior to revolution in 1979:

"Staff were forced to hide the multi-million pound oeuvre in underground rooms as

revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini railed against 'Westoxification' in the

1979 Revolution."[17] It is therefore unsurprising that in the decades that followed, "the

museum was used for displays of propaganda and memorials to soldiers who died in the

conflict, and the treasure trove of works below stairs was shunned."[18] Unlike de

Bellaigue, however, Porter suggests the preservation of the collection was due less to

economic considerations and more the result of tenacious museum administrators who

wielded bureaucratic procedures to keep more conservative forces of the state at bay.

Finally, the potential cultural thaw between Iran and the West has enabled

Western journalists and art experts to see TMOCA's basement collection in person.

Sending two of its contributors to Tehran, *Bloomberg Businessweek* gave a similar historical

backdrop of the collection's tumultuous beginnings. "Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

took power railing against 'Westoxification,'" *Bloomberg* stated in explaining the

sequestration of the otherwise renowned artworks, clarifying that, "his notion that

Western moral and sexual depravity had infected Muslim nations with a disease that

could only be cured with strict rule by Islamic clerics."[19] To these *Bloomberg* reporters,

that the modernist works of art escaped the revolution and endured the subsequent

consolidation of the Islamic Republic unscathed is nothing short of befuddling: "The

collection's survival is part of the larger Iranian paradox—the struggle of one of

humanity's oldest and most refined civilizations to overcome an historic spasm of

fundamentalism and xenophobia."[20]

The confusion over the continued presence of such artwork within the walls of

the museum despite such 'fundamentalism and xenophobia' only deepened when the

article relayed the story of the sole piece to leave the collection.   In 1994, the Iranian

government exchanged a Willem de Kooning nude for a book of miniatures from the

16th century entitled *Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp* that a diplomat serving in the Clinton

Administration was in possession of. During the three years it took the deal to be

negotiated, former deputy culture minister Mehdi Hojjat said amongst the other works

the Iranian government was mulling over departing with was Renoir's literally entitled

Gabrielle With Open Blouse. In a telling conclusion to its article that seemingly underlined

the aforementioned paradox, *Bloomberg* noted:

> "Hojjat recalls the most surprising comment he got
> during the long talks over what Iran would or wouldn't
> exchange for the *Shahnama*. One of the religious
> authorities on the supreme revolutionary panel was quite
> adamant about *Gabrielle With Open Blouse*, a portrait of the
> woman who worked for the Renoir family as a nanny.
> "This Renoir painting is very exquisite," the man said.
> "Do not give it away."[21]

In many ways, this final quote from the *Bloomberg Businessweek* article succinctly

captures what many in the West find so perplexing about the ubiquity of art within the

Islamic Republic. The 'religious authority' in Hoijat's recollection, it would seem, is not

guided by economic logic in advocating for keeping Renoir's portrait and does not refer

to its monetary value in making the case for its retention. His word choice in describing

the painting is aesthetically minded and keen on what is clearly a normative, positive

assessment of its cultural value: the portrait is exquisite. By extension, this glimpse into the Islamic Republic's decision making process could seem to indicate that one impetus for maintaining possession of the collection more broadly (with the exception of the de Kooning nude) is in part an appreciation of its cultural significance. How is it possible that a government grounded in a politico-religious tradition with an avowed hostility toward heterogeneity in any aspect of its national culture has at least some artistic sensibility towards genres and works that do not conform to its vision of the world? And yet, if that is the case, why then does the government keep the collection under literal lock and key in TMOCA's basement?

These questions and the commentary above encapsulate one way in which the relationship between art and the Iranian state has been read in the West. While this coverage is by no means exhaustive, this reading mirrors how Iran is understood and discussed within commonplace political discourse in the West more broadly. There are several layers to this narrative, the most immediate being the surprise and confusion registered over the seeming contradiction between the appreciation and condemnation of art by the Islamic Republic. The second layer is an implicit presumption of the Iranian state's absolute control over artistic production- control that appears to extend beyond its borders as evidenced by the controversy over Rouhani's visit to Italy. Finally, this reading draws on a larger historical narrative that posits the Shah as progressive cultural force and the Islamic Republic as a retrograde regime that uses religion to justify its curtailment of the arts. Seen from this vantage point, the Islamic Republic is a puzzle in that it both confirms and defies its stereotypical image in the West- it lives up to the

worst fears concerning the fate of artistic production under an intolerant religious regime while also providing safe haven for art emblematic of the Westoxification it assails.

As this chapter will demonstrate, however, this rendering offers only a surface-level reading of the relationship between the arts and the state in Iran. The following section will reveal, more specifically, that the co-constitutive nature of art and the state in Iran is actually a point of historical continuity between the Islamic Republic and the former monarchical regime. Against the backdrop of this history, the narrative painting the Islamic Republic as culturally backwards and the Shah as a progressive, modernizing force is difficult to sustain. A close look at contemporary forms of street art in the following section, moreover, will bring into relief how the Islamic Republic's control over artistic production within this reading has also been overstated. To be clear, this is not to ignore the vast and often-violent apparatus of censorship within Iran that it is legitimated through religious discourse. Time and time again the Islamic Republic has demonstrated how it is effectively an art critic with an army behind it.[22] My intentions is not to play down such acts of censorship by the Islamic Republic but rather to show how art can reflect back onto the state and fray its symbolic resources.

This alternative reading of the relationship between art and the state in Iran (both past and present) that follows is not offered simply as a corrective to the well-circulated but stilted narrative discussed above. Rather, it is to highlight how this narrative tacitly relies on a particular understanding of the state, art, and religion as facets of socio-political life that form fully apart from one another. As will be discussed in the conclusion, the narrative above converges with the liberal conception of the secular that was analyzed in the introduction wherein the secular and religious are mapped onto a

public/private divide. Within this political arrangement, the public sphere is upheld as a neutral ground that serves a buffer between the private sphere and the state. Culture, specifically art in this case, (ideally) unfolds within the public sphere without defining it or warping into something that would upend its neutrality. The Islamic Republic is therefore particularly troubling for some because it trespasses upon the inviolable principles of liberalism and democratic society in its disregard for the alleged separations between religion, art, and the state.

As this chapter will argue, however, these distinctions between the state, culture, art, and the public sphere do not hold in modern Iran. More specifically, Iranian history over the last half a century and contemporary forms of street art reveal how there are slippages between the boundaries of art, religion, and the state. Discussions in the West that treat the seeming collapse of religion, art, and the state into one another as the novel (and undemocratic) creation of the current regime thereby mistake cause for effect. My central argument, in other words, is that such slippages are not the by-product of the Islamic Republic but rather were formative in constituting it- a process that continues shape the political landscape of Iran. Art in contemporary Iran thereby forces a rethinking how the relationship between religion, art, and the state is understood.

Before explicating these political stakes entailed in a more nuanced reading of art in Iran, it will be important to first explore how the borders between the state, culture, and the public sphere have been porous both historically and in the present. In the sections that follow, moreover, it must be underscored that even though there have been instances of different versions of the Iranian state trying to subsume culture under its control as a matter of state policy, it is something that is never fully successful in

practice. Like the relationship between time and state in the previous chapter, the entanglement of art and the Iranian state must be understood as similarly co-constitutive. The critical impulse must therefore be one of making analytical room to see the intersections, exchanges, and overlaps between art and the state in Iran- thereby remaining vigilant against falling back into a framework that takes their separation as an apriori.

State of the Art in Iran

Apart from the ever-growing snarl of traffic, one of the most characteristic features of Tehran's physical landscape is the ubiquitous presence of street art. Colorful government murals, graffiti, and even advertisements provide a jarring and sometimes welcomed relief from the grey concrete that defines so much of Tehran's cityscape. The pervasive character of such street art makes Iran a relative anomaly in the region, for as Talinn Grigor argues, "post-revolutionary Iran remains the one state in the Muslim world where there is a sustained and systematic visual discourse that penetrates most aspects of public, private, cultural, sociopolitical religious life."[23] In almost every major square in Tehran and other large cities, portraits of clerics, casualties of the Iran-Iraq War and surreally rendered pastoral scenes provide an almost ethereal stillness that is continually washed over by the frenetic movement of urban life. Often vying for attention with advertisements, these visual artifacts serve as a vehicle for government propaganda and moral proclamations, declare geopolitical solidarity with various causes, and offer a spatially disjointed (though highly selective) history of modern Iran.

155

These quirks of visual culture within the Islamic Republic, however, can only be robustly understood if it is situated against the larger historical backdrop of art and the state in Iran over the last half century. After over a decade of what historian Ervand Abrahamian has described as a 'nationalist interregnum,' on August 19, 1953, the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh was overthrown in a CIA-engineered coup and state power was once again consolidated and centered around the monarch, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.[24] In many ways, this second phase Pahlavi regime strengthened and expanded the three pillars of the state that served as the foundation of the existing but then-weakened monarchical state: the military, bureaucracy, and court patronage system.[25]

While these semi-reorganizations of state power were blatant signals of Mohammad Reza Shah's attempt to recreate his father's regime, there were less dramatic moments directly prior and following the coup that reflected a different cultural agenda. In 1953, there were two major art exhibits at important official venues (the Mehregan Club and the palace of the Shah's brother) that featured a few modernist works of art. For Hamid Keshmirshekan, "the inclusion of modernists' works suggested that the cultural authorities had signaled an end to the official policy of indifference towards modern art."[26] This new attitude towards the art by the Iranian state was evinced much more expansively during the 1958 First Tehran Biennial, a wide-ranging art exhibit featuring dozens of artists that was inaugurated by the General Administration of Fine Arts, Public Relations, and Publications Department.[27]

These moments were the first in a long series of engagements between the new Pahlavi state and visual art, architecture, and other cultural forms. These artistic

mediums were both manifestations of and vehicles for the Shah's autocratic, sweeping

political programs that manifested through tropes of nationalism, modernization,

secularism, and progress. In a pattern the Islamic Republic would later repeat, the Shah's

support for particular art and other cultural forms was often accompanied by blunt

exercises of state violence. The Tehran Biennial, for example, was founded during the

same year as the SAVAK, the Shah's brutal and much feared secret police force.[28] For

Talinn Grigor, the new Pahlavi regime furthered the preexisting "dialectical and

ambivalent relationship developed between artists and architects at the service of the

state, and the centralist state that founded institutions with the aim of producing the

professional middle class" wherein "high art stood as a signifier of utopian modernity."[29]

Two of the three pillars of the Pahlavi regime, the bureaucracy and system of court

patronage, were therefore in part expanded through such forms of artistic and cultural

production. While by no means an equal relationship, some artists and architects in turn

benefited from increased public visibility and financial patronage from the state.

     This intertwined nature of art and the state during the Pahlavi era, however,

meant that the fate of certain artistic genres and mediums were tied to the success or

failure of the Shah's expansive social reforms. Of particular salience is the White

Revolution, initiated in 1963, which was an attempt to both counter rising Leftist

movements by offering land reform and to curtail clerical authority by secularizing the

judiciary through the 1967 Family Protection Law as well as by discouraging the wearing

of veils by Iranian women. On the one hand, as Keshmirshekan has argued, after the

White Revolution and "subsequent economic development of the state, it was possible

for the state to act as a patron of the arts in a much more effective manner."[30] The oil

157

revenues and the ability to collect as well as retain massive financial resources following

the 1963 reforms enabled the Pahlavi state to further its particular interpretation of

Iranian cultural modernity. On the other hand, as Layla S. Diba has noted,

"disenchantment with westernization set in as non-Iranian technocrats influenced all

fields of endeavor, including the arts."[31] Ironically enough, in other words, the Shah's

nationalist platform of secular modernity and appreciation for the arts came at the

expense of both Iranian exceptionalism and artists.

Figure 1: Shahyad Monument/Azadi Tower (Source: Google Earth)[32]

Of all of the artistic mediums that came to be associated with the Shah's regime,

architecture emblematized its socio-political outlook and is one of aesthetic changes

wrought on the Iranian landscape that continue to endure up until the present day.

Perhaps the most important architectural monument of this era was the Shahyad

Monument (later renamed the Azadi Tower), Figure 1 above, which was completed in

time for the grandiose celebration of the alleged 2,500-year anniversary of the Persian

monarchy in 1971. The monument and the 50,000 square meter oval green space surrounding not only became the western gateway to Tehran but is also the prototypical example of the Shah's melding of architecture with the reorganization of public space to project his delusions of monarchical grandeur.[33] More specifically, through such projects "the Pahlavi dynasty aimed to construct a national public sphere where Iran's national identity could be performed and displayed for a global audience.[34] Talinn Grigor has described this monument as "the architectural manifesto of the king's monarchy" that "became the symbol of the modern nation, marching forward, captured in the dynamic form of the landmark and connected to the past with the general configuration of the plan and the elevation along with the decorative details and prototypes."[35] Architectural works such as the Shahyad Monument, in other words, were crucial mediums through which the Shah sought to balance his Janus-faced self-image as a forward-looking modernizer who was nonetheless rooted in the historical longue durèe of the Persian monarchy.

Despite the Pahlavi monarchy's attempts to commandeer modernist and avant-garde aesthetic forms for its own purposes, these genres also helped to sow seeds of political discontent and took on new valences that ran directly counter to the interests of the regime. Azadeh Mashayekhi has argued, in reference to the Shah's reorganization of public space in Tehran, "a major consequence of these development projects and policies was widening inequality gaps and increasing differences among Tehran's residential districts."[36] The imposition of modernist aesthetics on Tehran and its spatial arrangements thereby exacerbated the growing resentment of the Pahlavi dynasty. Apart from cultivating further dissatisfaction with the Iranian state, some of these facets of the

monarchical regime in effect cannibalized its progenitor by providing symbolic and material support to oppositional social forces in the lead up to the revolution. In a spectacular display of populist force, on December 11, 1978 two million Iranians converged from each of the four sides of the Shahyad Monument for a rally that would signal the impending dénouement of the Pahlavi monarchy.[37]

On a more general level, the patronage, embrace and, in some cases, imposition of particular aesthetic norms by the Pahlavi state also helped facilitate alternative socio-political imaginaries that offered dramatically different futures for Iran. Referencing aesthetic arguments between artists over whether to adopt Western styles of art, Fereshteh Daftari argues such debates "reflected a national dilemma: how to preserve an Iranian identity, termed 'authentic,' that was threatened by near-abdication to the omnipresent West, without retreating into xenophobic parochialism or renouncing the aspiration to be modern."[38] Within Iranian society at the time, there was no consensus on how to deal with this dilemma and attempts to grapple with it varied across the political spectrum. The Shah, in contrast, characteristically and autocratically decreed through certain aesthetic forms his attempt to resolve this national puzzle by melding Western tropes of modernism, parochialism, Persian monarchical myths and sweeping gestures of change.[39] In so doing, however, he crystallized a common target that disparate alternative political forces could unify around and against. The cascading tide of revolution and the subsequent Islamic Republic that emerged in its wake would herald a turn away from these existing hegemonic aesthetic norms and towards the establishment of new ones. It is this critical shift whose legacy continues to reverberate through the post-revolutionary political landscape.

Given that modernist and avant-garde art or what was considered 'high' art were treated as synonymous with the Shah's regime, it is perhaps unsurprising that the most noticeable and profound aesthetic shift initiated by his overthrow was towards realist and populist visual art.[40] Apart from such larger symbolism, however, there were more practical social exigencies that mandated the case for revolution be made in direct and explicitly visual terms. The low rate of literacy at the time of the Pahlavi dynasty's toppling, more specifically, meant that visual art such as posters and murals were crucial for mobilizing support for the 1979 Revolution and during the consolidation of the Islamic Republic.[41] Despite or rather because of such widespread illiteracy, as Peter Chelkowski argues, "most Iranians were very attuned to a wide range of mental and pictorial images going back hundreds of years" such as Shi'ite iconography and the "Islamic Revolution revitalized and transformed these rituals and images, and put them to immediate political use."[42] It must also be stressed the iconographic sources of the revolution were heterogeneous and layered, for as Haggai Ram has highlighted "these multiple iconographies bridged the literary with the visual, the past with the present, the sacred with the profane, the modern with the traditional, and the national with the international."[43] Like the 1979 Revolution itself, the political aesthetics of the burgeoning Islamic Republic drew on anti-colonial and Leftist imagery that blended a militantly Islamic and nationalistic populism with socialist realism.

Another important aesthetic facet of the revolution was graffiti, which has had a colorful political history in Iran. There was widespread use of graffiti during the 1979 Revolution when Iran's walls became the sites of impromptu revolutionary communiqués, inscribed with such phrases as "If I Sit, If You Sit, Who Will Stand Up?,"

161

"Marx, If Only You Were Alive, You Would See That Religion Is Not the Opium of the People," and "Yonkee [sic] Go Away."[44] These moments of rogue disregard for property brought the Shah's modernist utopian visions crashing to earth by disrupting the relatively clean, ordered, and homogenized spatial organizations he imposed on Iran's cityscapes. In a foreshadowing of the political future to come, images of Khomeini and other revolutionary leaders were also stenciled in graffiti throughout Iran in the lead up to the revolution.[45] The graffiti skirmishes during the 2009 uprising are echoes of this historical moment, as supporters of the Shah would scribble counter-revolutionary slogans on city walls that were crossed out by either anti-Shah graffiti or messages drawn in the actual blood of those wounded or killed in demonstrations.[46]

One of first aesthetic casualties of the unfolding revolution was avant-garde art, which despite the fact that many such artists actively opposed the Shah could not shake its association with the previous regime. "The avant-garde was to be shunned," Talinn Grigor writes, "The core of Iranian modern and contemporary art was thus severed, precisely because of the boundaries of avant-garde art and the Pahlavi construct of monarchy and modernity was indistinguishable."[47] Aside from its connection to the monarchy, the abstract character and lack of an immediately identifiable political position caused avant-garde and modernist art to be eyed with suspicion in the midst of revolutionary fervor at the opening of the 1980s. For many Islamic and Marxist currents within the revolution, art was to be put in the service of the 'masses' or *mostazafen* (the wretched, oppressed, and/or exploited in the revolutionary Islamic parlance, a term perhaps the result of Ali Shari'ati's translation of and correspondence with Franz Fanon).[48] Those whose work was perceived not to be in the service of this cause were

162

dismissed as bourgeois at best and counter-revolutionary at worse, thereby causing many such artists to go into exile.

Following two years of relatively unfettered, spontaneous, and fervent artistic activity, especially with regard to public forms of visual art, the violent consolidation of state power by Islamist factions loyal to Khomeini in 1981 led to a *pak-sazi* or cleansing of the public sphere that "aimed to homogenize the built environment, and in turn, the historical narrative of the revolution."[49] Astutely aware of the impact of art, the Islamic Republic gradually replaced murals, posters, and works of graffiti with its own visual culture as it repurposed the streets of Iran in its own image. Some scholars have described this as a process of representational replacement that facilitated a new Islamic public sphere wherein public forms of visual art were scrubbed of not only any lingering remnants of the monarchy but also political references or gestures that did not conform to the newly established norms.[50] Although its traces endure, the diverse aesthetic inheritances of the revolution were explicitly shed and by extension the role of these socio-political forces in toppling the Shah were marginalized from the official historical record of Iran.

During the 1980's, artistic production in Iran reflected the tumultuous decade that saw an eight-year war with Iraq and the political settling of the Islamic Republic. Despite the express privileging and promotion of an official aesthetic, "Islamic and revolutionary values remained largely uncodified during the transition period and were subject to local or expedient interpretations."[51] At the same time however the Iranian state marshaled art in its effort to drum up support for the war effort, tapping graphic artists in particular to demonize Saddam Hussein. "Using techniques learned during the

163

Revolution, Iranian graphic artists sought to inspire, mobilize, and commit the entire

nation to action," Peter Chelkowski argues, concluding rather hyperbolically, "Never in

the history of propaganda have the graphic arts systematically played such an important

role as they did in Iran during the years 1980-88."[52] Following the end of the war

previously closed private galleries as well as new ones opened and, in the words of

Keshmirshekan, "contemporary Iranian art really regenerated during the 1990s, as new

trends, attitudes, and methods came to the fore."[53]

While many different forms of art (including those not entirely conforming to

the official dictates of the government) have emerged in other social and cultural sectors,

Iran's streets have by and large reflected the revolutionary Islamic aesthetic norms

promoted by the regime. The visual culture of the Islamic Republic has blanketed the

walls of buildings, billboards, and other public spaces. While a comprehensive history of

the shifts in street art is beyond the scope of this chapter, borrowing from Talinn Grigor,

these visual artifacts fall under roughly six thematic categories whose emergence parallels

the different political epochs of the Islamic Republic: "1.) The imperial-colonial enemy

[Figure 2]; 2.) The *velayat-e faqih*, or the jurisprudent [Figure 3]; 3.) The Iranian

revolutionary tradition going back to the nineteenth century and its export to Muslim

lands [Figure 4]; and 4.) *Shahadat*, or Shi'a martyrdom, and the veterans of the Iran-Iraq

War" [Figure 5] as well as 5.) Moral proclamations (introduced during the Rafsanjani

Administration from 1989-1997) [Figure 6] and 6.) Uban beautification (introduced by

President Khatami between 1997-2005) [Figure 7].[54]

Figure 2. The Imperial-Colonial Enemy: Wall of the former U.S. Embassy (Source: Brian J. McMorrow)[56]

Figure 3: The *Velayat-e Faqih* (Source: Fotini Christia)[55]

Figure 4: The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the export of the revolutionary tradition to Muslim lands (Source: Fotini Christia)[58]

Figure 5: Martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War (Source: Fotini Christia)[57]

Figure 6: Moral Proclamations- "Verily Allah does not do any injustice to mankind, but men do wrong to themselves (Fotini Christia)[60]

Figure 7: Beautification Mural (Fotini Christia)[59]

165

As this historical survey attests to, the boundaries between the state, religion, public sphere, and artistic production in Iran have significantly overlapped in the last six decades. Contrary to the insinuations of the analyses discussed at the outset of this chapter, this is not a novel by-product of the Islamic Republic but is rather an inheritance from a previous epoch that it has been bequeathed. To be sure, the 1979 Revolution initiated a change in the specific forms of Iranian art privileged by the new state and in this sense the Islamic Republic represents a departure from this history. At the same time, however, a historical continuity between these epochs is that artistic production was integral in the consolidation and maintenance of the state. These aesthetic mediums were fundamental in recasting the Iranian public sphere along the lines of a revolutionary Shi'ite Islamic imaginary and also helped the state weather the changes in and contradictions of such politics, much in the same way the tropes of modernist art and architecture helped (at least for a time) the Pahlavi regime do the same.

This historical continuity is significant because it troubles the presumption informing the aforementioned analyses of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary wherein the Shah is upheld as a beneficent, secular patron of the arts while the Islamic Republic is posited as backwards-religious regime with little appreciation for the arts. Recall *Bloomberg Businessweek*'s celebration of the Shah's regime as a progressive force for establishing the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art while denouncing the Islamic Republic as "historic spasm of fundamentalism and xenophobia."[61] This binary framing of religious/backward vs. secular/progressive not only ignores how the formally secular Pahlavi monarchy tried to violently commandeer artistic production but also how a wide

spectrum of progressive artistic genres facilitated the 1979 Revolution that brought the Islamic Republic to power. Emphasizing this continuity of the structural relationship of art vis-à-vis the state, in other words, disrupts the self-image of the Pahlavi monarchy as a modernizing force in Iranian history and the story the Islamic Republic tells of itself, namely that visual queues of its symbolic foundation are wholly Islamic.

Street Aesthetics

There is additional layer to this reading of art in the Islamic Republic, specifically the presumption that artistic production is completely controlled and subsumed by the state. Apart from the extensive forms of censorship employed by the Islamic Republic, the oft-cited evidence of this claim is the ubiquitous presence of pro-government street art. To be clear, it is abundantly evident that different iterations of the Iranian public sphere in large cities and rural towns bear the regime's visual markers of its brand of revolutionary Shi'ism. At the same time, however, not delving any further into such street art beyond this cursory glance can slide into an over-determination of the role of the state in its relationship with the arts. The forms of art surveyed below will reveal, in other words, that there are tears and fractures in such forms of self-representation. The very presence of such public artwork whose meanings are inherently ambiguous and multiple when juxtaposed with more direct propaganda pieces therefore make it difficult to sustain the narrative wherein the Islamic Republic has complete control over its semiotic and visual environment. As will be shown, the overlap between the state and artistic production in Iran is not unilateral but multi-dimensional and variegated.

Given the vastness of the artistic landscape in Iran, it will be prudent to focus on street art as it not only helps to shape the public sphere but also provides examples of the porous boundaries between culture and the state. I will focus in particular on two forms of this visual medium and important artists working within them. These works of visual art include the surrealist trompe-l'œil murals of Mehdi Ghadyanloo that adorn over 100 buildings in Tehran and stencils by the graffiti artist who operates under the pseudonym Black Hand. Though it is relatively neglected in discussions of street art in Iran, as the history of art in Iran surveyed above demonstrates graffiti is a vital feature of the visual landscape. Graffiti is unpredictable in terms of its placement and its imagery provide razor-sharp and playful reinterpretations of hegemonic aesthetic norms, thereby throwing a wrench in the processes through which the Islamic Republic uses street art to cultivate its self-representations. At the same time, however, graffiti has been extensively used by supporters of the regime and in ways that sometimes irk the state. Before turning to these technically illicit works of art, however, it will be instructive to turn first to Ghadynaloo's murals as they illustrate how even works of art commissioned and supported by the Iranian state does not always neatly conform to its mandates.

Trompe-l'œil and Surrealism in Tehran

In 2006, Iran's recently minted Bureau of Beautification issued a call for artists who would be selected to transform ten blank walls of Tehran into their own canvasses. After placing his submission, Mehdi Ghadyanloo, then a recent art school graduate, was not only selected but the judges of the contest concluded he should paint all ten works and the mayor Tehran went a step further in stating "they should give all the walls [of

Tehran] to him."[62] Apparently taking the mayor's suggestions to heart, the Bureau of

Beautification has allowed Ghadyanloo to paint over 100 of the 800 murals the ministry

has commissioned since 2004.[63] Ghadyanloo's work is characterized by its vibrant colors

and trompe-l'œil style (literally meaning 'deceives the eyes' in French) that uses optical

illusions to render a one-dimensional canvass three-dimensional. While not the only

artist to utilize such techniques in Iran, Ghadyanloo's work is worth focusing on as it

represents a disproportionate number of murals throughout Tehran.

Figure 8. Beautification Mural 1 by Ghadyanloo (Source: Huffington Post).[64]

Figure 9. Beautification Mural 2 by Ghadyanloo (Source: Ajam Media Collective).[65]

The two images above are emblematic examples of Ghadyanloo's murals that have blanketed cities in Iran. Through light, shadows, and perspective these pastoral scenes bend the parameters of space within the city. This is especially true of Figure 8 that uses the surrounding buildings to ground its frame and to seamlessly blur the boundaries between the physical and pictorial realities. At the same time, however, the golden fields and lush trees are rendered in less minute and realistic fashion as the apartment balconies, almost creating the effect of a painting within a photograph. The result is an uncanny play between physical reality and representation, which is especially evident in Figure 9 that not only juxtaposes life in the city with life in the country but also suggests the boundary between them may be porous (which may be a nod to the

transitory and precarious life of many poor rural Iranians who endure economic

migrations to Tehran). There is also no locus to the painting as the viewer is looking up

at the mural while its subject is looking down at a city. This provides a surreally circular

vantage point from which the viewer is pulled up into the painting, through the depicted

countryside, and back into the rendered city, a city that is simultaneously familiar and
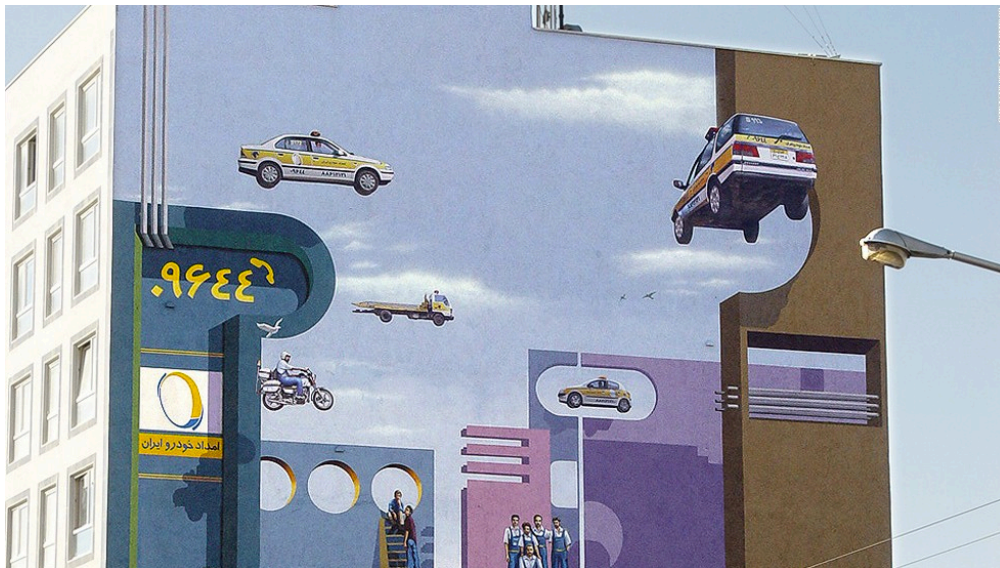
unrecognizable.

Figure 10. Beautification Mural 3 by Ghadyanloo (Source: Mehdi Ghadyanloo).[66]

Figure 11. Beautification Mural 4 by Ghadyanloo (Source: Mehdi Ghadyanloo).[67]

Figures 10 and 11 are further instances of Ghadyanloo's use of the conventions

of trompe-l'œil to transforms the flat canvass of the building into a three-dimensional

vista. As with the previous murals, the way the paintings blend into the attached and

surrounding buildings can either have the effect of turning the banal into the sublime or

skillfully lodging a quiet sense of unease into one's day to day negotiations of the city.

The floating cars in Figure 10, for example, can either offer a glimpse into a potential

utopia that is both tangible and fantastical or it can bring into stark relief and thereby

mock those stuck in the gridlocked traffic at the foot of the mural. There is a similar

interpretative uncertainty at work in Figure 11, which one the hand seems to heighten

the claustrophobic urban density in which the mural is ensconced in, after all Tehran

appears here to be a city that has managed to box in the sky. And yet on the other hand,

the same image could suggest a hidden richness and expanse underneath the city's more

cramped quarters, which the figure flying at an almost casual pace seems to be in no great hurry to escape in the first place

When situated against other government-sponsored works within the genre, the interpretative ambiguity inherent within Ghadyanloo's murals is in palpable tension with the more direct propaganda murals governed. More specifically, the unclear meaning(s) behind Ghadyanloo's pieces encourage interpretation and discourage symbolic clarity while government murals featuring portraits of Khomeini or moral proclamations admonishing Iranians not to lie leave little to the imagination. For this reason, these 'apolitical' surrealist murals have been described by Talinn Grigor as developing into "a pictorial discourse of resistance" since "to paint (in) the street streets was to simulate the pretence of propaganda art and to disclose that the act of painting is itself an act of rebellion, regardless of content."[68] These murals thereby create tears in the built aesthetic environment and disrupt the continuity of the carefully crafted visual structure of the public sphere in the Islamic Republic. In so doing, they reflect how not only the process of representational replacement ushered in by the 1979 Revolution is ongoing but also how aesthetic forms can unsettle the formal boundaries of the Iranian state.

Iranian Graffiti

Not all artists working in the Islamic Republic have been enthused with the surrealist murals of Ghadyanloo. Some graffiti artists who are upset with his virtual monopoly of Tehran's walls have made a sport of defacing his murals, as attested to by one such artist who gleefully stated that he was on a 'personal mission' to destroy most of his murals.[69] Grand posturing and artistic conflict aside, some graffiti artists have

173

found ways of (illicitly) mirroring the ubiquity of Ghadyanloo's murals while perhaps uncomfortably coexisting with them. While there are many graffiti artists working in Iran, it will be prudent to focus here on a couple of the better-known works by guerilla street artist Black Hand who has been compared to the English graffitist Banksy:

Figure 12. "Woman with Dish Soap" by Black Hand (Source: The Guardian).[70]

Figure 13. "Gaza" by Black Hand (Source: The Guardian).[71]

The first image, Figure 12, is a reference to the prohibition against Iranian women attending stadium football matches.[72] In many of the government-endorsed murals throughout Iran, women are much less frequently depicted and when they are it is an often as anonymous figure grieving over the martyrdom of a loved one. This representational spectrum for women, however, is split wide open through works of graffiti such as the stencil above that greatly expand the circumscribed aesthetic roles afforded to Iranian women. Moreover, by melding the visual queues of rigid gender roles (the gloves and soap a gesture to the home) with the jersey of the women's football

team (reflecting the robust public lives lead by many Iranian women), this image encapsulates and calls attention to the paradoxical socio-political circumstances women must navigate in Iran. The most pertinent aspect of this piece, however, is the fact that the woman in the stencil is a wearing a hijab. This aesthetic preference, regardless of the intention behind it, effectively co-opts and inverts a crucial symbolic resource built into the cultural scaffolding of the state. In so doing, this image denies the exclusive purview the Islamic Republic claims to have of the hijab and the chador.

With its clear message and evocative imagery about the bloodshed in Gaza, Figure 13 has a similar effect in that it articulates a pro-Palestinian position from a political constellation far removed from the government's hegemonic critique of Israel. As shown above in Figure 3, Palestine as both a geopolitical space and larger symbol has been an important facet of the iconography of the Islamic Republic since its inception. The massive financial support for Palestinian militant groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah by the Iranian government in spite of growing economic disparities at home has been a source of political tension, as evidenced by protesters shouting "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, my heart is for Iran!" during the 2009 revolt.[73] Through this simple statement, Black Hand offers a different expression of solidarity by eschewing the cooptation of the Palestinian cause by the Islamic Republic as well as the anti-Arab racism and Iranian nationalism that can sometimes inform an isolationist position toward the conflict.

Artists such as Black Hand are not the only purveyors of graffiti in Iran, as evidenced by that fact that during the 2009 uprising, the Basij miltia acted more like a rival gang than a government paramilitary organization by crossing out and defacing pro-

opposition graffiti during the post-election tumult.[74] In addition to its use by the Basij

during the 2009 uprising, there have also been more recent instances of graffiti by those

presumably supportive of the regime. In late summer 2015 during the lead up to the

impending nuclear deal between the United States and Iran, a symbolic but no less

surprising turn of events happened: the Islamic Republic removed the slogan "Death to

America!" from the walls of the former U.S. embassy (now the "Nest of Spies

Museum").[75] Shortly after its removal, however, the slogan was spray painted back on

the wall, only to be removed again soon afterwards.[76] While this back and forth

bordered on the cartoonish and absurd, it reflected substantial disagreements within the

regime over whether to support the potential agreement between the United States and

Iran. On the one hand, given that some hardliners in the government opposed the deal

and given their extensive involvement in the Basij, it would not be a stretch to assume

that members of roving militia were responsible for ensuring that the slogan stays on the

wall. On the other hand, given the smoky and obfuscated machinations of power in the

Islamic Republic, it is equally plausible that the government sanctioned removing the

slogan for its putatively positive impact on negotiations with the United States while also

arranging its reinstatement.

    Taken as a genre, these examples show how graffiti reflects an exceedingly

complex spectrum of pro- and anti-state positions in Iran. The forms of graffiti used by

the Basij during the 2009 uprising and by hardliners in 2015 draw on established

symbolic cues ("Death to America!" and the star of David- stand ins for the state of

Israel and shorthand for labeling something a foreign plot) that overlap with other

government-sponsored works of street art. There is little ambiguity as to what these

phrases denote since they are saturated in the semiotic constellations that have animated the Islamic Republic since its inception and which are part of its everyday political vocabulary. In contrast, while the graffiti stencils by Black Hand feature visual cues that are more often associated with the regime (the veil, expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian cause), the interpretative ambiguity that shrouding their meaning(s) disrupts their legibility as such.

These surrealist murals and graffiti that adorn Iranian streets reflect how the self-representation promulgated by the Islamic Republic can be too unwieldy and diffuse to maintain actual possession of. Again, there is no denying the massive network of propaganda employed by the government to shore up its authority that manifests in predominantly visual forms. However, these forms of propaganda are situated in a socio-cultural environment that is dynamic and shifting. As Ghadyanloo's murals or anti-American graffiti discussed above evince, even official or semi-official works of public art can create disunity within the government's attempts to control and manage the visual queues of the public sphere it has diligently cultivated over the last three decades. Any over-statement of the control Islamic Republic has over artistic production thereby risks short changing the discursive potential for different forms of art to temper or stymie such control.

Conclusion

Thus far, this chapter has critiqued two facets of the way of reading art and the state in Iran that was discussed at the outset. First, it was shown that this narrative wherein the secular, progressive Pahlavi monarchy is juxtaposed against the religious,

177

backward, Islamic Republic in reference to the arts is does not correspond the history of Iran over the last sixty years. Secondly, the assumption that the Islamic Republic has total artistic license neglects how contemporary forms of street show how the symbolic hallmarks initiated by the Islamic Republic can be picked up, reinterpreted, inverted, and pried open. Most importantly, these sections made clear how there are many slippages between discursive boundaries of art, religion, and the state. To be clear, neither of these categories can be reduced to one another- there are different historical and political logics informing each of them. However, at the same time, the historic and contemporary landscape of Iranian art makes it abundantly evident that such categories cannot be thought completely apart from one another. In other words, while not determinant, the relationship between religion, art, and the state is in fact co-constitutive both historically and in present-day Iran.

There is a final dimension to the aforementioned narrative, namely the surprise and confusion registered over the simultaneous support and condemnation of art by the Islamic Republic. This surprise and confusion go hand in hand, as they both stem from a presumption that art, religion, and the state does, or least should, map onto a liberal, secular framework that is rooted in the public/private divide. To repeat, within this political arrangement, the public sphere is upheld as a neutral ground that serves a buffer between the private sphere and the state. Culture, specifically art in this case, unfolds within the public sphere without defining it or warping into something that would upend its neutrality. But the Islamic Republic is particularly troubling for some because it trespasses upon the inviolable principles of liberalism and democratic society in its disregard for the alleged separations between religion, art, and the state. In so doing and

178

through the visual queues of its authority, the Islamic Republic thereby throws out entirely any notion of neutrality within the public sphere. The logical conclusion of this framing is that once the public/private divide has been eviscerated in this way (both by religion and the state-a double violation), any form of artistic production that does not reflect the will of the Islamic Republic will inevitably be purged and squelched. This is why the massive collection of Western works of art in the basement of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art is so confusing and surprising, because by this logic it simply should not have endured. With religion and the state in Iran not observing the hallowed tenets of liberal secularism by not staying in their place and invading the public sphere, artistic production should have been rendered an empty vessel, a medium for power.

As many scholars would point out, however, this surprise strains credulity if one considers how such insistence on the separation between culture, the public sphere, religion, and the state ignores how such partitions do not exist in practice in many states within the West. Lynn Hunt has argued that even during the most vehemently anti-religious Jacobin period during the French Revolution "politics took on a religious hue" and there was very little distinction in this moment between culture and the state- a historical legacy that continues to shape France.[77] While careful to note that liberal secularism is not simply religion in disguise, Talal Asad has argued that attempts to redeem the world through "the Enlightenment myth of politics as a discourse of public reason" and "the revolutionary myth of universal suffrage" are inextricably rooted in Christian ideas of redemption.[78] By way of Alexis de Tocqueville, William E. Connolly similarly notes: "While politics is *located* in a secular realm, that realm remains safe for

179

Christianity as long as the unconscious mores that *organize* public reason, morality, and politics are Christian. Christianity does not need to be invoked that often because it is already inscribed in the prediscursive dispositions and cultural instincts of the civilization."[79] Many liberal secular societies in the West, in other words, are defined not by an absence of religion but by its displacement.

While examples of the displacement of religion in and around artistic practice in the West are too numerous to cover comprehensively here, there are a few illustrative cases. Take for example how the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe that depicted gay S&M communities kicked up controversy when the religious right (spurred by Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina) discovered the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) helped fund the purchases of the photos by museums, leading to one museum director in Cincinnati to be charged with obscenity.[80] Andres Serrano's 1989 photograph *Piss Christ* that depicts the crucifixion of Jesus and which was then dipped in his urine, has elicited similar outrage when it was discovered that is was also (indirectly) funded by the NEA.[81] The portrait led to confrontation between Catholic protesters and museum security guards in New York and was also physically attacked with a hammer in France.[82] A four-minute video entitled *A Fire in My Belly* that depicts "Jesus on the cross being eaten by large black ants" was withdrawn from the National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C. in 2010 only hours after being shown due to complaints from religious activists.[83]

In these examples, the divisions between the public sphere, religion, art, and the state are murky at best. To be clear, I am not drawing an equivalence between artistic production and dissemination in the United States and that in the Islamic Republic of

Iran as they are informed by different histories and geopolitical contexts. But the fungibility of these divisions in the West does beg the question: why then do many in the West treat Iran as an exception when it comes to the overlap of culture, the public sphere, and the state? Iran is not a novelty in this specific instance as it effectively holds a mirror up to the West and reflects back an uncanny version of the co-constitutive character of culture and the state that is already a defining feature of liberal secular societies. It is this similarity, this uncanny echo of artistic practice in Iran that is elided and glossed over by the surprise and confusion expressed by the authors referenced at the outset of this chapter.

While the exceptionality of Iran must be tempered in this regard, it is also important not to lose sight of important differences within its geopolitical context. The most central of which is that, clearly, religion is not displaced in Iran but is formally centered with the full backing of the state- this is its novelty. The specific ways in which the divisions between art, religion, the public sphere, and the state are muddled in Iran differs therefore significantly from how they are in the United States and Europe. Put crudely, there is no one-size fits all model for understanding the complex overlap between these categories, especially if one considers how for many people in the world, not just in Iran, such divisions are not take as an apriori. Here it is helpful to recall Sanjay Seth's cautionary critique of historicism: "Historicism, it seems does register difference but only…by widening its net so that the difference so recognized is recuperated within a wider sameness."[84] In other words, Iran is treated as an outlier within the underlying analytical framework that assumes clear divisions between the public and private as well as that between secularism and religion. Confusion and

surprise therefore abound, as this analytical framework is never questioned- rather than realizing how it reveals a flaw in this overall argument, Iran is explained away as the exception. This is not to suggest that by virtue of its difference that the Islamic Republic and the violent forms of censorship it enacts is somehow beyond reproach. But, once again, how this criticism of censorship as well as the larger cultural landscape is articulated and understood matters.

To conclude, it is worth bearing in mind when levying a critique of the forms of censorship by the Islamic Republic that the kaleidoscope of socio-political imaginaries in Iran is literally written on the wall. These forms of street art initiate, further, and stymie the hegemonic forms of socio-political representation. What these works of art do or at least have the potential to do (unwittingly or not), moreover, is the re-politicization of public space in Iran according to different socio-cultural imaginaries that borrows and departs from the existing visual landscape. The case of contemporary Iran illustrates that while art cannot be extricated from the specific relations of power through which it emerges, it is also laden with a potential to disrupt, redirect, and reorder these very discourses of power. As a dynamic and constitutive aspect of contemporary politics in Iran, art will therefore continue to actively shape the historical present and future of the Islamic Republic.

[1] Nasser Karimi, "Tehran Art Auction Draws Record Sales, Signaling Emerging Iranian Art Market," *Haaretz*, May 29, 2016, http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/iran/1.722056.

[2] Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Tehran swaps 'death to America' billboards for Picasso and Matisse," *The Guardian*, May 7, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/07/tehran-swaps-death-to-america-billboards-picasso-matisse-hockney-iran

[3] Thomas Erdbrink, "Suddenly, Tehran's Mayor Becomes a Patron of the Arts," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/08/world/middleeast/suddenly-tehrans-mayor-becomes-a-patron-of-the-arts.html?action=click&pgtype=_Homepage&version=Moth-Visible&module=inside-nyt-region&region=inside-nyt-region&WT.nav=inside-nyt-region&_r=0.

[4] Jenny Stanton, "Beheadings, suicide bombings and the destruction of ancient artefacts: Anti-ISIS artwork depicting terror group's most horrific crimes go on display in IRANIAN competition," *Daily Mail*, May 28, 2015, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3100524/Beheadings-suicide-bombings-destruction-ancient-artefacts-Anti-ISIS-artwork-depicting-terror-group-s-horrific-crimes-display-IRANIAN-competition.html

[5] Ramin Mostaghim and Nabih Bulos, "Iran uses the pen and the sword against the Islamic State," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 2015, http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-iran-cartoonists-20150607-story.html. In Iran and in the larger Arab world, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is known by the acronym Daesh (*al Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham*). The English translation of this Arab acronym is direct except for the final word *al-Sham* which can mean 'the Levant,' 'Greater Syria,' 'Syria,' or Damascus. The geographical ambiguity inherent in the term *al-Sham* is thus the source of the inconsistency of the two English acronyms (ISIS and ISIL). *Daesh* is often construed as a pejorative word by the group bearing its name given that depending on its conjugation it can mean 'to trample down and crush' or 'a bigot who imposes his views on others'. Given the ire caused by using the term *Daesh* and its antipathy toward the organization, Iran makes a point of using the term any chance it gets. See Zeba Khan, "Words matter in 'ISIS' war, so use 'Daesh,' *The Boston Globe*, October 9, 2014, http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2014/10/09/words-matter-isis-war-use-daesh/V85GYEuasEEJgrUun0dMUP/story.html.

[6] See Don Melvin, "Iran hosts anti-ISIS cartoon competition," *CNN*, May 31, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/31/middleeast/iran-cartoon-competition/index.html and "Iranian cartoon contest links US, Israel to ISIS," *Jerusalem Post*, May 25, 2015, http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/ISIS-cartoon-contest-in-Tehran-draws-works-from-forty-countries-404012

[7] Pietro Lombardi, "Iran's President visits Italy: Nude statues covered," *CNN*, January 27, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/26/europe/italy-covered-naked-statues-rouhani/.

[8] Philip Pullella, "Anger grows in Italy over covering nudes for Iran's Rouhani," *Reuters*, January 27, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-iran-rouhani-nudes-idUSKCN0V51OE.

[9] Elisabetta Povoledo, "Italians Mock Cover-Up of Nude Statues for Iranian's Visit," *New York Times*, January 27, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/28/world/europe/hassan-rouhani-italy-visit-nude-statues-capitoline-museums.html?_r=0.

[10] Pullella, "Anger grows in Italy over covering nudes for Iran's Rouhani,"

[11] Harper's Bazaar Art, "Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art: The Crown Jewel," *Harper's Bazaar*, January 12, 2016, http://www.harpersbazaararabia.com/art/exhibitions/tehran-museum-of-contemporary-art-the-crown-jewel.

[12] Kia Makarechi, "Iran Set to Unveil Collection of Western Art Largely Unseen Since 1979 Revolution," *Vanity Fair*, November 12, 2015, http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/11/tehran-museum-iran-western-art-lashai. Estimates vary on the exact worth of the museum's collection and often reflect the purchasing power of the international art market.

[13] For coverage of the museum and its collection around the time of Ahmadinejad's inauguration, see: Christopher de Bellaigue, "Lifting the Veil," *Guardian*, October 7, 2005, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/oct/07/art.iran

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Lara Setrakian, "Inside Iran's Billion-Dollar Art Basement," *ABC News*, March 1, 2008, http://abcnews.go.com/Travel/story?id=4372055&page=1.

[17] Lizzie Porter, "Iran opens secret cache of art masterpieces," *The Telegraph*, November 25 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middle-east/iran/articles/Iran-opens-secret-cache-of-art-masterpieces/.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Peter Waldman and Golnar Motevalli, "Iran Has Been Hiding One of the World's Great Collection of Modern Art," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, November 17, 2015, http://www.bloomberg.com/features/2015-tehran-museum-of-contemporary-art/

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] For recent examples of censorship, see: "Banning of Films Continues under Rouhani Administration, 14 Movies Now Forbidden," *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*, August 17, 2015, http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/08/banning-of-films-continues-under-rouhani-administration-14-movies-now-forbidden/; "Mostafa Azizi sentenced to 8 years in Iranian prison," *CBC News*, June 10, 2015, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada /toronto/mostafa-azizi-sentenced-to-8-years-in-iranian-prison-1.3107324; "Iran: Imprisoned cartoonist subjected to forced 'virginity test'," *Amnesty International*, October 9, 2015, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/10/iran-imprisoned-cartoonist-subjected-to-forced-virginity-test/; Golnaz Esfandiari, "Iran Sentences Poets, Filmmaker to Prison, Lashings," *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, October 14, 2015, http://www.rferl.org/content /iran-jails-lashes-poets-filmmaker/27306541.html.

[23] Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio*, 23.

[24] Pahlavi's father, the iron-fisted architect of the modern Iranian state, Reza Shah, was deposed by the Anglo-Soviet invasion (aided by the United States) in 1941 as a consequence of Shah's pro-Nazi sentiments and the lure of Iranian oil fields. While the

twenty-one-year-old Muhammad Pahlavi was instated as the official head of state, in the words of Ervand Abrahamian, "the new monarch continued to hang on to much of the armed forces, but lost control over the bureaucracy and the patronage system,"(99). This relative power vacuum would continue until the coup in 1953. See: Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran.*

[25] *Ibid*, 123.

[26] Hamid Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives* (London: Saqi Books, 2013), 55.

[27] *Ibid*, 92n25.

[28] Hamid Dabashi*, Iran: A People Interrupted*, 130.

[29] Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio*, 18, 19.

[30] Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives*, 123.

[31] Layla S. Diba, "The Formation of Modern Iranian Art: From Kamal-al-Molk to Zenderoudi," in *Iran Modern*, eds. Layla S. Diba and Fereshteh Daftari (New York: Asia Society, 2013), 52.

[32] http://www.google-earth.es/index.php?name=Forums&file=download&id=47419

[33] Nader Ardalan, "Modern Iranian Architecture 1941-79," in *Iran Modern*, eds. Layla S. Diba and Fereshteh Daftari (New York: Asia Society, 2013), 75. For a discussion of the 1971 celebration of the Persian monarchy and its historiographic import, see Dabashi, *A People Interrupted*, 132-33.

[34] Azadeh Mashayekhi, "Tehran, the Scene of Modernity in the Pahlavi Dynasty: Modernisation and Urbanisation Processes 1925-1979," in *Urban Change in Iran: Stories of Rooted Histories and Every-accelerating Developments*, eds. Fatemeh Farnaz Afefian and Seyed Hossein Iradj Moeini (London: Springer International Publishing, 2016) 107

[35] Talinn Grigor, "Kingship Hybridized, Kingship Homogenized: Revivalism under the Qajar and the Pahlavi Dynasties, in *Persian Kingship and Architecture: Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis*, eds. Sussan Babaie and Talinn Grigor (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2015), 245.

[36] Mashayekhi, "Tehran, the Scene of Modernity in the Pahlavi Dynasty: Modernisation and Urbanisation Processes 1925-1979," 115.

[37] Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 161.

[38] Fereshteh Daftari, "Another Modernism: An Iranian Perspective," in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution*, eds. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2002), 65.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] This is not to suggest that visual forms of politics alone facilitated the revolution in 1979, as Charles Hirschkind has argued persuasively about the substantive impact of auditory mediums such as the dissemination of cassette tapes featuring Khomeini's sermons in galvanizing support for the revolution. See: Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[41] While Muhammad Reza Shah's White Revolution managed to raise literacy rates from roughly 26% to 42% of the population, less than half of Iranians by 1976 could read and

this disparity was especially pronounced between men and women. See Ervand Abrahamian's *A History of Modern Iran*, 134.

[42] Peter Chelkowski, "The Art of Revolution and War: The Role of the Graphic Arts in Iran," in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution*, eds. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2002), 128.

[43] Haiggai Ram, "Multiple Iconographies: Political Posters in the Iranian Revolution," in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution*, eds. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2002), 91.

[44] Ervand Abrahamian, "The Crowd in the Iranian Revolution," *Radical History Review*, Issue 105 (Fall 2009), 24.

[45] Shahram Khosravi, "Graffiti in Tehran," *Anthropology Now*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (April 2013), 3.

[46] Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging A Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (London: Booth-Clilborn Editions, 1999), 108.

[47] Talinn Grigor, "Return of the Avant-garde to the Streets of Tehran," in *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, eds. Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 239.

[48] For a discussion of the influence of Fanon on Shari'ati and their correspondence, see: Ervand Abrahamian, "Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports*, 102 (1982), 24-28.

[49] Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio*, 37.

[50] See: Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio*; Haiggai Ram, "Multiple Iconographies: Political Posters in the Iranian Revolution"; Hamid Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives* (especially chapter 4); and Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging A Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran.*

[51] Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives*,183.

[52] Peter Chelkowski, "The Art of Revolution and War: The Role of the Graphic Arts in Iran," 135.

[53] Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art: Development and Challenges," in *Different Sames: New Perspectives*, ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 28.

[54] Grigor, "*Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio*," 48.

[55] Fotini Christia, "Mural Located on Dr. Hossein Fatemi Street, Behjat-Abad, Tehran," July 2006, Tehran Propaganda Mural Collection, Harvard University, http://via.lib.harvard.edu/via/deliver/fullRecordDisplay?_collection=via&inoID=897638&recordNumber=105&fullgridwidth=5&method=view&recordViewFormat=grid

[56] Brian J. McMorrow, "Famous Mural of Statue of Liberty With a Skull Face in Front of An American Flag, Former U.S. Embassy," March 27, 2006, http://www.pbase.com/bmcmorrow/image/57979863.

[57] Fotini Christia, "Mural Located on Dr. Beheshsti Street," July 2006, Tehran Propaganda Mural Collection, Harvard University, http://via.lib.harvard.edu/via/deliver/fullRecordDisplay?_collection=via&inoID=897267&recordNumber=59&fullgridwidth=5&method=view&recordViewFormat=grid

[58] Fotini Christia, "We Venerate the Memory of the Selfless Martyrs of Islam," July 2006, Tehran Propaganda Mural Collection, Harvard University, http://via.lib.harvard .edu/via/deliver/fullRecordDisplay?_collection=via&inoID=897572&recordNumber=8 3&fullgridwidth=5&method=view&recordViewFormat=grid.

[59] Fotini Christia, "Mural located on Sayyad Shirazi Freeway, Hashtieh, Tehran," July 2006, Tehran Propaganda Mural Collection, Harvard University, http://via.lib.harvard .edu/via/deliver/fullRecordDisplay?_collection=via&inoID=897648&recordNumber=1 11&fullgridwidth=5&method=view&recordViewFormat=grid.

[60] Fotini Christia, "Verily Allah Does Not do Any Injustice to Mankind, But Men do Wrong to Themselves," July 2006, Tehran Propaganda Mural Collection, Harvard University, http://via.lib.harvard.edu/via/deliver/fullRecordDisplay?_collection=via &inoID=897613&recordNumber=93&fullgridwidth=5&method=view&recordViewFor mat=grid.

[61] Peter Waldman and Golnar Motevalli, "Iran Has Been Hiding One of the World's Great Collection of Modern Art," *Bloomberg Businessweek*.

[62] Kirsten O'Regan, "The Beautification Bureau," *Dissent*, Volume 63, Number 3, Summer 2015, 13.

[63] "Perception: Mehdi Ghadyanloo," Howard Griffin Gallery London, February 2015, http://howardgriffingallery.com/exhibitions/perception.

[64] Katherine Brooks, "Iranian Artist Has Covered Over 100 of Tehran's Walls in Surreal Street Art," *Huffington Post*, May 28, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05 /28 /mehdi-ghadyanloo_n_5399206.html.

[65] Ajam Media Collective, http://ajammc.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/01/DSC0800.jpg

[66] Image taken from artist's Facebook page, see: https://www.facebook.com/ mehdighadyanloo/

[67] Image taken from artist's Facebook page, see: https://www.facebook.com/ mehdighadyanloo/.

[68] Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio*, 86.

[69] O'Regan, "The Beautification Bureau," 18.

[70] Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iran's Banksy: 'The walls in my city are the canvas for my paintings'," *Guardian*, August 6, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2014/aug/06/iran-banksy-street-graffiti-tehran-black-hand-interview.

[71] Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iran's Banksy: 'The walls in my city are the canvas for my paintings'."

[72] Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iran's Banksy: 'The walls in my city are the canvas for my paintings'."

[73] For an in-depth analysis of this chant and its wider significance, see Hamid Dabashi's *The Green Movement in Iran* (New Brunswick: Traction Publishers, 2011), pgs 153-160. It should also be noted that due to the quagmire and tragedy of the Syrian Civil War, Hamas parted ways with Iran over its support for Bashar al-Assad. While they have since somewhat reconciled, these tensions nonetheless endure. See: Harriet Sherwood, "Hamas and Iran rebuild ties three years after falling out over Syria," *Guardian*, January 9,

2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/09/hamas-iran-rebuild-ties-falling-out-syria.

[74] For an analysis of the use of graffiti by the Basij during the 2009 uprising, see: Robert Mackey, "Latest Iran Protests Reverberate Online," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2009, http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/07/31/latest-iran-protests-reverberate-online/?_r=0; "The Writing on the Wall," *PBS Frontline*, July 1, 2009, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/07/the-writing-on-the-wall.html; and Ali X,"Tehran's Graffiti War," *France 24,* March 2, 2010. http://observers.france24.com/en/20100302-tehran-graffiti-war-green-movement-basij-militia-spray-paint-tags.

[75] Ishann Tharoor, "Iranians erase 'Death to America' graffiti on wall of former U.S. Embassy," *Washington Post*, August 31, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/08/31/iranians-erase-death-to-america-graffiti-on-wall-of-former-u-s-embassy/.

[76] Golnaz Esfandiari, "Iran's 'Death to America' Graffiti Reappears After Vanishing Act," *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, September 2, 2015, http://www.rferl.org/content/persian-letters-iran-death-to-america-graffiti/27222378.html

[77] Lynn Hunt, "The World We Have Gained: The Future of the French Revolution," Presidential Address to the American Historical Society, January 3, 2003, https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses/lynn-hunt. For further analysis of the intertwinement of culture and the state during the French Revolution see also: Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); and Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[78] Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 61.

[79] William E. Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist*, 24.

[80] Claire Suddath, "Crackdowns on Creativity: Robert Mapplethorpe," *Time*, April 5, 2011, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2063218_2063273_2063220,00.html

[81] Katherine Brooks, "One of the World's Most Controversial Artworks Is Making Catholics Angry Once Again," *Huffington Post*, May 14, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/13/piss-christ-sale_n_5317545.html.

[82] Amanda Holpuch, "Andres Serrano's controversial Piss Christ goes on view in New York," *The Guardian*, September 28, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/sep/28/andres-serrano-piss-christ-new-york.

[83]Ed Pilkington, "Christian activists force Smithsonian to pull Aids video from show," *The Guardian*, December 1, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/dec/01/smithsonian-pulls-christ-video

[84] Sanjay Seth, "Reason or Reasoning: Clio or Silva?," *Social Text* 78, Vol. 22, No.1 Spring 2004, 94.

Epilogue
Historiography & Politics

This dissertation began with an impasse, one that I arrived at after being persuaded by critiques of secularism and confronted with the Islamic Republic's citation of Islam to justify its profoundly undemocratic policies. To succinctly restate this impasse, how can one simultaneously critique secularism and the Islamic Republic? Do we accept the path of secularism, as it is seemingly the lesser evil of the two, even while knowing full well its latent potential for political inequality? Do we relinquish some conceits of political secularism and if so, which ones can be let go of without imperiling the secular project as a whole? In the context of Iran, would this in effect be Islamicizing secularism or vice versa? Does this matter? And finally, what of the public/private divide that is both the source and impediment of the democratic promise of secularism? Put crudely, how much religion and how much secularism is necessary for the attainment of a more democratic Iran?

As this dissertation has made evident, how this impasse and these attendant political anxieties are framed is a central part of the issue as it preconditions and thereby delimits answers to these questions. While these political concerns are exceedingly pertinent and are of central concern here, positing them in this way still preserves a binary logic not only between secularism and religion but also between the private and public sphere. Most importantly, the categories themselves are as a result presented as stable, coherent, and self-evident socio-political facts. In contrast, this dissertation has asked readers to take a leap of faith, as it were, in not presuming either the self-evident

189

character or coherency of these concepts in contemporary Iran. By asking readers to let go of these seemingly familiar concepts as secure mooring points, most crucially, I have also emphasized that moments in Iranian politics which render the boundaries between the secular, religious, private, and public porous do not necessarily betray democratic values.

These interventions were directed at a particular audience, namely those referenced in the introduction who adhere to secular, liberal principles and who have expressed unease or hostility toward Islam's alleged inability to coexist with them. There is, however, a second audience to whom this dissertation is directed, specifically those who critique liberal secularism from the Left and who are perhaps as wary of its democratic potential as much as Richard Dawkins or Bill Maher is skeptical of the democratic potential of Islam. Given that I would include myself in this second audience, these provocations have been much more fraught. Once again, the political realities in the Islamic Republic force those critical of liberal conceptions of freedom and equality à la Karl Marx or Michel Foucault to reconsider how they might have some merit in the face of its overwhelming forms of state violence.

Moreover, I am not calling for a disavowal or complete repudiation of secularism, the enduring importance of which has actually been emphasized by those most critical of it. Saba Mahmood has argued in reference to secularism that, "to critique a particular normative regime is not to reject or condemn it; rather, by analyzing its regulatory and productive dimensions, one only deprives it of innocence and neutrality so as to craft, perhaps a different future."[1] This interrogation of power and its discursive dimensions, Mahmood asserts, should also be extended to religion as well:

"Indeed, if the religious and the secular are indelibly intertwined in the modern period, each conditioning the other, then the question is not so much how modern society can expunge religion from social life (as Marx envisioned) but how to account for its ongoing power and productivity in material and discursive terms."[2] Wendy Brown has argued that the question of 'what is to be saved' within secularism cannot be answered generically but also affirms: "What I am committed to trying to save in the US context is the important distinction between church and state, a distinction that aims to secure a religion-free public realm and personal religious freedom. It doesn't do either completely, of course, but one then has to figure out how to extend secularism beyond its Christian-Protestant roots, so that it can make good on its promises. One also has to give up the idea that there is some neutral, secular space. So it's a question of making these problematic conceits part of our lived work on secularism."[3]

With these two audiences in mind, this dissertation employed a double-pronged analytical approach, the first of which consisted of not taking secularism, religion, the private sphere, and the public sphere for granted or as an apriori good. On the other hand, I have also strived to acknowledge the enduring political importance and value of these concepts despite their contingent and flawed character. The first chapter showed how the rights discourse of the women's movement traversed the public/private divide in some moments while strengthening it in others. In this chapter, the secular character of rights was not taken for granted as it was shown not only to be the bridge between self-identified secular and Islamic feminists but also capable of being integrated into an Islamic legal framework. In the second chapter, a focus on the politics of time in the 2009 uprising revealed how the public sphere in the Islamic Republic consists of dense

191

and overlapping layers of secularity and religiosity. Given the unfeasibility of pulling these layers apart, I argued that the 'critical exit' into more ethical futures for Iran will contain and be shaped by vestiges of the forms of religiosity initiated by the Islamic Republic itself. Finally, the third chapter challenged confusions over the robust art scene in Iran by some in the West by pointing to how these analyses presumed a separation between religion, art, culture, and the state.

Each of these chapters, moreover, critically engaged different ways of reading these particular aspects of the Iranian political landscape. While this dissertation is about the local context of Iran as a geopolitical site, it is also about how Iran is perceived, understood, and mobilized as a trope in different ways across the political spectrum in the West. Though it was by no intentional design at this project's outset, it is no coincidence that a specific narrative within Iran's larger modern history has anchored each chapter. The conceptualization of rights in Iran, in other words, cannot be thought outside of the history of the women's movement just as the socio-political life of time and art can only be robustly understood through their respective relationships with different iterations of the Iranian state. But as was stated in the introduction, how this history is told and understood also matters. It is therefore insufficient to point to otherwise-ignored historical facts as a way of illustrating how the complex lived experiences of such concepts as rights, time, art, and the state in Iran both confirm and confound expectation. I have therefore employed a historiographic approach that interrogated these concepts alongside and in conjunction with an unpacking of how contemporary Iranian politics has been historicized.

As this dissertation has shown, many existing historical narratives marshaled to make sense of Iranian politics are laden with secular understandings of knowledge & subjectivity. This is not to dismiss out of hand the analyses of Iran highlighted in the preceding chapters but rather to highlight how they are informed by particular a form of modern, western knowledge that assumes, as succinctly stated by Sanjay Seth, "a knowing subject who is apart from, even set up against, the objects to be known."[4] Seth further highlights how there is a regulative impulse inherent to this conception of knowledge: "A conception of knowledge that posits a knowing subject and an object external to it is also one that makes policing this distinction the very basis of any valid knowledge."[5] This distinction between knowledge and subjecthood helped sustain the mantel of 'pragmatic' feminism wherein Iranian feminists are posited as being able to step outside of their respective epistemic frameworks and demand equal rights from 'neutral' ground. The characterization of religion as a potent strategy of resistance by some observers of the 2009 uprising was shown to rely on a similar separation between knowing subjects and expressions of religiosity, thereby reducing religion to an empty and secular signifier. Finally, the confusion over the endurance of unsanctioned forms of art in the Islamic Republic was informed by a presumption that the division between knowledge and subjects had collapsed due to the visual markers of revolutionary Shi'ism that was alleged to completely subsume other forms of artistic production.

Without repeating the arguments of the previous chapters in full, the secular conceptions of knowledge and subjectivity that run through so many analyses of Iran impede a full appreciation of the nuances within its political landscape- especially those pertaining to religiosity. Other ways of knowing and being in the world, like some of

193

those in the Islamic world more generally and particularly those initiated after the 1979 Revolution in Iran, either become illegible or can be construed as posing a danger to secular forms of knowledge and subjectivity. Both this illegibility and hostility were on full display by those discussed at the outset of the introduction who oppose Islam for the putative threat it poses to Western values and civilization. Remarking on the political consequences that arise from engagements of Western forms of knowledge and subjectivity with "the 'constantly fragmentary' and irreducibly plural nature of the 'now,'" Dipesh Chakrabarty argues this encounter "makes the life practices we do not approve of-practices that seems superstitious or that ascribe agency to gods and sprits-seems anachronistic if not reactionary."[6] To be sure, as Michel Foucault has chronicled, the West's self-image as being the standard bearer for the rigid boundary between knowledge and subjectivity does not hold in light of its many interlocking forms of governmentality that regularly traverse this division. But, unsurprisingly, it is those forms of knowing and being in the world which do not reflect Western social and cultural norms that are marginalized at best and subject to violent intervention at worse.

Even though these cogent interventions by postcolonial scholars regarding difference offers a path for theoretical inquiry that is by now well trodden, they are still relevant for understanding Iranian politics and history. In trying to make analytical room to see the multifaceted planes of this history and politics, however, I want to make clear I am not suggesting that the authors critiqued in this dissertation are imposing concepts or ways of seeing the world on Iran that are otherwise foreign to it. Western forms of knowledge and subjecthood, secularity- these have rich and complex histories in Iran that stretch back well before the revolution in 1979. But they have manifested in distinct

ways owing to the different political currents within Iran, including revolutionary

Shi'ism, feminism, anarchism, Marxism, Kurdish nationalism, and many others as well as

imperial pressures from without. In narrativizing the history of Iran, one must therefore

take account of how concepts central to Western knowledge and modernity have been

translated politically and thereby remade in the process. Even though it has led to

sustained political tensions, construing this engagement between different ways of seeing

the world in Iran as only a clash or conflict neglects the subtle and layered forms of

epistemic cross-pollination that have resulted.

As I hope this dissertation has made abundantly clear, moreover, this critique of

secular readings of Iran is not a call for the pendulum to be swung the full other way. A

caution against flattening difference, in other words, must be equally vigilant against

overstating it. While different ways of being in and seeing the world may never be fully

compatible with one another, this does not mean that there cannot be bridges between

them. Radical alterity, a type of difference demarcated by the absolute impossibility of

any semblance of socio-cultural legibility or translation, can only exist in a theoretical

vacuum and not in the geopolitical present. And it is such forms of complete, totalizing

difference that the Islamic Republic claims to be sole arbiter of when it condemns and

dismisses any attempt at measurable reform as the result of either 'Western meddling' or

the corrupting influence of 'Westoxification'. Clearly, such claims are not entirely

without merit given the historical and current forms of imperial interventions levied

against Iran. But, to quote again Chakrabarty, the constantly fragmentary' and

irreducibly plural nature of the 'now,'" cuts both ways and does not merely haunt

Western, secular ways of seeing the world.[7] Time and time again, the Islamic Republic

195

has found the rigidity of its formal, revolutionary Shi'a outlook on the world buckle under the weight of a wide spectrum of historical political imaginaries that do not conform to it. This outlook itself has been upended, rearticulated, and reconfigured by virtue of the fact that once the state initiated it, its discursive malleability and dissemination could not be stemmed.

There is a further provocation that has paralleled my grappling with the impasse of religion versus secularism, namely that it may not be enough to just make room for different ways of being in the world. One has to deal with, in other words, the fact that, in the words of Sanjay Seth, "modern western knowledge provides many of the enabling assumptions of history writing."[8] The second chapter in particular proved difficult to write given that I was trying to historicize the non-secular organization of time structuring the Islamic Republic-an exercise in history writing that has as its disciplinary hallmark a reliance on empty, homogenous time. What's more, there is also the difficulty of writing about and representing/re-presenting religiosity as the hegemonic vocabulary for describing it has a secularizing effect. The moment you describe another person's religious way of being in and seeing the world as a form of 'belief,' it is immediately evident you are outside of that worldview. For some religious and pious persons for whom God simply 'is', the label of 'belief' reflects and presumes disenchanted outlook wherein God has no agency.

Like the putative impasse between religion and secularism, the understandable reaction to this conundrum may be to throw up one's hands in frustration. After all, what is the point of trying bridge such a divide when the language one uses to describe one's self to another person is chiasm that cannot be crossed? There is, however,

tremendous value to this endeavor. Judith Butler, for example, has eloquently taken up this question in relation to the social construction of gender and, contrary to the claims of their detractors, the density of Butler's prose stems from the challenge of using language to describe how language is itself the culprit responsible for a wide spectrum of gendered marginalization.[9] The issue of language is especially pertinent to Iranian politics given that not only is there the issue of literal translation regarding concepts such as rights, time, and the state, but also the problem that the political lives of such concepts out paces our vocabulary for talking about them. As the third chapter shows, however, where language fails art can offer one avenue for representing and conveying ideas without a relapse into the dichotomies of public versus private or religion versus secularism. By using the widespread visual queues of the Islamic Republic, the graffiti of Black Hand makes cultural legibility accessible but in inverting those symbols the artist offers us a glimpse into other potential forms of religiosity and secularism.

The issues speak to the politics of historiography and how we must balance difference when historicizing contemporary Iranian politics. In closing, however, I argue that historiography is not just a method but can actually be a form of politics in itself but only so long we take care to interrogate the particular conceits of history writing even while relying on them. History writing cannot and should not presume a singular way of being in the world and must be attentive to its secular foundations- the possibility of difference must be a precondition for it, not an impediment. At the same time, however, this form of critical historiography is indispensable and while it must be augmented and supplemented by other forms of knowledge, it cannot be replaced. While we must take seriously the specific way of being in the world privileged by the Islamic Republic, it is

197

still a state. The violence that sustains the nation-state more generally and the Iranian state in particular demand that we historicize its origins and its present so that we may hope to envision alternative futures.

My central intervention is that many discussions in the West about what a democratic future in Iran could and should look like effectively puts the cart before the horse. More specifically, these speculations presume the categories of secularism, religion, private, and public-then proceed to use these categories as a measure of the degree of democracy or lack thereof in Iran. To be perfectly clear, it is ultimately up to Iranians as to what that future could and should look like- neocolonial and imperialist arguments in the West that suggest otherwise be damned. But that does not mean that we cannot use Iran for thinking about the relationship of secularism, religion, and democracy more broadly, so long as this caveat is kept in mind.

In this vein, I am suggesting that we do not get hung up on the degree of religion and secularism or whether the divide between the public and private spheres is secure in Iran. Doing so only leads back to an irresolvable dichotomy between religion and secularism that in turn leads to a circular debate between the two and never shall the two meet. Instead, it is worth recalling Joan W. Scott's thoughtful self-reflection: "Perhaps it's the democratic outcomes I'm interested in more than the principle of secularism itself."[10] What happens if we presume that the categories of the religious, secular, private, and public are not stable or necessarily separate from one another? From this starting point, how could this lead to a rethinking of what democratic values are and ought to be? Within such a reconsideration of democratic values, how do we take

seriously both the substantive protections and inequalities engendered by the private/public divide?

I have sought in this dissertation to contribute to an understanding of the aspects of contemporary Iranian politics and history that often troubles or surpasses our existing conceptual vocabularies. This political history has often been inspiring and harrowing, accessible and opaque while also vacillating between the poles of fatalism and optimism. In analyzing and interrogating the categories through which political life is often made sense of, it is important not to lose sight of very real day-to-day consequences and potential of these categories. There are many in Iran who have died or risked death in the name of such concepts and there are many still who continue to pursue the hope and promise such concepts may provide. It is to them that we ultimately must defer.

[1] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*, 21.

[2] *Ibid*, 15.

[3] Robin Celikates and Yolande Jansen, "Reclaiming Democracy: An Interview with Wendy Brown on Occupy, Sovereignty, and Secularism," *Critical Legal Thinking.com*, January 30, 2013, http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/01/30/reclaiming-democracy-an-interview-with-wendy-brown-on-occupy-sovereignty-and-secularism/.

[4] Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 4.

[5] *Ibid*, 5.

[6] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Difference: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 253.

[7] *Ibid*, 253.

[8] Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*, 11

[9] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

[10] Joan W. Scott, *Politics of the Veil*, 94.

Bibliography

Abrahamian, Ervand. "Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution." *MERIP Reports*, 102 (1982), 24-28.

---. *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic.* Berkeley: University of California, 1993.

---. *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

---. *A History of Modern Iran.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

---. "The Crowd in the Iranian Revolution." *Radical History Review*, Issue 105 (Fall 2009), 13-38.

Afary, Janet. *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Afary, Janet and Kevin B. Anderson. *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Ahmed, Sara. *Differences that Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis of Theory." *Signs*, Vol 13, No. 3 (Spring 1988): 405-436.

Amnesty International. "Iran: Imprisoned cartoonist subjected to forced 'virginity test'." October 9, 2015. Accessed December 1, 2015, https://www.amnesty.org /en/latest /news/2015/10/iran-imprisoned-cartoonist-subjected-to-forced-virginity-test/.

---. "Syria's Refugee Crisis in Numbers." February 3, 2016. Accessed April 15 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/02/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities.* New York: Verso, 2006 [1983].

Ansari, Ali M. *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Ansary, Nina. "Iranian Women's Magazine Zanan Makes a Comeback." *Women's eNews*, May 28, 2014. Accessed June 1, 2014 http://womensenews.org/story/media-stories/ 140528/iranian-womens-magazine-zanan-makes-comeback#.VI4hXGTF_OR.

Arar, Rawan, Lisa Hintz, and Kelsey P. Norman. "The real refugee crisis is in the Middle East, not Europe." *Washington Post*, May 14, 2016. Accessed June 15 2016, https: //www. washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/14/the-real-refugee-crisis-is-in-the-middle-east-not-europe/.

Ardalan, Nader. "Modern Iranian Architecture 1941-79." In *Iran Modern*, edited by Layla S. Diba and Fereshteh Daftari, 73-78. New York: Asia Society Museum, 2013.

Arjomand, Said Amir. *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

---."Trying to Understand French Secularism." In *Political Theologies: Public Religion in a Post-Secular World*, edited by Hent de Vries and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan, 494-526. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.

---. "Thinking About The Secular Body, Pain, and Liberal Politics." *Cultural Anthropolgy*, Vol 26, Issue 4 (2011), 657-675.

Asad, Talal, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood. *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Asharq Al-Awsat. "Inside Iran: An Interview with 'Zanan' Magazine's Editor, Shahla Sherkat." May 11, 2007. Accessed June 1, 2014, http://www.aawsat.net/2007/ 05/article55262756.

Aslan, Reza. "Sam Harris and 'New Atheists' aren't new, aren't actually atheists." *Salon.com*, November 21, 2014. Accessed April 15 2016, http://www.salon .com/2014/ 11/21/ reza_aslan_sam_harris_and_new_atheists_arent_ new_arent_even_atheists/.

Baghi, Hatef and Colin Freeman. "Iran's Green Movement Prepared for Street Protest Against Hardline Regime Mullahs." *Telegraph*, December 26, 2009. Accessed January 15, 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/ iran/ 6891257/Irans-Green-movement-prepared-for-street-protest-against-hardline-regime-mullahs.html.

Barlow, Rebecca. *Women's Human Rights and the Muslim Question: Iran's One Million Signatures Campaign*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2012. Kindle Edition.

BBC News. "Crowds Gather to Mourn Reformist Iran Cleric Montazeri." December 20,

2009. Accessed January 1, 2015, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middleeast/8423319.stm.

Bellaigue, Christopher de. "Lifting the Veil." *The Guardian*, October 7, 2005. Accessed June 20, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/oct/07/art.iran.

Bhaba, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2010 [1994].

Bizaer, Maysam. "Iran's Christians Celebrate Christmas." *Al-Monitor*, December 28, 2014. Accessed January 15, 2015, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/ 12/iran-christians-armenians-christmas-rouhani.html.

Blake, Stephen P. *Time in Early Modern Islam: Calendar, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman Empires*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Bouroujerdi, Mehrzad. "The Paradoxes of Politics in Post-Revolutionary Iran." In *Iran at the Crossroads,* edited by John L. Esposito and R.K. Ramazani, 13-27. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Brooks, Katherine. "One of the World's Most Controversial Artworks Is Making Catholics Angry Once Again." *Huffington Post*, May 14, 2014. Accessed October 1, 2016. http: //www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/13/piss-christ-salen5317545.html.

Brown, Wendy. "Suffering Rights as Paradoxes." *Constellations* 7, no. 2 (2000), 208-229.

---. *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

---. "Rights, Tolerance, and Waning Sovereignty: An Interview with Wendy Brown". Interview with Illan rua Wall. *Irish Left Review*. September 2012. Accessed October 1, 2014 http://www.irishleftreview.org/2010/09/20/rights-tolerance-waning sovereignty-interview-wendy-brown/.

---. "Reclaiming Democracy: An Interview with Wendy Brown on Occupy, Sovereignty, and Secularism." Interview with Robin Celikates and Yolande Jansen, *Critical Legal Thinking.com*, January 30, 2013. Accessed October 1, 2016, http://criticallegalthinking .com/2013/01/30/reclaiming-democracy-an-interview-with-wendy-brown-on-occupy-sovereignty-and-secularism/.

Butler, Butler. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 2007 [1990].

Calhoun, Craig. "Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere." In *Rethinking Secularism*,

edited by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, 3-30. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

CBC News. "Mostafa Azizi Sentenced to 8 Years in Iranian prison." June 10, 2015. Accessed December 1, 2015, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/mostafa-azizi-sentenced-to-8-years-in-iranian-prison-1.3107324.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008 [2000].

Chatterjee, Partha. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Chelkowski, Peter. "The Art of Revolution and War: The Role of the Graphic Arts in Iran." In *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution*, edited by Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert, 127-141. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2002.

Chelkowski, Peter and Hamid Dabashi. *Staging A Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran.* London: Booth-Clilborn Editions, 1999.

CNN. "Iran's President Plays Down Ashura Protests." December 29, 2009. Accessed January 15, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast /12/29/iran. protests.larijani/.

Connolly, William. *Why I am Not a Secularist.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Cooper, Melinda. "Why I am not a Postsecularist." *boundary 2*, Vol. 40 No. 1 (Spring 2013), 21-39.

Dabashi, Hamid. *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.* New York: NYU Press, 1993.

---. *Iran: A People Interrupted.* New York: The New Press, 2007.

---. *Shi'ism: A religion of Protest.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011.

---. *The Green Movement in Iran.* New Brunswick: Traction Publishers, 2011.

Daftari, Fereshteh. "Another Modernism: An Iranian Perspective." In *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution*, edited by Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert, 39-88. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2002.

Dawkins, Richard . *The God Delusion.* London: Bantam Press, 2007.

Dehghan, Saeed Kamali. "Iran's Banksy: 'The walls in my city are the canvas for my paintings'." *The Guardian*, August 6, 2014. Accessed October 1, 2015. http://www. theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2014/aug/06/iran-banksy-street-graffiti-tehran-black-hand-interview.

---. "Tehran swaps 'death to America' billboards for Picasso and Matisse." *The Guardian*, May 7, 2015. Accessed June 1, 2016, https://www. theguardian.com/world /2015/may /07/tehran-swaps-death-to-america-billboards-picasso-matisse-hockney-iran,

Dennett, Daniel C. *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2006.

Dhawan, Nikita. "The Empire Prays Back: Religion, Secularity, and Queer Critique." *boundary 2*, Vol. 40 No. 1 (Spring 2013), 191-222.

Diba, Layla S. "The Formation of Modern Iranian Art: From Kamal-al-Molk to Zenderoudi." In *Iran Modern*, edited by Layla S. Diba and Fereshteh Daftari, 45-66. New York: Asia Society Museum, 2013.

Ebadi, Shirin. *Iran Awakening*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc. 2006.

Ennis, Dawn. "Kim Davis is Back in Court, Defiant as Ever." *Advocate*, January 20, 2016. Accessed April 15, 2016, http://www.advocate.com/marriage-equality/2016 /1/20/kim-davis-back-court-defiant-ever.

Erdbrink, Thomas. "Suddenly, Tehran's Mayor Becomes a Patron of the Arts." *The New York Times*, May 7, 2015. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2015 /05/08/world/middleeast/suddenly-tehrans-mayor-becomes-a-patron-of-the-arts.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&version=Moth-Visible&module=inside-nyt-region&region=inside-nyt-region&WT.nav=inside-nyt-region&_r=0.

Esfandiari, Golnaz. "Iran's 'Death to America' Graffiti Reappears After Vanishing Act." *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, September 2, 2015. Accessed October 1, 2015, http://www.rferl.org/a/persian-letters-iran-death-to-americagraffiti/27222378.html.

---. "Iran Sentences Poets, Filmmaker to Prison, Lashings." *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, October 14, 2015. Accessed December 1, 2015, http:// www.rferl.org/content/iran-jails-lashes-poets-filmmaker/27306541.html.

Ettehadieh, Mansoureh. "The Origins and Development of the Women's Movement in Iran, 1906-41." In *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, edited by Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, 85-106. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Faiola, Anthony and Stephanie Kirchner. "Islam is Europe's 'new fascism,' an other things European politicians say about Muslims." *Washington Post*, June 7, 2016. Accessed June 15 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews /wp/2016/ 06/07/ten-things-outspoken-european-politicians-are-saying-about-islam/.

The Feminist School [Iran]. "In Honor of August 27: The Third Anniversary of Campaign Face-to-Face Approach, The Symbol of Struggle in the One Million Signature Campaign, An Interview with Ms. Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani." August 26, 2009. Accessed June 1, 2014, http://www.feministschool.com /english/ spip.php? article327.

Fernando, Mayanthi L. *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Fischer, Michael MJ. "The rhythmic beat of the revolution in Iran." *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 3 (2010): 497-543.

Ghahreman, Sasan. "The Campaign for One Million Signatures: A Grassroots Effort, Interview with Sara Loghmani." *One Million Signatures Campaign [Iran]*, November 2006. Accessed June 1, 2014, http://we-change.org/site/spip.php?article282.

Grigor, Talinn. "Kingship Hybridized, Kingship Homogenized: Revivalism under the Qajar and the Pahlavi Dynasties." In *Persian Kingship and Architecture: Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis*, edited by Sussan Babaie and Talinn Grigor, 219-254. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2015.

---. *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2014.

---. "Return of the Avant-garde to the Streets of Tehran." In *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, edited by Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi, 233-252. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.

Gruber, Christiane. "The Martyrs' Museum in Tehran: Visualizing Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran." *Visual Anthropology*, No. 25, (2012): 68-97.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Translated by: Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

---. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989.

---. "On the Relation between the Secular Liberal State and Religion." In *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers*, edited by Eduardo Mendieta, 339-350. New York: Routledge, 2005.

---. "Religion in the Public Sphere." *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 14, no. 1 (2006), 1-25.

---. "Notes on a Post-Secular Society." *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Volume 25, Issue 4, (Fall 2008): 17-29.

---. " 'The Political': The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology." In *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, edited by Eduardo Medieta and Johnathan Vanantwerpen, 15-32. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Hafezi, Parisa. "Hundreds of Thousands at Pro-Government Rallies in Iran." *Reuters*, December 20, 2009. Accessed January 15, 2015,http://www. reuters.com/ article/2009/12/30/us-iran-rallies-idUSTRE5BT16O20091230.

Halliday, Fred. "Iran's Tide of History: Counter-Revolution and After." *In The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future*, edited by Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, 53-59. New York: Melville House Publishing, 2010.

Harper's Bazaar Art. "Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art: The Crown Jewel." January 12, 2016. Accessed June 15, 2016 http://www.harpersbazaar arabia.com/art/ exhibitions/tehran-museum-of-contemporary-art-the-crown-jewel.

Harris, Sam. *The End of Faith, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004.

---. "The Reality of Islam." *Samharris.org*, February 8, 2006. Accessed April 15, 2016, https://www.samharris.org/ blog /item/the-reality-of-islam.

Hinkson, Melinda. "Image-Encounters with the Techno-Mediated Other: Regarding Post-Election Iran on Youtube." *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 16, no. 4 (2011): 131-143.

Hirschkind, Charles. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Hitchens, Christopher. *God is Not Great*. New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc., 2007.

Holpuch, Amanda. "Andres Serrano's Controversial Piss Christ goes on view in New

York." *The Guardian*, September 28, 2012. Accessed October 1, 2016. https://www. theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/sep/28/andres-serrano-piss-christ-new-york.

Hossein-zadeh, Ismael, "Iran's Presidential Election One Year Later–Why the Greens Failed." *Middle East Online*, June 15, 2010. Accessed January 15, 2015, http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=39561.

Howard Griffin Gallery London. "Perception: Mehdi Ghadyanloo." February 2015. Accessed October 1, 2015, http://howardgriffingallery.com/exhibitions/perception.

Hunt, Lynn. *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

---. Family Romance of the French Revolution. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

---."The World We Have Gained: The Future of the French Revolution." *Presidential Address to the American Historical Society*, January 3, 2003. Accessed September 1, 2016. https: //www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and archives/ presidential-addresses/lynn-hunt.

Hussain, Ali J. "The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbala." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 25, No. 1, (2005): 77-88.

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. "Banning of Films Continues Under Rouhani Administration, 14 Movies Now Forbidden." August 17, 2015. Accessed June 20, 2016, http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/08/banning-of-films-continues-under-rouhani-administration-14-movies-now-forbidden/.

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. "Gender Inequality and Discrimination: The Case of Iranian Women." March 8, 2013. Accessed June 1, 2014, http://iranhrdc.org/ english/publications/legal-commentary/1000000261-gender-inequality-and-discrimination-the-case-of-iranian-women.html#20.

Jerusalem Post. "Iranian cartoon contest links US, Israel to ISIS." May 25, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2015, http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/ISIS-cartoon-contest-in-Tehran-draws-works-from-forty-countries-404012.

John, Tara. "Richard Dawkins Compares Ahmed the Clockmaker to ISIS Killer." *Time*, November 25, 2015. Accessed April 15, 2016, http://time.com/4126983/richard-dawkins-ahmed-mohamed-isis/.

Kampeas, Ron. "Israel envoy: Nuclear Iran 'a thousand times' more dangerous than Islamic State." *The Times of Israel*, September 19, 2014. Accessed April 1, 2016 http://www. timesofisrael.com/israel-envoy-nuclear-iran-a-thousand-times-more-dangerous-than-islamic-state/.

Kamrava, Mehran. *Iran's Intellectual Revolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Karimi, Nasser. "Tehran Art Auction Draws Record Sales, Signaling Emerging Iranian Art Market." *Haaretz*, May 29, 2016. Accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.haaretz .com/middle-east-news/iran/1.722056.

Keshavarz, Nahid. "From a Reading Group to the Campaign for One Million Signatures: An Interview with Jelve Javaheri." *One Million Signatures Campaign [Iran]*, December 30, 2007. Accessed June 1, 2014, http://wechange.org/site/ english/spip.php?article196.

Keshmirshekan, Hamid. "Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art: Development and Challenges." In *Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art*, edited by Hossein Amirsadeghi. London: Thames and Hudson, 2009.

---. *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives*. London: Saqi Books, 2013.

Khan, Zeba. "Words matter in 'ISIS' war, so use 'Daesh'." *The Boston Globe*, October 9, 2014. Accessed April 15 2016, https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2014/ 10/09/words-matter-isis-war-use-daesh/V85GYEuasEEJgrUun0dMUP/story. html.

Khomeini, Ruhollah . *The Ashura Uprising in the Words & Messages of Imam Khomeini*. Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works- International Affairs Department. Tehran: Iran, 1995. Online Edition, Accessed January 15, 2015, http://english.sahartv.ir/media/pdf/The Ashura Uprising.pdf.

Khorasani, Noushin Ahmadi. *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story (English Edition)*. Women's Learning Partnership, 2009.

Khosravi, Shahram. "Graffiti in Tehran." *Anthropology Now*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (April 2013): 1-17.

Kurzman, Charles. *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Leon, Melissa. "Bill Maher and Richard Dawkins Slam Muslims: 'To Hell with Their

Culture'." *The Daily Beast*, October 10, 2015. Accessed April 15, 2016, http: //www.thedaily beast.com/articles/2015/10/03/bill-maher-and-richard-dawkins-slam-muslims-to-hell-with-their-culture.html.

Locke, John. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 1689. Reprint, New York: Prometheus Books, 1990.

Lombardi, Pietro. "Iran's President visits Italy: Nude statues covered." *CNN*, January 27, 2016, Accessed June 15, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/26/europe/italy-covered-naked-statues-rouhani/.

Mackey, Robert. "Latest Iran Protests Reverberate Online." *The New York Times*, July 31, 2009. Accessed January 1, 2015, http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com /2009/07 /31/ latest-iran-protests-reverberate-online/?_r=0.

Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh. " 'This is the Price that as a Man Seeking Equality I am Willing to Pay': An Interview with Amir Yaghoub-Ali." *One Million Signatures Campaign [Iran]*,August 6, 2008. Accessed June 1, 2014, http://wechange.org/ site/english/spip.php?article315.

Mahmood, Saba and Charles Hirschkind. "Feminism, The Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency." *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75 No. 2, (2002), 339-354.

---. Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

---. "Can Secularism Be Other-wise?." In *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, edited by Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, 282-299 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

---. *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Makarechi, Kia. "Iran Set to Unveil Collection of Western Art Largely Unseen Since 1979 Revolution." *Vanity Fair*, November 12, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016, http:// www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/11/tehran-museum-iran-western-art -lashai.

Manoukian, Setrag. "Where is this place? Crowds, Audio-vision, and Poetry in Postelection Iran." *Public Culture*, 22, no. 2 (2010): 237-263.

Mashayekhi, Azadeh. "Tehran, the Scene of Modernity in the Pahlavi Dynasty: Modernisation and Urbanisation Processes 1925-1979." In *Urban Change in Iran: Stories of Rooted Histories and Every-accelerating Developments*, edited by Fatemeh

Farnaz Afefian and Seyed Hossein Iradj Moeini, 103-119. London: Springer International Publishing, 2016

Mehryar, Amir, Gholamali Farjadi, and Mohammad Tabibian. "Labor-Force Participation of Women in Contemporary Iran." In *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, edited by Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, 182-203. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Melvin, Don. "Iran hosts anti-ISIS cartoon competition." *CNN*, May 31, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/31/middleeast/iran-cartoon-competition/index.html.

Merry, Robert W. "The West and Islam: The Clash of Civilizations is underway, and Muslims intend to win." *The Washington Times*, November 16, 2015. Accessed April 15 2016, http://www .washing tontimes.com/news/2015/nov/16/robert-merry-clash-between-west-and-islam/.

Mirespassi, Ali. *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

---. *Democracy in Modern Iran: Islam, Culture, and Political Change*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. "Is Time on Iranian Women Protester's Side?." *Middle East Report*, June 16, 2006. Accessed June 1, 2014, http://www.merip.org/mero/mero 061606.

Moallem, Minoo. *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and The Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Moghissi, Haideh. *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994.

Moruzzi, Norma Claire. "A Problem with Headscarves: Contemporary Complexities of Political and Social Identity." *Political Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (1994): 653-672.

Mozzafari, Kaveh. "A Transcendental Campaign." Translated by Shole Irani. Accessed June 1, 2014, http://we-change.org/site/spip.php?article409.

Mostaghim, Ramin and Nabih Bulos. "Iran uses the pen and the sword against the Islamic State." *The Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016, http://www. latimes. com /world/middleeast/la-fg-iran-cartoonists-20150607-story.html.

Mufti, Aamir R. ed. "Antimonies of the Secular: A Special Issue," *boundary 2*, Vol. 40 No.

1 (Spring 2013).

Mufti, Aamir R. "Why I am not a Postsecularist." *boundary 2*, Vol. 40 No. 1 (Spring 2013), 7-19.

Nabavi, Negin. "From 'Reform' to 'Rights': Mapping a Changing Discourse in Iran, 1997-2009." In *Iran: From Theocracy to the Green Movement*, edited by Negin Nabavi, 39-54. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Nayouf, Hayyan. "Iran's Basij Sisters suppressed election protests," *Al Arabiya News*, August 5, 2009. Accessed June 1, 2014, https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/08/05/ 80895.html.

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

Obeidallah, Dean. "Bill Maher's Muslim Problem." *CNN*, October 7, 2014. Accessed April 15, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/07/opinion/obeidallah-maher-muslim-comments/.

One Million Signatures Campaign [Iran]. "Effect of Laws on Women's Lives." August 28, 2006. Accessed June 1, 2014, http://we-change.org/site/english/spip.php?article41.

O'Regan, Kirsten. "The Beautification Bureau." *Dissent*, Volume 63, Number 3, (Summer 2015), 12-18.

Osanloo, Arzoo. *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Paidar, Parvin. *Women and the Politic Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

PBS Frontline."The Writing on the Wall." July 1, 2009. Accessed January 1, 2015, http:// www. pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/07/the-writing-on-the-wall.html.

---. "Ahmadinejad has proof US trying to stop Hidden Imam." December 6, 2009. Accessed January 15, 2015.http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/ 12/ahmadinejad-has-proof-us-trying-to-stop-hidden-imam.html.

Petras, James. "Iranian Elections: The 'Stolen Elections' Hoax." Centre for Research on Globaization, June 18, 2009, http://www.globalresearch.ca/iranian-elections-the- stolen-elections-hoax.

Pilkington, Ed. "Christian activists force Smithsonian to pull Aids video from show."
        The Guardian, December 1, 2010. Accessed October 1, 2016,
        https://www.theguardian .com/artanddesign/2010/dec/01/smithsonian-pulls-
        christ-video.

Porter, Lizzie. "Iran opens secret cache of art masterpieces." *The Telegraph*, November 25
        2015. Accessed June 20, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/
        middle-east/iran/articles/Iran-opens-secret-cache-of-art-masterpieces/.

Povoledo, Elisabetta. "Italians Mock Cover-Up of Nude Statues for Iranian's Visit." *The
        New York Times*, January 27, 2016. Accessed June 14, 2016 http://www.ny
        times.com/ 2016/01/28/world/europe/hassan-rouhani-italy-visit-nude-statues-
        capitoline-museums.html?_r=0.

Puar, Jasbir K. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke
        University Press, 2007.

Pullella, Philip. "Anger grows in Italy over covering nudes for Iran's Rouhani." *Reuters*,
        January 27, 2016. Accessed June 15, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-
        italy-iran-rouhani-nudes-idUSKCN0V51OE.

Ram, Haiggai. "Multiple Iconographies: Political Posters in the Iranian Revolution," In
        Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution, edited by Shiva Balaghi and Lynn
        Gumpert, 89-102. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2002.

Ratti, Manav. *The Postsecular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion, and Literature*. New York:
        Routledge, 2013.

Rauh, Elizabeth L. "Green Movement Thirty Years Later: Iranian Visual Culture from
        the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Presidential Protests." *International Journal of
        Communication*. 7 (2013): 1316-1343.

Rezaian, Jason. "Iran's Jewish community reflects a complicated relationship with
        Israel." *Washington Post*, October 2, 2013. Accessed January 15, 2016,
        http://www. washington post. com/world/middle_east/irans-jewish-
        community-reflects-a-complicated-relationship-with-israel/2013/10/02/
        e531039e-2ac4-11e3-b141-298f46539716_story.html.

Riemer, Nick. "The Roots of Islamophobia in France." *Jacobin*, August 29, 2016.
        Accessed September 1, 2016, https: //www.jacobinmag.com/2016/08/burkini-
        ban-islamophobia-valls-france-secularism-islam/.

Robbins, Bruce. "Why I am not a Postsecularist." *boundary 2*, Vol. 40 No. 1 (Spring
        2013), 55-76.

Russo, Ann. "The Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid: The Intersections of Feminism and Imperialism in the United States," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 8:4, (December 2006): 557-580.

Sachedina, Abdulaziz. "A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imamite Imam." *Studia Islamica*, No. 48, (1978): 109-124.

Sahimi, Muhammad. "Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's Fatwa." *PBS*, July 12, 2009. Accessed January 2015, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/ tehranbureau/2009/07/grand-ayatollah-montazeris-fatwa.html.

Sameh, Catherine. "Discourses of Equality, Rights, and Islam in the One Million Signatures Campaign in Iran." *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 12:3-4 (2010): 444-463.

Schachtel, Jordan. "Ben Carson: The West is Facing A 'Clash of Civilizations' with Fundamentalist Islam." *Breibart News Network*, December 3, 2015. Accessed April 15 2016, http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/12/03/ben-carson-west-facing-clash-civilizations-fundamentalist-islam/.

Scott, Joan W. *The Politics of the Veil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Sedghi, Hamideh. *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Seth, Sanjay. "Reason or Reasoning: Clio or Silva?." *Social Text* 78, Vol. 22, No.1, (Spring 2004): 85-101.

---. *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Setrakian, Lara. "Inside Iran's Billion-Dollar Art Basement." *ABC News*, March 1, 2008. Accessed June 20, 2016, http://abcnews.go.com/Travel/story?id=4372055& page=1.

Sharma, Sarah. *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Sherwood, Harriet. "Hamas and Iran rebuild ties three years after falling out over Syria." *The Guardian*, January 9, 2014. Accessed January 1, 2015,http://www.theguardian .com/world/2014/jan/09/hamas-iran-rebuild-ties-falling-out-syria.

Sonn, Tamara. *Islam: A Brief History, 2nd Edition*. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Inside Out in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

---. "Use and abuse of human rights," *boundary 2*, Vol. 32, no. 1 (2005), 131-189.

Stanton, Jenny, "Beheadings, Suicide Bombings and the Destruction of Ancient Artefacts: Anti-ISIS artwork Depicting Terror Group's Most Horrific Crimes go on Display in Iranian Competition." *Daily Mail*, May 28, 2015. Accessed June 13, 2016, http:// www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3100524/Beheadings-suicide-bombings-destruction-ancient-artefacts-Anti-ISIS-artwork-depicting-terror-group-s-horrific-crimes-display-IRANIAN-competition.html.

Stenger, Victor J. *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason*. New York: Prometheus Books, 2009.

Suddath, Claire. "Crackdowns on Creativity: Robert Mapplethorpe." *Time*, April 5, 2011. Accessed October 1, 2016, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article /0,28804,2063218_2063273_2063220,00.html.

Taheri, Amir. *The Persian Night: Iran Under the Khomeinist Revolution*. New York: Encounter Books, 2008.

Tahmasebi-Birgani, Victoria. "Green Women of Iran: The Role of the Women's Movement During and After Iran's Presidential Election of 2009."*Constellations* 17, no. 1 (2010): 78-86.

Tait, Robert. "Funeral of Iranian Cleric Montazeri Turns into Political Protest." *The Guardian*, December 21, 2009. Accessed January 1, 2015, http://www.the guardian .com/ world/2009/dec/21/iran-funeral-ayatollah-montazeri-protest.

---. "Nine deaths in bloody clashes at Ashura mourning ceremony in Tehran." *The Guardian*,December 27, 2009. Accessed January 1, 2015,http://www.theguardian .com/world /2009/dec/27/iran-protests-tehran-ashura-ceremony.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

---. "Modernity and the Rise of the Public Sphere." In The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Vol. 14, edited by Grethe B. Peterson, 203-260. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993.

---. "The Politics of Recognition." In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Religion*, edited by Amy Gutman, 25-74. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

---. *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

---. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

---. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

---. "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism." In *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, edited by Eduardo Medieta and Johnathan Vanantwerpen, 34-59. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Tharoor, Ishann. "Iranians erase 'Death to America' graffiti on wall of former U.S. Embassy." *Washington Post*, August 31, 2015. Accessed October 1, 2015 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/08/31/iranians-erase-death-to-america-graffiti-on-wall-of-former-u-s-embassy/.

Theodoulou, Michael. "Jews in Iran Describe a Life of Freedom Despite Anti-Israel Actions by Tehran." *Christian Science Monitor*, February 3, 1998. Accessed January 15, 2016, http://www.csmonitor.com/1998/0203/020398.intl.intl.3.html.

Torbat, Akbar E. "Iran's Presidential Elections, Islamic Populism and Liberation Theology," *Centre for Research on Globalization*, June 28, 2009. Accessed January 15, 2015, http:// www.globalresearch.ca/iran-s-presidential-elections-islamic-populism-and-liberation-theology/14143.

United Nations High Commission for Refugees. "2014 UNHCR Country Operations Profile- Islamic Republic of Iran." Accessed June 1, 2014, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486f96.html.

Vakil, Sanam. *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*. New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011.

Waldman, Peter and Golnar Motevalli. "Iran Has Been Hiding One of the World's Great Collection of Modern Art." *Bloomberg Businessweek*, November 17, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016, http://www.bloomberg.com/features/2015-tehran-museum-of-contemporary-art/.

Walzer, Michael. "Islamism and the Left." *Dissent*, Winter 2015. Accessed June 2016. https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/islamism-and-the-left.

Warren, James. "Iran is more dangerous to Iraq than ISIS, terror experts tell U.S. Senate panel." *New York Daily News*, March 24, 2015. Accessed April 1, 2016, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/iran-dangerous-iraq-isis-u-s-terror-experts-article-1.2160637.

White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Widyaratna, Kishani. "If hope is an impossible demand, then we demand the impossible' -Judith Butler at Occupy Wall Street video." *Versobooks.com*, October 24, 2011. Accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/765-if-hope-is-an-impossible-demand-then-we-demand-the-impossible-judith-butler-at-occupy-wall-street-video.

Worth, Robert F. and Nazila Fathi. "Police Are Said to Have Killed 10 in Iran Protests." *The New York Times*, December 27, 2009. Accessed January 15, 2015, http://www. nytimes.com /2009/12/28/world/middleeast/28iran.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

X, Ali. "Tehran's Graffiti War." *France 24,* March 2, 210. Accessed January 1, 2015, http://observers.france24.com/en/20100302-tehran-graffiti-war-green-movement-basij-militia-spray-paint-tags.

Ya'alon, Moshe. "Why Iran is More Dangerous than Islamic State." *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 2016. Accessed October 1, 2016, http://www.latimes.com/opinion /op-ed/la-oe-yaalon-iran-threat-20160929-snap-story.html.

Yarbakhsh, Elisabeth Jane. "Green Martyrdom and the Iranian State." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 28, no. 1 (2014), 77-87.