



Cultural Engineering Under Authoritarian Regimes: Islamization of Universities in Postrevolutionary Iran

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze the efforts that have been made to Islamize Iranian universities, specifically since the emergence of hardliners in 2005. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Islamic regime relentlessly intensified its efforts to Islamize universities to train a new generation of ideologically driven students. In the three decades following the Revolution, three major periods of university Islamization have been implemented. The Cultural Revolution, which started in 1980, was the first step in the Islamization of Iran's universities: to cleanse the higher education systems from students and professors who criticized the new established Islamic regime. By increasing the number of students and the development of universities throughout Iran in the Rafasanjani era, the second wave of the Islamization of the university was triggered by Ayatollah Khamenei in 1994. During the reform era, the Islamization of universities slowed because of the many confrontations between the Supreme Leader and the reformist administrations. With the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential election, the Islamization of universities intensified. While there are a few publications about the Islamization of universities, they mainly focused on the first and second decades following the 1979 Revolution. Focusing on the third period, this article will investigate the different strategies and tactics for the Islamization of universities, as well as reasons for its failures.

Cultural Revolution: The First Wave of University Islamization

The university as a modern institution has continued to play an important role in the political transformation of Iran. Political regimes have used the university to produce and transform knowledge, and as an important agent for political socialization. Since the 1920s, when Tehran University was established, the university has been one of the most prestigious institutions in the struggle for political change in Iran. For more than seven decades, student movements have played a leading role in sparking and promoting social and political insurgency in Iran (Parsa, 2000, p. 95). That is why both the Pahlavi and the Islamic regimes have tried to control and suppress these movements through different mechanisms (Golkar, 2007).

The relationship between the university and the Iranian state has been highly controversial since the establishment of Islamic regime in 1979. Clerics were aware of



the importance of the university and its role in overthrowing Pahlavi's regime, which inspired them to maintain control over universities and students. The first attempt to Islamize universities involved closing the universities and declaring Cultural Revolution occurred in 1981.

To set this policy in motion, the Bureau of the Cultural Revolution (BCR), *Setad-e Enghelab-e Farhangi*, was established in March 1981 by Ayatollah Khomeini, who appointed seven persons to design and determine cultural policies for Iran's universities based on Islamic culture. To do this, the BCR established the Committee for Islamizing Universities, which was responsible for designing the strategies and policies for Islamizing universities. The committee published the results of its activities in a document entitled "Purposes and Strategies of Islamic Universities" (Golkar, 2008). To implement this plan, the BCR organized its activities into two main branches—the executive branch and the planning branch. In the first branch, the bureau focused on selecting and training ideologically driven professors and students. Within the executive branch, the BCR created two main institutions for selecting and training lecturers in universities, the Committee for Selection of Professors, or *Hayat-e Gozinesh-e Asatid*, and the *Trabit Moders* School.

The Committee for Selection of Professors sought to select lecturers who believed in Islam and, more importantly, in the *Velayat-e Faqih* or "guardianship of the jurist," since many of the professors—about 20,000—were expelled by this committee, accused of being either Marxist or liberal. The BCR also established the *Trabit Moders* School, which was responsible for training a new generation of Islamic professors who believed in the Islamic regime's ideology. In another important step, the BCR created an additional institution, the Committee for Selection of Students, *Hayat-e Gozinesh-e Danshjou*, to ban opponents of the regime from entering universities, while paving the way for students who supported the regime with revolutionary quotas in *Konkor* or the national university entrance's exam.

In the second planning branch, the bureau implemented policies through their curricula, syllabi, and even textbooks. For this reason, the Center of Academic Publication, *Markez Nasher-Daneshghai*, was established in 1981, its purpose being to translate and write new "purified" textbooks. The most influential body was the Office of Collaboration of Seminary and Universities. This office was responsible for reviewing the curricula and syllabi and for changing them, based on Islamic ideology. The main changes were in the humanities and social sciences, including economics, sociology, law and politics, psychology, and educational science. The addition of Islamic Studies courses, mandatory for all students, was chosen by this office. The Organization for Researching and Composing University Textbooks in the Humanities, *Samt*, was another institution that was created to Islamize university textbooks and to provide educational materials for teaching at universities.

To develop the plan of Islamization of society and strengthening its activities, the BCR was upgraded to the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (SCCR) or *Shoura-ye Ali-ye Enghelab-e Farhangi*, in 1984. Like the BCR, the SCCR had the



power to enact legislation independently of the *Majles* (parliament). In 1985, the regulation to establish disciplinary committees was passed by the SCCR, which were responsible for identifying and punishing student crimes at universities, mostly political and moral crimes, such as not following the Islamic dress code or behavior. The most prominent law ratified by the SCCR during this period, was “the regulation of preservation and maintenance of the rules of Islamization of higher education institutions” in 1987. According to these regulations, universities were responsible for monitoring and implementing Islamic regulations concerning the separation of men and women to avoid unnecessary mixing environments. According to this regulation, male and female students should be divided into separate classes, or sit in separate rows. Moreover, even in hospitals, patients had to be separated and treated by physicians and nurses of the same sex (“The regulation of preservation,” 1987).

With these regulations, universities were reined in during the decade following the 1979 revolution. For the decade, independent student movements were absent from universities because of expanded political control.

The Second Wave of University Islamization

With the end of the Iran–Iraq war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the relationship between the State and the universities changed significantly. Enrollment in higher education increased from 175,675 students in 1979 to more than 344,045 in 1991–1992 (Zarafshani, Knobloch, & Aghahi, 2008, p. 70). This rapid increase of university students made conservative groups worry, believing that the schools were just trying to keep up with the demand for higher education, and not moving toward becoming Islamic schools (Nabavi, 2001, p. 26). Therefore, in the beginning of the 1990s, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei requested that the university become re-Islamized. Following his command, the first attempt was to establish the Council for the Reviving of Humanities and Social Science Textbooks, in 1995. This council, which was established under direction of the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, organized 12 subgroups for reviewing existing textbooks and recommending “proper textbooks.”

During 1995–1997, Ayatollah Khamenei repeatedly insisted on the re-Islamization of higher education. He said that Iran’s universities were not yet Islamic, and asked the authorities to take urgent steps to Islamize them. He added, “What should have been done is not done yet. It means that the universities are not Islamic yet. Islamize the universities, this is a fundamental change . . . and requires massive decision-making processes” (Islamization of universities, 1996). In his opinion, one of the indicators of this problem was the development of insulting ideologically driven lecturers and students, like the *Basiji* (Mobilization of the Oppressed) students. To curb this tendency, Khamenei asked the staff of the Ministry of Education to begin implementing a series of fundamental and profound changes to re-Islamize Iran’s universities (“Iran’s universities should become Islamic source,”



1996). As he suggested, one method was dismissing university professors who did not believe in Islam and the regime, and replacing them with religious and committed individuals who were devoted to the regime and embraced the values of Islam.

To obey his command, the Minister of Higher Education established the staff for Islamizing Universities at the Ministry of Higher Education in August 1996. This staff, which consists of the Minister of Higher Education, three of his deputies, and representatives of the Islamic School of Qom (*Hawzeh*), had several subcommittees, including the Committee for Human Sciences' Books Authoring and Translation, the Committee for Evaluating Current Books in Human Sciences, the Committee for Teaching Appropriate Subjects in Universities, the Committee for Western Studies, and the Committee for Relationships with the Hawzeh (Taghavi Moghadam, 1996, p. 13).

The victory of Mohammad Khatami in the 1997 presidential election, and the vital role played by university students in supporting the so-called reformist movement, caused the Supreme Leader to insist more on the Islamization of universities (Mahdi, 1999). To follow his instruction, the SCCR, which was dominated by conservatives, supported the expansion of *Basiji* militia forces in the universities and established a new council named "the Council for Islamizing Educational Institutes" (CIEI) in 1997. To monitor the Islamization of educational institutes, on August 4, 1998, the CIEI required every institution to establish a committee for Development and Consolidation of Islamic Principles and Values in Higher Education Centers. These committees were established in the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, and Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

Since 1998, the CIEI has ratified many regulations, including establishing University Cultural Councils. This body was responsible for all social and cultural activities at each university, including student publications, meetings, associations, and so on. Supported by the SCCR, the Office of Collaboration of Seminary and Universities, unused since 1989, was upgraded to the Research Center of Seminary and Universities. Controlled by conservatives and clerics, it was supposed to develop Islamic Human Sciences, by writing and translating the Islamic textbooks for teaching at universities ("Role of the research center," 2010).

The CIEI ratified a document entitled "Principles of Islamic Universities" on December 1998. According to this significant document, Unitarian belief should be the goal of Islamic universities; instruction, learning, and studying should be considered a prayer toward this goal. In other words, in an Islamic university, people should move only toward Islamic goals and ethics ("Twenty years of effort," 2005, p. 149). The CIEI also ratified Religious Teaching Policies on June 22, 1999. The CIEI created the Committee for Developing Religious Educational Policies in Educational Institutes to strengthen religious education by coordinating it with new policies and by updating religious education methods.

The most crucial step in Islamizing educational institutes, however, was the final ratification of the document of "Strategies of Policies for Islamizing Educational



Institutes” on May 13, 2000 (“Islamic university, principles, and strategies,” 2001). The CIEI analyzed the university pillars and categorized its strategic policies into six parts: professor, student, curriculum and syllabi, cultural programming, educational programming, and school management. Their main goal in designing these policies was to form the basis for an Islamic university according to the fundamentals of an Islamic university. For example, regarding professors, the main strategy of the CIEI was to “create the legal basis for employing and choosing appropriate professors based on their education, belief, religion and commitment to the fundamental values of the Islamic regime” (“Islamic university, principles, and strategies,” 2001).

To achieve this goal, the council asked for a reevaluation of the academic staffs’ employment rules, to choose the best professors based on their education, belief, and ideological commitment. The council also asked for (1) improved Islamic conviction among high school students; (2) strengthened Islamic morals and values among university students; (3) evaluating and strengthening university policies; and (4) improving preuniversity educational and religious programs. The council also proposed policies of traditional Islamic culture in universities, such as segregation of male and female students. According to the CIEI, the representative office of the Supreme Leader became responsible for organizing all of the religious activities at universities. Duties included defending the values of the Islamic Revolution, paying particular attention to the establishment of mosques and prayer halls, and developing a culture of chastity in educational institutes. The CIEI also passed ideological laws during Khatami’s second term, including the creation of the Committee for Organized Prayer in Educational Institutes, and the ratification of the unification strategy between universities and the Hawzeh, or Islamic schools, and the establishment of a training center of religious subjects in 2003 (“Strategic document university and seminary,” 2003). The main goal of all these rules was to increase the presence of the clergy and ideology in universities.

Interestingly, these laws were never fully implemented because of the reformist administration in office. In contrast with the CIEI, which was controlled by the conservative figures, the Higher Education Ministry was directed by the reformists, who tried to devolve more authority to universities. Since 2000, universities have become more autonomous in developing their curricula and syllabi. They were also permitted to choose their administration, including deans of faculty and chancellors of the university through an election process. The SCCR also gave its authority to select faculty members to university in 2002. As a result, universities became more independent in hiring faculty. During this time, the Selecting Lecturers Committee, or *Kommittee Gozinsb Ostad*, at each university became responsible for investigating the qualifications of teaching candidates and hiring them (“Transferring of the selection students,” 2002). With these changes, many of reformist scholars simply joined universities between 2003 and 2005. It is worth mentioning that during this relaxed period, the number of female students in universities increased steadily. In 2001 and 2002, the admission rate of girls was higher than that of boys in all group subjects except



mathematics and engineering. In some academic disciplines, such as agriculture, 70% of total enrollments were female (Moinifar, 2011, p. 51). According to another piece, 70% of Iranian university students were women in 2004. These strides were another source of anxiety for conservatives, concerning universities (Esfandiari, 2005).

These transformations made conservatives angry, increasing the tension between reformist administrations and the status quo Council of Islamization of Universities. The Supreme Leader criticized Iran's Higher Education Minister personally about the unfulfillment of university Islamization. He criticized holding music concerts at universities, student exchange programs at foreign universities, and holding mixed-sex academic tours ("Islamization of universities," 2011). Immediately after the Supreme Leader's speech, the SCCR ratified a regulation on December 1, 2003, entitled "Executive Regulation of Policies of Promotion of Cultural Activities at Universities." The goal was to limit cultural activities at universities, including banning student camping trips and tours. In spite of these regulations, these policies were never fully implemented because of the reformist administration's independence. As a result, the Council of Islamization of University was suspended by the Higher Education Ministry beginning in 2004 ("Interview with Hojjat Al Islam Ghonche," 2007).

The Third Wave of University Islamization

The discussions of Islamizing universities began during the first days after the Ahmadinejad government took office in 2005. One of Basij lecturers, Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi, was appointed Minister of Sciences, Research, and Technology (MSRT) with authority to oversee and implement educational regulations, which were not enforced during the reform period.

The office of the CIEI moved to the Office of the Representative of Supreme Leader in Universities and was reactivated. Its first act of business was firing the politically active students and lecturers, especially the latter reformists who joined universities during the second term of Khatami. University scholars were asked to spend sabbaticals in the holy city of Qom, under the cleric establishment instead of Western universities. This biased targeting was an act of revenge against reformers and the reform administration.

In spite of these activities, Ahmadinejad and The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi, who had been relentlessly emphasizing the Islamization of universities, insisted on the acceleration of the Islamization of universities. The Supreme Leader also was not satisfied with the progress of the Islamization projects and refused to visit the Ministry of Higher Education in 2007 (Razavi, 2009, p. 13). As a result, Iran's Higher Education Minister established the Committee for the Follow up of the Supreme Leader's Orders Concerning Higher Education in 2008. He promised to finish this project within five years, stating that the government would spend as much money as needed to purify and transform the universities into Islamic



universities. To achieve this, the Higher Education Minister appointed a more conservative clergyman, Hojjat-Al-Islam Shateri, as new chief of CIEI. He also established the Committee for Tracking of the Supreme Leader's Order on Islamization of universities in 2007. With these changes, three priority categories were established for the new wave of Islamization of higher education, including lecturers, students, and educational contents.

The efforts to control universities led to deep disappointment and frustration among students and professors. In fact, during the June 2009 elections, 70% of university professors and students voted against President Ahmadinejad (*BBC News*, 2009). The crucial role students and professors played in the creation and expansion of the Green Movement was a sign of the failure of Ahmadinejad's efforts to control universities.

For this reason, the regime called yet again for the acceleration of a new cultural revolution in universities. Ayatollah Khamenei warned in the summer of 2009 that Western teachings had made students uncertain about religion. He criticized the universities that did not have enough ideologically qualified instructors who "[believe] in the Islamic world view" to teach the more than two million students studying the social sciences and humanities. The Supreme Leader stated that "humanities and liberal arts disciplines are based on philosophies whose foundations are materialism and disbelief in godly and Islamic teachings." He added that "teaching those disciplines led to propagation of skepticism and doubt about religious principles and beliefs" (Nafisi, 2009). His speech signaled that university Islamization should be emphasized.

To achieve this goal, Kamran Daneshjoo, who was responsible for holding the disputed 2009 presidential election, became the new Minister of Science, Research and Technology. Daneshjoo was appointed by Iran's Higher Education Minister, despite controversy over his scientific credentials, including accusations of plagiarism by the scholarly journal, *Nature* (Butler, 2009; Daragahi, 2009). In Daneshjoo's opinion, the most serious problem of Iranian universities is that they were copied from Western universities, which remove God and religion from human relationships. In a meeting with members of Iran's parliament, Daneshjoo emphasized that his primary goal was to move universities closer to those values preached in Islamic teachings. He promised that Iranian universities would be fully Islamic in the near future (Asermerooz, 2011).

Following Daneshjoo's promises, the CIEI increased its activities and began to consider other points of "Document of Strategies for Islamizing Universities," including Islamization of a cultural planning system, educational environment, and management. One of the new regulations, which was passed by the council in 2009, was to establish a Deputy of Cultural Affairs in each university, to plan and monitor cultural activities ("Cultural engineering in universities," 2009).

To sum up, since the beginning of the third wave of university Islamization, Iran's regime has tightened its oversight of universities in every aspect of higher education.



These policies can be classified into five main categories: management, students, lecturers, the curriculum, syllabi and educational contents, and the universities' environment or spaces.

Islamization of University Management

For imposing the political control of universities, the first step has been to replace independent academics with dedicated and committed figures, especially the Basiji lecturer. As Iran's Higher Education Minister stated, "If we want to Islamize the universities, I have to choose my colleagues in each university to ensure that they understand our anxieties concerning the expansion of Islamic values at universities, and implement our orders" ("Comprehensive management regulation," 2011).

Since 2005, The Ahmadinejad government has replaced many of the meritorious academic staff with fundamentalist figures, who believe deeply in university Islamization. Iran's Higher Education Minister announced in 2008 that "In the past three years, many university presidents were replaced, and most new presidents are either members of the Basij or have shown with their actions that they are committed to and supportive of the administration" (Rooz Online, 2008). In telling cases, some clergy, without any academic credentials, were appointed to be deans of universities, such as Tehran University as Iran's flagship university, and Allameh Tabatabai University, Iran's biggest humanities university. The selection of these people was a sign of the seizure of universities by a "seminary mentality."

The second wave of replacing university deans began after 2009. Danshjoon repeatedly warned university chancellors that they would be fired if they did not implement the regulations to Islamize universities and end the promotion of secularism ("The explicit warning to the universities' deans," 2010). Many university deans were fired and replaced, some by force, because they did not confront the Green Movement's supporters on their campuses. According to a report, more than 50% of heads of academic institutions changed in 2010 (*Bultan News*, 2010).

According to Danshejoo in 2010, the regulation of universities' management changed after 18 years. According to new regulation, the universities' deans are responsible for everything that happens in their universities; they are responsible for choosing their deputies and head of faculties. For this reason, in replacing pro-regime figures as deans of universities, all of the staff were replaced by regime loyalists. These changes have bolstered the implementation of the cleansing of political dissidents from Iran's universities.

Islamization of University Lecturers

The second strategy concerning the Islamization of universities, implemented by the regime, is controlling the university lecturers. From Ahmadinejad's point of view,



liberal and secular university lecturers are the main reason for secularism's influence over the country's higher educational system (*Aftab News*, 2006). Moreover, Iran's Higher Education Minister clearly warned that his administration will dismiss all faculty members who do not "share the regime's direction" and who do not have a "practical commitment to the Supreme Leader." In his opinion, universities should use only professors who are masters in Islamic studies, and are able to criticize Western ideologies (Theodoulou, 2010).

The regime has used various tactics to achieve this goal, including expelling dissidents, hiring pro-regime loyalists, imposing peer pressure, and instilling fear among lecturers. In the first step, the Lecturer Selection Committee that was inactive for a long time has become quite active lately. It began to pay particular attention to academic staff hired before 2005, by reevaluating their files. The result of these investigations was the expulsion and retirement of many liberal and secular academic staff over the past few years. The second wave of dismissing lecturers was after the expansion of the Green Movement in 2009. In this wave, many veteran professors, who had survived earlier purges, were dismissed or forced into early retirement (Jahanbegloo, 2010). They were dismissed for different political beliefs or for supporting their students during protests. According to Kalame News, the site affiliated with 2009 presidential candidate and de facto Green Movement leader Mir Hossein Moussavi, 50 professors were forced from teaching between the months of July 2009 to April 2010 (Radio Zamaneh Website, 2010). In 2011, they also reported that in Allameh Tabatabai University alone, the administration recommended 150 outstanding senior professors in social sciences for dismissal or early retirement (Radio Zamaneh Website, 2011).

There are many ways to find out which professors are not loyal to the regime, including spying on them by students, and even their colleagues recording their lecturers in classes. Some of the students, mainly student members of the Basij and sometimes students who have a criminal record with disciplinary committees, are used to spy and record the lecturers and report them to the *Harsat*, a branch of the intelligence ministry at universities (Radio Farad, 2009). Professors are usually called to the Harsat to explain why they mentioned a controversial issue or political figure. In fact, Iranian scholars who want to attend international conferences or publish in peer-reviewed journals must notify the Harsat of their work for control and censoring.

To replace dissident lecturers by pro-regime loyalists, the process of hiring lecturers in Iran's universities became more centralized to recruit ideologically driven lecturers at universities after 2005. The SCCR updated the rules of hiring lecturers in 2007, removing university autonomy in the hiring process.

According to this new regulation, in each university, an Executive Committee for Hiring of Professors, *komite ejrai-jazab*, was established. This committee consisted of the dean of the university, the representative of the Supreme Leader at university, and three faculty members approved by the SCCR. Each application investigated in



scientific and general (ideological) qualifications. The general qualification indicators included belief in Islam or another official religion, allegiance to the Islamic regime, belief in the effectiveness of the regime and Islamic democracy, commitment to the constitution, the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih* or “guardianship of jurist,” a practical commitment to the Supreme Leader’s orders, and practical obligation to Islamic rules. To investigate these indicators, each university has its own investigators. There is a number grade for each of these indicators (e.g., belief in the constitution, 10 points; belief in the *Velayat-e Faqih*, 15 points; collaboration with the Basij, 10 points; and career responsibility, 5 points) that allowed the investigators to score candidates (“The regulation of establishing,” 2008).

After reviewing and approving the application, the application is sent to Central Committee for Hiring of Professors, *Komite Markazi-Jazab*, in the Higher Education Ministry. This committee also has two working group for evaluating the academic and ideological qualification of each applicant. During this time, the Central Committee for Hiring of Professors requests background checks by organizations, like the Harsat, Intelligence Ministry, law enforcement, and judiciary. If the applicant is approved by these organizations, approval to hire the applicant is sent back to the university.

With more centralization in hiring lecturers, the individual university’s power in hiring their faculty decreased. Additionally, with the appointment of the Chief of Student Basij as the head of this committee, many of Ahmadinejad’s ideological supporters have been hired by universities. According to Iran’s Higher Education Minister, between the years of 1985 and 2005, 10,000 Ahmadinejad supporters were hired by universities as lecturers. During 2005–2010, 8,000 new lecturers were hired (*Jahan News*, 2010). To penetrate universities further and change the proportion of pro-regime loyalist professors, the MSRT will hire 5,500 new lecturers, who “believe in Islam, *momen*; are loyal to the regime, *moteahad*; and are experts, *motkhas*” by March 2012 (Bazarkar, 2011).

The procedures for hiring professors changed again in 2010 with the goal of more restrictions on hiring secular lecturers, and to facilitate the recruitment of pro-regime loyalists after the Green Movement (*Mehr News Agency*, 2010). Following these changes, the Higher Education Ministry asked both the candidate and the university to apply through a centralized procedure. Each university should send its request for hiring a lecture to the Centre of Hiring of Faculty Members in the Higher Education Ministry. Candidates who are looking for employment at the universities must also apply through the Internet.

Based on the information that candidates prepare for the Centre of Hiring of Faculty Members, the Higher Education Ministry decides to consider or reject the candidate’s application. It also decides to introduce which candidate to which university. The Centre usually introduces two candidates for each position to the university, and the university must choose one of the preselected candidates. The mechanism for hiring is similar to the past investigation through the Executive



Committee for Hiring of Professors, and the Central Committee for Hiring of Professors.

Although the regime asserts that the new procedure will improve the fairness of the selection process, the reality is more complicated. The procedure takes away all of the university's independence in choosing its faculty members. The main aim of this policy is to block opposing or independent candidates in the first stage, and introducing the regime loyalists to universities. As a result, the regime has formed legal procedures, which facilitate the selection of pro-regime lecturers at universities, and eliminates dissident scholars. Moreover, in a discriminatory procedure, the MSRT assigns Basiji lecturers to the top universities and sends apolitical or secular candidates to lower ranked universities, located in poor provinces. The more Basij lecturers are hired, the more pressure there is put on independent professors, control over students, and emphasis on the Islamization of curriculums and university atmospheres. To be sure that these new lecturers are aligned with the regime, and to keep pressure on independent professors, the Higher Education Ministry announced that the academic and general ideological assessment of professors is continued during their tenure ("Necessary indicators for hiring the professors," 2010).

The regime also established a new Islamic Science Citation (ISC) system comparable with the International Statistical Institute (ISI) in 2009. The ISC is supposed to analyze research capabilities in Islamic countries to enhance research output and impact (Sawahel, 2008). Although the regime propagandizes that the aim of the creation of the ISC is to challenge the dominance of Western countries in science, it also enables pro-regime lecturers to be promoted, especially in human sciences, when they are published in ISI journals.

Islamization of University Students

Another important issue in imposing governmental control over universities is the training of dedicated students who strongly believe in the Islamic regime. Training a new cadre for the revolution and suppressing the student movement remain central to the regime's efforts ("Necessary indicators for hiring the professors," 2010). Ahmadinejad's government has tried to thoroughly Islamize university students using various tactics, including facilitating entrance of Basiji students in the doctoral programs, blocking dissident entrance into graduate programs, and reducing the overall number of undergraduate students.

Since 2005, the disciplinary committees have become more involved in repressing the student movement, sentencing activists, and generally creating an atmosphere of fear at universities. There are disciplinary committees at universities that are responsible for dealing with students who break laws and regulations. Disciplinary committees are able to charge political students with different penalties, including expulsion, the absolute expurgation of all academic coursework, and imprisonment.



Many independent student associations, especially the democracy advocates and reformists' associations, have also been dissolved by these committees.

Blocking the entrance of dissidents, and facilitating admission for pro-regime students, is another tactic used in the Islamization of universities. The state mandates a 40% quota to war veterans and active Basiji militia members to promote their entry into universities. The revolutionary quota was established after the Iran–Iraq war, but the parliament passed a law in 1998 which guaranteed active Basiji to use this quota for entrance to universities. During the Khatamai era, only Azad universities applied this quota for Basiji members, but since 2005, Ahamdinejad's administration has implemented this quota for their entrance into the state universities. According to Dr. Abdullah Jasbai, the head of Azad University, more than 300,000 Basiji have used the regulation to enter different colleges of Azad University since 1998 (*Ayande News*, 2011).

From another side, the State has prevented the admission of critical and anti-regime students, according to the law passed by the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council. The Committee for Selection of Students, Hayat-e Gozinesh-e, Danshjou, is responsible for the inspection of students' ideological commitment and political beliefs. Since 2005, this committee has become more involved in banning opposition students from entering universities, particularly in postgraduate programs. The term "starred students" was used to refer to those students who must be excluded from higher education based on their political beliefs. According to a report, 217 students who were active socially and politically in universities during their undergraduate studies were banned entrance to graduate-level study for political reasons, between the years of 2005 and 2010 ("Punishing stars," 2010). Some of them were able to enroll in university only after signing a commitment letter, which stated that they would do nothing against the religious establishment during their studies, or risk expulsion. It is worth mentioning that all doctoral students must sign this letter, regardless of their political activities.

Having a large apparatus in universities helps the authorities to put all students under their control and surveillance. The Harsat is responsible for covert surveillance of the students and the recording of their activities. Each department should have a Harsat office to monitor and control the students and lecturers. The Student Basij Organizations (SBO), located in each university, is also working to control students. With more than 600,000 members and 2,600 offices in Iran's universities, the SBO is a huge presence in controlling the students (Golkar, 2010).

The Committee for Selection of Students prevents the admission of many politically active students, using the records of many of the regimes' apparatus, such as the police force and judiciary. Although some of these students are allowed to continue their education by pledging that they will not participate in political activities, some still have not been admitted, despite their possession of academic merits to study in postgraduate courses. The regime tries to quiet students, by ordering them to sign commitment letters. In cases where students continue their activities, they



immediately are suspended or expelled from the universities. One student puts his feelings this way: "For a student, the threat of being expelled is sometimes worse than incarceration" ("Inside Iran," 2010). According to a report by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHR), 217 students were expelled for subversive political activities after 2009 ("Punishing stars," 2010).

Facilitating entrance for the Basiji students into the doctoral program is another effort in Islamization of students. The Ahmadinejad administration changed the system of admission for doctoral students in Iran's universities in 2011 (Boursenews, 2011). Before that, each year, approximately 6,000 doctoral students were accepted in a decentralized procedure. In other words, each university was responsible for its own entrance exam and student-selection process. With the new policy, the PhD entrance system became centralized, under the control of the Higher Education Ministry. According to this new policy, the Higher Education Ministry alone will be responsible for holding a national-level exam and for selecting PhD students. It usually introduces three students for each position and sends them to the university for interviews. With this tactic, the Higher Education Ministry controls the admission of students, both graduate and undergraduate. This control helps the government prevent politically active students from continuing their education and from facilitating the Basiji students to easily enter into postgraduate studies. According to a claim, in the first exam held in 2011, a majority of students accepted for an interview were Basiji students (Iran Briefing, 2011).

Reducing the number of undergraduate students, especially in human sciences, is another method used in the Islamization of universities. With the criticism of the Supreme Leader about the existence of two million students in the social sciences in 2009, the Ahmadinejad government decided to stop the expansion of humanities and social sciences disciplines in universities. According to the Head of Office of Evaluation and Supervision, the percentage of students in the humanities and social science should decrease from 43% to 36% ("Decreasing the number of students in humanities," 2011). To achieve this goal, the capacity of students' admission in human sciences has dramatically decreased in 2011 ("Shooting ideology to thought," 2011).

Islamization of University Curriculum

According to the Supreme Leader's speeches, Islamization of universities without Islamization of textbooks and academic syllabi is impossible because of the potential for secularism to creep into the courses ("Scientific revolution," 2011). Ayatollah Khamenei intensified his critiques of human sciences taught in Iran's universities after the expansion of the Green Movement. He stated, "Most of the discussions of humanities are based on the philosophies based on the Western worldview, and materialism. These philosophies consider humans as animals without any responsibility in relation to God. Thus, teaching of such humanities is akin to providing our



youngsters with skepticism and disbelief in Islamic and divine values. This issue is not appropriate” (Piri & Halim, 2011, p. 94). Iran’s Higher Education Minister also stated that “we cannot train the monotheistic students, using the texts, which are roots in liberal democratic ideologies” (“More Islamization of universities’ atmosphere,” 2010).

The regime has endlessly attempted to inject more ideology into university textbooks, as a method for Islamizing the university courses. The general courses, both religious and ideological, such as Islamic knowledge, the *Qur’an*, and Islamic morals, are mandatory for all of the students, regardless of their disciplines (Behdad, 1995). During the Ahmadinejad administration, these courses have been updated. Some courses, including a course on family morality, and holy defense, which refers to the Iran–Iraq war, have been added. Because all of these courses are taught primarily by clergy, expansion of these courses has led to an increasingly higher number of clergy at universities. Non-clergy lecturers must obtain permission from religious authorities at Qom Seminary to be able to teach these courses.

The regime has also changed the content of the textbooks and syllabi of university curricula to better reflect Islamic thought because in the content of most of the textbooks, the secularist, humanistic, and individualistic thought had too strongly influenced this area of humanities. Therefore, this has caused concerns among the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Secularist, individualistic, and humanistic thoughts are in contradiction to Islamic and revolutionary principles. That is why “purifying” the textbooks of secular theories has been one of the duties of the hardliner administration especially after 2005.

Based on these ideas, the revising and altering of university courses and syllabi are one inevitable policy progression toward Islamization of universities. The Committee on Promotion of Human Sciences Textbooks was established under the control of CIEI to purify the textbooks. The committee has five main duties, including censoring critical elements in syllabi, recommending new syllabi for each discipline, identifying the “proper texts book for each course, identifying the syllabi which need new textbooks and writing or translating new textbooks in each discipline” (“Committee for promotion of textbooks,” 2005). As a first step, the committee selected 12 disciplines for curriculum review including educational science, political science, psychology, philosophy, sociology, law, management, economics, international relations, art, architecture and history (“Committee for promotion of textbooks,” 2005).

Based on the decisions made by the council, a group of special fundamentalist institutes and research centers have been selected to edit texts of these topics. Some of these institutes include the Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute; the Islamic Culture and Ideology Research Center; the Hawzeh and University Research Center; the Professors Bureau of the Representative Office of the Supreme Leader; the Islamic Science and Culture Research Center affiliated with the Office of Islamic Propaganda; the Imam Sadegh University; and the SAMT Organization. Each of these institutes has been chosen to evaluate and revise the



topics of one or two subjects. For example, the Cultural Studies Research Center of the MSRT has been chosen to edit the educational topics and texts of political science and international relations; the Hawzeh and University Research Center has been chosen for educational science; and the University of Isfahan has been chosen to revise topics within the subject of art (Activities of Promotion Committee, 2009).

Each institution was responsible for altering curriculum and syllabi to include topics relevant to the Islamic revolution. For example, in the political science curriculum, some major additions included courses on the study of Islamic worlds and Islamic political thought. New disciplines were also created at the postgraduate level, including Islamic management, Islamic economy, Islamic banking, and Islamic architecture (Activities of Promotion Committee, 2009). Moreover, some disciplines were modified significantly, such as the discipline of women's studies. A special committee was created to "purify" women's studies from feminist ideologies. Instead, the committee changed the name of the discipline from women's studies to family studies to emphasize women's role in the family and to encourage women to adhere to their traditional role as mothers and housewives ("The explanation of higher education ministry's activities," 2008).

The committees are also responsible for choosing and editing the educational material of various universities, including private universities, requiring them to use these censored texts. To speed up these processes, another committee entitled "The Committee for Transformation and Promotion of Social Science" was created under the SCCR in 2007 (*Khorsan Newspaper*, 2010). This committee was again elevated to the Special Supreme Council of Transformation and Promotion of Social Science in 2009. This council became more involved in changing educational texts, with a perceived focus on anti-Islamic and antirevolutionary subjects, and in updating them with appropriate educational texts authored by ideologically committed professors. According to the Director of the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, Hamid Reza Ayatollahi, the revision of 38 academic disciplines and 400 syllabi will be finished and sent to the Higher Education Ministry by October 2011 (*Issar News*, 2011).

Another dramatic example of the regime's commitment to controlling the university in Iran is the elimination of certain subjects within the humanities and social sciences as courses of study. In 2011, Allameh Tabatabaee University prevented the admission of students in 13 humanities disciplines, including psychology and journalism ("Shooting ideology to thought," 2011).

Islamization of University Environment

Ayatollah Khamenei frequently demanded the atmosphere of Iran's universities be Islamized during the past two decades. Many regulations were passed by the SCCR in the past two decades. Although some of these regulations have never been



implemented in the past, the Islamization of the university environment has intensified since 2005. Specifically, since 2009, many regime officials have asked for the acceleration of Islamization of educational centers.

There are many institutions that are responsible for shaping an Islamic atmosphere at universities, most importantly, the Supreme Leader's Representative Office, the university's Cultural Council, the Disciplinary Committees, and the Law Enforcement force (*Entezamat*). These institutions are all involved in changing the face of universities, by the implementation of different policies.

The first symbolic attempt for the Islamization of universities since 2005 has been the burial of "unknown martyrs" on university campuses by the Ahmadinejad government. Burying martyrs in universities is a symbol of capturing and controlling universities (Elling, 2009). This policy is also in effect at Azad Universities. According to university officials, a memorial for 35 martyrs will be built in different branches of Azad University by 2012 (Farheektegan Online, 2011).

Another policy has been creating mosques and Islamic seminaries at universities to inject a religious element into the physical university landscape and atmosphere. The renewing of mosques at universities started in 2008. According to a deputy of Iran's Higher Education Ministry, there are 67 mosques in 110 state Higher Education Centers throughout Iran. Additionally, 30 new mosques will be built in the future. By 2012, the number of mosques in different branches of Azad University will increase from 145 to 300 (Farheektegan Online, 2011).

Iran's Higher Education Ministry decided to establish a theological seminary in each mosque beginning in 2011. The aim is to encourage students to study academic and seminary courses simultaneously (*Mebr News Agency*, 2011). According to the Deputy of Cultural and Social Affairs in Iran's Higher Education Ministry, 30 Islamic seminaries were established at universities in 2011 (Mardomak Website, 2011). The establishment of these seminaries allows for clergy to create the appropriate environment for further control by the regime of university space. The Supreme Leader heralded the presence of clergy at universities and their direct association with students and faculty as being among the key blessings of the post-Islamic Revolution era in Iran (*Payvand News Website*, 2010). One of the consequences is holding more ideological political training for students, including the ideological plan called "the plan of thought's party," or *Tarh-e Ziafat-e Andishe*. This plan, by the Office of Representative of the Supreme Leader, began in 2009 to extend ideological indoctrination. As an intensive plan, it operates for students, faculty, and staff during Ramadan. The first aim is to establish multiple networks of pro-regime loyalists at universities and to instill ideological training in them.

Imposing moral control over universities is part of the Islamization of the university's atmosphere. It has been done under the implantation of *Amr be Maruf VA Nahy AZ Monkar*, or "Commanding the right and forbidding the wrong." According to this principle, the Islamic code of behavior should be enforced, including policies such as the wearing of proper *hijab* by women, wearing makeup, prohibiting male-



female fraternization at universities, and banning co-educational activities and field-trip camps. Referring to the law of “Promotion of Chastity,” which was passed in 2005, Iran’s Higher Education Minister stated that students should wear clothing and behave in an Islamic manner. There are many reports, which show that the *chador*, the full-body covering, is enforced on some university campuses, especially in small cities (Khatam, 2009).

According to regime propaganda, the behaviors prohibited by Islamic code promote moral corruption and are indications of cultural invasion by Western countries at universities, with the ultimate goal of toppling the Islamic regime. To confront this threat, the regime has imposed moral control over students, using many coercive mechanisms and tactics. The critical apparatuses are the Disciplinary Committees, Harsat, the Law Enforcement force (Entezamat), and the Student Basij Organizations. All of these institutions are involved in controlling students’ behaviors. In an extreme way, some of the officials asked for the formation of a special council to impose uniforms for students as a solution to the Islamic dress code (*Tabnak News Agency*, 2009).

Another important program in the Islamization of the university atmosphere is gender segregation, which seriously clicked after 2009. In the religious establishment’s opinion, the mixing of young men and women is dangerous in the way that mixing cotton and fire is hazardous (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2009). Although in 1985 the SCCR ratified a law recommending that universities hold separate classes and even libraries, the policy has never been implemented over the past two decades. Since 2011, the Ahmadinejad administration has intensified its efforts to implement segregated classes and, ultimately, separate universities for each sex (Sharma & Raeis, 2011).

This policy is implemented through a variety of methods, each increasingly draconian. The first method is separating male and female students into separate rows in the classroom. It is recommended that male students sit in the front rows, while female students sit in the back so that the male cannot view the female students from behind. In the second phase, university classes should be separated. According to Iran’s Higher Education Ministry’s order, university classes will be separated as a tactic for segregation in existing co-educational campuses. Each university should hold different classes for male and female students, first in general courses and then in the specialized courses. Many universities began implementing this policy in 2010, including Mazandran University and Sharif University.

Establishing completely segregated universities is another tactic for an Islamization atmosphere. Although there have been historically single-sex universities, such as Alzahra University for women or Imam Sadegh Universities, the new administration has decided to increase the number of segregated universities throughout Iran. According to Higher Education Ministry officials, the SCCR has already approved the establishment of two women’s universities in Tehran (“New initiative in Iran to reinforce gender segregation,” 2010).



The last method for male–female segregation is the implementation of a gender quota for male and female students in different academic disciplines. Because the number of female graduates has increased dramatically over the past three decades, the religious establishment has tried to stop or, at least, slow this process. As a tactic, it decreases the number of female students in certain disciplines, and totally prohibits them in disciplines such as mining engineering. Universities are also encouraged to offer certain majors only to men and certain other majors only to women. In 2011, 20 Iranian universities have announced that 40 departments will begin accepting only one gender of student (“Gender segregation underway in 20 Iranian universities,” 2011). In some disciplines, the quota for men is twice that of women and vice versa; for example, in Orumieh University, there are 35 seats only for males in the discipline of construction engineering, compared with 15 for female students. In the opposite case, while there are 24 seats for females in family studies, there are just 6 seats for males in Tarbiat-e Moalam University in Tabriz (Asadi, 2011).

Conclusion

With more than 4,100,000 students, and 95,000 professors at Iranian universities, the university is one of the most important spheres for the Islamic regime to carry out its revolutionary Islamization agenda (*Mehr News Agency*, 2012). The political regime in Iran has continued to assert control over universities and higher education institutions since the Iranian revolution.

The three waves of university Islamization in the three decades following the revolution have resulted in a heavy cost to Iran’s higher educational system. Since the beginning of the second wave alone, more than 60 strategic plans and 266 executive policies or regulations were ratified by the CIEI (*Fars News Agency*, 2011). As a result of these policies, a climate of mistrust, insecurity, and fear has been created at Iran’s universities. Scholars and students emigrated from Iran to places where their freedom of expression is respected and where they can continue their work. According to many official reports, Iran now ranks first in the world in brain drain.

From the other side, universities have been filled with pro-regime loyalists, many of whom hold weak academic credentials because their political capital outweighs their academic merits in the current system. Independent scholars, particularly those in the social sciences and humanities, who remain in universities, are unable to conduct independent research because of imposed limitations. The quality of higher education has sharply eroded in Iran as a result. Despite the high costs of implementing this political–ideological project in Iranian universities, it is unclear to what extent it has been effective in achieving the regime’s goals to silence the student movement while educating and indoctrinating the new ideological generation.



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