

From Cultural Revolution to cultural engineering

Cultural policy in post-Revolutionary Iran

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Introduction

With the victory of an Islamic Revolution in 1979 in Iran, the cultural landscape of the country experienced a dramatic transformation both at the grassroots level and the formal structural levels. The most notable policy development with direct impact for cultural policy in this phase was the issuance of Ayatollah Khomeini's mandate to undertake a 'Cultural Revolution' in various aspects of society. The 'Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution' was established and activated. A complete revision in the educational system and other public spheres was one of the main features. The Council has remained as the main policymaking authority until now and has directly formulated policies, while influencing other policies adopted by various administrative and legislative institutions.

This chapter reviews policy documents adopted by various administrative and legislative bodies to map the evolution of Iran's cultural policy scene in the past four decades. It begins with a brief introduction of the country, followed by a section on cultural policy orientations in the pre-Revolution era to contextualize cultural policy in Revolutionary Iran. The chapter continues by elaborating the processes and features of Cultural Revolution and its impact on policymaking after the Revolution. It then deals with the most recent policy development, which has been the adoption of a 'Cultural Engineering' approach by the Council through which it seeks to ensure that all economic, social and political policies, programs and measures undertaken by various parts of the administrative bodies are in line with cultural orientations approved by the system. It will be argued that the new approach is mainly a change of rhetoric, which seeks to materialize the original goals of the Revolution within the new atmosphere, not a substantive shift of policy for which one could find grounds to envisage a notable success.

The chapter concludes with some theoretical and practical analysis of cultural policy in Iran and tries to locate the system within the main typology of cultural policy systems in the world. While having its unique features, the existing cultural policy model seems close to the engineer model (though with some main differences) as well as having some similarities with the nurturer model.

Iran: and overview of the context

Known mainly through the western media representation focusing largely on political issues, Iran is less familiar to the outside world, especially those in the west, from a socio-cultural perspective. This is partly because of a series of significant political events taking place in recent decades revolving around Iran. The overthrow of the pro-western king (*Shah*) of Iran and the establishment of a theocratic state (the Islamic Republic of Iran) in 1979 was the first in this series of events that heralded nearly four decades of considerable political upheavals in the region as well as at the international level. The capturing of the U.S. embassy in Tehran by university students and people who had strong anti-American sentiments was the second on the list; having roots mainly in vast interventions by the U.S. in Iran's domestic affairs (including the 1953 coup against the popular Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq) the feelings peaked when the Shah entered the U.S. after fleeing the country in 1979.

The longest political crisis began when Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980 in order to seize the opportunity of post-Revolutionary chaos to establish his position as the strongest regime in the region. The war, which lasted for eight years, was marked by strong support for Saddam by western powers (such as the U.S., the United Kingdom, France and Germany), eastern powers (mainly the former Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China) as well as Arab countries (including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait) who considered Revolutionary Iran as a common threat to their interests (for various reasons). Iran's continuance of its nuclear energy plans (which is considered as a potential threat by western powers due to possibility of obtaining nuclear weapons) has provided western media with enough opportunities in recent years to maintain the same line of negative representations of the country.

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss or challenge those representations. However, it is useful to have a brief introduction about some of the main features of the Iranian society for a better understanding of the socio-political context of its cultural policy. The first point with relevance to cultural policy is the contrast of pre- and post-Islamic history and heritage of the country that has inspired two contrasting lines of cultural policy in modern Iran before and after the Islamic Revolution.

Officially known as the 'Islamic Republic of Iran', the country was called Persia at the international level until 1935 (although it was referred to as Iran at the domestic level from ancient times). The current name is derived from the word 'Aryan', which means the 'land of Aryans' (noble people). Aryan refers to the Indo-European race; members inhabited this part of the world in ancient times and they are believed by some scholars to be the ancestors of the European peoples (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2005a). Iran is home to one of the oldest civilisations in the world. Recorded history began with the Elamites c 3000 BC. The Medes flourished from c 728 BC but were overthrown (550 BC) by the Persians. Cyrus the Great (558–529 BC) is the most famous emperor during this era who appears in the Bible as the liberator of the Jews held captive in Babylon (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2005b) and who is believed to have issued the 'first human rights charter' in the world (ICS, 2016a), the original version of which is kept in the British Museum.

Islam came to Iran in the 7th century when the Sāsānian dynasty (AD 224–651) was defeated by Muslim Arabs. However, the majority of Iranian Muslims were from the Sunni sect until the Safavid dynasty (1502–1736) established a dominant Shi'ite state. The last dynasty, which ruled Iran before the Islamic Revolution in 1979, was the Pahlavi dynasty (1926–1979). Its founder, Reza Shah, overthrew the Qājār dynasty (1794–1925)

through a coup backed by the British Empire. He and his successor (his son, Mohammad Reza Shah) were known as pro-western, autocratic and anti-religious rulers and provided the ground for a vast and influential presence of western powers in the country, especially the United Kingdom (U.K.) and later the United States (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2005b,c).

These orientations and their cultural, political, social and economic implications evoked dissatisfaction among various sectors of the society (left wing parties, religious leaders, nationalist movements, academic forums and the grass roots) and led to the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The Revolution had as its main slogans 'independence, freedom, Islamic Republic' and 'no to West, no to East, [yes to] Islamic Republic'. The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini, who passed away in 1989 and was replaced through the selection of Ayatollah Khamenei as Supreme Leader (1989-present) by the Assembly of Leadership Experts, began a new era in the history of the country, which brought about a series of serious changes to various aspects of the Iranian society, notably in the field of culture and cultural policy.

The second notable issue relates to demographic characteristics. With a population of 75,149,669, Iran enjoys a diverse society both in terms of language and ethnicity with languages being linked to ethnic groups. The main ethnic groups with their own unique languages are Fars or Persians 60% (including Persian sub-groups such as the Mazandarani, Tats, and Gilakis), Azeris or Turks 20%, Kurds 7%, Lors 3%, Arabs 2%, Baloochis 2%, Turkmens 2%, Turkic tribal groups (e.g. Qashqai) 2%, and non-Persian, non-Turkic groups (e.g. Armenians, Assyrians and Georgians) 2% (Library of Congress, 2008). Unlike ethnicity and language, Iranian society is not a diverse one in terms of religion. Based on 2011 national census, more than 99.4% of the population are Muslim and the rest consists mainly of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians (SCI, 2012).

A third issue related to the nature of cultural policy in Iran is its state-dominated economy. The majority of large-scale industries including the oil industry, broadcasting, telecommunication, banking, automobile manufacturing, insurance, roads and railroads, shipping and energy are under state ownership and control. Privatisation and economic adjustment has been a constant and often contradictory policy paradigm since the end of the Iraq-Iran war with subsequent governments following various approaches to this issue. The most recent development is the reinterpretation of Article 44 of the Constitution in a way that allows for the private sector to play a more active role (80% of the state assets should be privatised).

Last, the nature of the political system in Iran influences cultural policy to a great extent. Based on the 1979 Constitution¹ and its amendment in 1989, the political system of Iran is 'Islamic Republic' with Shi'a Islam being the official religion while officially recognising the other Islamic sect (Sunni) and other main religions, namely, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism. The Supreme Leader (who must be a prominent religious figure) is the highest state authority and is elected by the Assembly of Leadership Experts (elected by direct public votes).

The President is the head of executive branch and the highest state authority after the Supreme Leader. He is elected by universal suffrage (for four years with a possibility of being elected for a second term) and is responsible for the implementation of the Constitution. Apart from the cabinet, he is also head of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (explained below). The national Parliament (Majles) is composed of 290 members elected by people (at municipality levels) for four years and is the main legislative entity, although it has a so-called rival in the field of cultural legislation (Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution).

Cultural policy in the pre-Revolution era

To have a clear understanding of the motives and drivers of cultural policy after the Islamic Revolution and especially the necessity of a ‘Cultural Revolution’ from the perspective of its agents, there is a need to illustrate the cultural policy scene of pre-revolution era. It could be argued that integrated attempts towards modern cultural policy began with the establishment of Pahlavi dynasty as part of the overall modernisation agenda of the country. The period spans from 1925 until 1979 and includes the ruling of Reza Shah (1925–1944) and his son Mohammad Reza Shah (1944–1979). The dynasty was founded four years after a British-assisted coup (in 1921) when Reza shah overthrew Ahmad Shah Qajar, the last king or Shah of the Qajar dynasty.

Four main orientations could be identified in the cultural policy of Pahlavi era, namely ancientisation/archaism, westernisation, secularisation, and assimilation. Although these four elements are interrelated and overlapping, distinct features and policies could be traced for each component:

(A) Ancientisation/Archaism

The Pahlavi dynasty had a strong emphasis in its cultural policy on symbols and elements of ancient or pre-Islamic era legacy. Although this tendency began with Iranian intellectuals during Qajar dynasty (Ashna, 2009), it was only under Reza Shah that formal cultural practices were guided by this principle.

By ancientisation we mean authentication of a contemporary national identity by reference to Iranian ancient symbols and practices. First, Reza Shah labelled his dynasty ‘Pahlavi’, which refers to an ancient Iranian language. Second, the strengthening of archaeology, to discover and preserve the remains of ancient Iranian civilisation, was put on the agenda of cultural policy. Several archaeologist teams were invited from countries such as Germany, the United States of America and France to work alongside Iranian archaeologists and the *Museum of Ancient Iran* (currently National Museum of Iran) was established. Third, the national calendar was changed from Hijri Qamari (an Islamic lunar calendar beginning in AD 622, during which the emigration or *Hijrah* of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina to establish an Islamic state occurred) to a Persian Imperial Calendar (a solar calendar beginning with the birth of the Persian Empire founder, Cyrus the Great, in 559 BC). Fourth, a series of festivals was held in 1971 on the occasion of the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Iranian monarchy by Cyrus the Great (referred to as “The 2,500 Year Celebration of the Persian Empire”). Fifth, the international name of the country was changed from Persia to Iran to denote the nobility of Aryan or Indo-European race. Sixth, epic poems and epic poets were highly promoted especially *Ferdowsi* and his book *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), which contains the longest epic poem of the Iran and Persian-speaking world and is characterised by pure Persian language, free from imported words from other languages especially the Arabic language (Fazeli, 2006; Ashna, 2009; Ohadi and Hajirajabali, 2016).

(B) Westernisation

Intentions of the Pahlavi dynasty for rapid modernisation based on western experience, values and principles led it to adopt several measures including in the field of culture. Although some of these cultural measures were basic in their nature, others were imitations of the most superficial aspects of western culture. Establishment of a modern schooling system throughout the country based on the western model,

including mixed schools of girls and boys, was among the most notable measures. While these schools aimed to raise children who are loyal to the royal family and their homeland and serve the process of nation-state building, the curricular and extra-curricular content and activities clearly pursued the goal of westernisation and promoting the idea of western civilisation's superiority, towards which the country should ultimately move.

The establishment and expansion of universities, based on western models, was also a prominent measure in this era, although some institutions such as *Darolfonoon* were set up several years before (in 1851), inspired by western higher education institutions. Tehran University was established in 1934, and the number of universities raised from four universities (with 14,500 students) in 1953 to 16 universities (with 154,315 students) in 1977 (Abrahamian, 1980). Alongside adopting educational methods and contents (especially in humanities and social sciences), there were strong and extensive relationships between Iranian universities and their western counterparts.

Forced promotion of western-style dressing for women and men was another measure taken by Reza Shah. Unification of Iranian's Dressing Law was first adopted in 1929 for men and was followed by the banning of *Hijab* for women in 1935. It was believed that traditional dressing was a barrier for modernisation and participation of women in social life and that unification of dressing in line with western styles was a prerequisite for modernisation. Although forced application of the dressing codes was not followed by his successor Mohammad Reza Shah, western style dressing was still promoted and encouraged by all elements of the cultural apparatus including schools, universities and mass media.

A fourth aspect of this policy was the vast promotion of western style art in all fields especially cinema, theatre and music. 'Shiraz/Persepolis Festival of Arts' was the main annual event held at an international level for 11 years (from 1967 to 1977) in the city of Shiraz and Persepolis, although this festival also included Iranian classic arts.

Of notable importance with regard to the diffusion of western thought was the widespread translation of western literature in all fields. Comparing the list of compiled books in Farsi and those translated into Farsi, Ashna (2009) concludes the second group has dramatically outweighed the first category.

(C) Secularisation

Reza Shah used religious gestures as a tool to attract support from the clergy and the public during his first steps of serious political life, including throughout the initial years of his rule as king. However, he soon came into conflict with religious leaders and their followers by pursuing his modernisation agenda. In fact, all policies outlined under ancientisation and westernisation were considered by religious opposition to be part of a broad de-Islamisation and secularisation agenda. Ancientisation policies were focusing on pre-Islamic history and elements and icons to marginalise Islamic symbols and thoughts. Westernisation policies were also used to modernise various aspects of social life based on western lifestyles and were strong drivers of change towards secularisation given the central position of secularism in contemporary western culture.

In addition to those policies, more direct measures were aimed at excluding religion and religious manifestations from the public sphere. Forbidding or limiting some religious rituals exercised in public spaces, supporting secular intellectuals including

through promotion of their ideas and products and controlling, limiting or oppressing religious figures who were opposing the secularisation agenda are more notable among these measures (Fazeli, 2006; Navakhti Moghadam and Anvarian Asl, 2010; Devos and Werner, 2014; Ohadi and Hajirajabali, 2016).

(D) Assimilation

As outlined above, the Iranian population consists of several ethnic groups with a rich diversity of languages and cultural heritages. The process of nation-state building in the Pahlavi era, especially under Reza Shah, included a cultural assimilation agenda as an integral part of modernisation. It was believed that a strong centralised state was needed to preserve the national integrity and solidarity, which in turn required the construction and promotion of a unified national identity (Ramezanzadeh, 1997: 246; Salehi Amiri, 2009, 285–288). Construction of this new identity took place through a plethora of measures *inter alia*:

- Promotion of Persian (Farsi) language as the official language including through formal education system for all ethnic groups, while trying to purify it from non-Persian elements, particularly Arabic and Turkish words, especially through the establishment of the Persian Academy (Ashna, 2009).
- An emphasis on the Aryan Race and trying to promote it as the superior race that should be preserved and purified (Fazeli, 2006; Navakhti Moghadam and Anvarian Asl, 2010).
- Trying to weaken local and ethnic cultural diversities including through the promotion of unified codes of dressing, oppression of ethnic movements, stabilising the residence of migrating tribes and nomads (including their forced displacement to Persian-speaking areas) and changing the local non-Persian names of places and tribes (Salehi Amiri, 2009; Vaez Shahrestani, 2009).

The Islamic Revolution and its Cultural Revolution agenda

Iran witnessed dramatic political upheavals in the last years of the 1970s, which ended up in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Although groups from different schools of thought were engaged in fighting the Pahlavi regime for various reasons, the religious movement under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini was successful and came to dominate the socio-political movement. This was mainly due to the popularity of Islamic values and slogans among the majority of highly traditional and religious population of the country, as well as the ability of religious leaders to communicate effectively with the masses and to utilise religious teachings, symbols and institutions (thousands of mosques, *Hussainia*,² religious schools or *Hawzah*,³ religious charities, etc. that were present in every neighbourhood of the country) in their struggle against the regime.

The main lines of socio-cultural oppositions of the religious movement were directed at the cultural policies pursued by the Pahlavi regime. Actually, all four main policy orientations discussed above were considered to be in contradiction with the religious identity of the Iranian population and the authority of religious leaders associated with it. Highlighting the Ancient and pre-Islamic history during the Pahlavi era was a sign, for the religious opposition, that Pahlavi cultural policy tried to denote the inferiority of the Islamic legacy by its portrayal as the main cause for the backwardness of the country. It was also employed in legitimising the monarchy and the superior status of the monarch against other sources of authority. The secularisation agenda was in sharp contrast with claims of

religious leaders regarding the capacity and mission of Islam to provide solutions for social, political and economic questions and the needs of human beings in every time and place during the history and throughout the world; something that was only in their competence and capacity of the religious to materialise. Westernisation promoted a lifestyle and set of ideas that seriously challenged the virtue of Islamic morality, whilst codes of conduct and assimilation policies were mainly aimed to facilitate a model of rapid modernisation based on western values.

It was in this context that the Revolutionary forces tried to radically transform the cultural scene of the country after it was changed in the political arena. National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT) underwent a radical change to align with the Revolution and purify itself from non-Islamic elements, including those products that promoted the western lifestyle. Its name was changed to Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and it remained under state control with the monopoly of domestic radio and television services in the country. Cinema, theatre and music witnessed the same shift in content and went under strict scrutiny by the government, first through the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education and then through the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG). It was also the case for the publishing industry (newspapers, magazines, books, etc.) to experience state monitoring and control mainly through the MCIG.

Reforming the public culture was also on the top of the agenda of the Revolution. Islamic clothing (Hijab) became mandatory for women first in state-owned and controlled places and then in all public spaces. All kinds of trades and interactions related to alcohol production and consumption, gambling and prostitution were banned. In fact, all aspects of life in the public sphere were supposed to be in accordance with the Islamic cultural norms.

The most remarkable development was in the field of higher education. As was mentioned above, universities were developed in Iran based on western models in their form and content and were in contrast to traditional religious schools. After the Revolution, universities were the main platform for student branches of various political groups (including leftist parties and forces) to promote their ideas that were not in conformity with the dominant Islamic ideology. In 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a mandate for a 'Cultural Revolution', which was mainly aimed at a radical revision in higher education. The main measures undertaken in this period were:

- Purging non-conformist lectures and students from universities (especially leftist forces),
- Purifying the contents of books and attempting to revise them or compile new texts in accordance with Islamic teachings (especially in the field of humanities and social sciences),
- Establishing a specific procedure for the selection and admission of lectures and students (to approve their political and religious eligibility in addition to academic qualifying),
- Attempting to unify (or at least make close) university education with the educational system in religious schools,
- Restricting and regulating aspects of informal student life including clothing codes, socialising mixed events, etc.

(Sobhe, 1982; Gheissari and Nasr, 2006; Keddie and Richard, 2006; Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2011)

The Cultural Revolution Headquarters was established in 1980 to pursue this agenda, but it was replaced with the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council, which holds more power and

authority than its predecessor. The Council is headed by the President (with its membership comprising of individual and ex-officio members pertaining to cultural, educational and religious entities) and is now the main policymaking and monitoring body in the field of cultural policy in Iran.

Cultural policy has gone through various phases after the Revolution, with each phase having some distinguishing features (see Table 32.1). It has been mainly influenced by the dominant political discourse of the time and has been shaped by the socio-economic and political conditions of the country. However, Seddigh Sarvestani and Zaeri (2010) argue that two broad discourses could be identified in post-Revolutionary Iran: Traditional-Revolutionary Discourse (from 1979 to 1988 and from 2005 to 2013) and Liberal-Developmental Discourse (1989 to 2005). Keeping this in mind, one could identify the three phases of ‘Early post-Revolution’, ‘Imposed War (Holy Defence)’, and ‘Principle-ism’ with the Traditional-Revolutionary Discourse and the other three phases (‘Reconstruction’, ‘Reforms’, and ‘Moderation’) with the Liberal-Developmental Discourse. In fact, the first two phases were heavily influenced by the Revolutionary spirit, which favoured the resurgence of Islamic traditions in all aspects of life. This discourse was also dominant in Ahmadinejad’s period with his prominent emphasis on ‘back to Islamic principles and values’, which were claimed to be weakened by non-Revolutionary orientations of Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations. In response to the hard-line cultural orientations of the ‘Principle-ism’ phase, which aimed to impose a traditionalist reading of the social

Table 32.1 Main cultural policy developments in post-Revolution era

<i>Titles of the phases</i>	<i>Years and heads of administration</i>	<i>Main policy developments</i>
Early post-Revolution	1979–1981 (multiple)	Cultural Revolution; launch of mandatory Hijab; banning and closure of alcohol production and consumption, gambling, and prostitution places
Imposed War (Holy Defence)	1981–1988 (Mousavi)	Domination of formal and public culture by the war; establishment of Islamic Azad University (non-governmental but public)
Reconstruction	1989–1997 (Hashemi Rafsanjani)	Structural adjustments and privatisation; Launch of private schools; promotion of consumptionist culture; expansion of cultural facilities
Reforms	1997–2005 (Khatami)	Civil society expansion; strengthening the role of NGOs in the field of culture; more open environment for publishers of newspapers, magazines and books (but tough reaction from the judicial system); international cultural cooperation; dialogue among civilisations
Principle-ism	2005–2013 (Ahmadinejad)	Cultural Engineering; more emphasis on religious aspects of culture; expansion of cultural facilities; more roles for Basij and mosques in delivering cultural policy
Moderation	2013-present (Rouhani)	More roles for NGOs representing members of culture and art community; more open to public culture; loosening scrutiny mechanisms on cultural products; cultural diplomacy

and cultural life through the new ‘cultural engineering’ agenda, voters elected moderate Rouhani, who was supported publicly by Khatami and Rafsanjani and promised to follow a more open cultural policy. As the head of Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, Rouhani has decreased the level of activities and interventions of the Council in the overall design and delivery of cultural policy in favour of more authority for cultural bodies of his administration; he regularly faces criticisms and confrontations from religious figures as well as revolutionary entities outside the government. Banning or making disruptions in cultural activities like some pop music concerts, films, theatres and festivals approved by the Ministry of Culture (under Rouhani) on behalf of or by the above-mentioned figures and entities are examples of these confrontations that aim to disappoint voters and supporters and send a clear message to the public that the government cannot say the final word in the field of culture.

Cultural policy orientations in post-Revolutionary Iran

A plethora of cultural policy instruments have been adopted after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and numerous cultural initiatives have been launched based on these instruments. Content analysis of these instruments shows a dramatic change in cultural policy orientations of the country in the past four decades. The main documents and instruments included in the analysis are: Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran; Five-Year Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plans (first to fifth plans); Mega policies adopted by the Expediency Discernment Council of the System and policies adopted by the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council.

As it is evident from the main categories, as well as from the subcategories and themes extracted from the documents and instruments mentioned above, there is a sharp deviation from the policy orientations in pre-revolution cultural policy. Contrary to the Pahlavi era, cultural policy is bestowed with the sacred mission of Islamisation in all fields of social life. The ancient Iranian legacy and culture is marginalised or absent from these policies, and there is a strong caution about the so-called cultural invasion of the western world.

There are numerous instruments, institutions/bodies, budget allocations, etc. regarding each of the subcategories (listed under each main category) in the public administration of the country that are outside the range of this chapter, but below is a brief list of the main themes and subthemes:

Promotion and consolidation of religious and ethical doctrine

Given the nature of the political system established following the Islamic Revolution, it is not surprising that the most frequent theme appearing in all policy instruments revolves around its religious and ethical doctrine. It is clearly against the secularising agenda of the Pahlavi era and tries to bring religion into all fields of social life. As an example, promotion of Quranic culture is practiced through a variety of measures: provision of Quranic courses (recitation, memorising, meaning and interpretation, etc.) in cultural centres, schools, universities, neighbourhood houses of municipalities, cultural and arts centres of mosques, production of cultural items (films, books, TV series, etc.) with Quranic themes, decoration of public spaces with Quranic messages, organising Quranic competitions in various disciplines (recitation, memorising, meaning and commentary, etc.) at various levels by a variety of institutions including the above-mentioned bodies.

The main subthemes under the first category are as following:

- Emphasising the centrality of Islamic values and superiority of the monotheist perspective
- Promotion of moral virtues and ethical codes
- Confronting superstition and religious deviance and aberrance
- Promoting and implementing the 'Enjoining Good and Forbidding Wrong' principle
- Promotion of prayer and praying culture
- Promotion of Quranic culture
- Organising and enhancement of cultural aspects of religious rituals
- Promotion of chastity and Hijab culture
- Promotion of reasonable thrift, contentment and non-luxury lifestyle

Strengthening of Islamic Revolution values

While the first category of policy orientations seeks to ensure the religious character of the society, this second category deals with the preservation and strengthening of its Revolutionary characteristics. Again, it is a mandate for all public bodies to promote these values in their activities through various forms. A prominent element of this category is the 'diffusion of Basiji⁴ Culture'. Established in November 1979 based on a mandate from the founder of the Islamic Republic, Basij is a paramilitary volunteer force subordinate to the 'Islamic Revolutionary Guard'. The full name of the force is *Nirou-ye Moqavemat-e Basij* (Mobilisation Resistance Force) or *Basij-e Mosta'afin* (Mobilisation of the Oppressed) with its main features and functions being deep loyalty to the supreme leader, providing voluntary public services, morals policing, engaging in internal security as a law enforcement auxiliary force and confronting dissident gatherings. The organisation has branches in nearly all mosques, neighbourhoods, schools, universities, factories, governmental and public bodies, etc. Given the key role of Basij in post-Revolution history with regard to defending the country as well as supporting the political system, extensive cultural activities have been commissioned to it, while other public bodies are also mandated or encouraged to promote Basiji culture.

The main subthemes under the second category are as following:

- Observation and consolidation of Islamic Revolution values
- Paying attention to Revolutionary values in allocation of resources
- Promoting and vitalising thoughts of Imam Khomeini and the Great Leader
- Diffusion of Basiji Culture
- Diffusion of self-sacrifice and martyrdom culture
- Deepening the spirit and insight of knowing and fighting enemies

Conservation and strengthening of Islamic-Iranian culture and identity

Unlike the pre-Revolution era, the Iranian identity (especially if linked with the pre-Islamic history) does not receive prominent status in cultural policy instruments; it is usually mentioned in conjunction with the Islamic identity. It means that only those elements of Iranian identity and culture are proper to be preserved and promoted that are compatible with Islam or at least are not contradicting it. Therefore, while, for example, very big cinema films and TV series dedicated to the introduction of national-Islamic heroes and scholars receive considerable support, there is almost no publicly funded cultural project dedicated to heroes,

legendary figures and scholars from the pre-Islamic history of the country. The main sub-categories related to this theme are:

- Consolidation of national unity
- Strengthening of national identity
- Identification and preservation of cultural heritage
- Promotion of Persian language and literature

Consideration of cultural dimensions in other sectors

A main mission of cultural policy instruments is to envisage mechanisms and structures that ensure that policies, plans and measures in other fields (economy, politics, social) are in conformity with the Islamic, Revolutionary and Iranian culture. For example, it is believed that the Islamic-Iranian identity of cities in the country is weakened through the process of modernisation, and elements of non-Iranian culture are increasingly witnessed in urban landscapes. Therefore, there are regulations that aim to stop this trend and to promote domestic and indigenous elements of architecture. Other subthemes in this field include the following:

- Providing grounds for synergy of non-cultural sectors with cultural policies
- Land use based on cultural considerations
- Paying attention to Islamic-Iranian culture in architecture and city-building
- Observation of cultural aspects in privatisation

Respecting cultural diversity and cultural rights

Cultural diversity has received only marginal attention in cultural policy instruments, just as is the case for cultural rights. It seems that there has been a historical reluctance to acknowledge diversity since it is considered a threat to the presumably unified national-Islamic identity. Existing references to this category address the following items:

- Supporting cultural and religious diversity
- Supporting and safeguarding legitimate freedoms
- Protecting cultural rights

Active and influential cultural interactions

Another issue addressed in cultural policy documents is the necessity of cultural interactions with other nations as well as with cultural entities at the international level to have an influential presence while using the positive aspects of other cultures. However, more emphasis is on cultural influence on other nations and playing as an inspiring cultural role model for other Muslim societies. Subthemes include:

- Cultural communication and interaction (with other countries)
- Taking advantage of other cultures
- Cultural presence at the international level

Confronting cultural invasion

The cultural interaction explained in the previous section is limited by a very serious caution about the harmful aspects of other cultures, in particular the western culture represented by American culture (and exported through new mechanisms of cultural colonialism). Consumerism, lack of respect for traditional family forms and religion, sex, violence, drugs and alcohol, which are promoted in the cultural productions (including in cinema, TV, and fashion industry) of the west, especially the United States, are regarded as the main threats to Iranian-Islamic culture. With the end of the Iraq-Iran war and the beginning of the construction era, this theme began to be raised increasingly in the cultural policy instruments. Related subthemes include:

- Confronting cultural cringe (towards other cultures)
- Confronting grounds for cultural invasion
- Active promotion of alternative cultural models

Encouraging cultural participation and culture of participation

Participation is a key theme in nearly all policy instruments both as means and as an end. While a mission of cultural policy is to extend citizens' participation in cultural activities, it also should pave the way for a cultural participatory ethics in all aspects of social life. However, as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, this is more related to democratisation of culture than devolving the control over cultural policy to the public through cultural democracy. Subthemes in this field include the following:

- Emphasising the right to participation
- Providing grounds for participation
- Strengthening and encouraging cultural participation
- Promoting a spirit of participation
- Encouraging the sense of responsibility

Enhancement of citizenship ethics and culture

Nurturing citizens who are aware of and dedicatedly practicing and observing their commitments in various aspects of social life is seen as a main item on the agenda of cultural policy. Therefore, various sorts of cultural productions and cultural activities are deemed to follow this agenda. Related subthemes include:

- Enhancement of work ethics and responsibility
- Expanding the culture of valuing work and production
- Strengthening a culture of law-abiding and discipline
- Strengthening a culture of environment protection

Consolidation of family institution and the status of women in society

The traditional family occupies a pivotal position as a sacred institution in the ideology of the Iranian political system. Therefore, in theory no cultural item should be produced or

distributed that weakens this position. Even women's employment, which is usually regarded to be on the agenda of social and economic policies, has received special attention and dedicated policy instruments by the SCCR to ensure that they are compatible with the roles of women in the family. The main subthemes under this category are the following:

- Protecting the sacredness of the family institution
- Strengthening the family institution
- Policies regarding women's employment
- Socio-cultural policies regarding women's involvement in sports

Optimising the extent and way of state intervention in culture

Besides the above-mentioned categories that deal with the content and orientation of cultural policy, two other themes are related to the administrative aspects of cultural policy. With extensive state intervention in culture after the Revolution, a need was felt in the second and third decades to optimise this intervention by limiting it to the policymaking level and devolving executive functions to non-governmental public and private entities. Inspired by the post-war structural adjustment approach, this rhetoric has not been realised while the language of policy instruments in this regard is still very state-oriented. Subthemes in this field include the following:

- Necessity of government responsibility and accountability in the field of culture
- Centralisation of policymaking and decentralisation of implementation
- Supporting and enhancement of public/state media
- Developing the cultural economics
- Supporting public cultural activities
- Regulation of relations and interactions among stakeholders of the cultural sector
- Promotion of creativity and innovation

Establishment of an integrated system of strategic cultural management in the country

The Existence of multiple and parallel governmental and semi-governmental cultural institutions is a major issue in the design and delivery of cultural policy in Iran. Therefore, there is a need for an integrated system of cultural management under the supervision of SCCR. Various instruments have addressed the need for this including through the following subthemes:

- Taking advantage of cultural facilities of non-cultural bodies
- Systematic monitoring of cultural developments
- Increasing efficiency of cultural bodies
- Strengthening cultural research
- Development of human resources in the cultural sector
- Expansion of ICTs in the cultural sector

The above-mentioned categories and subcategories illustrate the main cultural policy orientations in Iran from 1979 to 2005 with the main agenda of launching a 'cultural revolution' in the country. However, it was felt after three decades that those policies had

not been effective in producing the desired outcomes, while they are also not compatible with (and enough) for the contemporary era. Therefore, a new wave of cultural policy initiatives was launched under the 'Cultural Engineering' rhetoric that will be discussed below.

Cultural engineering: a new era?

The 'Cultural Engineering' concept was raised in 2005 by the Supreme Leader of Iran and was followed and promoted by various cultural bodies, resulting in the formulation and adoption of the 'Cultural Engineering Map' by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution in 2013 (SCCRS, 2013). This new rhetoric raised many questions and ambiguities (including in the first 'Conference on Cultural Engineering' in 2007) regarding such issues as: the relationship between the two concepts of 'cultural engineering' and 'engineering of culture', the status of religion in cultural engineering, the paradox between the concrete and highly standardised concept of 'engineering' and a completely different concept of 'culture', which may mean an overwhelming intervention by the political power (see e.g. Fouladi, 2009; Moeidfard, 2006). The long-time span from 2005 to 2013 between the time when the concept was first raised and the time it was adopted as an official instrument may point to some of these ambiguities.

It seems that the new cultural trends in the Iranian society that were accelerated by the end of the imposed war against Iran by Saddam Hussein played a key role in the adoption of this new approach. These trends included the gradual weakening of revolutionary and religious values, attitudes and behaviors after the war, cultural globalisation (Afshari Naderi, 2007) and the spread of western values and lifestyles including through new media, the growth of consumerism and a relatively moderate orientation in cultural policy during the Khatami administration. These trends combined with the ambition of the Iranian political system to establish a 'new Islamic civilization' (Masjedjameie, undated) using culture as a strong catalyser of development and progress as grounds for this new policy approach.

A review of the vision, principles, goals, strategies (13 mega and 104 national strategies) and measures (302 national measures) outlined in the 'Cultural Engineering Map' shows that this new instrument reflects nearly all the themes of previous cultural instruments adopted so far, while it addresses some new issues as well. It has a maximalist approach and covers nearly all areas of social life, even the issue of fertility and population growth rate. Given the current low population growth rate and an ageing population trend, this section is more elaborate than other sections, pointing to specific actions to promote a culture of valuing marriage and childbearing through various economic, social and welfare incentives.

As expected, the meaning of culture employed in this map is highly related to and overshadowed by religion and religious values, attitudes, behavior and symbols. There is a new emphasis on strengthening the soft power components of the system to confront the 'soft war' against the Revolution, alongside stressing the role of arts and new ICTs in pursuing the cultural goals of the system.

It could be argued that the main feature of this new instrument is its mandate and endeavor to establish an integrated national system of cultural policy under the supervision of the SCCR, which ensures that all kinds of policymaking (social, political, economic, cultural) are compatible with Islamic and Revolutionary characteristics. Moreover, there is an ambitious intention to purify, standardise and enrich the public culture to establish

a new Islamic civilisation that could emerge as a role model and source of inspiration for all Muslim societies. It will be argued in the concluding section that it is hard to consider the adoption of this new approach as a fundamental change of policy and to envisage a notable success for it.

Concluding remarks

Cultural policy has an interesting history during the past half century and has witnessed considerable transformations and fluctuations especially due to the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. However, it is also possible to trace instances of continuity alongside tremendous change. For example, despite very different points of emphasis, there is a similarity of policy intention between the pre- and post-Revolution periods with regard to the issue of cultural assimilation. While cultural policy in the Pahlavi era was following measures to assimilate various sections of the population in line with modern and western lifestyle (e.g. through forced codes of dressing), cultural policy during the Islamic Republic era has had the agenda of creating and nurturing a 'revolutionary and religious citizen' (including for example through mandatory Hijab). In fact, a common cultural policy assumption in both periods is that culture is a unique platform and a manipulable instrument for pursuing the main goals of the system, be it nation-state building and modernisation or Islamisation and building a new Islamic civilisation (in line with the notion of 'imagined communities' developed by Anderson, 1991). Therefore, cultural policy in Iran is of an 'instrumental' character (McGuigan, 2004), but ironically with little or no emphasis on economic instrumentality.

Another line of continuity in cultural policy in Iran (between the pre- and post-Revolution periods) could be found in terms of following a democratisation of culture agenda instead of a cultural democracy paradigm (Evrard, 1997). In both periods there have been measures to build public cultural facilities, promote access to and use of cultural facilities and services and popularising high culture and cultural knowledge (though with completely different value orientations), but there has been a lack of serious attention to cultural diversity, full and effective cultural representation and participation, as well as democratic control of cultural life. As an example, one can compare the approach of 'Youth Palaces' in the pre-Revolution era with 'Culture Centres' in the post-Revolution period. While young people in the former were exposed to a range of cultural activities in line with the four elements of Pahlavi cultural policy (especially the westernisation agenda), young people in the latter are exposed to different cultural activities that aim to nurture the ideal young people desired by the Islamic system (though with gradual loosening of this agenda during the last two decades). However, the approach and mechanisms are nearly the same and are far from the cultural democracy paradigm.

Cultural policy in Iran certainly falls under a 'stating discourse' in McGuigan's typology of cultural policy (2004) in which the state follows a maximalist intervention approach in culture. Reflecting on the typology of cultural policy models provided by Craik (2007) that identifies five models of state intervention in the fields of arts and culture (the patron model; the architect model; the engineer model; the facilitator model; elite nurturer model) it could be argued that the Iranian model is a mixture of the engineer and nurturer models. It is close to the engineer model because it prioritises culture as an objective of political education allied with the ideological cast of the state. However, there is a difference between the Iranian model and that of the former Eastern Bloc countries because the government does not own all the artistic means of production and creators are not employees of the government, although

there are mechanisms to control or 'guide' them in line with the political agenda of the state. There are also similarities with the nurturer model because the state provides a small number of elite cultural entities (based on its own criteria) to receive budgets and generous subsidies, which protect them from having to compete with 'outsider' cultural organisations.

As a final remark it is noteworthy that Iranian society has a hybrid identity consisting of various ancient, Islamic and modern components (Amuzegar, 2014), and the Iranian people seem to be eager to exercise a bricolage of various components and are not ready to leave one in favour of the other. This is an issue that is beyond the scope of this chapter and needs further elaboration in other academic works. Therefore, it appears that strict cultural engineering policies and practices could not meet their full objectives.

Notes

- 1 The complete text of the Constitution in English containing detailed information about the following bodies, authorities and procedures cited in this section as well as some concise information about the Iranian political system is accessible, *inter alia*, at: www.iranchamber.com/government/government.php.
- 2 A congregation hall for Shia commemoration ceremonies.
- 3 A seminary where Shi'a Muslim clerics are trained.
- 4 Members of Basij Organization are called Basiji.

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