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**THE STATE AND SOCIETY IN THE IRANIAN  
PUBLIC SPHERE AFTER THE ISLAMIC  
REVOLUTION**

**HOSHANG DARA HAMA AMEEN**

The University of Huddersfield

February 2017

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# **Abstract**

This thesis is an attempt to understand the concept of the public sphere through applying it to the Islamic Republic of Iran. This requires understanding the era of the revolution of information and communication technology, as it has affected the structures of the Iranian public sphere. It also aims to understand the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. It tries to offer a complete picture of the Iranian public sphere, including its state and society. Here, both the concept of the public sphere and the Iranian public sphere are being used in order to understand each other.

The concept of the public sphere, here, is understood as it covers all actions and reactions that occur in a country. Its contemporary model is one which greatly depends on the Internet and uses non-controllable freedoms. The aim is, therefore, to find out the nature of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution and describe the role that the agents of both state and society play in the Iranian public sphere.

To collect and analyse data, updated documents and methods are used. Thus, the thesis has used different resources including pictorial and online documents. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the collected data. It has partly been gained through online media observation to collect data, and content and discourse analysis to analyse it.

Finally, by showing reactivity inside the Iranian public sphere, this thesis suggests that non-democratic regimes cannot disable the public sphere totally and also the public sphere can be active even under the hegemony of non-democratic powers. However, activity does not necessarily mean strength, as the Iranian public sphere can be considered as active but also weak. That is mainly because most of its activities are fruitless ones.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction and Methodology

## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter, as an introductory one, tries to explain the most important ideas about the research in terms of its methodological issues, namely the research questions, hypothesis, aims and contribution. It will also provide an overview of the thesis structure and its chapters. Several problematic matters related to the nature of the study, terminology and word count limitation will also be clarified. Furthermore, it tries to spell out the significance of the study, the used methods and other issues related to the thesis. Finally, the reasons behind beginning this project are discussed.

## **1.2. Why Study the Public Sphere in Iran?**

The public sphere, as a concept, is not a very new one. Though in a slightly different context, it was mentioned in the work of Greek and Roman philosophers (Melton, 2001). After Jürgen Habermas' book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962/1989), and especially after its translation into English in 1989, the concept of the public sphere began to receive more attention. However, it still needs to be analysed in greater detail, especially in terms of its models, levels and conditions. Moreover, because of the factors affecting it, namely information and communication technologies, it can be argued that the contemporary style of the public sphere is different from the bourgeois one. On the bourgeois model of the public sphere, Habermas (1962/1989) argues that it is where private agents acts in public against public authorities of authoritarian states, through a rational-critical debate, to crate public opinion and have impact on state's policies.

The bourgeois public sphere, therefore, is the model discussed by Habermas for a specific era and area. It basically depends on the separation of private and public spheres. Public in this model is the result of gathering private agents in a public arena to discuss common matters. Today, for many, it looks like an inapplicable model (McKeon, 2004). Thus, it is believed that previous theories are not able to offer a suitable understanding of the contemporary style of the public sphere. Furthermore, the idea of the public sphere has basically developed around a certain type of state in a specific era and area that has a specific cultural and political culture. Thus, examining it in a different era and area, such as Iran after 1979, would be interesting. Consequently, conducting research on the concept of the public sphere in this important era that has been greatly impacted by new information and communication technologies is a worthwhile endeavour.

There is still a gap in the public sphere literature and particularly in Iranian public sphere studies. In general, existing studies are insufficient to understand the public sphere as a concept in the context of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The apparent absence of in-depth studies and philosophical analysis in the related literature has increased the gap bigger. Likewise, focusing only on an agent or a character of the public sphere in those studies means that they only offer a partial view. For example, there are on Iranian intellectuals, Alinejad, M. (2002); on technology, Shirky, C. (2011); on Islam, Salvatore, A., & Eickelman, D. F. (Eds.). (2004); on Iranian cyberspace, Graham, M., & Khosravi, S. (2002); on Weblogistan, Amir-Ebrahimi, M. (2009); on media, Dehghan, A. R. (2009); on gender, Skalli, L. H. (2006); on women, Koolaei, E. (2009); and on Early Modern Public Sphere, Rahimi, B. (2011)). Therefore, there are studies, but once more they do not offer a whole picture of the Iranian public sphere. To address this, this research tries to analyse both the state and society as the most influential agents of the public sphere that shape its nature in Iran. It will consider some of the regime's tools which have been used to dominate the

public spheres, as well as discussing society's resistance. In this way the research will try to contribute to the body of knowledge of Iranian public sphere studies. The aim is, therefore, to find out the nature of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and describe the impact of both state and society on it.

The other reason why Iran was chosen is because Iran is different from most other political systems in the world. This is because it is the only Shi'i state in the world and also the only state which is ruled by the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist) (Amanat, 2007). It is true that the Iranian regime shares some elements with other political systems, but in fact, it is difficult to argue that Iran is a fully theocratic, authoritarian, totalitarian, arbitrary and even Islamic regime. It is preferable to understand *velayat-e faqih* as it is, not as something compared with other kinds of political regimes. However, this is not what the research aims to do. It is argued that "different societies produce different *forms* of public and private life. [...] Different societies produce different *discourses* about the nature of public and private life" (Susen, 2011, pp.39-40). Thus, Iranian society has its own form of and discourse on the public sphere.

As the literature indicates, the concept of the public sphere has been applied in different countries and cultures all over the world (Wakeman, 1993; Ferree, 2002; Zegeye & Harris, 2003). Here, this research is an attempt to apply it to the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is true that there are a number of studies which have been done on the Iranian regime and society and clarified an aspect of the Iranian public sphere, such as those works that have been done on Iranian women, university students, NGOs, etc. The current study, however, looks at Iran purely from the perspective of the public sphere itself, not from matters like human rights, democracy, deliberative democracy, feminism, student activities, etc.

This study uses Habermas' definition of the concept of the public sphere as "a realm of freedom and permanence" (1962/1989, P.4). However, the research is not going to idealise and generalise the bourgeois style of the public sphere in contemporary Iran. It means that the bourgeois style of the public sphere and classic understandings of the public sphere are not enough to analyse and understand new and contemporary style of the public sphere. Moreover, there it is believed that there is no ideal model of the public sphere to be applicable in anywhere and anytime. The contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere needs a contemporary understanding of the concept of the public sphere and the nature of the Iranian state and society. It means that understanding the contemporary Iranian public sphere requires understanding its new social, cultural and technological phenomena, which are transforming the way of life of the Iranians and their activities in the public sphere. Societies in different areas and eras have a public sphere. However, the differences between different public spheres are related to their structures, activity/passivity and matters of common concern. Things that shape the public sphere are mostly related to agents of the public sphere. It could be argued that the state and society are the agents with the greatest capacity to embrace other sub-agents and are also the most effective.

Here, the thesis claims that the public sphere is not something related to only specific regimes and societies but can be found in others, even in non-democratic regimes – albeit in a different style. Besides, the research tries to describe the Iranian state and society, after 1979, through applying the concept of the public sphere. This is because the concept of the public sphere, more than other related concepts, can embrace the features of both state and society. Thus, in addition to rethinking the concept of the public sphere in the contemporary era, the research also tries to describe the Islamic Republic of Iran through applying the public sphere.

### **1.3. Aims and Objectives**

The present study aims to set up and answer several questions. It follows a plan with a method to do so. The aims can be listed as the following: Offering a new frame to the public sphere which embraces state, society, civil society and social movements. This is because, here, it is understood that the public sphere is not something to be put against and/or versus the state (Eftekhari, 1999). Reorganising the understandings of the public sphere's models, levels and styles. It is believed that the mentioned issues have been discussed, but not organised, as putting them in a frame to understand and analyse. Rethinking the concept of the public sphere in the era of social media. This is because the new information and communication technologies have changed the nature of public activities dramatically. Finding out the nature of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 by applying the concept of the public sphere, with a focus on the role that both state and society play. Discovering the vulnerabilities and potential of the Iranian public sphere by taking cases and examples that can be helpful in understanding such a complicated society. And finally, to contribute to the literature by providing a study on the contemporary Iranian public sphere as there is a gap. Moreover, there is also enough data to be collected for analysis.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

Regarding the research aims, hypothesis and methodology, several questions will be set up and answered. Here, they are listed and classified.

Related to the concept of the public sphere

In this regard, the study asks what is the public sphere? In answering it, it tries to clarify the concept through highlighting the differences between the public sphere and some other

related concepts, such as civil society and social movements. Moreover, the study tries to organise and arrange the models, levels, preconditions and characteristics of the public sphere, especially its contemporary style.

Related to the nature of the Iranian public sphere

Another question is what is the nature of the Iranian public sphere? To answer this, the study seeks to find out the origins of the Iranian public sphere in history, and then make a comparison between the Iranian public sphere before and after the revolution of 1979. In this way it will be able to know how the Islamic Revolution transformed the structures of the Iranian public sphere. Furthermore, the operation of the public sphere in Pahlavi and Islamic regimes, both of which were/are non-democratic, will be explained.

Related to the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution

The research tries to answer the question of how is the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution? Through analysing and describing this matter, the study emphasises the role of both state and society in Iran, as the main agents of the Iranian public sphere. Both have been considered as themes to be analysed. In doing so, the nature of the Iranian regime and Iranian society, and their roles in reshaping the Iranian public sphere have been discussed. To make the issue clearer, the Iranian regime's tools to guide/dominate the public sphere, and especially the case of hijab, have been debated. On the other hand, the study analyses the personality and mentality of the Iranian individuals, as this plays a significant role in characterising the private and public life in Iranian society. Besides, it focuses on online and Internet-based activities as a result of the new information and communication technologies that have changed the nature of the Iranian public sphere. In this way, the research investigates the vulnerabilities and potential of the Iranian public sphere, which are threatened or strengthened by the regime and society.

### **1.5. Hypothesis**

The research will focus on the fact that democracy does not necessarily activate the public sphere, and non-democratic regimes do not have enough power to deactivate society completely. There are societies which are ruled by non-democratic systems and possess a relatively active public sphere. Iran is a good example of this, as there are activities that occur in the Iranian public sphere in both supporting and criticising the regime's policies. There are examples of events that lead the Iranian public sphere towards formulating rational-critical discussions and public activities that will activate the public sphere. These include Friday Prayers [which is a weekly gathering of people to pray together with a religious-political speech]; activities of university students, labour syndicates, feminist groups and environmentalism organisations; human rights campaigns demanding better services; public executions which have become a reason for people to gather in public and take part in collective acts such as campaigns, collecting signatures and demonstrating to ask the family of killed one and/or the court to exempt and/or cancel the decree.

There are activities at nearly all levels of the Iranian public sphere. However, the matter of concern is whether all of these activities are *real* and if society's independent agents are doing them, or if some are *faked* ones and the regime itself is doing them in order to show itself as a popular regime, guiding public opinion? In other words, it can be debated that the regime in Iran is playing an important role in reshaping the Iranian public sphere by guiding/dominating it by carrying out activities in its own name and in the name of the people.

Besides, the Iranian public sphere's activities have not brought any remarkable changes related to the regime's policies and society's behaviour, and most of them have become

abortive. There were/are lots of public activities demanding some issues like adjusting laws, cancelling executions, freeing political prisoners, etc.; however, approximately all of them were not successful. Thus, it can be discussed that, with regard to their quantity, in terms of their quality, the Iranian public sphere's activities, mostly, are fruitless and have no impact on the regime's policies.

The recent events in the Arab countries [Arab Uprisings or Arab Spring] and also in Iran [Green Movement] revealed the fact that the lives of those peoples were not controlled by their regimes completely (Dabashi, 2011b). Additionally, there are "fruitful" activities in Arab countries and fruitless activities in Iran. The uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya changed the regimes and the constitutions of those countries. However, the Green Movement in Iran did not obtain any notable result (Tafesh, 2012). Furthermore, it should be noted that counter Arab Spring, the demand of the Iranian Green Movement in 2009, was not regime change, but related to the Iranian presidency elections and its results (Kurzman, 2012).

Overall, an active public sphere refers to a group of people who have the capacity to act; and a strong public sphere is that one where people have the ability to act *and* bring about change. This research builds its main argument upon the hypothesis that democracy does not always activate the public sphere, and non-democratic systems cannot make the public sphere totally passive or disabled. Nowadays, because of the presence of social media and networking, the realms of liberty are not completely controllable by the state. It is true that a metaphorical sphere such as a web sphere is not an actual one; however, it can be an arena to arrange and regulate some acts in real life (Clay, 2008). It is also a good arena in which to express opinions and have discussions on what happened, what is happening and what is going to happen. Therefore, the web sphere is not quite metaphorical for some

freedoms such as freedom of opinion and expression. For some non-democratic states, it also becomes a sphere in which to demonstrate society's resistance against the regime.

Consequently, the research assumes that non-democratic regimes cannot dominate and passivise society completely and also are not always opposite to the desire of society and its individuals. In the era of information and communication technologies, because of the significant role that social media tools and networking play, the realms of liberty are not completely controllable. The contemporary Iranian public sphere, with regard to its non-democratic regime, has various active agents which play roles in both the virtual and real public sphere.

### ***1.6. The Main Argument of the Research and Its Contribution***

By looking at the literature regarding the concept of the public sphere, it is obvious that most scholars link democracy with society's activity (Fraser, 1990; Maxwell, 2005). In other words, they believe that having an active society able to raise its voice requires several conditions which are mostly related to democracy. That is, principally it is true that having an active society needs a democratic regime, culture and democratic individuals. However, the point is that democracy does not always activate the public sphere. There are societies which are ruled by non-democratic systems and possess an active public sphere. Therefore, the matter concerns the activity versus passivity and the weakness versus strength in the public sphere. It is interesting to know which factors and motivations make the public sphere more active and strong, and why some societies, with regard to democratic political systems, have an underactive public sphere. However, Iranian society, with regard to the hegemony of the non-democratic systems, has a noticeably active, but also weak, public sphere.

Here, the meaning of 'active' is understood as being dissimilar to 'strong'. Active involves all of those targeted activities which occur in society seeking common good. An active society is one which lots of action, reactions, and rational-critical discussions aimed at finding common good are occurring within it, and there are real interactions between its agents. The results and endpoints of these activities do not reduce its significant value in exerting freedoms, such as freedom of speech and expression, by Iranians in the public sphere. However, the term strong, here, illustrates those actions of the public sphere which can act *and* change. Thus, a strong sphere is one which can be active and also bring change. In other words, only having activities in the public realm is not enough to create a strong public sphere. It also needs real changes on those matters that are desired to be changed by the agents of the public sphere. In summary, an active public sphere is one which has the capacity to act and strong public sphere is one which has the ability to act *and* change.

In fact, there is a gap in the public sphere literature and particularly in the Iranian public sphere. Existing studies are generally insufficient to understand the concept of the public sphere in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Besides, the nature of the Iranian public sphere as a sociopolitical concept in the field of political philosophy is unexplored. To address this, the research has to analyse several aspects of both the Iranian regime and society, focusing on its political and sociocultural structures. Therefore, the research aims to investigate the nature of both the Iranian regime and society in order to find out their role in the public sphere and nature of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Focusing on only one agent or one character in the public sphere in the studies about the Iranian public sphere means that they only offer a partial view. Moreover, the studies are not about describing the Iranian public sphere from the perspective of the public sphere itself, but from others like democratisation, human rights, feminism, environmentalism, etc. (Ganji, 2008). Here, it is believed that the public sphere is an indivisible theme. The agents

of the public sphere are doing their activities in different fields of society and impact on each other. Consequently, the research tries to contribute to political science literature by offering a new and organised understanding of the concept of the public sphere through focusing on the public sphere itself and its functions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, applying the concept of the public sphere in Iran is a better way to describe contemporary Iran.

### **1.7. Methodology**

The study uses qualitative research methods. Thematic analysis will be helpful for this research and enable the research questions to be answered (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a "method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic" (p.79). In this method, a theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p.82). In conducting this method, Braun and Clarke focus on six phases; 1) becoming familiar with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report.

Thematic analysis, involves collecting and analysing different data and documents as themes. The data will be collected from books, articles, essays, media, governmental documents, in/formal speeches, websites, private papers and social networking sites. The data, including the visual data, useful information and documents also have been gathered from observing social and state media (Macnamara, 2005). Each one of these documents

has been discussed and analysed in order to find its hidden aspects, which is related to the Iranian public sphere. It is to make the Iranian public sphere's characteristics simple, as it is a very complex one due to the interventions of state and also due to the fusion of religion with other domains. Thus, the research depends on both secondary and primary data. The former are collected from books, journals and other sources of articles. The latter, nevertheless, are mostly retrieved from Iranian websites, social media and some governmental documents. Here, those types of websites and social media have been chosen to use as sources and to be analysed that are formal, governmental or have recognised by social media websites as real but not fake ones. This methodology is used because of its accessibility in collecting data and flexibility to apply it (Riff et al, 2014). It is also suitable for the nature of the present study, its questions and aims. As the research aims to offer a complete image of the Iranian public sphere, it requires the analysis of more than one type of data and documents, considering them as themes. Here, understanding and analysing the Iranian public sphere through observing its media and social media and Internet-based sphere is worthy of study. Thus, knowing Persian and Arabic will be helpful to find, understand and analyse different articles, speeches, and footages. That is because the related local issues are mostly debated in these languages.

Iran is being used as a case study to understand the operation of the public sphere in a non-democratic system. Besides, the concept of the public sphere is being used to describe contemporary Iran. By this, it is believed that using the concept of the public sphere is a better way to know how the real/actual Iran is. That is because, as discussed before, the public sphere more than any other related concept can cover agents of the state and society. Iran also is a good case study to use to find out how the public sphere works in a non-democratic setting. This is because Iran has a non-democratic regime and an active public sphere (Khiabany & Sreberny, 2001; Kazemi, 2001).

As the research tries to look at the case from an original viewpoint, it has faced some challenges. One of those challenges is that Iran as a state has a very complex political and social structure. It believes and applies the doctrine of velayat-e faqih as a system of regime and governance, which is the only state that follows it. It allows and encourages the state and religion to be mixed. It has its own philosophy regarding to the public sphere and civil society. Iran, in fact, has its own method for ruling/running society. It believes in its own doctrine, which comes from its religious and national values (Bar, 2004). However, the study is not confined to evaluating Iran or the Iranian public sphere to find out if it is democratic or not. There are studies in analysing the Iranian regime and culture to prove that Iran does not possess a democratic regime and/or a democratic culture (Katouzian, 2003 & 2012; Ganji, 2008; Mirsepassi, 2010). In fact, this is an obvious fact about Iran. It is a kind of 'truism' that the Iranian regime is not a democratic one. Moreover, the regime itself does not hide its real belief/desire in having a non-democratic system – neither Western, nor Eastern, but an Islamic republic. The regime also does not hide its religious doctrine to rule the country. However, it is proud to be non-democratic and to be Islamic. Trying to Islamise society and its sects is the main task of the regime (Khatami, 2008). Here, for the Iranian regime, the discourse of Iran is not a democratic state is not a criticism.

Islam and Shi'a Islam are the most interesting themes in this study. Nonetheless, the study will not analyse the religion as it appears in the religious texts. In other words, the study does not interpret the religious texts, but analyses them as they are already interpreted and applied in Iran. Thus, the research does not discuss the religion as an independent topic in terms of the Iranian public sphere. That is because in both political and religious issues are mixed and politics is considered a form of worship (Khalaji et al, 2011). That is why the study does not separate religion from politics but analyses both.

The public sphere is understood as where citizens play role as agents of the state and society. These agents have role in shaping the public sphere's nature, appearance and its performance. Here, it can be argued that almost all citizens, who appear in the public to discuss and/or do something, have role in reshaping the public sphere. However, their impact on the public sphere's performance is linked to various factors including their sociocultural, economic and political position in community. Their position in the state and society will enhance their role in the public sphere. Furthermore, there are various factors that play role in empowering citizens, as individuals and also as groups, within society. State's ideology/strategy and society's culture/tradition can be considered as the most significant factors in enriching the position of society's groups. It is apparent that, for example, theocratic systems and religious societies give the clergy more and the women less role (Afshar, 1985; Higgins, 1985; and Honarbin-Holliday, 2008). Democratic systems and developed societies, however, encourage civic culture and respect civil society elements. Thus, it can be argued that, the positions of the society's agents are designed by their sociopolitical systems and also are designing the public sphere. Here, analysing these themes will be helpful to describe the role of the agents of the public sphere.

Furthermore, the research focuses on the Iranian public sphere *as whole*. This means that what will be targeted to be discovered is the public sphere itself, not only an agent or an element of the public sphere. Of course, this will be achieved through analysing several levels, elements and agents of the public sphere, considered as themes, examples. As it mentioned before, there are studies to analyse only an agent or a phenomena but not the whole public sphere. Here, it is believed that, analysing only an element of the public sphere cannot offer a sufficient understanding about the whole picture of the contemporary Iranian public sphere. Thus, the research tries to explain its nature by critically analysing both the regime and society, as themes that can cover almost all agents of the public sphere. It also

pays attention to individual actions beside collective ones. That is mainly because of the contemporary style of the public sphere, which could be argued as the result of the revolution of information and communication technologies. It is, in fact, characterised by its dependence on social media tools more than mass media, and individual acts in virtual spaces more than collective ones in physical places (Oberschall, 1997; Castells, 2008). Therefore, the attention is on individuals more than organisations and other agents of civil society and/or social movements. Accordingly, thesis considers the public sphere as a realm of freedom and performance of individuals and groups, not civil society and social movements as a realm of the activity of groups and organisations (Morris and Herring, 1984). It is true that the non-governmental realm is a realm between state and individuals/groups, but this does not mean that the state and its institutional actors do not have any role in it. Each individual, here, has been considered as an agent of the public sphere. Both the state and society, also, have also been considered as agents of the public sphere. That is because regimes and governments are not always against the public sphere's activities. However, in some cases, they do play an active and positive role in it.

The research tries to describe, analyse and apply the concept, not the theory, of the public sphere in Iran. It means that what is going to be applied is the concept of the public sphere purely from the perspective of Habermasian public sphere or the meaning of the concept itself abstractly, but not from theories, schools and approaches such as feminism, liberalism, or so on. Thus, it uses the concept of the public sphere, rather than following a theory such as theories of civil society and social movements. Furthermore, this study is not going to investigate whether the Iranian regime and the Iranian public sphere are democratic or not. It, indeed, tries to describe it as it is. That is all in order to investigate the nature of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution focusing the role of both state and society. Consequently, it depends on the concept of the public sphere rather than

its related theories. It emphasises the concept of the public sphere as exemplified in the related literature. Here, it does not mean that the public sphere is not relevant to the concept of democracy and the processes of democratisation. They are, in fact, related to each other and the public sphere as it is developed in the literature can play a significant role in empowering democracy (Kellner, 2000). Moreover, in both developed and developing societies, the public sphere can enhance democracy in its different social and political levels. The importance of the public sphere is in that it is where individuals/citizens can participate in political-related issues, and this embodies the principle of political participation, as an important element of democratic settings. Here, it can be claimed that states which try to occupy the public sphere is aimed to prevent people from their right to take part in shaping the public policies. These are attempts to control and discipline people's freedom and performance. Accordingly, the groups and tendencies that try to raise their voice against a totalitarian/authoritarian regime, use the public sphere as an essential tool for protesting and then having impact on the regime. However, the present study aimed at discovering the nature of the public sphere and revealing what is happening in the Iranian public sphere after its Islamic Revolution. Consequently, the nature of the regime, the potential of society and the condition of the political participation in the Islamic Republic of Iran will be clarified.

In the present research, thematic analysis is used as a methodology. The themes are collected through media observation rather than from doing interviews and/or questionnaires. There are a number of reasons for doing this. Firstly, regarding the mentality of Iranian individuals, it is hard to find out their real thoughts and feelings on things related to their life in both private and public aspects. This issue, and the functions of both *Ketman* and *Taqiyeh*, will be discussed a great detail in chapter three and six. Secondly, Iranians, usually, do not want to be at risk from their own regime and the researcher also does not want to put them at risk. Thirdly, having access to the private and

public Iranian spheres, and also being accepted by Iranian policy makers for interviews, are not easy for non-Iranian researchers. Moreover, it is believed that the interviews and questionnaires are not a good way to collect the neutral, free and open data from Iranians. Fourthly, it is believed that with the help of knowing the Persian language and because of the spread of social media tools and the presence of active citizen journalists, useful data and information related to the Iranian regime and society can be found, remotely, over the media. Thus, if there is something valuable and also possible to be broadcasted, it can be found in media; if not, doing interviews, questionnaires and being in Iran does not help the researcher to find them. Fifthly, there are some security-related risks to being in Iran for doing such a research in such a period; thus the researcher depended on media observations instead of other ways of collecting data such as participant observations.

The use of this methodology, thematic analysis, in fact, does not mean that there are no limitations. There are, in fact, difficulties in collecting data for this research (Agichtein et al, 2008). It is, mainly, related to the nature of the work, as it uses online and media observation, it is done remotely, and more importantly it is about Iran. Each one of these factors made the process of data collection difficult. These factors limited the access of the researcher to find the real and reliable data and documents, especially primary data and visual documents. For instance, online documents, by their nature, are suspicious. There is always possibility of presence a of faked and manipulated information and footages. The use of Photoshop by both supporters and critics of the Iranian regime made the process of verifying real footages hard. Moreover, the presence of huge numbers of Iranian websites, weblogs, and social media accounts with fake and/or unknown creators, again, made the researcher confused in choosing the proper document for an appropriate purpose. What has been done in order to overcome these confusion, is that is that those types of websites and social media have been chosen to use as sources and to be analysed that are formal,

governmental or have recognised by social media websites as real but not fake ones. Furthermore, the thematic analysis has its own limitations. Despite the matter of reliability, coding themes and listing them from more to less important, is another matter of concern. For this, different documents have been chosen to support different arguments that are raised in the thesis. Besides, by analysing these documents more information has been collected. The way of choosing some photos, for example, among lots of them, was that those one that had been shared and discussed more on Iranian media and social media have been used. Flexibility, with regard to its advantages, moreover, makes the concentration on needed data difficult (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al, 2012). However, the methodology used in the research is still believed to be proper for the nature of the study, because of its advantages, namely its flexibility and up to date data; also the use of photos itself is a proper way to describe a phenomenon or a situation, as 'a picture is worth a thousand words'.

Here, what have been chosen, as themes to be analysed, are a number of various subjects, which are different in nature. Generally, the thesis has benefitted from constitutional articles, Iranian leader's speeches, and photos from the actual life of Iranians and their virtual life, both in their private and public spheres. The constitutional articles are being considered as themes to show how the Islamic Revolution Islamised Iran. There will be examples to show the regime's desire to follow a specific doctrine of life and politics, with the focus on Shi'ism. These articles, also, can reveal some state's principals for running the country/society. Moreover, what has been written in the constitution, often, can be interpreted in a different version and for a different purpose. To solve this, the thesis uses some speeches of some Iranian leaders as themes to analyse, using discourse analyse methods (Fairclough et al, 2011). In doing so, the research could cover both theoretical and

practical aspects of the ideology of the Iranian revolution/regime, related to the matters of the public sphere.

Furthermore, to know the actual and daily life of Iranians, the thesis tries to describe it through using photos that are taken and published by in/formal agents of the Iranian public sphere, in both state media and social media. The used photos, by their nature, are something that can tell their story and reveal some hidden aspects of the Iranian public sphere. However, the thesis used pictorial analysis to find out their potential hidden stories (Hurtut et al, 2008). This means that the thesis benefited from the photos as data to analyse and find something new, and also as supportive documents to the arguments. These photos, in fact, cannot be denied easily. They, however, can tell a story related to what is happening in Iran's today. More significantly, some of these photos can reveal the hidden facts inside Iranian society which are aimed to be unknown by the local and global public spheres. Here, personal photos of daily life of ordinary Iranians that have been posted/published on social media tools are also useful and helpful. This kind of footages could help the researcher to know what is happening in the private spheres and how they are different from the Iranian public sphere. In other words, it is to clarify the differentiations and/or struggles between private and public spheres in Iran.

Here, different themes have been used in different discussions, as it is believed that only one theme and/or subject cannot reveal all aspects of the Iranian public sphere. For example, when it is about discussing state's attempts to occupy the public sphere, the case of hijab is analysed to clarify the mentioned matter. However, when it is about discussing the society's resistance, the case of social media is analysed. Moreover, the position of women and the curriculums of the Iranian educational system are used to know the structural changes in the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic revolution. Other used photos and themes also are used for a specific purpose aimed that altogether provides a

whole picture of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Overall, the analysed themes enabled the thesis answer the research questions. They, moreover, presented a whole picture of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

## **1.8. Chapters**

The research chapters have been written to be suitable and fit with the research questions, aims and methodology. The thesis is divided into seven chapters, including Introduction and Methodology, and Conclusion. Regarding the nature of the study and its word limit, more focus is on chapter five and six, which discuss and analyse the Iranian state and society. This is because these two main agents of the public sphere can embrace other agents and sub-agents. Thus, by focusing on these two, the research could emphasise its main issues and also pay attention to other related ones.

### **Chapter One: Introduction and Methodology**

This chapter, as an introductory chapter, deals mostly with matters related to the methodology. It tries to clarify the aims and objectives of the research, the research questions and hypothesis. It also discusses the gap in the related literature and the originality of the research. By this, the chapter spells out the research's significance and its contributions to the knowledge. In this chapter, the methodological issues are clarified by highlighting the reasons for choosing the media observation for collecting the data and thematic analysis for analysing the data. Both advantages and disadvantages of the methodology have also been discussed. Moreover, it is discussed why some other appropriate methods have not been used. In general, the chapter is to defence of the way of conducting the research.

## **Chapter Two:** The Public Sphere: A Literature Review

In this chapter, there are attempts to understand and rethink the concept of the public sphere. It tries to make the public sphere clearer through paying attention into the differences between public and private, and the public sphere versus civil society/social movements. It also tries to reorganise models, levels, and preconditions of the public sphere, which had not been organised enough in the literature. Furthermore, the contemporary style of the public sphere, which is affected by information and communication technologies, is discussed with regard to the matter of the possibility of the public sphere's demise. In another section, there are attempts to highlight the public sphere's vulnerabilities and potential focusing on the role of both state and society in the public sphere. In doing so, the chapter helps to answer one of the main questions of the research - what is the public sphere?

This chapter uses as its basis Jürgen Habermas' book, *the Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962/1989). However, it tries to criticise the Habermasian model of the public sphere by using the arguments of several authors, namely Hannah Arendt, Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Lincoln Dahlberg and Craig Calhoun. The importance of this chapter is that it offers a new and organised understanding of the public sphere. It also provides new understandings regarding contemporary style of the public sphere.

## **Chapter Three:** The Origins of the Iranian Public Sphere

This chapter tries to find out the historical roots of the meanings and operations of the concept of the public sphere in Iran. It tries to discover characteristics of the Iranian public sphere by focusing on Iranian politics in the era of the monarchical regimes, religion of Islam and Shi'a in Iran, and then Iranian society and its culture. What has been found,

briefly, is that in Iran, political regimes - because of their material power, and religion - because of its spiritual power, have a bigger role in reshaping the Iranian culture and formulating the mentality of Iranian individuals. Accordingly, they have an impact on reshaping the nature of the public sphere. Besides, the main origins of the public activities go back to the Shi'i religious rituals from the era of Safavids. The public sphere in the era of the Qajars, because of the increase of the functions of the bazaar and newspapers, had become more active than before. Furthermore, some huge events such as the Tobacco Movement and the Constitutional Revolution, which could be called the first proper public sphere activities, occurred in this era. This chapter helps to answer the research question related to the nature of the Iranian public sphere, before and after the Islamic Revolution.

#### **Chapter Four:** The Islamic Revolution and the Structural Transformation in the Public Sphere

This chapter discusses and analyses the Islamic Revolution of Iran (1978-79). It tries to reveal its roots in the years before the revolution. It also highlights the structures in the Iranian public sphere, which were transformed due to the revolution, by emphasising the main changes of the characteristics of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution, including the change of the regime and the dominant ideology, and also the change in the Constitution. This chapter, by analysing different documents and visual data, offers a sufficient understanding of the Islamic regime's goals, policies, strategies and mechanisms to actualise its main goal of Islamising society, including Islamising the public sphere's appearance, acts, and functions. The chapter has been written in a way which fits with the research's methodology and also serves to answer the research questions related to the structural transformation in the Iranian public sphere.

## **Chapter Five:** The Iranian Regime and the Iranian Public Sphere: Vulnerabilities and Potential

In this chapter, the role of the Iranian regime in increasing the public sphere's vulnerabilities and potential is discussed by emphasising the nature of the Iranian regime, the regime's mechanisms such as its constitution and law, media tools, educational institutions and armed forces. The chapter also analyses hijab in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It focuses on the hijab in various aspects such as its religious, legal and political functions in order to clarify the regime's behaviour to deal with the public sphere. In doing so, the chapter tried to explain the regime's impacts in dominating and/or supporting the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution by providing different documents and visual data.

## **Chapter Six:** Iranian Society and the Iranian Public Sphere: Vulnerabilities and Potential

This chapter tries to discover and discuss the role that Iranian society, its agents and individuals play in increasing the vulnerabilities and potential of the Iranian public sphere. It also tries to clarify the nature of society through analysing the personality and mentality of the Iranian individuals. Besides, both private and public life in Iran are analysed. The chapter also pays attention to the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere which depends on virtual/online spheres and an Internet-based model and that is without ignoring the offline society. Altogether, the chapter tries to offer a new understanding of contemporary Iranian society and the Iranian people to discuss the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution. To do this, the research follows the methodology mentioned in collecting and analysing different documents and visual data.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The concluding chapter summarises the thesis. It lists what has been found in the thesis regarding research questions and debated arguments of its hypothesis. Finally, it states the findings and evaluations of the research as a whole. There will be also several recommendations for further research in this field of study.

### **1.9. Conclusion and Notes**

The public sphere is a challenging topic which has not been adequately addressed. Iran also has remained under-researched in many aspects, including its contemporary public sphere. These make the public sphere and the Iranian public sphere an important area for study. This study has tried to discuss, analyse and describe the nature, vulnerabilities and potential of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 through analysing the most affective agents in reshaping the public sphere, state and society and using various sources, including visual online ones. Here, the research's perspective is only from the concept of the public sphere, not other related concepts and theories such as civil society, social movements, human rights, democratisation, etc.

Online sources have been used as they are up to date and easy to access. They are also good sources for photographs, and other visual data. Moreover, they include various sources such as in/formal, non/governmental, and social media tools and websites. The visual data is mostly retrieved from different online sources. The photographs are not the research's main data. They have been provided to assist and support the main arguments which mostly depend on the literature in order to make the thesis more understandable and documented.

It should be noted that the term *regime* in this thesis does not mean a specific type of regime. In Iranian sociopolitical history, the term regime has been used to describe a kind

of regime which is not legitimate and is almost despotic. The Islamic Revolutionaries and the Islamic regime are mentioning Pahlavi regimes just as *regimes* to say that they were despots and had no legitimacy. Nowadays, the Iranian opposition groups are mentioning the Islamic Republic of Iran as a *regime* to say the same. Thus, literally, a regime means a bad-regime. The Iranian argument on this matter is that this word has been used to mention and/or describe the Islamic Republic of Iran, and some others, but has not been used to describe the United States of America, for example, or other European countries. Moreover, the use of the term *state* does not necessarily refer to a modern state, as it appears in modern political thought, but to power, authority, system of governance and rule.

One more note is related to the term *mentality*. With regard to the use of the word 'mentality' in this thesis, it should be noted that it does not refer to reading the mind of Iranians. It is in fact about the typical way of the life and thoughts of Iranians. It is apparent that tens of millions of Iranian people do not think the same; as they are different in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, sub-religion, and even the level of economy income. However, it is believed that they, but not all of them, could have some common sense, as they do have some common interest/fate within the framework of Iran, as a country and they are also impacted by several similar historical issues. Therefore, when in this thesis it reads that 'Iranians think', for example, it does not mean that all Iranians, one by one, think like that. It is always referring to their political culture as something shared among them as crowds, but not as individuals. Nonetheless, the basic way, which is used in this thesis, to understand the crowds is to look at their members. It is, indeed, about the psyche of a nation, but not its one by one individuals.

The next chapter is *The Public Sphere: a Literature Review*. It aims to understand the concept of the public sphere through paying attention into what is public and private. Moreover, it discusses the differences between the public sphere and civil society/social

movements. The chapter also clarifies models, levels, styles, preconditions and vulnerabilities and potential of the public sphere.

# Chapter 2 The Public Sphere: A Literature Review

## **2.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed matters related to the research and to the public sphere, but not the public sphere itself. Here, this chapter tries to understand it through looking at the related literature. It tries to understand the concept of the public sphere by finding its elements through its different definitions, clarifying its differences with civil society and social movements, analysing what factors can have an impact on its activity and strength, and then reorganise its models, levels, preconditions, etc. It, moreover, discuss the contemporary style of the public sphere. This chapter will answer the research questions related to the concept of the public sphere. It will analyse the question what is the public sphere? Moreover, it tries to organise and arrange the models, levels, preconditions and characteristics of the public sphere, especially its contemporary style. Furthermore, what has been theorised in this chapter will be applied to the Iranian public sphere in the next chapters. In doing so, the research will clarify the concept of the public sphere in both its theoretical and imperial aspects. Thus, this chapter will be a base for the whole research, and the analysis of the thesis will be based on this chapter because it will provide a new understanding of the public sphere as an 'essentially contested concept'.

What is central to this is accepting Habermas' theory of the public sphere as a frame which comes from his work *the Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962/1989). Habermas raises the concept of the public sphere as "a realm of freedom and permanence" (p.4). Consequently, the chapter tries to understand and reorganise the concept of the public sphere as a necessary element for exerting freedom and the performance by its agents. However, it is not going to define, but

understand and reorganise, the public sphere as an abstract definition. It simply means that it is believed that it is better to try to understand and describe the concept of the public sphere rather than stick to a definition. By this we can let the concept of the public sphere to be flexible with those structural changes that come into its field. It, in fact, remains an open concept. This is because the presence of an open concept of the public sphere helps the actual public sphere remain as an open realm. It will also serve the public sphere to protect its nature, as it is a process in continuous transformation. Understanding the public sphere needs understanding its related matters including its vulnerabilities and potential, its levels and models, and its main agents which are state-related and society-related ones.

For the public sphere, not just places and palaces, individuals and groups, but also the dominant ideology of the regime and the cultural values of society are significant and play role in reshaping the public sphere. Besides, different societies produce different styles of public sphere. There are different models of the public sphere. An active and strong public sphere requires several preconditions. Nonetheless, there are local, national, supranational and global levels of the public sphere. The new information and communication technologies, moreover, have changed the public sphere's applications and functions. The contemporary style of the public sphere, which is distinguished by the impact of the Internet, requires more analysis. Nevertheless, states and societies have different methods to deal with the public sphere. Analysing their sociopolitical systems is helpful to know what are the potential and vulnerabilities of the public sphere, how an active and strong public sphere can be produced, and what kind of problems and difficulties it will face.

## **2.2. Understanding the Concept of the Public Sphere**

As mentioned before, this thesis attempts to understand, not define, the concept of the public sphere. This section and the following ones aim to do this, and the whole thesis can offer a new understanding of the public sphere, which also can provide a complete idea of what the public sphere can cover and include. Here, it is accepted that the public sphere is an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie, 1955).

Here, understanding the concept of the public sphere as a term which includes ‘public’ and ‘sphere’ will be helpful for understanding the whole concept of the ‘the public sphere’. This requires a dichotomy, dividing the term into its two parts in order to understand it through understanding its parts divisibly. Thus, the method is to divide, understand and reconstruct it. Here, both *public* and *sphere* will be analysed in order to find a proper meaning of the concept of *the public sphere*.

The term public is linked to those things/matters which are not private. Thus, it is plausible to understand public through understanding private. Private, however, refers to those things/matters that are linked to the private life of the individuals in a society. These are not related to the lives of others. For example, one’s favourite kind of breakfast, doing or not doing daily exercises, following a specific kind of lifestyle, and the like are quite private. That is because those actions are not relative to others in public. Here, it should be noted that the link between individuals and society is a strong and non-deniable one. Society will be stronger by strengthening its individuals as the private life of the individual has an impact on others and also on society. A healthy lifestyle may have an impact on others, indirectly, as it reduces the cost of health care in the state. Therefore, the potential and vulnerabilities of a society are the reflections of both the private and public acts of its individuals. Nonetheless, here, private means that individuals can choose and do the kinds of activities that they want to without having a direct intervention on the lives of others.

Through knowing what private is, non-private or public can be understood more easily. Here it can be argued that those activities, actions, reactions and discussion, that are occurring in the public places and are having link with more than one, or majority, can be argued as public activities, as they have linked with the matter of public, even if they are done by private agents. Public things are not related to only one person, but to more than one, or to people – the majority or minority - in the community or society that have a part of its metaphorical ownership (Warner, 2002). Again, it does not mean that there is no connection between private and public, but it can be argued that the public, usually, is the extension of private. Streets and pedestrians, common palaces such the cinema or theatre halls, buildings of hospitals and schools all are public. The meaning of public for these places means that the real function of those places is to serve not just one but more or the majority of people in that community or society. Nonetheless, public is not only about material things, but also ideal ones. For instance, a state's national anthem, a society's security, a national football team, liberty, justice, peace, and other ideal concepts are related to all. In addition, what individuals in society do in their private life is private and what they do in their public life is public.

For Hannah Arendt (1958), public means "everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity" (p.50). Furthermore, it "signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place on it" (p.52). Friedrich Schiller makes the range of public even wider. In 1782, he stated that "the public is everything to me, my school, my sovereign, my trusted friend. I shall submit to this and no other tribunal" (Cited from: Melton, 2001, p.2).

Nancy Fraser (1990) spells out the notion of publicity and argues that "the idea of a public sphere is that of a body of 'private persons' assembled to discuss matters of 'public concern' or 'public interest' [...] The result of such discussion would be 'public opinion' in the strong

sense of a consensus about the common good" (p.58-59). Thus, the public is something which comes from and contains the private. Generally, it can be argued that everything has the potential to be viewed as public, as it may become something related to public concern (Termbly, 2006; Barenreuter, 2009). Here, 'private' can mean 'public' when it becomes a public matter and is associated to others, or when it plays the role that the public should play.

Related to the word 'sphere', the second part of the term 'public sphere' is synonymous with words like area, arena, realm, scope, space, atmosphere, zone, environment and domain. Socio-politically, a sphere is not an entire existence, but includes a place/space in which one can do his/her activities and be seen/heard by others. This could be in a local, national and/or global arena.

A sphere that could be shared with others could be referred to as public. This sphere, as a place embracing the meaning of public, is emerged with exchanging news and information through exchanging commodities and goods. At first, it started in northern Italian city-states and then spread to northern and western European cities. However, the real emergence happened with the opening of coffee-shops in England, salons in France and literature forums in Germany. It then spread across the world (Habermas, 1962/1989; Rospocher, 2012). The historical public sphere advanced with the foundations of places such as coffeehouses, literary clubs, and salons. As a space in which private individuals were involved in rational-critical discussion, it quickly moved beyond 'a non-political literary world' and extended its field to political subjects. Then, the bourgeois style of the public sphere appeared within the private sphere of family, and finally obtained a political change (Melton, 2001). Besides, "with the emergence of early finance and trade capitalism, the elements of a new social order were taking shape" (Habermas, 1962/1989, p.14). It was, in fact, dominated by the impact of money and power. Tsekeris (2008) makes a link between

capitalism and the bourgeois public sphere in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century and states that:

The bourgeois public sphere, increasingly, became a significant part of the social life that consisted of private individuals who argued together in public places (such as the seventeenth-century coffee-houses in London, the eighteenth-century salons in France and the table societies' in Germany) in order to elaborate on the key issues of the day (mainly of political concern) and exchange views and opinions on matters of importance to the common good (p.12).

Here, a sphere refers to somewhere an individual can do their "legal" wants and can actualise their wills within it. In other words, a sphere is a place in which its agents influence and are influenced. A sphere is not only a place but also palaces and spaces which have rules, habits and norms, including individuals, associations and authorities. It is that which embraces all actions and reactions which occur within it by agents of society in a rational-critical way and in order to find a common good.

Public sphere indicates a space in which private agents in a society can gather together and have a rational-critical debate on common matters. That is, of course, in order to find the common good. Thus, the public sphere is the extension of the private realm of *persons* in a society. The public sphere as a concept has been defined and clarified by different scholars from different point of view. Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) is known as the founder of the public sphere as a concept, states that:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general

rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor (p.27).

For Habermas, discussing public issues was transferred from elite to public (or ordinary) people due to the emergence of public spaces. However, here it is understood that the public sphere is not only for private individuals, but also for public and non/governmental agents. In other works, Habermas (1974) tries to clarify and defend his idea of the public sphere and its functions. According to Habermas (1962/1989), the public sphere is bourgeois in its style which appeared in the bourgeois age. Calhoun (1992) clarifies this as a public place for private people seeking the common good through rational-critical discussions. It also could be argued as the reintegration of both private and public aspects of a society's agents in the public domain. The public sphere also can be considered as a sphere of citizens with their differences, to communicate and debate the needs of society. Johnson (2001) tries to clarify this by stating that:

Central to the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere was the unravelling of that conception of the separation between the private and the public domain through which it had interpreted its own principle of communicative interaction. The threat came, in the first instance, from those populations who encountered the principle of separation as an ideological obstacle to their own aspirations (p.223-224).

Modern and contemporary styles of the public sphere, however, originate from the bourgeois style. It is an ideal, original and basic model for other models of the public sphere. However, it is not a model that can be generalised and idealised to all eras and areas, as each one of them has its own circumstances. According to Keane (1995), the modern distinction of the concept of the public sphere was originally bound up with the struggle against authoritarian states in Europe. The terms public, public virtue and public

opinion were to upkeep liberty of press and other publicly-shared liberties. Discussing the public was against the despotism of monarchs and courts supposed of doing arbitrary, abusing their power and authority, and advancing their private interests at the expense of society. In this new sociopolitical and institutional background, the political character of freedom of expression particularly established in the extended struggle to establish autonomous newspapers of the state, which officially recognised in the constitutional organisations of modern industrial states. Indeed, as Tsekeris (2008) argues, freedom of speech was undoubtedly pivotal to the public life of people, in discussing political matters.

It can be concluded that the public sphere is a realm to actions and reactions between the agents of community/society. However, not only individuals, but also NGOs and authorities can play the role of agents. Thus, the public sphere is like an open area in which to cooperate and work together seeking common good through having a rational-critical debate. It is a realm of freedom and performance for society's agents in a public space (Habermas, 1962/1989). Nonetheless, the notion of the public sphere indicates an open arena of rational-critical debates in public, an arena that is conceptually connected with the democratic process in which individuals can freely deliberate normal issues of common concern. Generally, the public sphere is theorised in contrast to privatised approaches of economic activities and the private realms of personal and family relationships (Tsekeris, 2008). Consequently, the public sphere is not only a place or a space in which to do something random, but a meaningful process with clear targets. It is concerned with establishing and activating common minds in order to find a common good.

The concept of the public sphere, in fact, has been theorised in the Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and then developed in other works of Habermas himself and others. Habermas uses this concept as a social sphere in where private individuals come to discuss non-private, but public, issues. These discussions should occur

in a condition in which freedom and equality are provided for all participants. They should be free from state's intervention to create a public opinion which represents people's, but not power's, thoughts on public matters. Moreover, individuals can debate state's legitimacy, rationality and also its policies. Therefore, the public sphere is aimed at rationalising the state and empowering the democracy. As Kellner (2000) argues, "Habermas's focus on democratization was linked with emphasis on political participation as the core of a democratic society and as an essential element in individual self-development" (p.262). In the Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas attempted to develop his theory of the public sphere. In this theory, Habermas, once more, emphasis rational-critical discussions in which they are free from the state's intervention and based on logic and reason, communicative rationality (Habermas, 1984). In defining the public sphere, Habermas (1974) states that:

By "the public sphere" we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body (p.49).

What is significant in the public there is that the matters of common good, liberty, justice, rationality, and other related ones, only can be found inside the public sphere, but not inside the sphere of state's authority or even private agents. Thus, no one can claim that they know what is good for common or what is common good, but this should be argued and then built up by the rational-critical discussions among private individuals, and finally accepted by the public sphere, which also will be reflected in public opinion. The public opinion itself, moreover, can be created through individual's discussions on matters of public interests (Yazdkhasti et al, 2013). Thus, where individuals discuss public related matters, it becomes a part of the public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989). The public sphere,

in Habermas' understanding, should be free from state's hard and soft power. The public opinion also should not be built upon state's use of hard power or its use of the soft power, media. It, however, should be based on society's private agents as its power embodies in social performance and social movements. Thus, society's agents can observe, criticise, and influence the state's performance. All individuals can play role in the public sphere and discuss state-related matters, as citizens. Their right is a natural one which no one should be deprived from it, as no one has priority over others. In doing so, even state's authorities, companies and other elements of capitalism should be equalised with ordinary citizens, to play role in the public sphere. Nevertheless, as Fraser (2007) argues,

A public sphere is conceived as a vehicle for marshalling public opinion as a political force. Mobilizing the considered sense of civil society, publicity is supposed to hold officials accountable and to assure that the actions of the state express the will of the citizenry (p.7).

Here, it can be argued that, for Habermas, the public sphere consists of nothing but private agents that have interest on public-related matters and try to have an impact on state's performance. By this, they can create public opinion which is, in democratic settings, respected by public authorities. In discussing common issues, what is important is, is that the power of participants should be logic, reason and rational justifications, but not hard power and/or propaganda. Thus, the public sphere, as uses civic and rational methods to discuss public issues, creating common sense and seeking common good, is a sphere against both the statism and privatism. It is where the society, private agents, tries to rationalise and democratise, the state and public authorities (Muzaffari, 2007).

In fact, the bourgeois public sphere in Habermas' discussions goes back to the bourgeoisie middle class of European people, whose could make the public sphere free from authoritarian regimes' interventions, relatively. This was began by using salons in France,

clubs in Germany, and coffee-shops in England, as these places became places to discuss common related issues, including state's performance in society. These discussions were characterised by their freedom from the state, equality for participants, and also they were open to accept new participants. The discussions were mostly about political issues and the nature of the authoritarian system. Besides, Habermas (1974) states that:

We speak of the political public sphere in contrast, for instance, to the literary one, when public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of the state. Although state authority is so to speak the executor of the political public sphere, it is not a part of it (p.49).

Here, it should be noted that state can be considered as a part of the public sphere, as it plays role in reshaping the nature of the public sphere and also can act as an agent which is care about matters of common interest. The state also has its own agents which their basic aims are to dominate/guide the public sphere. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a public sphere without the role of the state in it. The state also is not always a tendency against society's interests. It can support society's agents in seeking common good, which both the state and also society can benefit from it. Nevertheless, Habermas (1974) argues that "only when the exercise of political control is effectively subordinated to the democratic demand that information be accessible to the public, does the political public sphere win an institutionalized influence over the government through the instrument of law-making bodies" (p49).

The performance of the bourgeoisie public sphere shifted from the face-to-face dialogues to printing and issuing independent newspapers to cover and discuss state's policies, which also included issues related to parliament, in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, not only the state, but also private individuals could have their own media to express and present their ideas on matters related to common/public (Mehdizadeh, 2010). As Habermas states "today

newspapers and magazines, radio and television are media of the public sphere” (Habermas, 1974, p49). The main function of the public sphere, therefore, was observing and discussing the state’s policies based on a rational-critical discussion. The rational-critical discussion is also aimed at seeking common good, which is also for the sake of people’s interest, not state’s interest. When society could be free from state’s interventions, the public sphere could rise and growth among private individuals. Thus, it can be argued that the public sphere generated from the private spheres of people. The public sphere, furthermore, is where private individuals discussing non-private, but public, issues, based on a rational-critical debate. However, the fundamental in Habermas’ theory for the public sphere is that he believes that “the public sphere as a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer or public opinion, accords with the principle of the public sphere (Habermas, 1974, p50). However, it is understood that the public sphere is not in between society and state, but in fact, in consists of both society and state. This is because there is not a public sphere without the state and individuals.

Habermas, moreover, discusses the growth and demise of the bourgeois public sphere. He believes that state’s intervention and the hegemony of mass media can decline the public sphere and change it to an ideological sphere in which serves an ideology, but not public interest. In Habermas’ view, the demise of democratic communicative actions, as a result of the growth of mass media and monopoly capitalism, will cause the demise of the public sphere, in playing its proper role in society. Habermas adds that “the political public sphere of the social welfare state is characterized by a peculiar weakening of its critical functions” (1974, 55). Moreover, spread of thoughts based on consumerism and the profit of companies, globalisation, the development of free market and private sectors in economy, led the public sphere towards declining, as it is mentioned by Habermas as re-feudalisation.

Habermas also thinks that the hegemony of advertisements in media make individuals think less about matters of public interest and more about their private benefits (Yazdkhasti et al, 2013). As Kellner (2000) argues, "for Habermas, the function of the media have thus been transformed from facilitating rational discourse and debate within the public sphere into shaping, constructing, and limiting public discourse to those themes validated and approved by media corporations" (p.265).

Moreover, when the public sphere becomes a tool of the state, companies, and media, then they can use it to manipulate people's mind and guide them towards non-public related interests. This enforcement can be found, easily, in non-democratic settings which state's interferences in people's private and public life is apparent and it have impact on reshaping people's thoughts. Thus, the public sphere is considered as a declined one when it serves private, but not public, interests, of the state or specific groups of society. As Habermas (1974) states "often enough today the process of making public simply serves the arcane policies of special interests" (p.55). He adds that "yet this trend towards the weakening of the public sphere as a principle is opposed by the extension of fundamental rights in the social welfare state" (p.55). Kellner (2000) discuss this matter and claims that public opinion in 'the debased public sphere of welfare state capitalism' is directed by elites of media, economy and politics, as they could control the system and society. He adds that:

While in an earlier stage of bourgeois development, public opinion was formed in open political debate concerning interests of common concern that attempted to forge a consensus in regard to general interests, in the contemporary stage of capitalism, public opinion was formed by dominant elites and thus represented for the most part their particular private interests. No longer is rational consensus among individuals and groups in the interests of articulation of common goods the norm. Instead, struggle among groups to advance their own private interests characterizes the scene of contemporary politics (p.264-265).

In general, the public sphere is about the individual's integration with their own community/society, the participation of individuals as citizens in public and political life, and the individual's participation in empowering and enhancing the democracy - democratisation. Publicity is that element of the public sphere which can activate it in achieving its goals and seeking common good. In Habermasian understanding, the public sphere because of its publicity can create critical public opinion criticising the role which state plays in people's lives. Besides, there are two types of publicity. First, there is a critical publicity which involves a critical public opinion. Second, there is a supportive publicity which is subjected to state's mass media or is activated by state's agents (Al-Alawi, 2015). Nevertheless, the public sphere can also be understood as a sphere to perform the functions and performances of both private and public agents of both state and society; it can be expanded than to be about only democracy. Here, Fraser (2007) states that:

The concept of the public sphere was developed not simply to understand communication flows but to contribute a normative political theory of democracy. In that theory, a public sphere is conceived as a space for the communicative generation of public opinion. Insofar as the process is inclusive and fair, publicity is supposed to discredit views that cannot withstand critical scrutiny and to assure the legitimacy of those that do. Thus, it matters who participates and on what terms (p.7).

What is significant in analysing the contemporary public sphere is that, it, in fact, requires studying post-bourgeois style of life and politics, in which state is less powerful and society is becoming more powerful, based on civil society organisations and new social movements. Here, both feminist activities in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and also the struggle of blacks in the US are good examples of the post-bourgeois public sphere's activities (Al-Alawi, 2015). Furthermore, new information and communication technologies are playing an important role in reshaping the public sphere and performing its functions. As Kellner (2000) argues,

“the rise of the Internet expands the realm for democratic participation and debate and creates new public spaces for political intervention” (p.280).

Consequently, the public sphere is where society’s independent agents, individuals and groups, are free from the interventions of state’s authorities and also companies and the church, or mosque. Therefore, the public sphere is not an organisation or institution, but it should be considered as a networking space for exchanging information and ideas between individuals/citizens (Yazdkhasti et al, 2013).

### ***2.3. The Public Sphere versus Civil Society/Social Movements***

This section deals with matters of both civil society and social movements related to the public sphere. However, the framework of the research is based on the concept of the public sphere rather than on civil society/social movements because these two concepts are not synonyms. It can be argued that both have some common features and are related to society and its agents; however, they are not two interchangeable concepts, as each one has its own meanings. It is also true that in some works they have been used as synonymous concepts, though this does not mean that they are two interchangeable concepts (Mohebi, 2012; Pierson, 1996). The reason that this research will not use civil society and/or social movement theories is not because they are not useful or do not have any link with the public sphere but because this work tries to be purely from the perspective of the public sphere, not something else. Moreover, it is believed that in this way the study will be able to answer the research questions.

Here, it is believed that the public sphere is older and also broader than civil society. Each society, even each community, has a kind of public sphere, but not civil society. The public sphere embraces any agents of society that have an impact on activating/passivising it.

Thus, the public sphere not only concerns agents of civil society and actors of social movements, but also all non/institutional actors, in/formal institutions, non/governmental organisations, groups and individuals. Nevertheless, the public sphere not only concerns local and national spheres, but also the global public sphere, which has impact on other levels of the public sphere (Keane, 1995). In addition, in the case of Iran, there is an essential and controversial question, which is 'did Iran ever enjoy a civil society'? Here, it cannot be argued easily that Iran enjoys a civil society; however, it can be argued that it has a public sphere, regardless of its nature and characteristics.

One of the reasons that made some scholars think that civil society and the public sphere are interchangeable is that they consider the public sphere as something just like civil society that needs to be built. The public sphere, in fact, is something which is already existed and what is changing is changing *in* the public sphere, not *of* the public sphere. Thus, what is changing is the nature of the public sphere and the structures of society in the public sphere, not the structures of the public sphere or the public sphere itself. Accordingly, the public sphere is something different to civil society and social movements. Consequently, public places and public activities can always be found in societies; although, the public sphere does not have the same level, model and power everywhere. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the nature of the public sphere, and to measure its publicity, activity and ability to have a rational-critical discussion on common matters, and not a discussion on whether Iran (for example) ever had a public sphere or not.

Here, it can be argued that the public sphere includes nearly all agents and elements of the state – including the regime and its formal and political institutions. It is not conceivable to put the public sphere against, or even versus, the state, society, NGOs or other agents of the state. This is simply because the public sphere is embracing all of those mentioned aspects of society (Mohebi, 2012). To be clearer, for example, formal acts of state, such as

elections, parades, police operations, the president's speech and the like, all occur in the public sphere; accordingly the actors of these acts are agents of the public sphere. The public sphere also embraces all micro, meso and macro levels of activities which represent levels of activities of individuals, organisations and society (Fuller, 2005). Moreover, all personal and collective, individual and societal, and even relational and nomadic acts could be accounted for as activities of the public sphere. However, what are important for the public sphere are acts which depend on a rational-critical debate, having interest in the matter of common and seeking for common good - such as questioning the matters of legitimacy and rationality of the state, which are the most challenging issues for state and the most valuable issues for the public interest.

Struggles between individuals and the state, individuals and society, state and society all occur in the public sphere. In Iran, for example, private places have become places with public characteristics. All private and public places have an impact on the public sphere, and they have an impact on each other too. This is why the public can be accounted for as an extension of the private. Ironically, in Iran, private can also be accounted for as an extension of the public. Nonetheless, social movements are those collective activities that occur in the public sphere, though they are not the public sphere itself. In relation to the civil society organisations, each NGO is usually concerned with the interests of its particular social group. It plays role in the public sphere, but cannot reshape it alone by itself. Thus, the public sphere is not only concerned with the activities of civil society. It is, in fact, concerned with the activities of all agents that occur inside a country at its different levels. The struggles in the public sphere could be between the agents of the public sphere, and in general they are between groups which are *pro* and *anti* a phenomenon, idea, norm, value, law, and the like (Oberschall, 1997).

It should also be noted that, sometimes, the hegemony of a social group or a social class is dominant over society; though this does not mean that it dominates the public sphere totally or becomes the public sphere itself. Even, the regime itself is not able to stitise everything, and that is why always some spaces of society remain as public. Public spaces remain public, but in different conditions and situations - in different levels of activity and strength. The Iranian public sphere, for instance, through different periods of history, was dominated by akhonds, peasants, workers, white-collars, nationalists, religious-nationalists, intellectuals, students, women, and now, partly, by human rights activists and journalists. Therefore, the public sphere is a sphere for all, which is activated by all, too. Here, it can be stated that:

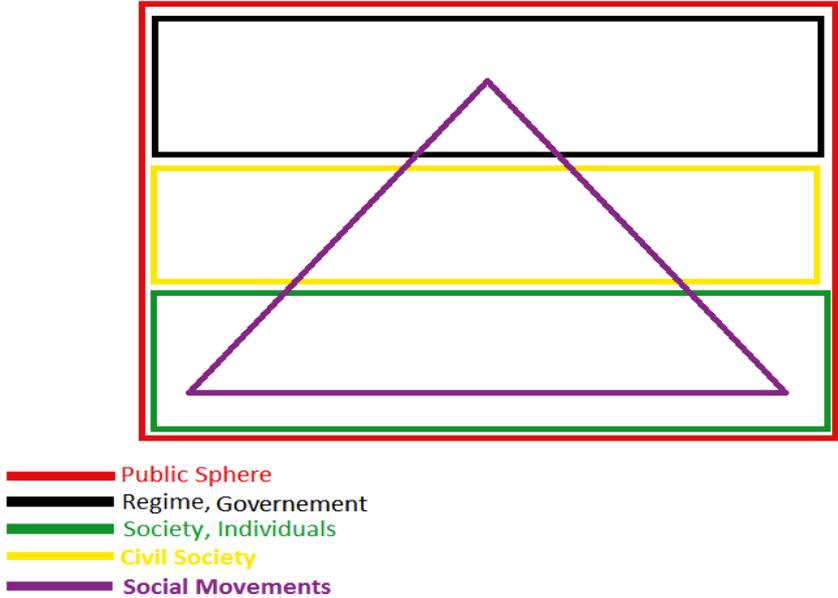
The public sphere is not a space but an occurrence. It's not an entity; it is a phenomenon. It is the effect of two, three, or more people coming together to figure out what to do on matters of common concern. Where civil society seems to map formal and perhaps informal associations, the public sphere maps activities (McAfee, 2009, Online).

Civil society, however, can be counted as part of the public sphere. It can also be placed against, or versus, the state or regime, but not against the public sphere. As is known, civil society is a mediator between the state and individuals. It plays this role through activating several non-governmental organisations. However, the public sphere embraces the whole process of acting and reacting which occurs in society (Mohebi, 2012; Fraser, 1990). Furthermore, the requirements of having a civil society are more than those of a public sphere. What is essential to enjoy the public sphere is the presence of individuals in a community/society having common concerns and seeking common good in a rational-critical way in a public space. However, without the presence of several requirements, such as having a semi/democratic political system and a civic culture, civil society will not appear. As a result, Iran, regardless to its non-democratic regime, can have a public sphere, even if

it is not democratic or civic enough. Conversely, arguing that there is a civil society in Iran is a more challenging matter. For the matter of social movements, they require individuals, networks and leaders [or a vanguard]. It is true that social movements are a part of the public sphere's activities. However, symbolic gestures conducted by a single person, such as a piece of graffiti by Banksy, a naked woman walking alone on the street to protest something, or a chat between two people in a coffeehouse about matters of common concern, are all activities of the public sphere, but cannot be described as a social movement. Thus, all kinds of protests can be described as activities of the public sphere, but not civil society or social movements, as they represent only collective/organised actions (Crossley, 2002).

The following charts clarify the position of the public sphere, civil society and social movements in relation to each other inside a state/country, and also the differences between civil society and the public sphere.

**2.3.1. The position of the public sphere, civil society and social movements**



The above chart exemplifies the position of the public sphere, civil society and social movements in relation to each other inside a state/country. As shown in the chart, and as discussed before, the border of the public sphere is as much the border of the state/country. It can embrace all other aspects of the state/regime and society/individuals. Besides, civil society is located between state/regime and society/individuals, and plays a role as mediator. Furthermore, all individual and collective activities occur inside the public sphere. Social movements are also a part of what is happening inside the public sphere.

**2.3.2. The differences between the public sphere and civil society**

	<b>Public Sphere</b>	<b>Civil Society</b>
<b>Emergence</b>	Pre-modern	Modern
<b>Range</b>	Embraces state, individuals and civil society	Located inside and is a part of the public sphere
<b>Location</b>	Embraces state, individuals and society	Located between the state and individuals
<b>Preconditions</b>	Existence of individuals in a community/society with having common concerns.	Existence of a democratic authority, civic culture, NGOs
<b>Agents</b>	Includes individual/s, in/formal, non/institutional agents [should be active]	Includes nongovernmental organizations [should be nongovernmental and organised]
<b>Tasks</b>	Seeking for common good in a rational-critical way in a public space	Seeking for reducing the gap between the state and individuals by conducting collective actions depend on collective behaviour

The above table demonstrates the differences between the public sphere and civil society. It shows the difference between the two concepts in terms of their emergence, range, location, preconditions, agents and tasks. As clarified in the table, and as discussed before, with regard to some similarities that they have, the public sphere is older, wider and easier to create than civil society. Furthermore, these concepts are not synonymous and are not interchangeable.

## **2.4. Models of the Public Sphere**

Here, the models of the public sphere will be discussed. This also will be an attempt to organise them. This is first done to understand an important matter related to the concept of the public sphere. Accordingly, the research will investigate the Iranian model of the public sphere and try to clarify the whole image of the Iranian public sphere.

There is more than one model for the public sphere. Scholars also have different perspectives on it. However, they also agree on several related issues. Generally, it is more reasonable to classify models of the public sphere based on the characteristics of the models and who they are different with each other because of the nature of their structures and functions, but not based on different perspectives of theorists or scholars on the public sphere - as there are some classifications for the models of the public sphere like the Arendtian or Habermasian model of the public sphere (Benhabib, 1993). Here, different political-philosophical studies have shown that the concept of the public sphere can be understood as performance which is formed by different sociopolitical and economic circumstances. These differences are significant elements to determine the theoretical structures which can shape the models of the public sphere.

The models of the public sphere can be classified depending on their history into four models. First, the classic or ancient model of the public sphere, which *polis* and *res publica* of Greek and Roman represent it. Second, the bourgeoisie model of the public sphere, which is considered as the beginning of the public sphere in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. Third, the modern model of the public sphere which is distinguished by the rule of democratic systems. And forth, the contemporary model of the public sphere, which is known as the era of the hegemony of capitalism in economy and the revolution of information and

communication technologies. There is also the possibility of the demise of the real and proper public sphere (Villa, 1992). Each one of these models is different in several aspects. This is mainly because different societies in different periods shape different models of the public sphere.

Modern democracies have different models of the public sphere. These models can be classified into four different styles. The first one is the representative liberal model, which is highlighted by the role of elites. The second is the participatory liberal model which is more popular. The third one is the discursive model of the public sphere which is based on public discourse. And finally, the last model is known as the constructionist model of the public sphere (Ferree et al, 2002). The most apparent feature of all of these models is their liberal values. Here is a table retrieved from their work to clarify the models of the public sphere in their understanding (p.316).

Normative criteria in democratic theory

Theory types	Criteria for a good democratic public discourse			
	<i>Who participates</i>	<i>In what sort of process</i>	<i>How ideas should be presented</i>	<i>Outcome of relation between discourse and decision-making</i>
<b>Representative liberal</b>	<i>Elite dominance Expertise Proportionality</i>	Free market- place of ideas Transparency	Detachment Civility	Closure
<b>Participatory liberal</b>	Popular inclusion	<i>Empowerment</i>	Range of styles	Avoidance of imposed closure
<b>Discursive</b>	Popular inclusion	Deliberative	<i>Dialogue Mutual respect Civility</i>	Avoidance of premature, non-consensus-based closure
<b>Constructionist</b>	Popular inclusion	Empowerment Recognition	Narrative creativity	<i>Avoidance of exclusionary closure Expansion of the political community</i>

The public sphere, in fact, mirrors the nature of the state and society. Thus, what is happening inside society can be reflected in the public sphere too. For example, it is hard to find a gender-balanced public sphere in a society that its state and society believe in gender-discriminations. Nonetheless, there will be different levels of discrimination against women in private and public spheres. This is because the state's law has more power to enforce, control and discipline than society's tradition. Besides, the public performance is more sensitive for both state and society than the performance of the individuals in private.

This is why non-democratic states usually try to control the individuals' performance in the public sphere, as it could have impact on the state's security/stability. Moreover, religious and traditional states and societies see themselves as the women/honour protectors; and try to play their role in the public sphere to emphasise their legitimacy (Eftekhari, 1999; Panah, 2007).

Here, the public sphere, itself and as a concept – in theory, is not believed as a gendered concept, but a human-related one, and the women's participation in the public sphere is understood as the participation of agents, regardless to their gender. However, there are also two models, the male and female public sphere, which are classified by feminists. This classification is based on the gender hegemony on the public sphere (Skalli, 2006). Feminist intellectuals argue the gender biases inside family life that disempower women, and the gender separation between public and private arenas that empower men (Calhoun, 2001). Nancy Fraser (1990 & 1992) claims that because of the hegemony of men over societies and creating of a patriarchy domain, the public sphere has become a sphere in which men practice their hegemony over women. This could be considered as a critique of Habermas for considering the role of women in the bourgeois public sphere (Calhoun, 1992). In this regard, Benhabib (1993) states that:

The emancipation of workers made property relations into a public-political issue; the emancipation of women has meant that the family and the so-called private sphere become political issues; the attainment of rights by non-white and non-Christian peoples has put cultural questions of collective self- and other-representations on the 'public' agenda (p.104).

By emphasising the economy as a measurement, feudal, bourgeois and capitalist are the models of the public sphere. Each model has its own characteristics related to its economic

system and lifestyle. However, in terms of politics, the functions of the public sphere in liberal democratic and totalitarian regimes are different. As Benhabib (1992) argues "liberalism is a form of political culture in which the question of legitimacy is paramount" (p.81). The liberal model of the public sphere transforms the political debate of enhancement into a juridical discourse about rights. What makes the public sphere active in liberal democratic regimes is that freedom of expression and criticism is recognised. An active society and a flexible regime can produce a strong public sphere. Thus, having an active and strong public sphere requires active agents and a responsible regime in order to answer public demands positively.

Generally, there are active and passive and also strong and weak models of the public sphere. Here, it should be noted that the active/passive public sphere refers to active/passive agents of the public sphere, and what is active/passive is the agents of the public sphere, not the public sphere itself. This is because it cannot be something without its agents, and what shapes its nature is mainly its agents. Here, these adjectives are tagged to the public sphere as it lets its agents be active/passive. In fact, compared to developing countries, most European and North American societies have reached a better grade of freedoms and rights, security and safety, and peace and prosperity, which are important elements to build up an active/strong public sphere. However, there is a kind of re-feudalisation of society in terms of public activities. This is not because there is something wrong with the democracy development processes in its political aspect, but because of the hegemony capitalist values which emphasise consumer values more than ideals like the common good. Nonetheless, the negative application of individualism as a pillar of liberalism makes individuals be more selfish and apathetic about common life. These make the public sphere to be not a sphere looks for common good but for a selfish interest (Stivers, 2009; Correia, 2011). The fault, therefore, is with the social aspect of the democratic process

which can damage the activity of the public sphere. It can be argued that, in general, there are active-strong, active-weak and passive-weak models of the public sphere.

It is obvious that individual participants cannot improve their communicative performances in isolation. However, the collective actions arise as a result of the response of others. These are shaped and reshaped through interactions (Kemmis, & McTaggart, 2005). Thus, there is a dynamic process which is activated by the others actions and reactions. These acts are socially shaped through experiences with the reactions of other individuals in society. Stivers (2009) tries to clarify this by stating that:

There could be no public life if people did not share certain qualities and understandings – if they were not already always in relationships with one other – and at the same time were not, each from them, utterly unique. Politics is made up of conversations and arguments among people who are different but also share common concerns (p.1104).

Nevertheless, capitalism and its enormous companies, media and marketisation of the public sphere make the public domain passive and fake it (Dahlberg, 2006). The media, in fact, is an institution of the public sphere which is activating and strengthening the public debate. However, it is no longer to spread only news, but information and cultural values too (Habermas et al, 1974). The strategy of the media, as Termbly (2006) believes, is a revealing one. It is more targeted at feeding curiosity and satisfying audiences than in motivating the public debate. Calhoun (1992) criticises the role of the media and argues that:

Publicity now became the tool of a media machine that constructed its audience, not as private individuals capable of rational argumentation, but as passive consumers of messages which, utilizing strategies of repetition, seduction and disavowal, relied upon and reproduced relations of power (p.29).

These modern and contemporary events have changed the meaning of the public sphere and shifted it from the national to the global level. For instance, the collapse of the fascist and radical nationalist ideologies on the one hand, and the emergence of the European Union on the other have played a big role in renewing and reactivating the European public sphere. Its efforts are towards the Europeanisation of the national public spheres in Europe (Barenreuter, 2009). Several shared issues, such as terrorism, financial policy and the European constitution have reshaped the European public sphere (Eriksen, 2004). However, the hegemony of selfish interests over common interests is still apparent (Pana, 2009). Therefore, it can be concluded that the public sphere is dynamic, but not static. It can be seen that in several circumstances, the public sphere's work is more active than usual. In an era of civil and/or international wars, the spread of contagious illnesses, financial and economic crises and the emergence of a new tyranny, the public sphere is more active. Thus, crisis can play role in activating the public sphere.

Ironically, most non-democratic, developing and unstable countries have an active - but at the same time weak - public sphere. This is because activities of active individuals or agents in the public sphere. These activities involve rational-critical debates on country's crises (Kurzman, 2012; Dabashi, 2011b). It is noted that some the crises of these countries originate from their governments in order to protect themselves by misleading people and taking their focus off critical issues. However, there are also some problems which are not related to politics, but to social affairs, as a result of cultural values and traditions; these also have a role in activating the public sphere.

Consequently, it is reasonable to argue that the absence of some things like stability and security, liberty and rights, and prosperity and development makes the public sphere more active. However, at the same time, this makes the public sphere weak. The meaning of weak in this context is that the public sphere by its rational-critical discussions and its

various activities does not affect the regime nor change the reality of life considerably. However, sometimes, it can be strong as well as active (Tafesh, 2012).

Good examples for these models of the public sphere are the Arab Uprisings in Arab countries as an active-strong model, and the Green Movement in Iran as an active-weak model. The Arab Uprisings is also called the Arab Spring. It started in 2011 in Tunisia and then spread to Egypt, Libya and Yemen and continued to some other Arabian countries like Bahrain and Syria as a protest against political regimes. The Iranian Green Movement, *Jonbesh-e Sabz*, refers to all demonstrations and activities that occurred in Iran after the presidential election in 2009. This is because the former could be active and result in changes, while the latter could be active resulting in no changes at all. Thus, here, public sphere models are categorised depending on the public sphere's activity and strength on the one hand. On the other hand, its focus is on those classifications that help its application in the post-revolutionary era in Iran to be possible and suitable. That is, of course, due to the characteristics of the Iranian regime and society that cannot be considered as democratic. However, the Iranian public sphere, which will be discussed more in the following chapters, is struggling to be more active and stronger than it was in the past. The table below makes the models of the public sphere clearer.

## Models of the Public Sphere

An active-strong public sphere:	It is a vibrant public sphere, enjoys occurring lots of activities, and can change the de facto as the regime is recognising, respecting and responding public demands.
An active-weak public sphere:	It is a vibrant public sphere, enjoys occurring lots of activities, but cannot do changes as the regime makes its activities to be fruitless.
A passive-weak public sphere:	It is an inactive public sphere, does not enjoy occurring that much activities to activate the public sphere, and of course no activities do not bring changes.

### **2.5. Levels of the Public Sphere**

In addition to models, there are also various levels of the public sphere. This refers to the extension and dimension of the impact of the public sphere's activities. This is related to activities of the agents of the public sphere that can affect and also can be affected. Hence, each public act is looking for common good in a town, city, province, region, state, continent or whole world. The extent of the affectivity of the public sphere is connected to the extent of its activities. In fact, the tasks of the public sphere are targeted ones, which try to have an impact on the public sphere and its agents, including the state.

Essentially, the extent of spheres determines the level of the public sphere. There are several classifications for the levels of the public sphere. Generally, they can be classified into three levels. First, 'micro-public spheres' include coffeehouses, meeting places and literary circles. Micro levels are important features of all social movements. Second, 'meso-public spheres' refers a more extent space which its arguments are mostly about power. Millions of people are partaking on it by watching, listening or reading across distances, and

using media tools generally. Third, 'macro-public spheres' is the most extended space of the public. The European public sphere, which embraces European Union spheres, is an example (Keane, 1995). Consequently, the levels of the public sphere can be classified into local, national, supranational and global levels.

The local public sphere involves rational-critical discussions, the expression of opinions, deliberations and cooperation inside a local area (a town for example) related to local matters and aims to find common good for a specific people/area. There are a number of people who participate in a public act to discuss an issue in order to formulate public opinion to determine what they want to do. The public sphere of a component/sect in a pluralistic society or a nation in a multinational state is a good example to illustrate the extent of the local public sphere.

One of the most apparent characteristics of this level of the public sphere is that it is 'local' with a local and limited impact as it is motivated by local issues. However, in some cases, linked to the 'national' or 'supranational' or even 'global' sphere, it also can have an extended impact. Nowadays, because of the role that Internet-based media play, local issues, especially those which are linked with matters like human rights, terror, and the like, also have the potential to have a global aspect. Tibetans in China, Catalonians in Spain, Sunnis in Iran and Iraq, and Shiites in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are good examples of the local level of the public sphere (Kumaraswamy, 2003). These minorities are usually resisting/struggling in their own limited spheres to find common good not for the whole of the state, but for their own minorities. Nonetheless, sometimes they can have an effect beyond their local area (Moore, 2002). This can be due to several reasons such as the role of media and foreign/international intervention in the name of supporting/protecting democracy, human rights, etc. Thus, public activities of the local sphere can play a role not just in its own area, but outside it too.

The national public sphere is another level of the public sphere. It is related to the agents of the public sphere in a country/state that try to have a role in common related issues, such as a state's public policies. They can have an impact on affairs inside and even outside of the state. Ordinary individuals, social classes, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local governors and governments in federal states are agents of the public sphere at a national level. These agents, either together or separately, try to achieve and use their freedom in order to formulate public opinion through having rational-critical discussions. They play a role in struggles between the public and the political class at a national level (Tandon, 1991). Here, the public sphere is not only concerned with agents like ordinary people and spaces like coffeehouses, but also with agents like state authorities and spaces like parliament in which public acts occur. Thus, parliament and the debate that takes place there could also be considered as being part of the public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Parliament is also known as the legal representative of the public sphere. Therefore, it can play an active role inside the state's organs (Hohendahl, 1995).

The national level of the public sphere is concerned with affairs which are related to a state. Examples include internal and external threats on the state, natural and human catastrophes, etc. Hence, the new crises of a state need new decision-making process; the presence of a strong integration between people on the one hand, and people and the state on the other, make the process easier and more effective (Migdal, 2001; Agnew, 2014). Therefore, in some situations the public sphere by its rational-critical discussions can help the state's authorities to find common good/interest for both of public and political class. This clarifies the significance of a public sphere, free from state intervention.

Furthermore, the absence of state-society integration will discourage the development of notions and fictions in society. This also will have a negative impact on the prosperity and activity of the public sphere. Not just state and society, but also other agents of both can

play a positive/negative role in activating the public sphere at its national level. Usually, democratic systems of a state and democratic values of a society will help the public sphere become activated. Ironically, non-democratic systems and values also can activate the public sphere, as they become a matter of discussion for the public sphere. Moreover, traditional and religious values also have the potential to activate the public sphere, as they are supporting occasions which people gather and do collective acts (Cuceu, 2015). The quality of these acts, as to how extensively they are linked to public concerns and common good like legitimacy and justice, is a significant matter.

The supranational, or regional, level of the public sphere is broader than both local and national levels. Its agents, by nature, have more than one sphere. Here, the extent of public activities is wider, and also the agents are more in terms of quantity and different in terms of quality. Individuals, groups, I/NGO's, simple and multinational companies and states also play as agents (Lang, 2012). Therefore, here, the rational-critical debate does not occur only among people in one country. It also might be between two states and/or two peoples of two different states through different channels such as posts, telephones, websites, social media and other communication tools. Furthermore, state representatives like foreign ministries takes part as an agent in this sphere.

The European Union is a good example of this level. What happens inside an EU members can have impact on others. European reactions to the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting (7<sup>th</sup> January 2015) and Paris attacks (13<sup>th</sup> November 2015) are good examples. Therefore, agents of the local and national public spheres could be considered to be agents in the supranational public sphere too. Exchanging ideas and deliberating about new or expected events occur through different channels. Additionally, freedoms and facilities of movement, the development of social media tools, and the activated digital sphere make it easier and more effective. Nevertheless, the EU members as the members of an international governmental

organisation (IGO) are following certain regulations in order to find out what are the demands/opinions of European citizen's (Barenreuter, 2009). An example of this is the referendums on the EU constitution, which activated both the European public sphere as a supranational level and the public sphere of the members as the national level.

Nonetheless, not only the EU, but also the Middle East has such a supranational level of the public sphere (Hoexter, 2002). This is not because problems such as instability in security, economics and politics in a state will affect other states too. For instance, Iran, as a country and as a state, is affected by what is happening in both Afghanistan and Iraq because there are several direct and indirect links that can have an impact on each other. Implied and/or explicit political and security interventions, cultural and economic relationships, and uncontrollable borders between them made these countries vulnerable in regard to each other's developments. In the last decade, one of the most debatable issues in the Iranian public sphere was the US military invasion of Iraq (Sahimi, 2013). Thus, an internal issue of a state can become a matter of public concern for other states too, and this represents the supranational level of the public sphere.

The global public sphere is the broadest level of the levels of the public sphere. Nowadays, because of the revolution of information and communication technologies each individual could be considered as a proper citizen of his/her state and a metaphorical citizen of the world (Lipschutz, 2005). Some international affairs, such as terrorism, financial crises and their aftermath, natural disasters and the need for global help are all global issues and are discussed at a global level (Castells, 2008). These are examples of matters that are of interest to the population of the world. These matters, wherever they are, can affect other countries. Thus, these force people around the world to have a rational-critical debate in order to find a common/global good.

The most apparent characteristic of the global level of the public sphere is that it is linked to the contemporary era. The contemporary era is affected by the apparent role of economy, materialism and fashions, huge companies, social media, which have created a global digital sphere, terror attacks, poverty and disease in African countries, etc. These are issues that cause daily debates among global agents of the global public sphere (Ramsey, 2010). Furthermore, at the global level of the public sphere, there are individuals whose have made a name for themselves as a global reputation and play as an international agent; however, INGOs have more roles (Castells, 2008). Besides, states, because of their power, also can play a remarkable role in this realm. They can provide a better environment to their citizens to have role at the global level of the public sphere. This is can be throughout having an impact of public opinion on state's international role. Thus, agents of the local public sphere can have an effect on the global public sphere, through their local and national public spheres. In relation to Iran, as it is not excluded from contemporary developments of communication technologies, the Iranian public sphere enjoys having all of the levels of the public sphere. The next chapters will clarify how Iranian agents act in these different levels.

## ***2.6. Preconditions of the Public Sphere***

The public sphere and its different levels and models have been shaped through history. It is continuously reshaping itself. Each society creates a special style for its public sphere which represents its sociopolitical structures. Moreover, the public sphere, in different areas and eras, should remains public. Here, the matter is about publicity. Here, not the sphere itself, but its publicity and other characteristics, such as its activity and strength, can perform the functions of a public sphere. Generally, the public sphere is something which can be activated in order to develop minds, actualise freedoms, achieve a possible level of

justice, increase options, form public opinion, make opportunities for rational-critical discussions, and the like. For a public sphere to be active and strong several pre/conditions are required such as openness, fairness, asymmetry, mutual respect, mutual trust and consensus.

Dahlberg argues that a public sphere can be central to a strong democracy if it can activate citizen deliberation, form public opinion, and guide the political system. This kind of public sphere requires rational-critical debates, equality, autonomy from state and corporate power, sincerity and reflexivity (2004). The significance here is the communication between the agents of the public sphere. There are many but not unlimited ways to communicate; including seeing, smiling, gesturing, hearing, talking, touching, reading, and writing. Speaking, listening, writing, and reading are most common ways to communicate. All of these tools can play a role in activating the public sphere and then in strengthening a democracy.

Furthermore, a public sphere needs a place/city. Cities, with all of their components such as buildings, streets, marketplaces, parks, and public places, and metaphorical components – actions, reactions and interactions, relations and relationships – are central to the public sphere. The places, where people are not in touch with each other and there are not rational-critical discussions on a common issue, cannot be accounted as a public space. However, a private place, a dining room for example, in which people gather to discuss a matter or in which protesters meet is a public area. These different locations become public places in that they become locations of influence, of common action harmonised through dialogue and persuasion (Benhabib, 1992). It should be noted that, not only people and cities, but furthermore a particular kind of people in a specific type of a city [place] can formulate an active-strong public sphere.

Liberty, rationalism, common sense, pluralism, transparency, awareness and the like, all are required to activate the public sphere. Beacroft (2004) believes that "human life can be separated into two distinct – the public and the private – and as human beings we are dependent on both [...] but we must master our private necessities in order to obtain freedom in the public realm" (pp.42-43). However, social organisations invest in individuals to contribute autonomously to the public sphere. Here, the role of private life and families in preparing individuals to act rationally and critically in the public realm is remarkable (Calhoun, 2001). Thus, the public is the extension of the private, and the private status of private agents will shape the nature of their activities in the public domain. Moreover, the role of private agents in public realms can be enhanced. It is, in fact, related to their freedom to be in public areas. The agents of the public sphere, to have rational-critical debates, need freedom from state intervention, equality of opportunities and a good network to be connected.

The fundamental element for activating the public sphere is communication. Here, monologue, for example, does not help the public sphere, while dialogue does. Better communication involves having active agents, effective tools, important topics, and a free and equal environment. Good communication tools are those that are easy to use and effective; furthermore, they should not be filtered, censored and/or limited. Face-to-face and online communications are the oldest and newest forms of communication, respectively. Good communicators can also improve the value of the public sphere. Aware and educated individuals, for instance, have a lot of impact in/on the public sphere. Additionally, Melton (2001) argues that:

The ideology of the public sphere, on the other hand, assumed that private persons could deliberate rationally on public affairs and that indeed, the collective judgments of 'public opinion' could make government more rational. But for public opinion to be rational it had to

be informed, and an informed public opinion depended on a greater degree of transparency in government. It also required that debate on public affairs be open and relatively constrained by censorship (p.9).

Accordingly, this is related to both people and the authorities of a state. Government, by providing a safe and stable environment, recognising freedoms and transparency, and accepting and answering critiques can play a noticeable role in activating the public sphere. Government can also be an agent of the public sphere. It, however, has to not enforce and generalise an idea or a lifestyle. Thus, the public sphere has to remain a space in which to achieve, protect and exercise pluralism. However, what threatens the public sphere in the totalitarian system is that the system itself tries to "equalise" people in order to provide a passive society unable to bring any changes.

A constitution, which is, indeed, drawn by "the power" of the state, also plays a significant role in distributing the roles in the public sphere. It distinguishes the roles and differentiates the powers of the public sphere. Hence, a constitution outlines the relations between individuals, authorities and governments – in federal cases. From one state to another, the role of the agents is different. It is obvious that liberal-democratic systems, as opposed to non-democratic and totalitarian systems, provide a higher level of rights and freedoms for public agents. These systems, by following the principle of non-interference in both private and public spheres and being responsible make the public sphere an active-strong one. This is mainly because it is believed that public opinion, which is formed by rational-critical debate in the public sphere, can be a basis for decision-making processes. Moreover, as Fraser (1990) argues, the public sphere, as an informally organised form of non-governmental discursive opinion, can work as a counterbalance to the state. Nevertheless, "participatory parity is essential to a democratic public sphere and that rough socio-economic equality is a precondition of participatory parity" (p.74).

In conclusion, the public sphere can be considered as a sphere where agents communicate to discuss public-related issues in order to find common good. Thus, a better public sphere is one which has active agents, good communication tools, and a free environment. Here, the political system of the country and its regime, the structure of society and its values, the personality and mentality of individuals, can all shape the nature of the public sphere. They can provide conditions for an activate/strong and vibrant public sphere too. Thus, the social structure of society can play a significant role in political functions of the public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989). Furthermore, as Hannah Arendt (1958) argues, "all human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men" (p.22). Nowadays, the 'public' is more defended and protected by its national agents and international observers. Moreover, both NGOs and INGOs, civil society organisations and social movements, all can play a considerable role. Nevertheless, borderless media and social networks also have a role in digitalising the public sphere and creating a global one, which is less vulnerable than the closed public sphere. This is, of course, by facilitating and accelerating connections over the world (Lunat, 2008). Iran, in fact, has basic preconditions of a public sphere. Moreover, it struggles to face non-democratic tendencies both inside the state and society, and tries to provide a proper environment for an active and strong public sphere.

## ***2.7. Contemporary Style of the Public Sphere and its Characteristics***

Different societies, and also each society in different periods, have different public spheres in terms of their nature and functions. This is, simply, because of their different cultural, sociopolitical and economic structures. However, there are several common characteristics of public spheres in different societies. All areas and eras have a specific style of public

sphere. The nature of the public sphere has changed throughout the classical, modern and contemporary eras. Each one of these has its own style with its own characteristics.

The contemporary style of the public sphere can be accounted for as a result of the structural transformation of the bourgeois/modern public sphere. Calhoun (1993) argues that the real contemporary style of the public sphere has emerged because of the events of 1989, as the matter of democracy shifted from elite and academic debates to the realm of individuals and groups. The process of democratisation followed by an active civil society also had an important impact on shaping this style. Benhabib (1992) also believes that the process of democratisation is as a result of the rise and growth of an independent public sphere.

Nowadays, the public sphere is greatly affected by the hegemony of new communication and information technology. However, its impact is different from place to place due to differences in Internet access. The Internet, as the most remarkable feature of the contemporary era, has a significant role in shaping the different models and levels of the public sphere. This is because it is worldwide in coverage, speed at spreading news and information, ease at making contacts - sending or receiving information, providing multiple sources, and equal for all (Ubayasiri, 2006).

The Internet, by creating a virtual space for its users allow them to be in touch with each other and have controversial debates. These include debates on the authenticity of the Internet-based public sphere, or web sphere. Hence arguing that the web sphere is a proper alternative to the real public sphere is problematic; nowadays, access to the Internet is important to have an active public sphere. Social networks have become an appropriate sphere in which to discuss topical issues. The web sphere, furthermore, plays a better role in gathering a bigger number of people cross the world. However, the real public sphere

mostly depends on local and national levels of the public sphere. Termblay (2006) describes the impact of the Internet on private agents too. As the Internet and digital technology opens up new potential of appearance and communication to citizens and groups in both public and private spheres. Thus, the Internet can be considered as a new feature of not just the public, but also private lives of people. However, what has been debated and what are the topical issues in those spheres are important in measuring the nature of the public sphere. As Benhabib (1992) argues:

Public dialogue is not about what all the Chinese Laundromats, Italian restaurants, and the Lockheed Corporation know they agree to even before they have entered the public foray. Rather, public dialogue means challenging and redefining the collective good and one's sense as a result of the public foray (p.84).

One of the problems of the actual public sphere in contemporary daily life is that its public places mostly become places to find profit and pleasure, but not to find common good (Salvatore, 2007). This can be accounted for by the capitalist system as it encourages individualism/selfishness while ignoring the public/common good (Keane, 1995). Ironically, the public sphere has become a space in which to criticise this economic systems, on the one hand. On the other hand, it has become a space in which to discuss the quality of products and other consumption values. Furthermore, Ubayasiri (2006) argues that:

The bourgeois public sphere eventually eroded once again through economic and structural changes paving the way for what Habermas calls the modern mass society of the social welfare state – where rational, critical debate, the life blood of the public sphere has been replaced by leisure. Similarly the state and society have become entwined in each other's spheres (p.5).

The dominion of the economy over all other domains and also the hegemony of individualism – as a basis of liberalism and capitalism – have participated in the decline of the public sphere. The common good and society's values and virtues have been replaced by profit and pleasure. There is also a replacement of common/altruistic interests by individual/selfish ones (Correia, 2011; and Salvatore, 2007). Moreover, contemporary regimes mostly stick to their own political interests, and individuals seek their own interest through competitiveness manners. What they demand of the state is basic protection and security. (Stivers, 2009). Consequently, not just ideals, but also communications are threatened by this model of governance and life. Nonetheless, integration and cooperation between agents of the public sphere is one of the most important conditions for having an active, strong and successful public sphere. Arendt (1958) states that:

The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us for reality of the world and ourselves, and while the intimacy of a fully developed private life, such as had never been known before the rise of the modern age and the concomitant decline of the public realm, will always greatly intensify and enrich the whole scale of subjective emotions and private feelings, this intensification will always come to pass at the expense of the assurance of the reality of the world and men (p.50).

There is an obvious decrease in teamwork among the public sphere's agents in its contemporary style (Hohendahl, 1995). This affects the role of agents in common affairs. As Villa (1992) argues "the loss of the 'revolutionary spirit' yields a routinized politics of interests and general welfare: *actors* are transformed into *clients* who are more or less effective in persuading a *de facto* oligarchy to favor their particular interests" (pp.717-718). Subsequently, there are two different kinds of apathy individuals/agents in the public sphere. First one is positive apathy which individuals feel that they are in a guaranteed level of the prosperity. This causes individuals to not care about public or common issues, as they

are not matters of concern for them. This tendency can be found in the public sphere of social welfare states which could have an effect on the essential rights of individuals (Habermas et al, 1974). Second, there is a negative apathy which individuals feel frustration about their ability to have an impact on the common issues. This is also linked to matters such as freedom of expression, transparency to see what is happening in society, rational-critical discussions, and the like. Furthermore, in some political systems, people are "free" to criticise, but the regime does not reply, or make changes. These make the public sphere less active, and also make the public sphere's activities meaningless, as they will not bring change any changes.

The presence of active and strong public spheres in some societies has also been noted. In this regard, the Internet and new information and communication technology tools have a significant role. The new digital and Internet-based spheres make the connection between agents easier and more widespread. It also feeds and guides their actions and reactions. In fact, there are lots of public activities which are shaped through social networks. Thus, it could be argued that an active public sphere in its contemporary style requires having access to the Internet. Consequently, the web sphere is where agents discuss topical issues and plan for activities in real public sphere.

Another characteristic of the contemporary style of the public sphere is the notable role of women. Benhabib (1992) states that:

With the emergence of autonomous women's movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with women's massive entry into the labor forces in this century, and with their gain of the right to vote, this picture has been transformed. Contemporary moral and political theory continues, however, to neglect these issues, and ignores the transformations of the private sphere resulting from massive changes in women's and men's lives (p.92).

The contemporary eras are distinguished by the spread of democratic values and human rights, and increase the role of women in all aspects of daily life, in both developed and developing societies. The Internet and new information and communication technology has also increased the potential of women, even in non-democratic regimes and cultures. The Internet has become a safe space in which women can express themselves and take part in discussions on public related issues. Not just women, but also other agents, especially the vulnerable and weak, have benefited from these characteristics of the contemporary era.

Consequently, it seems to be unreasonable to idealise and/or generalise a model of the public sphere onto all other eras and areas, as each requires a different model. Generally, the contemporary style of the public sphere in developed societies is distinguished from developing ones. Each one, moreover, has its own difficulties to be active and strong. The problems of the former do not come from a lack of liberty, transparency or democratic values, but mostly from other factors related to development; including: being apathy and having no interest in common good, the hegemony of capitalism and negative individualism, 'soft despotism', spreading of the values of profit and pleasure, abnormal busy in the daily life, decline of the role of families in private spheres as the basis of the public sphere, computer games and the like (Melton, 2001).

Furthermore, there are also signs of re-feudalisation and bureaucratisation in society. Regimes, big companies and the media are all trying to use the public sphere for their own interests and to serve their own ideologies. There is also a decline of thinking critically, which is central to having a rational-critical debate as a basis of a public sphere. As has been argued, this could be symbolic of the demise of the public sphere in modern Western democracies - and it needs to be rescued (Habermas, 1962/1989). In order to save the public sphere, Habermas suggests 'rationalising' the state by creating new rational

structures in the authority's structure and depending on the rational relations between people and between people and government through occurring rational-critical discussions.

The public sphere in developing societies is also problematic and experiences several difficulties caused by its passivity and weakness. Fraser (1990) claims that "the conflation of the state apparatus with the public sphere of discourse and association provided ballast to process whereby the socialist vision becomes institutionalized in an authoritarian statist form instead of in a participatory democratic form" (p.56). There are matters such as the rule of non-democratic systems, non-guaranteed rights of the agents of the public sphere, non-democratic constitutions, state's intervention in both private and public spheres, non-democratic cultures and traditions, etc. Paradoxically, these problems make the public sphere active, and they also become matters to activate the public sphere, as they become matters for rational-critical discourses in both web and real public spheres. In general, it can be argued that the public sphere in both developed and developing countries is threatened by different factors which decline its activity and strength. In relation to Iran, its public sphere has a style which uses contemporary tools and methods for its aims. The following chapters will clarify how Iranian agents use new communication tools, especially social media in the public sphere. Moreover, as Fraser (2007) argues, the matter is that:

These developments raise the question of whether and how public spheres today could conceivably perform the democratic political functions with which they have been associated historically. Could public spheres today conceivably generate legitimate public opinion, in the strong sense of considered understandings of the general interest, filtered through fair and inclusive argumentation, open to everyone potentially affected? (p.19).

## ***2.8. The Public Sphere's Vulnerabilities and Potential***

The public sphere can be threatened and also improved by different factors in various ways. Here, these factors are mentioned as vulnerabilities and potential of the public sphere. These are mainly related to the main agents of the public sphere, which are the state and society. This will be used to understand the functions of the concept of the public sphere in Iran, after the Islamic Revolution. It, furthermore, clarifies in the strength and weakness of the contemporary Iranian public sphere.

Vulnerabilities refers to the factors that increase the public sphere's passivity and weakness. This could be affected by the different reasons, such as the desire of non-democratic regimes to occupy the public spaces in society. Factors considered as negative for the public sphere are understood as those notions and actions that increase the public sphere's vulnerabilities by reducing its activities and making them meaningless/fruitless. Moreover, potential refers to the factors that increase the public sphere's activity and its strength. This also could be increased due the different causes, such as the desire of society's agents resist regime's policies in interfering people's lives. The factors that are considered as positive for the public sphere are understood as those notions and actions which increase the public sphere's potential by increasing its activities and making them meaningful/fruitful.

In order to understand functions of the public sphere, it is necessary to know the following. What factors threaten/improve its dynamicity? How can it survive under a non-democratic system? How the regime can help the public sphere to be vibrant? How society can help the public sphere to reshape itself due to different events in different periods of time? What methods and mechanisms do pro/anti-public agents use to achieve their goals in that regard? Then in regard to understanding the Iranian public sphere, its vulnerabilities and

potential need to be clarified in order to measure its activity/strength. This will be achieved by examining this model at different levels of the contemporary Iranian public sphere, which is a multi-levels one. Moreover, the study will discuss various activities of different agents of the public sphere and their impact on its strength and activity. In doing so, the research analyses various themes to answer its questions.

In terms of methodology, as has been discussed, the research follows a design which classifies agents of the Iranian public sphere into two main groups: state-related and society-related. This is because these two can cover other sub-agents, and also they are the most powerful elements which can shape the public sphere. Moreover, it is known that non-democratic regimes are the most powerful elements which threaten the public sphere's dynamicity. However, society's independent agents are sources for its activity and strength. Here, both the Iranian regime and Iranian society plays a mutual role in activating the public sphere, as there are different tendencies inside both which looking for an active or a passive public sphere. Thus, here, state and society are used to determine the public sphere's vulnerabilities and potential, and how these two can play a role in shaping the nature of the public sphere, alongside other preconditions of having an active public sphere, were discussed before.

### **2.8.1. The State**

Hence, the public sphere, by its nature, considers arguing public-related matters; state and its related issues are matters to be discussed by the public sphere's agents (Rospocher, 2012). Besides, different political systems have different approaches in dealing/responding with the public sphere. Generally, the main aim of any regime is to defend its own interests. These interests include avoiding chaos, sovereignty over people and territory, and guaranteeing the regime's existence. In this regard, the public sphere is an important issue for regimes, as it formulates public opinion as a source of their legitimacy (Graham, 2012).

Moreover, as Calhoun (2001) argues “a public directed at bringing the will and wisdom of citizens to bear on affairs of state” (p.1898). Thus, the public sphere’s activities could have an impact on the regime’s plans and policies, in terms of supporting or criticising them (Fraser, 1990). In other words, it can be argued that the regime is fed by the public sphere’s agents, both directly and indirectly. Regimes, therefore, try to shape the public sphere to serve their interests. In non-democratic systems this usually results in the regime’s intervention in both private and public spheres. Democratic regimes, however, recognise and respect the values of pluralism and liberty in the public sphere. They do not try to equalise individuals and generalise an ideology, a type of thinking, or a specific lifestyle (Kellner, 2000).

A democratic regime uses democratic techniques and mechanisms to deal with the public sphere and its agents. It does not depend on violence, but civic methods; not demagoguism, but dialogism. It allows individuals participate in public and political life. The state, moreover, does not interfere in people’s private and public spheres (Barenreuter, 2009). In this way, the regime creates a free and equal-to-all public sphere that is suitable for rational-critical discussions. In addition, the state has to recognise and respect public opinion as a result and outcome of the public sphere’s rational-critical discourse. In doing so, the public sphere can enjoy its plurality in deliberating notions and doing actions, which increase its activity. Moreover, a regime’s respect/respond for the demands of the public sphere increases its strength. This will be possible, not only by drawing an appropriate constitution and laws, but also by building material spaces such as halls, salons, parks and gardens, meeting places, etc. The state also can play a role as an agent of the public sphere by taking part in the public sphere’s activities (Ashley, 2005). Here, usually, the state tries to make a balance between the interests of the state and society. It also tries to

compromise with society in order to reach a point that serves, progresses, and develops both of the state and society. Barenreuter (2009) states that:

In the liberal democratic understanding, the main aim of the political system is to safeguard the equal freedom of all citizens. Freedom and equality are, within this concept, not to be produced by politics, they are essential qualities of human beings and it is the task of the political system to respect these essential qualities. This means, above all, that the political system has to interfere as little as possible with the private lives of the citizens including their economic freedom (p.5).

Here, it should be noted that both democratic and non-democratic systems try to shape an active public sphere in which it can serve the system. Hence, democracy is an important condition for activating the public sphere; it does not necessarily produce an active and strong public sphere. Nowadays, the public sphere in democratic settings is not without problems. Indeed, capitalism and individualism, which are respected by democratic systems, have played role in creating apathetic individuals and passive public spheres (Poster, 1997).

Non-democratic systems, moreover, use several techniques to deal with the public sphere. In these systems, by nature, there is a mutual fear among agents and also between state and society. Here, the absence of mutual trust and cooperation is obvious. These kinds of regimes try to dominate the public sphere as they see the public activities as a threat. To deactivate the public sphere, non-democratic regimes interpret the public sphere's activities as something against the unity and/or high interests of the state, threat to national security, social or cultural values of society, etc. They also attempt to privatise/statise what is public. This could be considered as a kind of re-feudalising the public sphere (Arendt, 1951/1962). For non-democratic regimes, there are different ways to dominate, discipline

and control society and its agents. Examples of these ways include militarising society, censoring media, filtering websites, etc.

The power, in fact, makes the regime to be the most powerful factor in shaping the public sphere besides other factors. Hence, the public sphere combines agents, communications and acts, and the regime can limit/develop their conditions with the use of its hard and soft powers. The most effective tools that can reshape the public sphere are, indeed, in the hands of the regime. These tools are used to serve the regime's plans and policies, including the constitution and law, media tools, educational institutions, armed forces, etc. (The way that the Iranian regime uses these tools will be developed in chapter five). Consequently, the state, and its institutions, as agents of the public sphere, because of their soft and hard power, can increase the public sphere's vulnerabilities and potential, more so than other factors.

### **2.8.2. Society**

Hence, the public sphere concerns connected agents in public; society can provide agents, communication tools, and public spaces as elements of the public sphere. It can also provide a proper environment for the public sphere's activities. Society, and its independent agents, including NGOs and social movements which appear in collective actions, is a basis for the public sphere's activities (Castells, 2008). It has a role in shaping its nature and model. Due to its requirements towards the state in different periods of time, it produces new and appropriate agents of and in the public sphere. Society, in fact, is where the public sphere will appear and be fed and grow.

In three different ways, society can have an impact on the nature of the public sphere, and its vulnerability and/or potential. First, society is where individuals and groups appear, organise and act as agents of the public sphere. It can be explained by arguing that all

agents of the public sphere, regardless of their functions and aims, come from society. Thus, the quantity and quality of these agents will have an impact on the public sphere's activity and strength. This is because active agents shape an active public sphere.

Second, society is where places and spaces are available for public purposes. Different public and privately owned places are in and for society and its agents. Bazaars and coffeehouses, religious places such as mosques, and also other public places such as parks and streets, are all related and linked to society's agents, either directly or indirectly. The importance of these spaces is in the fact that public acts occur in such places. Society provides these places and also observes, administrates and develops them to be more appropriate and flexible with new circumstances.

Third, society is where ideas appear and grow, public opinions form and culture is produced (Valsiner, 2007). All of these are basic elements of society's agents and shape their mentality and personality; they then re/shape the public sphere's nature. The sociocultural features of a society have an impact on the public sphere's activates and remaining vibrant. All civic, democratic and public-interest elements of a culture can help the public sphere to have its potential in activating the public sphere and also in facing those tendencies which try to dominate the public sphere. This is because these features shape the way that people gather and act in public, and also the way that they struggle for their own rights and freedoms.

Here, understanding the importance of the role that society plays in producing and providing the agents of the public sphere and its spaces will be helpful to understand the way that the public sphere performs its tasks. Besides, it clarifies the role that society can play in increasing the public sphere's vulnerabilities and potential. Therefore, understanding the nature of the public sphere in terms of its vulnerabilities and potential requires

analysing and understanding the nature of its society. In doing so, this research will focus on Iranian society, as well as the Iranian regime, in order to investigate what is happening within the Iranian public sphere and how it can be measured in terms of its activity and strength.

## **2.9. Conclusion**

To sum up, it can be argued that the public sphere is an arena in which society's agents can carry out their activities in public. It is a sphere in which private agents come to see and hear, and also to be seen and heard by others. The public sphere is something more than a sphere, space or a place. It, in fact, refers to all of the actions and reactions in a society seeking for common good, through rational-critical discussions. Thus, the public sphere is a sphere in which meaningful processes occur. It is about discussing and deliberating ideas in order to form a public opinion. In this way, the public sphere can have an impact on common-related matters at different levels. This way of making policies through forming public opinion is known as deliberative democracy (Gimmler, 2001). However, this chapter has tried to determine the nature of the public sphere itself, not just its functions in democratising a society. Consequently, the public sphere is where different agents in a country appear in public-function spaces to discuss public-related issues in a free and equal environment in order to find common good.

Only an active and strong public sphere can form public opinion and have an impact. In order to do this, the public sphere requires several preconditions. In short, it needs active agents and a responsible regime to respect the outcome of the public sphere, public opinion. The public sphere also should be public in nature and remain so. Publicity, significantly, can help the public sphere remain free from state intervention and equal for all

citizens, and in this way obtain its goals. Thus, the main threat to the public sphere is privatism or statism, which is found in non-democratic political systems (Minton, 2006).

Nowadays, because of new information and communication technologies, society's agents can play a role at a wider level of the local public sphere, and are also less controlled. There are local, national, supranational, and also global levels of the public sphere. Each one of these levels has its own characteristics. The global level, in fact, is the more challenging for regimes, as it has been considered a tool which can threaten the country's prestige in the world, and also can activate other levels of the public sphere to criticise the regime. Moreover, all levels of the public sphere can be found in countries affected by contemporary developments related to communication tools.

Different societies produce different models of the public sphere. This is because different political systems and dominant ideologies, cultures and traditions are playing a role in reshaping the nature of the public sphere. In this regard, this chapter has focused on two models which are produced by democratic and non-democratic political systems. Generally, by depending on activity and strength, the models of the public sphere can be classified as either active or passive, and strong or weak. Here, each model has its own characteristics and are different in their functions, as they face different regimes and act in different circumstances. Generally, there are active and strong, active and weak, and also passive and weak models of the public sphere.

In the contemporary era, the matter of the possibility of the demise of the public sphere has been raised again mainly because of the new information and communication technologies, and especially Internet-based communication tools including social media. These have created a new style of the public sphere, known as the contemporary style. This style is distinguished from bourgeois and modern styles of the public sphere by its dependence on

the web as a new sphere. The matter, indeed, is about the possibility of calling a web sphere as a public sphere. Here, it can be concluded that there is no possibility of the demise of the public sphere as it exists in different areas and eras. However, it is possible to transform the public sphere from one style to another because of developments in society.

Generally, in developed societies, because of the rule of democratic governments and the hegemony of democratic values, the public sphere is strong as its activities are answerable by the regime. However, the replacement of values and virtues by profit and pleasure does not help the public sphere to be active, as selfishness decreases people's interest in public related matters. In developing societies, however, the rule of non-democratic regimes makes the public sphere weak as its activities are limited and its demands are not answerable by the regime (Salvatore, 2007). These kinds of societies cannot provide a strong public sphere and their activities are usually fruitless. Ironically, because of a considerable number of crises, which are related to several common affairs, the public sphere in these societies is active. Next chapters are to examine the concept of the public sphere in the Islamic republic of Iran. It will investigate the role of the state and society in the Iranian public sphere. In doing so, the nature of the Iranian public sphere will be clarified, as the discussions will explain the activities of the agents of the Iranian public sphere at its different levels. They, furthermore, describe the characteristics of the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere. The next chapter, however, is to find the origins of the Iranian public sphere, as they can be found in the eras of Qajars and Safavids, developed by the Islamic Revolution, and impacted by the role of religion. The role of religion and the position of agents, however, are changed due to various factors that will be discussed.

# Chapter 3 The Origins of the Iranian Public Sphere

## **3.1. Introduction**

Today, what is happening in Iranian society is strongly linked to its history. Historical events are central to reshaping the modern and contemporary Iranian public sphere. This chapter emphasises the most significant events that had an impact on the state and society in Iran and its public sphere. It highlights the historical elements of the public sphere in Iranian society. It will be argued that public events in Iran did not start in 1978, but this was the transformation point to a new and different phase. In fact, the essential elements of the nature of the Iranian public sphere were shaped before the Islamic Revolution. Moreover, in Iran, both before and after 1979, both state and society has struggled to dominate the public sphere. Thus, understanding Iran before 1979 will be helpful in understanding contemporary Iran. This will be done by analysing some main historical events and secondary data discussed in the related literature.

It is obvious that in formulating a specific behaviour or value in a community/society, time plays an important role. For instance, the nature of society and an individual's personality and mentality are shaped over a long period. Thus, covering the early eras of Iranian history is important. However, not only humanitarian issues (e.g. ideas, wars and peace, religion and its different interpretations) but also natural ones (e.g. topography, geography and geopolitics) have an impact on reshaping the nature of a society and its individuals. Here, the chapter does not refer to mentioning (or listing) but analysing some apparent historical events that the elements of the early Iranian public sphere can be found there. It is about describing the nature of the early Iranian public sphere, which plays role in shaping and nature of the modern and contemporary Iranian public sphere. Moreover, it does not

mean that during this long history the Iranian public sphere has not changed. However, it means that several principal features can be found in the Iranian public sphere both before and after the Islamic Revolution. Besides, there are different narrations and interoperations of those historical events. However, what have been chosen to be analysed are those events which are clear and apparent by historians, and what the chapter going to find is linked to the matter of public sphere. Thus, the discussions, here, are to look at the events with the lens of the public sphere, but not a specific ideology, which is usually arguable.

In general, in order to find out the main origins of the Iranian public sphere, the study discusses some historical events and sociopolitical structures of Iran. These also involve issues related to religious and intellectual matters. Moreover, analysing psychosocial phenomena of Iranian individuals and society is done in order to investigate several traits with regard to the main topic of the research, the public sphere.

### ***3.2. The Rise of the Iranian Public Sphere in the Era of the Monarchical Regimes***

Iran, as a state, has been experienced different settings and different rulers. The phases of governance in Iran could be classified into three different periods. First, Iran ruled by non-Iranian empires. Second, Iran ruled by Iranian powers/regimes in both monarchical and Islamic-republican regimes. And finally, there was a phase of anarchy and chaos in Iran (Mackey, & Entessar, 1997). However, anarchy does not mean an absolute absence of power. It is, in fact, the absence of a strong and organised authority to control and rule society; as there was always the presence of power between different Iranian groups and tribes. This also will be discussed as it has an impact on the sociopolitical structures of Iranian society and the psyche of the Iranian people. Here, it should be noted that the state is understood as the difference between the rulers and the ruled inside a social group

(Duguit, 1921). In doing so, the term state does not necessarily refer to its modern definition.

The study concentrates on two main phases of politics in Iran: monarchy and the Islamic Republic. This is because these two periods, most considerably, have shaped the nature of Iranian society and the mentality and personality of its individuals. The rise of the monarchy in Iran shifted Iran from the rule of non-Iranians to the rule of Iranians. The study focuses on the eras of Qajars (1796–1925) and Pahlavis (1925–1979), in which the elements of a proper public sphere can be found. In the era of the Qajars, both the Tobacco Movement and the Constitutional Revolution, as the most important events in Iranian history will be discussed.

The first public places in Iranian history go back to the establishment of the first coffeehouse in Iran in the era of Shah Tahmasb (1524-1576). After that, in the era of Shah Abbas (1577-1629) the number of coffeehouses, *Qahveh-Khanehs*, increased, especially in the urban areas like Qazvin and Isfahan which had a kind of Bazaar. Before Iran, only Mecca, Damascus, Egypt and Istanbul had such kinds of coffeehouses (Dawud, 1992). After coffeehouses, which become a public place in which people could gather together, there were several events in public. However, these events were related to Shi'i rituals, and were not political in nature (Rahimi, 2011).

Then, in 1904, the first movie theatre or cinema was opened in Tehran by Mirza Ebrahim Khan Sahhafbashi (Mehrabi, 2014). The history of the Iranian cinema has four stages. First, in 1904 the first movie theatre opened in Tehran. Second, Reza Shah started promoting cinema culture in Iran. Third, Mohammad Reza Shah promoted it more than any previous time. The last phase in Iranian cinema is the era of the Islamic Republic (Safa-Bakhsh & Ejlali, 2006). In almost all of these stages art has challenged different kinds of religious,

governmental and sociocultural censorship (Khalaji et al, 2011). Cinemas in Iran were good places for people to go to watch and then discuss the movie shown, as well as several marginal issues related to public affairs.

The monarchs tried, and succeeded relatively, to create 'Iran' as a "modern" state in terms of drawing its borders, uniting its languages, and enhancing Shi'i-Islam as the official religion of the state. Therefore, it can be argued that Iran as a modern state and as an "integrated" society started from the era of the Qajars. In fact, this is the most significant era in Iranian history in which the proper origins of the public sphere and the first 'public' events occurred. Here, it can be argued that the nature of the emergence of a public sphere can have role in shaping the public sphere. The Iranian public sphere emerged with occurring religious public events, and it is still a religious one, to some extent. Katouzian (2003) believes that the modern Iranian public sphere emerged with the events of the Constitutional Movement, forming newspapers, voluntary associations, and also forming parliament, as it can be considered as a public space. He differentiates between the Iranian and English style of the public sphere, and states that:

It [the Iranian public sphere] had not been a complex product of Renaissance, Reformation, bourgeois development and revolts against absolutist or authoritarian governments as in the English revolutions of the seventeenth and the French revolution of the eighteenth century, or the European revolutions of 1848. It came along almost suddenly at the same time as the campaign for law and democracy in the movement for constitutional government. Like most things Iranian, lawful government and democracy came to Iran and captured the mood of the whole society, all with a great bang (p.105).

For the first time in Iranian history, Nasser ad-Din Shah of Qajar built several semi-public places such as *Takiyeh Dowlat* (Government Theatre), *Rowzeh khanehs* (places for reading

religious/Shi'i poems), *Taziyeh khanehs* (places for conducting the ceremony after the death of Shi'a Imams) and some other generally religious/Shi'i and governmental/royal places, which people (men), and especially nobles, had access to (Abrahamian, 2008).

Newspapers were also for the first time published in this era. However, they could not become a good space for public debates. They were in the Persian language to support the ideas of the royal family and spread its soft power over its people. Printing and publishing the first newspaper in Iran was to serve monarchs, not people. The newspaper was to become the regime's instrument for discipline, coercion and brain washing (Bashir, 2000; & Balaghi, 2001). Newspaper in the period of Qajars was become a symbol of despotism, in two different ways. First, it did not include democratic and/or people-related, but demagogic, speeches. Furthermore, there is the rule of the monarch and the influence of the clergy, which both were not liberal and democratic. The monarchs were appointed based on race and blood, and clergies were representing God and Imams. People also believed in several sayings such as the truth is something which is close to the centre of power. Second, buying the newspaper was obligatory; people, especially those who had a specific amount of income, had to buy it. That was why the common Iranian people called it *Zoornameh* (forced-paper) instead of *Rooznameh* (news-paper) (Qazi-Jahani, 2009). Then, several newspapers published in exile. They also had an impact on the intellectuals and individuals of Iran and took part in activating people's discussions on public issues (Bayat, 1991).

The oriental despotism used media and linguistic despotism in order to discipline the public sphere and its agents. People were reading what the regime was writing. Besides, the regime was publishing an exclusive newspaper only for its ministers and other men of the state. There was a semi-institution considering what is going to print and what has been printed in the newspaper. This was a kind of censorship (Qazi-Jahani, 2009). The

emergence of newspapers in Iran cannot be accepted as the emergence of the real public sphere and real public communication. It was only serving the regime, and did not become a realm for discussing public issues. It was not even about the regime's news which might had impact on people's life. 'The shah's lioness giving birth' was an example of the newspaper's headline (Kianfar, 2009; & tebyan.net, 2013). Most of the news and events that were published were about the shah, his journeys, and his garden and zoo. Besides, the writers were part of the shah's bureau, and were not ordinary people. It, indeed, was from regime to people. Therefore, it cannot be described as a proper communicating tool. Here, a space for occurring public discussions was not newspaper, but, as mentioned before, it was traditional and religious places. Then, after developing cities, the bazaar and other places become an arena for gathering people and meeting each other to discuss public affairs, including what had been written in the newspaper. Bazaars in Iran were not just places to buy and sell, they were for debating and deliberating too (Fraser, 1990). In these areas clergies had played a considerable role by making contact with people and bazaaris. They were also, trying to encourage people to be against the regime.

Iran in the era of Safavids and Qajars is a good example of religion entering the public sphere, either supporting or criticising the regime. However, in both situations, it was dominating, but not liberating, public life. The clergy made the religious events have public characteristics. It started from the era of Safavids when the Muharram rituals occurred in public. Then, they and especially *Maraja'* (the Sources), had played an important role in several public-related events in Iran such as the Tobacco protests (1890-91), the Constitutional Revolution (1906-11), the banning of the drinking of Pepsi Cola in the 1950s, Oil Nationalisation (1953), the coup of 1953, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979 (Mibagheri, 2003; Gasiorowski, 1987). All of these events are the roots of the Iranian public sphere, in which religion was central.

Most kings depend on religion or religious men to show the legitimacy of their power and kingdom. Men of religion, Sufi's, Sheikhs, Faqihs, Mujtahids, Ulama, and the like also benefited from the monarchy, as they also wanted to have influence in society (Moaddel, 1986). The shah himself gave religious titles to particular religious functions, like Sheikh al-Islam [great man of Islam] and Imam Jom'as [who delivers a speech in Friday]. In fact, this tradition goes back to the early eras of Safavids, those who made Shi'ism the formal religion and faith of Iran (Bayat, 1991; Perry, 2010).

The clergy did not stand alongside the monarchy in all of the period of the Qajars. The *ulama*, educated religious men, had played a significant role in the first public political event in the history of Iranian society. It is called the Tobacco Movement or Tobacco Régie because of the fatwa [religious decree] banning tobacco consumption in 1892 by Ayatollah Mirza Mohammad Hassan Shirazi, *marja'-e taqlid* (Source of Emulation) (Adalaty, 2010). The protests were held in Tehran on January 4, 1892 and then Tabriz, Esfahan, Shiraz, and Mashhad. As Bayat (1991) argues, a main reason was because "Great Britain supported British commercial expansion in Iran, which they wished to be open to international trade, whereas Russia adamantly opposed it" (p.18). Furthermore, the shah had made a treaty with a British merchant, Talbot, to treat and trade tobacco for 50 years. Ordinary people, peasants, merchants and also ulama, all were not happy. The events of 1891-1892 caused the tobacco privilege contracted by Naser al-Din shah to a British company to be revoked and also were a remarkable rise in the clergy's activity. It was the result of an alliance between mosque, bazaar and intelligentsia against the regime (Bayat, 1991). Thus, the Tobacco movement can be described as the first proper public action in the Iranian history.

The main factor that made Shi'a clergy more powerful and influential in comparison with Sunni and other religious men in Iran is linked to Shi'a ideology itself which believes in the importance of the idea of *taqlid* [imitation, following] (Rahimi, 2011 and 2012). This made

them have more followers and more impact on the system, as they had the capacity to have an impact on the balance of powers in society. Moreover, the monarchy was depending on clergy to support their legitimacy, believing that if clergies accept the rule of monarchs, people also do. Thus, clergies became a mediator between monarchs and the people. These caused politics to be mixed with religion.

The Tobacco Movement was a starting point to another important event, which was also a result of public awareness about their rights of governance, called *jonbesh-e mashruteh* - Constitutional Movement. It includes a series attempts and events that occurred in the era of Muzzafar ad-Din shah and then in the era of Mohammad Ali shah. Adalaty (2010) argues that the Constitutional Revolution had three stages in two periods of Qajars and Pahlavis era. The first was from 1906 to 1907, which is distinguished by the hegemony of clergy. Second one was from 1909 to 1921, which was characterised by the people's political awareness. Third in the era of Pahlavi was from 1941 to 1953, which the intellectuals played an important role.

The Constitutional Revolution occurred in order to change the system of the state from arbitrary monarchy to a constitutional one. Its most significant result was establishing *majles-e shura-ye melli* (National Legislative Assembly, parliament) and drawing the first constitution for the country. The Constitutional Revolution (1906) after the Tobacco Protest (1890) was the first massive event in Iranian history. The revolts were not in order to collapse the regime but to reform and change it from arbitrary rule to a limited one by a constitution. It was also, as Katouzian (1997) argues, admired by the revolutions through the world and in neighbouring of Iran which changed several regimes from monarchy to republic. Thus, there were external and domestic factors influencing the movement.

In fact, the main event that inflamed the movement was the increasing price of sugar (Adalaty, 2010). The Constitutional Movement was the starting point in the process of building an institutionalised state (Abrahamian, 1979b). This is because, in the Iranian history, the collapse of an arbitrary regime had always been overshadowed by chaos until the rise of another strong and arbitrary regime. Thus, the revolution was to build an institutionalised state, based on law and constitution, to limit regime's interference into people's private and public lives. This is why, in Persian, both *qanun* (law) and *azadi* (liberty) were used interchangeably, as law was linked to liberty from arbitrary rule. It was believed that for man to be free, he needs to live under a regime which is based on law or the constitution; thus, law is the basis of freedom and a tool to be free (Katouzian, 1997). Consequently, the desired liberty was freedom *from*, rather freedom *to*.

The role that the clergy played in public places in the era of Qajars was both negative and positive. It was positive, because they tried to make people aware about people's rights, the regime's injustice, and encourage them to demand for establishing *adalatkhaneh* (the house of justice) and *hukm-e qanun* (the rule of law). They used their statues to persuade people to protest against the regime. The religious men used religious places such as mosques (especially Friday's speech) and *Husseiniyehs* (places for reading poems in the memory of Imam Hussein's martyrdom) in order to increase their followers and also to oppose the regime (Katouzian, 1997; Mahani, 2013).

The point that should be noted is that the clergy did not oppose the regime only because it had no interest in people's lives, but also, and most importantly, because they believed that the regime was not in line with the *shari'a* (Islamic law). Here, it can be concluded that the target of the clergy's activities was not in order to "modernise", "democratise" or "liberalise" the state and society, but "Islamise" it. The clergy, moreover, had an impact in creating an atmosphere for the individuals' discussions on public related issues. Before the emergence

of the clergy's role, there was a huge gap between people and the regime; only while tax collecting people and the regime were in contact. Nonetheless, the clergy were closer to people, and the religious places (such as: religious schools and mosques) became semi-public places. Therefore, it can be argued that the early elements of the Iranian public sphere can be found in the realm of religion.

Besides, the goal of the clergy was not to accept modern values. They agreed with the intellectuals in criticising the regime but not Islamic customs and even traditions of society, or to substitute the regime with a non-Islamic one. They were opposite to the tendency of the intelligentsia to try to make Iranian society open. Sheikh Fazlulah-e Noori, a great religious man in the era of the Constitutional Revolution, showed his opposition to the revolution when he found that the intellectuals demanding for drawing a constitution based on "modern", "secular" and "democratic" principles (Adalaty, 2010). Mibagheri (2003) believes that Noori showed his respect and loyalty to the regime, because he thought that democracy and parliamentarism are a deviation from Islamic law and tradition. Noori believed that they fought for Islamic justice not for copying the constitution of a European country - Belgium. He claimed that the draft of the constitution had more than 20 articles against Islamic principles and called it *zalalat nameh*, 'letter of darkness' (Adalaty, 2010). This had a negative impact on the revolution.

Beside, *bazaariun* (merchants, men of trade, money-owners) also have a role in public events. They helped protestors by funding their activities in both the Tobacco and Constitutional revolutions. In the Tobacco movement, a merchant in Esfahan burned his tobacco to criticise the regime and to support the people's demands (Adalaty, 2010). However, the majority of the traders enjoyed a good connection with the shah and local rulers. As Bayat (1991) describes: "they were given almost total freedom of action in return for expected contributions in cash and kind, not as taxes but as gifts" (p.44-45).

With regard to the intelligentsia, the term in Islamic societies has more than one synonym. On the one hand, there were *oqala* (professors of intellect), *daneshmandan* (professors of knowledge) and *raushanfekran* (enlightened thinkers, those infused with the spirit of the European Enlightenment). On the other hand, there were *ulama* (who learned in the traditional religious sciences). The term intellectuals refers to both *oqala* and *ulama* (Bayat, 1991).

The tendency of intellectuals started from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, as some experienced life and study in European countries. They tried to spread the philosophical and political notions of the West in Iran. This caused the clergy to criticise them. The intellectual's, in fact, were trying to copy European culture and apply it in an Eastern country such as Iran. They did not respect the religious and traditional customs of the people. They were too optimistic about the European powers, and ignored the colonial perspective of Western countries (Adalaty, 2010). Therefore, they did not have a good position in society.

The Qajar shahs had admiration in the European ideas and its development. They travelled to European countries. However, they did not like other Iranians travelling to Europe because of the huge differences between Iran and Europe in terms of services, security, stability, industry and military development. Nevertheless, some of the Qajar rulers appreciated and cheered the notion of enlightenment. For example, Crown Prince Abbas Mirza, in 1811, sent two young men to London in order to study medicine. Also, in 1815, five other scholars went to England to study engineering, artillery, locksmithing and the English language (Bayat, 1991).

Women also participated in the Constitutional revolution. According to the Iranian literature on the women's movement and feminism, women had a notable role in the events of the period of the Qajars. It is argued that the history of Iranian feminism started with the

events of the Tobacco movement. The whole history of Iran until the tobacco contract was argued as eras of darkness. Women had been treated as weak creatures, considered as dolls with no wills, and hidden under veil in society (McElrone, 2007, & Hajianpoor, 2014). They were jailed by their husband, brother, father, and sons. Briefly, as McElrone (2007) writes, they were slaves of [many things and many issues including] their veils.

The years of the Constitutional Movement involved the increased awareness of men and the emergence of the women's role in public affairs. For the first time, Iranian women took part in public affairs as agents. The participation of women and especially those in Naser al-Din Shah's palace in the Tobacco movement by donating their jewellery to the protestors and then taking part as guerrillas and armed women transformed the role of women in Iran from slaves to participants. It was also their emergence as political agents in the public sphere (McElrone, 2007). In fact, this kind of participation could not be linked with the matter of feminism. Women participated in activities as humans, individuals and citizens, but not as a social group/class. Hence it had an impact on the history of feminism in Iran, but they were not protesting for feminist demands. It was, indeed, against the regime as a tyrannical system not as a patriarchy (Hajianpoor, 2014). Generally, the origins of the Iranian public sphere can be found in the period of Qajars and in the events of Tobacco Movement and Constitutional Revolution. All groups and especially the clergy, intelligentsia, bazaariun and women took part in it.

### ***3.3. Iranian Society and its Culture in the Era of the Monarchical Regimes***

Here, in this context, culture will be considered to be ideas, behaviour, customs, traditions, art and the lifestyle of a specific people who are living in a specific area. Culture, indeed, is shaped through different eras of history. The study of culture generally, and Iranian culture

in particular, is complex, as it is a multi-faceted and multi-level phenomenon. However, here have been attempts to describe and analyse Iranian culture with regard to the public sphere. Gorge Simmel (1910) believes that:

The things in nature are, on the one hand, more widely separated than souls. In the outward world, in which each entity occupies space which cannot be shared with another, there is no analogy for the unity of one man with another, which consists in understanding, in love, in common work. On the other hand, the fragments of spatial existence pass into a unity in the consciousness of the observer, which cannot be attained by community of individuals (p.375).

Here, it is plausible to consider things as individuals and souls as persons [or personalities]. Persons, however, have more impact compared to individuals. Simmel (1910) believes that every component of a group is not a society part, but beyond it there is something else. Moreover, man sees himself as a *product* of society and also a *member* of it. By this, people are both subject and object of society and its culture at the same time.

With regard to the matter of a culture's influences on the political life, political culture should be discussed. 'Political culture', as a term, refers to political directions and tendencies of individuals toward the political system and its different organisations/institutions to find their role. It also refers to the people's understandings of their political system. Generally, political culture can be classified into 'parochial', 'subject', and 'participant political culture' (Almond & Verba, 1989).

Chilton (1988) tries to spell out the criteria of culture, and especially political culture. For him, the conception of culture "must distinguish culture from mere aggregates of individuals considered in isolation [supra-membership]"; it "must refer specially to something shared among people [sharedness]"; it also "must allow for the possibility that different people

have different degrees of influence over the culture [inequality]"; and "the conception must be capable of producing hypotheses that are testable by objective standards against empirical data [objective testability]" (pp.422-424). Consequently, beliefs and deeds cannot be considered as a part of culture, if do not involve those principles.

Obviously, Iranian culture is a result of Iranian history. Further, religions, traditions, customs, internal and external wars, arts, literature and also natural disasters have participated in forming it. Iranian culture cannot be generalised over all groups of the Iranian people, as there are different sub-cultures. Nonetheless, here are attempts to analyse different aspects of Iranian culture.

Munoz (1993) argues that traditional and classic families and societies, and their behaviours have been transformed in various characteristics as a result of modernisation. These usually transform cultures from traditional/close to modern/open ones. In between these two, as Almond and Verba (1989) believe, there is a third type of culture - 'civic culture'.

What emerged was a third culture, neither traditional nor modern but partaking of both; a pluralistic culture based on communication and persuasion, a culture of consensus and diversity, a culture that permitted change but moderated it. This was the civic culture. [...] It was in this culture of diversity and consensualism, rationalism and traditionalism (p.6).

Here, it is controversial to call Iranian culture a proper style of civic or democratic culture. Central for both regime and religion in Iran was not people, but the Shah and God. They did not play the role of protector of citizens, but were a source of fear and anxiety. Regarding religion, as Tamir (1997) argues "hell is the realm of their fears" (p.229). Nonetheless, "secular fear, which concentrates on the avoidance of cruelty and pain, is therefore more contextualised than it seems, and cannot provide a solid ground for a universal political theory" (p.229). Here, the main pillar of Iranian culture is religion which is mostly based on

fear; consequently, fear (of God and/or shah) was the main pillar of Iranian individuals' psychology. This can have an impact on the public sphere's activity, as scared individuals cannot play an active role in society.

There is a hierarchy of fear in Iranian society. Children and wives fear the father in the family because of the patriarchal system. Father fears the shah. The shah fears the kings of the powerful states. They all fear God. The relationship between people and the regime is also based on fear. People fear the regime because the regime has a strong army. The regime fears people, as they are unhappy because of the taxes (Ghadamyari, 2012). These all had an impact on the personality and mentality of Iranian people. These circumstances made the regime and people in Iran to be not in a good relation. It made citizens feel alienated in their own society regarding to the public and political issues. That was also, first of all, because of the oriental despotism of the Qajars and then other regimes (Abrahamian, 1974). Tamir (1997) states that:

Individuals feel that their group has been recognized only if their norms, traditions, language, patterns of behaviors, find a place in the public sphere. If they are forced to restrict the expression of all these particularistic aspects of their lives to the private sphere, they feel deprived and marginalized. If they are required, for purposes of social-political participation, to veil their particularities, they fail to see themselves as autonomous (p.305).

For citizens, to feel the presence of a political system as their own, they ought to see its public sphere as reflecting their languages, traditions, customs, history and wills. Thus, this could be a source of social domination and fear. Here, as Tamir (1997) adds, "a certain amount of fear and mistrust of the state and its institutions is desirable and sound; too much fear and distrust can lead to unreasonable, sometimes dangerous, behavior" (p.306).

The family, moreover, as recognised as the most significant base and structure of society, has an important role in shaping culture. Family education takes part in activating or deactivating the individuals in both private and public arenas. Nassehi-Behnam (1985) argues that the Iranian family is based on both Shi'ite Islamic law and influenced by the Turkish and Mongol kinship systems. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Naser-e od-Din Tusi described it using the term *household* not family. The Iranian traditional family was a self-directed component of production and consumption. It was also patrilineal and patriarchal, and built based on men hegemony. Endogamy and polygamy are common. Grandfather, father, eldest son, uncle or the eldest man of the family was considered as the chief and who should to be followed. Another character of the Iranian family is a high birth rate which could be the result of "fear of infant mortality, the need for security in old age, fear of being alone, the prestige of fertility, and the productive role of children. Boys are wanted more than girls and are better-cared-for, better-fed, and better-dressed" (p.558).

The family and religion were the most important fundamentals of Iranian society and its culture. The family was the most constant and essential social unit. From birth to death, Iranians are living inside, and not leaving, the family. Their life was subjugated by the family and kinship relationships. Most of the characteristics of individuals are shaped by family. Moreover, the family also had a noticeable role in governance. Members of *majles* and the government are appointed or chosen by the regime or people depend on their families. Further, being a member of a famous family is a big chance to avoid the government's red tape. Nepotism is also a serious phenomenon in governmental organisations. This also made bureaucracy more complex, but at the same time, easier for some particular social classes (Gable, 1959).

Nowadays, modernisation, democratisation and industrialisation have affected Iranian traditional culture and the family itself. However, there are still families that remain

traditional, as they do not live in urban areas. In fact, the city, and its architectural design, has an impact on culture (Bosworth, 2007). It affects the style of people's lives in both the private and public spheres. In terms of Iranian cities, Clark and Costello (1973) argue that the social and physical structures of Iranian cities have roots in the Islamic tradition and then later Persian culture. Generally, pre-industrial cities are characterised by three main elements. First is religion, which is embodied in the mosques and shrines. Second is government, with its fortresses. And third is bazaar, commercial places and manufactures. This design, indeed, has played an important role in making coalitions among different groups of society and has shaped the public sphere.

Iranian cities and its lifestyle are also affected by several factors, namely monarchy and Shi'ism. These two features have formed much of what has occurred in the ancient and modern Iran (Mibagheri, 2003). The Mongolian invasion of Iran, moreover, still has an impact on the Iranian psyche, as it is quite clear in Iranian literature. Good proof to this is a poem which became an indivisible part of Iranian's psyche about the Mongols' injustice and oppression, and Iranian's suffering: 'they came, and drilling, and burned, and killed, and taken, and gone' (peykeiran.com, 2011). The Mongolians and their descendants, who destroyed Iran and killed people in massacres, left a deep scar on the Iranian psyche. It also had an impact on their social and political attitudes. Iranians, for more than three centuries lived under chaos and fear.

Following the regime and obeying the political and/or religious authority is another essential character of the political culture of Iranians. Principally, the invasion of foreigners throughout different periods of history has produced a sense of apathy towards local or national rulers. This is because Iranian people did not have a considerable role in their history. It also might be anticipated that the institutions of the monarchy and Shi'ism were both counter to the foreign intervention. However, they were promoting the idea of obeying

authority/political order. In the period of Safavids, religious men announced that the shah had to be obeyed. Moreover, religion has been the base of legitimacy for political authority in Iran. It was also another reason for respecting authority Iran (Mibagheri, 2003). Besides, culture is a product of society's agents, of individuals, groups and institutions, and also their attitudes and beliefs. It also includes the administrative system of the country as a reflection of society's values. Gable (1959) believes that "the administrative system of a country is an aspect of the total environment and culture of its people" (p.407).

The intellectuals' role in Iran is a considerable one. They, as clergy and political leaders, played a significant role in the Iranian public sphere and its culture (Khosrokhavar, 2004; Jahanbakhsh, 2001). In the era of Mohammad Reza shah, the 1953 coup happened as a result of intellectuals' influence. They also had a role in the Islamic Revolution in 1979. *Tudeh*, an Iranian communist party, and its intellectuals played a noticeable role in the Islamic Revolution and also in the first years after the revolution in supporting the republican system. After the revolution, the secular intellectuals mostly fled from Iran and those who stayed were silenced.

In the decade of 1970s, there was an Islamic renewal in intellectual life under the influence of several religious intellectuals such as Ali Shari'ati, Mehdi Bazergan, Mortaza Motahhari, Ayatollah Khomeyni and Talaghani. In the 1990s, new trends appeared in Islamic thought which questioned the revolutionary functions of the 1970s and 1980s. They called themselves Reformists. Their most prominent question was 'did the Islamic Revolution reach its goals?' In contrast, revolutionary intellectuals, which shared Marxist and Shiite concepts, focused on essentials of individual freedom, cultural openness and peaceful coexistence with the West (Khosrokhavar, 2004). This was led by the reformist president Mohammad Khatami. After the events of the Green Movement, Mir-Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi are the most famous leaders of this movement.

There are also several Shiite clergy-intellectuals that supported by the regime. Also, there are several clergy intellectuals that are challenging the regime and are opposed to the idea of velayat-e faqih such as Shabestari. Moreover, there are several secular and even lay intellectuals that have criticised the system as a whole not just the regime, such as Dariush Shayegan or Akbar Ganji. They reject any combination between Islam and democracy (Khosrokhavar, 2004; Alinejad, 2002). Besides, there are several religious intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush who believe that all people are able to interpret and value religious information, but only for themselves. He also believes in a democratic religious government. Soroush argues that religion, human rights, and democracy can work in tandem. He states that the state's policy must reflect in *shura* which occur in the public sphere. Furthermore, he argues that even religious rules can be debated in the public sphere (Razavi, 2004).

Consequently, after the Islamic Revolution, there were several intellectual movements: Marxist-Islamists (before and at the time of the revolution), radical Islamists (early era of the revolution), secular and Islamists (after the Iraq-Iran war), and the appearance of journalists and human right activists. Furthermore, nowadays, social media users are dominating the intellectual domain. A notable number of activities in the public sphere are reflecting and responding to the demands and requests of social media users. The nature of Iranian culture, in fact, has an impact on the nature of the Iranian public sphere. This will be clarified more in next chapters.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

To sum up, the origins of the Iranian public sphere can be found in the Iranian sociopolitical history. Today's Iranian public sphere has its origins in both religion and politics which have a significant role in shaping the lifestyles of Iranians in both the private and public arenas.

The Iranian public sphere started with the establishment of public places. Examples of the early Iranian public places are coffeehouses and bazaars; religious public places such as mosques and Husseiniyehs; cultural public spaces such as newspapers, movie shows, theatre halls, cinema, sport stadiums, and printed media, radio and television stations, and finally Weblogistan - or blogging, weblogging, where people write and read on a cyber space, but not on mass or traditional (Hendelman-Baavur, 2007), social media and cyberspace. Besides, the most apparent public-related events were Muharram rituals in the era of Safavids. Then, the Tobacco Movement and the Constitutional Movement in the era of Qajars, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979 which had a significant role in transforming the structures of the Iranian public sphere from the traditional to modern model. The Green Movement (2009), moreover, could be described as a remarkable event that used new information and communication tools (Clay, 2011; Kamalipour, 2010).

The mosaic of Iranian society, which is based on an agricultural economy, despotism rule, religious culture, and nomadic traditions, has an outstanding role in shaping the Iranian public sphere (Beck, 1980). Political regimes - because of their material power, and religion - because of its spiritual power, have a bigger role in re/shaping the Iranian culture and formulating the mentality and personality of Iranian individuals. Moreover, Iranian culture influences the socioeconomic and political systems of society and, also they influence it.

Iran, as a country and also a state, has experienced various events through the history. The nature of the Iranian culture, because of the factors that had a role in reshaping it, is quite complex. The mentality of Iranians, because of all of the domestic and foreign factors which have affected them, is also quite complex. Thus, it is hard to argue that 'Iranian individuals are apathy/sympathy', 'Iranian family is a traditional/modern one' or 'Iranian society is a non/civic one' and the like. Hence, these kinds of judgments are not helpful to understand the real nature of Iranian individuals, society and public sphere. Here, the historical analysis

has been used as a method to understand the nature of Iranian society and find the origins of its public sphere. Nevertheless, Almond & Verba (1989) state that:

The emerging nations are presented with two different models of the modern participatory state, the democratic and the totalitarian. The democratic state offers the ordinary man the opportunity to take part in the political decision-making process as an influential citizen; the totalitarian offers him the role of the 'participant subject' (p.3).

What makes a society democratic or totalitarian is an important matter. However, this chapter was not concerned with this matter. Rather, it has tried to spell out those factors that have had a role in reshaping the nature of the Iranian public sphere. It considered politics, religion and traditions as important themes to analyse. It has argued the cases of political regimes – especially in the era of monarchies (the Qajars and Pahlavis), and also religion, culture, the family and society. Also, the mentality of Iranians has also been considered. Finally, it has clarified those factors that played a role in shaping the Iranian public sphere and spelled out its origins, its first public places, and early public events. The next chapter deals with the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and how it transformed and/or shaped the Iranian public sphere. It analyses several historical events to find the roots of the Islamic Revolution. Moreover, it discusses some main events of the revolution that enhanced the role of religion and weaknesses the position of women. To clarify the impact of the revolution and its ideology on public and private life of Iranians, the chapter considers regime and the constitution as themes and analyse them.

# **Chapter 4 The Islamic Revolution and the Structural Transformation in the Iranian Public Sphere**

## ***4.1. Introduction***

The previous chapter clarified the nature of the Iranian public sphere before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This chapter tries to clarify the Islamic Revolution and its role in the Iranian public sphere transformation. It will explain the application of the public sphere in the era of both the Pahlavi and Islamic regimes, as non-democratic regimes. The main argument of this chapter is that the public sphere has existed despite the nature of the regime. However, the difference is in its nature, performance and appearance. The Islamic Revolution, moreover, as an event, could transform the structures of the Iranian public sphere. Here, almost all scholars and even ordinary people accept that Iran after 1979 is something different than Iran before 1979. As the chapter will emphasise, the Islamic Revolution could change the Iranian regime's ideology and the lifestyle of Iranians. As it is accepted that the main agents of a public sphere are state and society, thus the change of their performance and appearance could cause to the change of the public sphere's performance and appearance, too. Consequently, the events of the Islamic Revolution and also its applied ideology are worth to study, as they flavour the nature of the today's Iranian public sphere.

The Islamic Revolution during the years of 1978-79 has been described in different perspectives. On the one hand, some describe it as a miracle in the twentieth century for the Iranian people and also for Muslims all over the world. On the other hand, some are looking at it as the most catastrophic event in the century for the freedom and the life of the Iranian people, and even for the region (Lafraie, 2009 and Panah, 2007). Both

arguments emphasise that the revolution was a huge event with huge aftermaths. It simply means that the revolution was a real one that changed the solid pillars of Iranian society and the regime in order to start a new phase in the life and politics in Iran.

This chapter discusses the Islamic Revolution of Iran in several different sections. First, it discusses the events of the Islamic Revolution by focusing on its roots. For this, several historical events will be analysed. Second, it will be about the Islamic Revolution as a transformation phase of the Iranian public sphere, and try to illustrate how it changed the social and political structures of Iranian society. Its focus will be on the change of the regime and constitution, as both had a significant role in transforming the public sphere's structures. In order to make it clearer, several state symbols and constitutional articles have been used and analysed. Furthermore, the chapter finds that the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere is distinguished by its Islamic characteristics and can be considered as a result of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Moreover, it has been impacted by the legacy of the previous regimes and also by the sociocultural elements of Iranian society itself.

The religion of Islam and sub-religion of Shi'a will be argued in all sections and even sub-sections as an essential factor which had impact on all sects and agents of society and the public sphere. In fact, it is hard to discuss post-revolutionary matters without mentioning the significance of religion (Lee and Shitrit, 2014). However, the chapter is not going to separate religion from other related issues, as it is not separated from them in *de facto*. That is also because of the nature of the system which is religious and does not believe in separation between mosque and state as secularism does. Religion in Iran is not developed as an independent institute, but it is essential for early all institutes. In other words, it is mixed with all institutions of the regime and all sects of society. In addition, the study discusses and analyses the applications of religion in Iran, not its texts.

The religious institutions had a positive and pivotal role in emerging and then activating the Iranian public sphere before the revolution of 1979. Then, after the revolution, in several cases, their role became negative. This is, partly, because of the change of their statues from ruled to ruler. This turning point could be described as the main result of the change of the aims of the religious institutions which appeared in their attempts to dominate and discipline the public sphere and its agents. The Islamic regime, moreover, used religious institutions as an instrument to dominate/guide society and its individuals. The religious institutions also serve the regime in order to guarantee their own interests in both political and financial affairs.

In order to make the revolution's impact on the Iranian public sphere clearer, the thesis uses historical analysis, depending on secondary sources. It also uses various documents to prove that it has changed the Iranian regime and people's lifestyle. Besides, analysing the revolution as a multi-aspect phenomenon makes the topics mixed with each other. However, its structure has been drawn to be as suitable as possible with the methodology of the research and its framework.

#### ***4.2. The Islamic Revolution of Iran and its Roots***

The significance of analysing the Islamic Revolution of Iran is related to several reasons. First of all, what is happening in the contemporary Iran could be accounted for as an aftermath of that event. It was a transformation from a secular-monarchical regime to an Islamic-republic one, as it changed the sociopolitical structures of Iranian society too. Additionally, the Islamic Revolution is still in process and has not finished yet; it is still an operational and an effective phenomenon. It changed the regime's domestic and foreign policies. It also had an impact on the mentality and personality of Iranians and their

lifestyle. The revolution occurred more than three decades ago, but it is still a vivid memory in the Iranian common memory, as it is still in process.

Furthermore, the importance of analysing the roots of the revolution is that it makes the nature of the revolution clearer. Indeed, it is not only about the events of 1978-79, but also the whole process of the revolution. As is known, revolution is a longer process in comparison with a *coup d'état*. The Islamic Revolution of Iran can be considered as a result of the Shi'a political struggles during history too. Thus, by clarifying the roots, agents and events of the revolution, understanding the soul of the revolution itself and its aftermaths will be easier.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Persia was governed in an absolute autocratic kingdom under the name of the Shah. Then, in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a parliament and constitution were established, as a result of the Constitutional Movement. The Qajars stayed in rule until 1925. Then, Reza Khan changed his title to Reza Shah Pahlavi and also changed the formal name of the country from Persia to Iran in 1935 (Milani, 2011). This was in order to found a new name for the country to be capable in embracing not just Persian tribes but also others. It was an attempt to persuade non-Persian speakers to feel that Iran is for all. The Pahlavi regime tried to continue the Qajars' and Safavids' policy in regard to the formal language of the state – Persian or Farsi, and also its formal religion – Shi'a Islam. Then, in 1979, the Islamic Revolution, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, changed the Iranian system to an Islamic republic and the formal name of Iran to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Principally, the Islamic Revolution was a result of combining clergy and liberals, nationalists. It was also rooted in the Tobacco Movement (1890-92), the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11), and the events of the era of Mossadegh (1951-53) (Keddie, 1966). In regard to

the roots of the hegemony of the Shi'ite clergy over Iranian society, in fact, it goes back to the era of the Safavids. The Safavids supported Shi'a ulama in both symbolic and real ways. Symbolically, Shah Ismail Safavid made the Shi'a Islam the formal religion of Persia. Economically, Safavids supported ulama's status in the country by allowing them to have *waqf* property – property of Muslims that they dedicate to the ulama; and also by letting them have control over the *khoms* - religious taxes. Besides, there were clergies who have been paid by the state as they were appointed in public service sectors. These made the ulama powerful on the one hand; and on the other, it forced them to work in the Shah's favour (Keddie, 1969). Shi'a ulama were also close to the bazaaris. Thus, their link with both monarchs and bazaaris made them have a good socioeconomic position.

Clergy also had a good position in the era of the Qajars. Ironically, Sunni ulama in Iran, and even in those countries where they were the majority, were subjected to the government (Keddie, 1983). All of these factors made the Shi'i ulama to have a better position than the Sunni ones. Then, in the era of Pahlavis, the role of the Shi'a clergy was weakened by the regime. The Pahlavi regime tried to centralise the government and secularise courts, schools and other welfare sectors. It gave women the right of education and to work outside the home with the Family Protection Law (1967-1975). They also got the right to vote in 1963, an attempt to make women and men equal in Iranian society (Keddie, 1980). Ulama were not happy with these processes, as these decreased their role in society and in government too. Thus, they tried to encourage people to protest against the Pahlavi regime. The early elements of the revolution were performed from the early eras of the Pahlavi regime (Ramazani, 1974).

The ideologies of the religious-revolutionary agents have been performed even before the White Revolution, 1962-63. Abrahamian (1979a) believes that the roots of the Islamic Revolution go back not to the speech of the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1963, nor to the events

of Mossadegh's coup in 1953 and the nationalisation of oil, but to the beginning of the Shah's efforts to create an absolute authority in 1949. The Shah had a desire to reformulate Iranian society. Thus, it was opposed by aristocrats, intellectuals, traditional bourgeois, and also clergy groups. The events of 1949, the Shah's plan to change and reshape the regime and society had been protested by the public, strongly. Just after a few months of those events, Mossadegh headed a group of liberal politicians; Ayatollah Kashani headed a bigger group of clergymen, which had hegemony over the bazaar, nationalists, middle class, and even some social democrat and secular groups. They combined in a coalition named the National Front. The National Front had several demands such as fair elections, freedom of the press, end of military law, and the nationalisation of oil from the British-owned companies. The National Front, by 1950, had arranged several demonstrations to protest the country's circumstances. Most of those who took part in those rallies were from the middle class including university students, white-collar workers, professionals, teachers, and other groups of the Iranian intelligentsia. These were supported by the bazaar middle class, including shop-owners and shopkeepers, small traders, traditional bourgeoisie, and also ulama.

The roots of the Islamic Revolution have also been linked to several different aspects of the common life of Iranian individuals and their culture. The emergence of new religious intellectuals, the growth of leftist groups, the legacy of the years of 1906 (Constitutional Revolution) to 1953 (Mossadegh's coup), and most importantly the socioeconomic and political circumstances of the Pahlavi regime and Iranian society in that era, all had roles in formulating the events of the revolution of 1978-79, and even its aftermaths. In fact, the main trait of the Islamic Revolution, as Keddie (1983) discusses, was its enmity against imperialism and its elements. It was repeated in the Tobacco Movement (1890-92), the Constitutional revolution (1905-11), oil nationalisation (1951-53), and the protests in

defence of Khomeini (1963). In all of those events people made the regime responsible for foreign intervention in national affairs.

Shi'a is considered as a symbol of resistance and fight against unjustness; thus ulama accepted to lead movements against the rulers. During the years of the revolution, they tried to remember and revive the myth of Imam Hussein and link it with the contemporary circumstances. They nearly succeeded in replacing historical actors with the modern ones. Shah was Yazid; Iran was Kufa and Karbala; and the case was the same - revolting against an unjust authority. Besides, the Islamic calendar of communal customs, the events of the public meeting of Friday Prayers, and the other public events all were in use in order to make and control the mass actions in a political flavor (Skocpol, 1982). It was, briefly, the use of Shi'ism as ideology and mythology in the case of revolution. This made the non-Shi'a and even secular groups agreed on leading the revolution to be under the ideology of Shi'a and the leadership of a Shi'ite clergyman, Ayatollah Khomeini. Additionally, not only the mythologies of Shi'ism, but also Iranian nationalist symbols were in use. The literature and especially poems of classic and modern Iranian authors were used in a strong and effective sense (See: Arjomand, 1986). The myth of Nawrouz [New-Day], and its main character Kaveh the Ironsmith, which comes in Ferdawsi's Shahnameh, a 10<sup>th</sup> century poet, had played a big role in gathering people and pushing them to revolt, as it also happened in the era of the Constitutional Revolution (Karimi-Hakkak, 1991). The importance of Nawrouz was that, in an aspect, it was accepted by nearly all Iranian ethnic groups.

Ashraf and Abrahamian (1983) highlight the connection between the clergy and bazaar that goes back to the traditional setting of the cities in Iran. In urban areas both bazaar and mosque are located in the same place, the city centre, and both are close to each other. This physical structure of the city and its design has impacted their social structure, too. Not only physically and socially, but also in terms of economy and finance, both mosque and

bazaar had their own interests in being beside each other. The importance of the economic factor is that merchants became a main source of the finance of the clergy, and the clergy supported bazaaris for their demands against the Shah's regime. Bazaaris thought that the new revolutionary government will be friendlier with them because of their attitude as "good Muslims" and also because they are from the same communities. In regard economy, they thought that they will not pay any more taxes rather than religious taxes. Moreover, politically, they might have some influences in running the country. Thus, there were several common points between them and they could have a social kind of contract, too.

In fact, the main reason for the Shah's defeat was that he accepted the people's demands, relatively. By this, he showed himself and his regime as a weak one. Depending on the Iranian sociopolitical history, a weak shah must be replaced with a strong one. This is because, in Iranian mentality, being less brutal could be interpreted as the weakness of the shah, not his goodness. During the history, Iranians were praising strong not weak shah, ruler. For them, being strong is a value like being fair. More acceptances of the people's demands by the Shah, led people to feel that the shah is becoming weaker and they are becoming stronger. This also led them to have more demands, which finally the people's demand was that the shah must go and the regime must change; and it happened (Katouzian, 2003).

What makes Khomeini accepted as a leader of the revolution by nearly all opposed groups, as Burns (1996) argues, is that he was the biggest enemy of the Shah. The enmity between the Shah and the Ayatollah was raised when there were attempts to discredit the clergymen who were having a strong status in Iranian society. His longstanding and courageous opposition to the Shah made Khomeini to have a spiritual power among the Iranian people that highly respect the religious men (Henderson, 2010). Khomeini's life in exile, Iraq, was also helped him to think, read and write more about the Islamic rule. Exile increased his

followers, as an author and also as a religious source. His re-exile from Iraq to France, Nofel Loshato, in 1978, was also another opportunity for him. He was living in a free, open and democratic country and with having the freedom of expression. It also made the revolution worldwide known, with the help of international media.

### ***4.3. The Transformation of the Structures in the Public Sphere***

Modern Iranian history is divided into before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. It identifies that the Islamic Revolution has transformed the structures in the Iranian public sphere. Its aftermath appeared in nearly all features of the regime and society. Moreover, the impact of Islam and Shi'ism, as a dominant ideology, is undeniable. This section tries to describe and analyse some of the most significant and distinguished features of Iranian society after the revolution. It discusses the change and transformation of the statues of regime, constitution, economy, education, judiciary system, intellectuals, women, and the public and private aspects of the lives of Iranians. The religion of Islam and sub-religion of Shi'a are the most operative factors which participated in reshaping the Iranian public sphere. Religious characteristics, indeed, have been raised in nearly all levels of the Iranian public sphere.

#### **4.3.1. Change of the Regime and the Dominant Ideology**

Regimes, in all countries, and especially in non-democratic ones, have ability to reformulate sociopolitical structures of society. This is mainly because of they have control over army, economy, media and education. Thus, regimes can have an impact on the public and even private aspects of the lives of people. Accordingly, regime change causes the change on the structure of the public sphere, too. The Islamic Revolution, simply, because of its ability to

change the regime, could also change several principal characteristics of the Iranian public sphere. By changing the regime and dominating the authorities of the state, the revolution could also change the other main pillars of Iranian society. The Islamic Revolution, in fact, had a notable impact on the lives of the Iranians in both private and public aspects.

The Islamic Revolution, indeed, was not matching with the modern ideologies. Its slogan was 'neither East, nor West; but the Islamic republic'. Ludwig Paul (1999) highlights the aims of the revolution as being to Islamise the regime and its domestic and foreign policies. Its ultimate aim in foreign policies, moreover, is to create an Islamic *ummah*, unity of all Muslim peoples through the world in all cultural, economic and political aspects. In order to achieve this goal, the main barrier is the presence of Israel as a recognised state, which occupied Palestine and its holy capital, Quds or Jerusalem. Hence, Israel is only a 'Small Satan' and just an agent of the 'Big Satan', the United States of America, which is the centre of imperialism and Zionism. Another goal which has to be attained is the spiritual aim of the Islamic Revolution, Tawhid, accomplishing oneness with Allah, and the rise of a human headed for science and wisdom. Here, it can be argued that the Islamic regime in Iran is one which depends on spirituality. As Krasner (1982) argues, the principles and norms can provide basic characteristics for a regime. Thus, the change of the principles and norms of a regime means the change of the regime itself.

After the collapse of the Shah and success of the revolutionary groups in 1979, several different power centres emerged. The apparent Islamic powers were the militant students, who attacked the US embassy in Tehran; the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), which was founded by the radical pro-Khomeini groups; and the secret Revolutionary Council (Ramazani, 1980). Nevertheless, there were also deep differences among the Islamists, especially regarding to the status of the clergy in the machinery of government. The grand ayatollahs also had different perspectives about applying Shi'a in politics and were not

agreed on a method (Hooglund, 1982). Even, Khomeini, at first, believed in some ideas which recognised the contribution of several non-Islamic currents in the government. Bazergan and Bani-Sadr were two of those prime ministers who did not have an Islamic attitude towards governance. However, after the enhancement of the power by Khomeini, the circumstances changed (Rosen, 2014). The revolution was occupied by absolutist fundamental clergies who were supported by Khomeini. By 1983, the revolution had become what Khomeini wants to become, religious and fundamental.

In fact, there were several events which led the revolution to be religious more than liberal. The events of the U.S. embassy and the crisis of hostages increased the role of 'Followers of Khomeini's Line' and then the resignation of the National Front ministers made the Islamic groups stronger. In this way, the Islamic Republican Party, Khomeini's party, could control the majority of *Majles* and government (Keddie, 1983). Islamists used the young emotional students increase people's loyalty and achieve their own goals. The main goal for Khomeini and his followers was the amplification of the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*, which was theorised by Khomeini as a type of government inspired by Shi'ism (Milani, 1992). The embassy seizure, as Moaddel (1992) highlights, was a good opportunity for the ulama to realise their wants in the constitution. Thus, they put the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* as a central point of the ruling system into the constitution. It gave them a level of judicial and political power which they had not had before. The result of the referendum on the constitution was that the Iranians agreed on an Islamic republic ruled by *velayat-e faqih*.

Khomeini emphasised that the state's political system should be based on Islamic law and be achieved by enforcing the Shari'a. The task of Islamising the country and applying Islamic law should be in the hand of a faqih, a jurist. The authority is delivered to the jurist by Allah. He is also a successor of the Twelfth Imam, during His absence. The jurist or the ruler, here, has an absolute authority in making decisions and issuing orders. He also can

make decisions even against the Islamic law, if in the country's interest. The regime also can abrogate any bonds with the people or other sides of any contract, if it is believed that it will be against national or Islamic interests. It also can stop any acts and laws, if he thought that it is necessary to do. Furthermore, the jurist can order to destroy a mosque, and even "can temporarily forbid pilgrimage, one of the pillars of Islam, if it happens to be against the interests of the Islamic country" (Niknam, 1999, p.19). Thus, it can be believed that the ruler [*faqih*] is an "autocrat" one which enjoys having absolute authorities, and the regime [*velayat-e faqih*] is "pragmatic" which is doing what is in its interest.

The Islamic Revolution has experienced different chapters. First, the era of the revolution and war under the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini (1979-1988). Second, the era of what is called *the reconstruction stage* under the presidency of Rafsanjani (1988-1997). Third, the era of Mohammed Khatami, a reformist president (1997-2005) (Aras, 2001). Forth, the era of Ahmadinejad's presidency, the phase of returning conservatives and the activities of the Green Movement leaded by Mir-Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi (2005-2013). Fifth, starting in 2013, the presidency of Hassan Rouhani. Rouhani called himself and his staff as moderates (rouhani.ir, 2015). Before Rouhani, the only one who had a demand for a more open society and even for being more open in foreign relationships was Khatami (Wells, 1999).

Khatami argued that freedom is respected by religion and stated that the organisations which do not respect the significance of liberty are fated to collapse. He had a demand for establishing a kind of public sphere in which liberty became institutionalised and parallel with Islamic law. Khatami tried to make a combination between liberty and religion. He used the ideas of new religious intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush, who believes in Protestantism in Islam (Aras, 2001). Then, the era of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is the most challenging one in terms of the activities of the Iranian public sphere. The regime issued

new laws and rules with regard to family, the media, and individuals. In general, it was the era of conservative rule again. It was, indeed, a new attempt to emphasise enforcing the fundamental and radical bases of the Islamic republic and the revolution's missions. However, at the end, Ahmadinejad's cabinet was called as a diversionary stream by the conservatives.

### **4.3.2. Constitutional Change**

The Islamic Revolution of Iran had a desire to change the nature of Iranian society and its structures. Drawing a new constitution was one of its mechanisms to apply its ideology and enhance its strategies in the state and society. The constitution, in Iran as everywhere else, can play role in shaping the relationships between the agents of the public sphere, including: individuals, groups, legislative, executive, and judicial state authorities. However, the constitution simply reflects the will of the *power*. A new constitution, moreover, is a symbol for a new state. In other words, a new state appears in a new constitution. In defining the significance of the constitutions, in liberal states, related to the public sphere, Habermas (1974) state's that:

In the first modern constitutions the catalogues of fundamental rights were a perfect image of the liberal model of the public sphere: they guaranteed the society as a sphere of private autonomy and the restriction of public authority to a few functions (p.52-53).

The constitution occupies the highest level of the legal system of a country and determines the nature of the political, economic and social systems. Therefore, changes such as the change of the constitution and other constitutional organisations will transform the public sphere's structures. Iranian revolutionary forces had their own plan to draw a new constitution to embody their ideologies. It was a milestone to announce the change of the

regime. Thus, a new constitution was drawn, accepted, and applied. It was dominated by fundamental and radical Shi'ite ideology (Milani, 1992). Here, it can be argued that the new Islamic constitution, just like the revolution itself, was an attempt to stabilise an Islamic system against secularism and liberalism, and toward Islamising the regime and society.

During the drawing of the constitution, Khomeini did not allow the word 'democracy' to be mentioned. Thus, the liberals, leftists, and other moderate groups failed in mentioning the new republic as a Republic, Democratic Republic, or Islamic-Democratic Republic of Iran. Then, the constitution bill was drawn by an 'Assembly of Experts' (*Majles-e Khobregan*) instead of a 'Constituent Assembly' (Ramazani, 1980). Burns (1996) believes that the Iranian people supported the referendum because most of them believed that the acceptance of the new Islamic constitution meant the confirmation of the overthrow of the monarchy. The referendum, moreover, asked the voters to show their opinion on only one option which was to agree or disagree with the establishment of an Islamic Republic. There was not any other option for the voters to choose another kind of government. Thus, there were, in fact, lots of individuals and groups that did not have any desire for Islam, Islamic rule or the Islamisation of the country; they voted for an 'Islamic Republic' as the acceptance of the Shah's overthrow. Nevertheless, there were several revolutionary elements that boycotted the referendum.

After the success of the referendum at the end of March 1979 and in a two-day-long voting process, April 1, 1979, was announced as 'the Islamic Republican Day' by Khomeini. Khomeini officially stated that "such a referendum is unprecedented in history to establish a government of righteousness and to overthrow and bury the monarchy in the rubbish pile of history" (Ramazani, 1980, p.449). It was, for Khomeini, indeed, strong evidence of the people's wish to overthrow the monarchical regime and to found an Islamic Republic. In the

Islamic constitution of the Islamic republic of Iran, there were several articles that show the obvious transformation of the public sphere by the revolution, such as:

Article 4:

All civil, penal financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle applies absolutely and generally to all articles of the Constitution as well as to all other laws and regulations, and the fuqaha' of the Guardian Council are judges in this matter.

Article 5:

During the Occultation of the Wali al-Asr (may God hasten his reappearance), the wilayah and leadership of the Ummah devolve upon the just ('adil] and pious [muttaqi] faqih, who is fully aware of the circumstances of his age; courageous, resourceful, and possessed of administrative ability, will assume the responsibilities of this office in accordance with Article 107.

Article 12:

The official religion of Iran is Islam and the Twelver Ja'fari school [in usual al-Din and fiqh], and this principle will remain eternally immutable. Other Islamic schools, including the Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Zaydi, are to be accorded full respect, and their followers are free to act in accordance with their own jurisprudence in performing their religious rites.

The above articles show how the basic principles of the country were changed to become more Islamic and Shi'ite. The elements of a theocratic regime are obvious in the text. In

this way, the revolution could make several radical changes to the political lives of Iranians which led to radical changes in other aspects of their lives. Nevertheless, the Islamic constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran believed in several developed values and virtues which were new to the Iran. Arjomand (1986) argues that the Islamic constitution recognises freedoms of expression, the media, political gathering, and more which do not oppose the basis of Islam and Shari'a. This could be considered as a good progress in the case of liberty, equality and social justice in Iran.

### **4.3.3. The Public Sphere Transformation**

Iran since 1978-79 can be argued as a country in a 'transformation process' (Aras, 2001). It has been controlled by conservative groups who are trying to conservatise the regime, society and even its individuals. This process, mainly, depends on the Shi'a-Islam ideology and which considers Iran as a 'Vatican of Shi'ism' (Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2004). Thus, Shi'ism played a notable role in transforming the Iranian public sphere, as attempts to establish a country, and also a world. The revolution has changed nearly all aspects of Iranian society, including the regime's policy, the design and functions of public places, the nature of the public sphere's activities, arts and literature and the lifestyle of Iranians. After the revolution, the regime even changed the names of some streets in Tehran, the capital, and other cities. They can be classified into two different groups of non-Iranian and Iranian-monarchy names. Both have been changed to Islamic names. It should be noted that the names of streets in Iran, as well as elsewhere, have their own symbolic significance. The change of these names confirms the success of a revolution and the end of an era.

Another example of the change in Iran after the Islamic Revolution is related to the state's official papers, such as currency and post stamps. These icons can, relatively, explain the

regime's desire for applying a specific type of lifestyle. These, by their nature, can also have an impact on the way that people think, discuss and act in both private and public arenas. In the images on the Iranian currency before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the focus before the revolution was on the Shah, Iranian civilization – as there were images of the Shah and Iranian parliament, and the tomb of Hafez-e Shirazi, an Iranian poet. However, after the revolution, the regime's focus was on the Rahbar and Islamic symbols – as there are images of Khomeini and Quds tomb, and a mountain in Iran. Here, it can be concluded that the nature of both regimes in terms of focusing on the Shah/Rahbar is almost the same. In both before and after the revolution, Iranian political system could not survive personalising the regime. Moreover, what has been changed is the person, but not the nature of the system, totally; as Khomeini had almost all authorities that the Shah had.

Since the revolution, the clergy have found their status in the new regime and society, who had previously lost it in the Pahlavi era. They, step-by-step, controlled nearly all governmental sectors. They could have their sayings regarding different issues. Imam jom'as, for example, attained a remarkable power and had a significant influence. They, especially in bigger cities such as Tehran, represent the revolution, regime and supreme leader; their Friday speeches have always been broadcasted in open-public places for all. That is, indeed, a way to Islamise the public areas of society and influence individuals (Zubaida, 1988).

Furthermore, with regard to economic policies, there was also a plan to Islamise economics. Briefly, the state's ideology must be Islamic, neither communist, nor capitalist. This is a way of making Iran a self-sufficient country in economic terms. However, there was ignorance about the importance of the economy by the Islamic elements in the revolution. Khomeini, in the early part of the Islamic Revolution, declared that "we did not make the Islamic Revolution so the Persian melon would be cheap". Moreover, Reja'ie, the Prime Minister,

claimed that "the Revolution was for the sake of Islam and not for material things such as the availability of, say, oranges and grapes" (Moaddel, 1992, p.369). Besides, in terms of the nature of the revolution as an event and its outcomes, Arjomand (1986) believes that there are some shared traits between the Islamic Revolution of Iran and Nazism and Eastern European Fascism. Economics was not important for neither fascists nor the Islamic Revolution. Both considered it insignificant. They also had a plan to integrate all classes of society into one. However, class for both fascists and Islamists was replaced by 'nation', the proletarian nations and the disinherited nations [*Mostaz'afin*] (Arjomand, 1986).

Education also had to be Islamised from the perspective of the revolutionary forces. The revolution had a plan to revolt again against what the previous regime had created and was rooted in the mind of individuals and the culture of society. This project was named the *Enghelab-e farhangi*, Cultural Revolutions. It aimed to transform Iran into a real and pure Islamic state (Paul, 1999). Islamic Republic Party leaders, then, believed that in order to create a self-sufficient and independent Iran, Iran had to have its own true Muslims to let 'morality' surpass 'science', and 'value' surpass 'knowledge' (Moaddel, 1992). The Cultural Revolution included changing the atmosphere, staff and curriculum of school and universities.

The judiciary system also was another important part of state that had to be Islamised. The revolution replaced secular laws with laws rooted in Islamic law [Shari'a] and the Shi'ite tradition. Arjomand (1986) states that "the Shi'ite Sacred Law has been codified for the first time in history, and Islamic morals and coverage of women are strictly enforced by an especially created official vigilante corps" (p.403). The revolution, at first, halted the use of non-Islamic laws and then established an Islamic constitution.

Iranian intellectuals played a notable role in theorising the revolution and suggesting ideologies for the phase after overthrowing the monarch (Nabavi, 2003). In fact, the link between them and modern philosophies began in 1934 with the publication of Rene Descartes' works in Persian (Boroujerdi, 1997). Historically, Iranian intellectuals were admired and inspired by European thinkers. This admiration was apparent, especially, in the Constitutional Revolution when the constitution and laws were influenced by Belgian, Swiss and French law codes in penal law. However, the civil code stayed in the line of the Islamic criteria, Shari'a (Niknam, 1999). In the years of the revolution, intellectuals became part of what was called the Third World thinkers who criticised ideas such as capitalism and democracy in its Western version. They also saw human rights as 'the Trojan horse of the powerful West' (Boroujerdi, 1997). Then, the revolution produced its own "intellectuals", Islamic intellectuals, who are defending the revolution and its ideology.

The case of women and their rights is a complicated one. Both Pahlavi regimes tried to 'emancipate' women by unveiling them and issuing the Family Law. The Shah himself had an interest in modernising and secularising the country. He thought that women ought to be the first ones that should be modernised and/or Westernised. Besides, there were attempts to modernise and Westernise all other classes of society and sects of the country, namely Iranian army (Keddie, 1983). Bahramitash (2003) argued that it is true that the Shah gave women more rights in theory and even in practice, but the fact is that his reform plan did not cover all women. It, indeed, had benefits for the privileged classes, not for other classes or for those which were poor and lived in villages and rural places. Moreover, they gained the right to vote, but what made gaining this right meaningless is that there was only one political party, and voters had no more choice. Thus, not only the right to vote, but also the elections were meaningless. The Islamic Revolution, however, changed both appearances and functions of women in society.

In fact, what transformed the public life of women from "liberal" to traditional were not totally the events of the revolution itself. However, there was a tendency towards Islamising society even before the revolution. The Islamic groups had different perspectives on the role of women in society; however, almost all of them were against the Shah's plan to unveil women. Ali Shari'ati, a religious intellectual, in the 1970s published a book entitled *Fatima is Fatima*. It was an attempt to make Fatima [the Prophet Muhammad's daughter] a symbol for the life of Iranian women. Fatima in Islamic and Shi'ite tradition is the symbol of a strong woman who stands beside her husband to fight against injustice. This book influenced lots of Iranian women. They looked at this character, Fatima, as a familiar model in their own history. As a result of these works, many educated Iranian women joined Islamic revolutionary activities and tried to wear hijab. However, these changes were not fundamental and radical ones. For instance, hijab in that era was not head-to-toe style; it involved replacing miniskirts with a headscarf and long coat (Bahramitash, 2003). Moreover, it should be mentioned that hijab for most Iranians is a value which is rooted in their religion and their tradition. They wear hijab as a part of their culture. Thus, bearing enforced hijab seems to be easier than unveiling it by Iranians.

Revolutionary groups, and especially Islamists, were aware about the power of women and their ability to take part in the protests. In both protests in defence of Khomeini and revolution against the Shah, they focused on the roles that women had played helping Islamist revolts in history. They used these examples to encourage women to leave their homes and be in public places against the Shah, and described it as a religious task, a kind of *Jihad*. At the beginning of the revolution, Khomeini called for women to take a part in protests and violate the night curfew. The response to his call was great and they did what he asked them to do. Furthermore, it was an important transformation of the lifestyle of the Iranians, as families before that did not allow their daughters and wives to leave their

homes without the permission of the father or husband. The contribution of women to the Iranian revolution and being in the front position of the demonstrations also had other advantages. Their attendance at the forefront of protests and giving flowers to the soldiers made the revolution peaceful. This is simply because it made it difficult for the regime's armed forces to shoot them. They also had an impact on armed forces, in several cases, to join the revolution and fight beside their 'Muslim sisters' (Akhondi, 2011).

After the Shah's overthrow and success of the revolution, Islamists became the most powerful revolutionary group. Khomeini, which became a leader of the revolution and represented most Islamic groups, was one of the most radical and fundamental. He was aware that women's support was one of the most effective elements that brought him to power. Nonetheless, when the revolution was a success, Khomeini planned to change the position of women in society and public. That was why he decided to send back women to their homes. They had to be 'mothers and wives' in their home, not in public places (Bahramitash, 2003). During the era of the Islamic regime, Iranian women have experienced ups and downs in the public sphere's activities. However, they have always remained as one of the most challenging groups for both the regime and society.

#### ***4.4. Findings and Conclusion***

The era of the Islamic Revolution can be argued as the era of transforming the Iranian public sphere, which started by transforming the regime and its dominant ideology and constitution. The revolution is distinguished by having its own features, namely the significant role which religion and clergymen played. Post-revolutionary Iran, however, is recognised as a patriarchy- in terms of gender and social affairs, a religious one - in terms

of regime, law, education, and etc., and closed one – in terms of domestic and foreign policies.

According to what this chapter analysed, it is plausible to argue that one of the most influential events in the modern and contemporary history of Iran is the Islamic Revolution of 1979. It also can be called the *only* revolution in Iranian history and Shi'i tradition. That is because of the meaning of the concept of revolution, which can be defined as "the collapse of the political order and its replacement by a new one" (Arjomand, 1986, p.383). It also can be identified as "basic transformation of a country's state and class structure, and of its dominant ideology" (Skocpol, 1998, p.265). In the Islamic Revolution of Iran, both mentioned characteristics could be found easily. Nonetheless, nearly all of the other events of Iranian history were only movements, revolts, coups, or the like. As discussed in the previous chapters, no one of those events made a real revolutionary change with regard to economic, political, social, and cultural structures in Iran, but the Islamic Revolution did.

The Islamic Revolution, in fact, could not survive the legacy of the monarchical regimes totally. Some examples may help the case to be clearer. After the revolution, some elements of the country were changed, just superficially; such as the replacement of the Shah by the Rahbar [Leader]. In fact, both Mohammad Reza Shah and Ayatollah Khomeini occupied the top of their systems and had almost the same authorities. As the Shah was appointing the Committee of Senate, the supreme leader also appoints half of the members of the Guardian Council of the Constitution. Moreover, even symbolic elements of the Islamic Republic had almost the same sense of the era of the Shah. For instance, the slogan of 'God, King, and Country' was replaced with the slogans such as 'God, Faqih, and Country' or 'God, the Quran, and Khomeini'. The description of the Shah as 'the vanguard of the great civilization' changed to the description of 'the leader of the oppressed people of the world' for Khomeini.

The importance of studying the Islamic Revolution of Iran is that it changed almost all substructures, if not infrastructures, of the Iranian regime and society. The Iranian regime, moreover, after more than three decades, still sees itself as a revolutionary one. Until now, the supreme leader of Iran is the supreme leader of the revolution too. He is attempting to achieve those revolution's aims and goals that have not been achieved yet. The most considerable issue in this regard is Islamising society in domestic and exporting the Islamic Revolution in foreign policies. The Islamic Revolution, indeed, changed not only the structures of public related matters, but also the lifestyle of Iranian individuals. The Islamic regime, as a most fundamental outcome of the revolution, is Islamising the country in regard to both public and private spheres, continuously.

After more than three decades, the events of the Islamic Revolution still remain a controversial matter, especially in terms of its causes and outcomes. That is, mainly, because of its nature making it an odd event compared to other Iranian events and also other revolutions in the world. In fact, the Islamic Revolution still has potential to reproduce itself and reformulate Iranian society. It is reshaping the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere in a revolutionary sense. Furthermore, what is happening in today's Iranian society can be considered as the revolution's aftermath.

Arjomand (1986) argues that the revolution of 1979 was odd in compare to the other revolutions over the globe. He states that:

The Western revolutions were directed against state and church. The church had been anglicized in England, gallicized in France, and disestablished by Peter the Great in Russia; in all instances, it was an integral part of the monarchical regime. In the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the entire beleaguered Shi'ite hierocracy rose against the state (p.389).

Here are two main points. First, the rise of a religious regime as a result of a revolution in the time that the world had already passed the historical period of religious regimes is odd. Second one is related to the ideology of Shi'ism, which is accepted to be an opposition as its main role in politics. However, in 1978–79 it tried to change its historical position from ruled to the ruler. There were several Shi'i subdivisions that did not recognise *velayat-e faqih*, as a Shi'i rule. There were also individuals and organisations which had desire in overthrowing the Shah's regime, but not in accepting theocracy as an alternative for the monarchy. The success of Shi'a clergy, in fact, made the Islamic Revolution of Iran to become the greatest event in the history of Shi'a.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran, however, was not very abnormal in comparison to Third World events in that era (Parsa, 1988). This is because of several common features such as culture, religion and geopolitics. Thus, it is not surprising if they share some revolutionary characteristics such as revolutionary violence. Skocpol (1982) highlights this and argues that:

The Iranian Revolution has been so obviously mass-based and so thoroughly transformative of basic sociocultural and socioeconomic relationships in Iran that it surely fits more closely the pattern of the great historical social revolutions than it does the rubric of simply a political revolution, where only governmental institutions are transformed (1982, p.266).

Here, it can be argued that one of the factors that make the Iranian revolution unusual is the impact of Shi'ism and the role of the revolution's leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, himself. However, the fact is that the Ayatollah was representing the civilization, mythology, tradition, and ideology of Shi'ism (Bill, 1982). In fact, what determined the revolution's outcomes was the dominant ideology of Shi'ism. Its role, moreover, was crucial in local

conflicts among the revolution's forces after the fall of the monarchical regime (Burns, 1996).

Hence, in analysing the Islamic Revolution in a critical way, researchers must distinguish between the Islamic and Shi'ite impact on the revolution's functions and their tasks. It is obvious that Islam in Middle-Eastern countries is the dominant religion. There are individuals and groups that have a desire to return to the Islamic tradition and apply Shari'a. The failure to democratise Afghanistan and Iraq disappointed people with the foreign powers. This also strengthened anti-American ideas. Therefore, anti-Americanism is not unique to the Iranian revolution/regime. However, as Keddie (1983) highlights, the appeal for a revival of the Islamic tradition does not mean the rejection of modern technologies and scientific developments. Further, the desire for some ideas such as constitutionalism and republicanism in Iran is not new. They are accepted ideas, but should be in an Islamic setting.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran has been described using different methods and with different aims. It, in fact, has lots of 'friends' and 'enemies'. However, it is widely accepted that it was an *en masse* movement; had impact on different aspects of the life of the Iranian people and peoples; changed partially the balance of power in the Middle East; appeared in a new version of religious and anti-imperialism revolutions; has already become an undeniable part of the history of Iran, also a part of which reshaped Iranian society, and contributed in formulating the mentality of Iranian individuals and their way of thinking and acting. It also transformed the public sphere. Besides, as Amir-Ebrahimi (2009) states:

The political dictatorship of the Shah before the Islamic Revolution, and the monitored public spaces after the revolution, did not allow for the emergence of a permanent public

sphere in Iran. Furthermore, under both regimes, radio, television, and the leading newspapers were under the complete control of the state (p.330).

The revolution's main achievement was that it mobilised a big number of people in different classes and groups against the monarch. It was also successful in overthrowing the Shah and his regime. As a result of these successes, the Iranian people regained 'national pride'. The revolution and its regime also became a notable power against so-called the Western bloc, without standing beside the Eastern bloc. This started a process of transformation in political and socioeconomic issues inside the country. At the beginning of the revolution, there was a gap, as the old regime was collapsed and the new one was not established. This shaped a semi-democratic [or an anarchical] sphere that created worthwhile opportunities in terms of political and ideological debates and dialogues (Halliday, 1980). Indeed, that was not because of the desire of the Islamic revolutionary forces; rather it was because of the lack of an omnipotent authority to control the public sphere (Bill, 1982). Hence, the revolution itself was a huge event and activated the public spheres. It also became a phenomenon for encouraging the agents of the public sphere to discuss it and also debate common matters/ideas such as governance, justice, freedom, human rights, and the like. It was, indeed, an event that reintegrated Iranian peoples and classes in a new frame aiming at doing something together. Even nowadays, the Islamic Revolution of 1979, its missions, agents, forces, and its outcomes are still an arguable matter for Iranian individuals and agents.

Today, Iranian society and its regime could be described as an outcome of the revolution of 1979. The revolution, has politically transformed Iran from a monarchical system to an Islamic Republican one; from inspiring from Cyrus the Great to Imam Husain and other Shi'ite Imams. All of these changes have been institutionalised in Iranian constitution,

education, media, and other channels of the regime to guide, control, discipline and administrate society.

In terms of the socioeconomic aspects of the country, the revolution is on its own way to Islamise the country and all of its sects by changing nearly all of what has an impact on individuals and society. However, the process of Islamising the country is not finished yet. In 1996, for instance, the Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei declared the failure of the Islamisation of the universities (Kian-Thiebaut, 1999). Then, in the period of Ahmadinejad's presidency, he stated that all aims of the revolution should be achieved. The Islamic regime in Iran, in fact, shaped a new atmosphere and also produced new [post-revolutionary] agents. It also changed the flavour of activities among the new generation of the intelligentsia, human rights activists, journalists, social media users, etc. In this new phase, both regime and society in Iran make the Iranian public sphere vulnerable in some cases, and also activated it in some other cases. The next chapters will discuss these matters, concentrating on the Islamic regime and Iranian society, and their positive/negative impact on the public sphere's activity and strength. Moreover, to clarify the position of the agents, especially women, in the Iranian public sphere, the thesis uses the issue of *hijab* as a case study. In doing so, the chapter evaluates the role of the state in the Iranian public sphere and its mechanism to occupy it. Nonetheless, the issue of Weblogistan also will be analysed as a case to show how society finds its own way to be active in the public sphere, even if it is a virtual one. The next chapter is to discuss state-related matters.

# **Chapter 5 The Iranian Regime and the Iranian Public Sphere: Vulnerabilities and Potential**

## ***5.1. Introduction***

The previous chapters have clarified several aspects of the concept of the public sphere, its roots and stages of transformation in Iran. The importance of this chapter, and also the next one, is to emphasize the nature of the contemporary public sphere in Iran. Here, the focus will be on the Islamic regime and its response to the Iranian public sphere. The reason that the regime is chosen is related to that significant role which it plays in reshaping the Iranian public sphere. That is also because of the nature of the regime and its ideology which are allowed to interfere in public related affairs.

The analysis will be about both vulnerabilities and potential of the regime in terms of the Iranian public sphere, as testing these concepts allows the nature of the Iranian public sphere to be explored in more detail. Vulnerabilities, here, refers to the characteristics of the regime and its acts in the public sphere which have a negative impact on the public sphere's activity and strength. These are all in order to enforce the regime's power and apply the revolution's ideology. Moreover, potential, here, refers to the notions and actions of the regime which have a positive impact on the public sphere. This impact could be directly, as the regime itself wants to activate the public sphere; or indirectly, as the regime does not want to activate the public sphere, but it become a reason of activating the public sphere. Accordingly, this can be helpful to understand the nature of the Iranian public sphere and its main agents - state and society. Consequently, the nature of the regime and also the nature of the public sphere itself will be explained.

It also should be noted that some terms used in this chapter should be understood in the context of the study. For instance, the use of domination or occupation is referring to the attempts of the regime to occupy spheres of people in both private and public life. Besides, the meaning of activity, here, is not about being good or bad, or democratic or non-democratic. However, it is about occurring activities in the public sphere, as having a proper public sphere, first of all, requires having activities regardless to their nature and outcomes.

The literature of studying the public sphere is mostly about societies ruled by non-religious regimes; and arguing the democratic elements of the public sphere. However, in the case of Iran, the matter is different, as Iran is a non-democratic/religious state, and the public sphere can be found there. Therefore, what the research is investigating is the nature of the public sphere in a country which is different from others, in some sociocultural and also political aspects. An outstanding issue is that Iran has its own way of running society. It believes in its own doctrine from its local and national values, which are naturally different from other societies. The Iranian paradigm is different in that it practices an Islamic ideology in an Iranian-Shi'i version (Kamrava, 1992; Akhavi, 1996). Despite the fact that several elements/signs of democratic and non-religious settings can be found in the Iranian political system, but it does not mean that Iranian regime is a fully democratic or a secular regime. Therefore, the study emphasises the Iranian nature of the Iranian regime.

This chapter will not evaluate the Iranian public sphere to find out if it a democratic or not. That is generally because it is a kind of 'truism' that the Iranian regime is not a democratic regime, it is not even an Islamic-democratic republic. Moreover, the Islamic regime does not veil its beliefs, as it is not a democratic one. It also does not hide its religious perspectives for running the country and society, as is apparent in the constitution. Further, they are proud to be non-democratic, attempting to Islamise society as its main task. Thus, for the Iranian regime, the discourse of 'Iran is not a democratic state' is not a criticism.

Here, it is also believed that a good way to understand the Iranian public sphere is to understand it as it is, through its theoretical and applied philosophies, rather than by comparing it with democratic principles.

For the Islamic regime in Iran, the point of politics and governance is to guide people towards *the right way* and to get God's satisfaction (Ma'rifat, 2007; Eftekhari, 1999). In this regard, Ahmad Khatami, Tehran's Friday preacher, *imam jom'ah*, in a Friday prayer, announced that "it is the Islamic regime's duty to guide people to the heaven" (bbc.co.uk, 2014, Online). This also accepted by Ayatollah Khamenei, the Iranian supreme leader and other conservatives. Thus, it is not about being democratic or being free as they want to be. Likewise, the point of life as a process, with all of its aspects, political, economic, social, and cultural, is to success in otherworld too (Mohammadi, 2013). The Islamic regime sees itself as God's tool. Its functions are a religious. Besides, it responds people's demands if they are within the Islamic criteria. Thus, the regime in Iran is trying to be more Islamic than democratic. Here, the focus will be on matters of activity versus passivity of the Iranian public sphere and the regime's tools and strategy in dealing with it.

The chapter is divided into two main sections to discuss the vulnerabilities and potential of the Iranian public sphere related to the Islamic regime. Both sections are about the regime itself and the regime's tools are examples to clarify the main issue. The case of hijab is also chosen for the same reason; it has been chosen only as a theme which can indicate other potential areas for analysis. Furthermore, some other related themes have been chosen in order to supply evidence to support the arguments and will also be analysed in order to find out some hidden elements of the nature of the Iranian public sphere. That is in order to find out the nature of the regime's impacts on the public sphere in both positive and negative aspects and how the regime plays a role in reshaping the public sphere. The chapter, finally,

summarises the findings and evaluations in its last section, as it clarifies the significant role of the regime in reshaping the nature of the Iranian public sphere.

## ***5.2. The Iranian Regime and the Public Sphere's Vulnerabilities***

The aim of this section is to discuss the Iranian regime's notions and actions in the public sphere, which make it vulnerable. Here, several points, as examples, will be highlighted to show how the regime's plans and policies make the public sphere passive. Firstly, it will start by discussing the nature of the regime and its conditions in terms of geopolitics, ideology, religion and tradition. Then, some significant tools of state such as law, media, education and the armed forces, in dealing with the public sphere, will be analysed. The section uses the case of hijab to analyse the regime's domination in the public sphere. It will also discuss hijab's legal and political functions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, under this subsection, some more themes, which indicate the regime's interference in the public sphere, will be analysed.

### **5.2.1. The Nature of the Iranian Regime**

A regime, or more specifically a political regime, can be defined as a set of principles and structures that regulate and rule people/s within a country/state. It is, close to the term of government, but also boarder than it. This could also be applied to the Islamic regime of Iran too. Moreover, as discussed in previous chapters, the Islamic regime of Iran could be viewed as an outcome of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Shi'i civilization. It is also the result of Shi'i attempts during history to change its status from being opposed/ruled to being ruler (Dabashi, 2011a). Moreover, not only political and religious traditions, but also the country's geopolitics has impacted the nature of the regime. Partly, Iranian regime's act

is, directly or indirectly, linked to its Middle Eastern neighbours. Some external factors push Iran to be a more Islamic and religious state. Iran, in order to protect itself from decadence within its Sunni neighbours and also in order to play a regional role in the Middle East, is following Shi'ism. Besides, Iran is trying to show itself as the centre of Islam, or as an Islam-protector state in international relations (Panah, 2007). Thus, following Shi'ism and Islam, for the Iranian regime, is not only a religious value, but also it has its own significance in politics. Iranian regime has found Shi'ism as 'the best method' to protect Iran from 'the others'. By this, it can persuade people to agree with the regime (Rizvi, 1999).

Being different from the others, in fact, is considered as the source of legitimacy for the Iranian regime. Thus, it focuses on that Iranians are Shi'i Muslims, and are not 'infidels' or even Sunni Muslims. The significance of this argument for Iranians is related to the Iranian's fear of the demise of Iran. It is also related to the mentality of the Iranian rulers, as Iranians suffered national despotism and foreigners' interventions. This makes the Iranian regime insistent on Islam and Shi'ism as an identity which can protect the Iranian people and their country from the threats of 'the others'. In an atmosphere dominated by such feelings, people have to accept and respect the regime, as it is better than the rule of others who try to assimilate them. Consequently, Iran, in its foreign policies, because of its fear of assimilation, is trying to be far from the international society actors. It is, indeed, even trying to 'isolate' itself – in terms of values, identity, and ideology, but not economics. This is because of the nature of the regime, its psychology and ideology that always feels that it is threatened by the others on the one hand. On the other hand, protecting Eastern and Islamic/Shi'ite values, and opposing the Western and secular values make it stronger.

Internally, what threatens Iran is its plurality, as there are various nations, languages, religions, sub-religions (Elling, 2008; Varasteh, 2013). Democracy may threaten the unity of the Iranian territory. It is true that there are plural and integrated societies in a peaceful

confederation. However, Iran is different in several aspects. Firstly, the matter is not only related to the regime and its political legacy, but also to society and its cultural values which support a non-democratic lifestyle. Secondly, pluralism in Iran has a difficult form. Sects are not fully independent, as all of their agents are not only in Iran. There are Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey; Baluchis in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Turks and Azeri-Turks have their independent states, Turkey and Azerbaijan. Arabs also have a number of states. Each one of these nations can be used by other states against the Iranian regime and its union. This situation, once more, increases the mistrust between the Iranian regime and the Iranian peoples. Moreover, as both regime and society are not democratic, Iran needs an identity to integrate its plural society. It could be something like Pan-Iranism, Shi'ism or a mixture of both. It also needs a method to protect the country's unity, like centralism or the use of hard power. This is because there are possibilities for the rise of a number of independent states inside Iran, or the union of the Iranian sects with Iranian neighbours. Thus, it can be concluded that the mosaic of Iranian society also has a role in shaping the Iranian regime.

Historically, Iran experienced the rule of foreigners, arbitrary rules, monarchy and semi-constitutional monarchy, and the Islamic Republic. Moreover, as Kazemi (1995) highlights, there are four different political tendencies in the Iranian modern history, which participated in formulating its political tradition. First, the monarchical group which still has a notable number of supporters. Second, liberal-nationalists, which are supporting secularism. Third, religious and pro-religious groups, which are in power since 1979. And fourth, the leftist groups which had a long history in Iran without being in rule. Nowadays, it is easy to find some elements of those tendencies in the Islamic regime. For example, the supreme leader in Iran has occupied the top of the system, just like the king in a monarchy. In Iran, like in a constitutional monarchy, there is a constitution. Iranian regime, also, like a theocratic

system, is a religious one. The regime calls its economy system as a system which is not Western, neither Eastern, but Islamic; however, it is closer to socialism than liberalism.

The economy is also another factor that played role in reshaping the nature of the Iranian regime. In the previous chapters, the viewpoints of the Islamic regime on economy were discussed. However, it should be noted that the Islamic Revolution did not change the Pahlavi's economy style dramatically. It, in fact, still remains as an economy which is mainly based on the production of petroleum. This makes Iran a *rentier* state. The link between rentier regimes and despotism is a strong one (Mahdavy, 1970). This is mainly because when the regime finds itself as the owner of the country's wealth, allows itself to enforce its ideology in the country. Thus, the power, which comes from wealth, is in the hands of the regime 'against' people. Here, the equations between regime and people, state and society, and governmental and public will be unbalanced.

Economics in Iran has always been a significant factor. Its significance is related to the economic disasters in Iranian history, foreign interventions, drought, famine, and agricultural problems. After discovering oil, however, the circumstances had not changed dramatically. This is because of the lack of a *just* government or good-governance in the country. Moreover, discovering oil and gas increased the ambitions of foreigners to invade and occupy Iran. Then later, even after the oil nationalisation, the wealth went to the modernisation of the army more than other sectors. Corruption in economic and financial affairs became a phenomenon in the Pahlavi era. After the Islamic Revolution, there were still lots of economic problems in the country. That was because of the legacy of the Shah's regime in terms of economic problems and economy-related laws, and then because of the cost of the Iraq-Iran war for eight years and its aftermaths (Gheissari, 2009).

Nowadays, the Iranian economy is facing several new problems in terms of the economy and the life of the Iranian people. The most notable challenges are corruption, the cost of the nuclear program, the Iranian subsidisation for the Shi'i and anti-Israel groups and regimes outside Iran, and the international economic sanctions over Iranian financial and economic institutions. Economy-related issues have always been considerable as motivations for the Iranian people to be active in the public sphere. There are examples of economic crisis which encouraged people to do collective activities in the public sphere: the tobacco trade in the 1890s, the price of sugar in the 1900s, the problem of oil in the 1950s, the price of chicken in 2012 and pistachio in 2013, etc. (Reinert, 2012). Economic affairs are also becoming a key slogan in the parliamentary and presidential elections; Ahmadinejad's slogan in his election campaign was "we shall put the fruits of oil wealth on the ordinary person's dinner table" (Ehsani, 2006, p.8). In the presidential elections of 2013, the economy, especially international financial and economic sanctions, were mentioned in the electoral slogans of candidates.

The Iranian economy, according to Ehsani (2006), is 'state-controlled and uncompetitive'. Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic of Iran claims that it is following an Islamic economic system, or at least attempting to follow it. It originated from Khomeini's notion of building an Islamic economic system, to be neither capitalist nor communist. Furthermore, according to Article 44 of the Islamic Constitution of Iran, the economic system involves all three private, public and cooperative sectors. It was suggested in 1979 by the Revolutionary Council in order to Islamise and nationalise the Iranian economy sectors. Although, in Iran, Islamising the economy means satatising it, as the state is representing both people and religion at the same time. This affects the public sphere's activity too, as the regime has control over economic and business activities. The Iranian regime has its own hegemony over the economy, as well as over the public sphere.

Both the Iranian regime and society have been affected by the traditions of both Islam, as religion, and also Shi'a as sub-religion. Since the Islamic Revolution, the regime has tried to Islamise society by institutionalising Islam in Iran. However, the regime, indeed, has not been successful at attaining some of the revolution's principal aims, especially in achieving social justice and economic self-sufficiency. It also has not created an Islamic society yet. Besides, the religious regime in Iran is not fully theocratic, but has some of its own characteristics. It is, in fact, a *sui generis* regime. In this regard, Chehabi (2001) states that:

Like totalitarian regimes, it [Iran] proclaims the absolute supremacy over public life of an ideology, i.e. 'Islam'; like authoritarian regimes it permits a limited degree of pluralism; and like democracies it holds elections in which the people sometimes have a genuine choice (p.49).

The Islamic regime of Iran considers itself as a tool to apply God's will. In other words, the regime, in theory, does not have its own programme for dealing with society and its individuals. It also does not have its own sovereignty, as the sovereignty is possessed by God, not regime or people (Tabesh & Moheseni-Darabidi, 2011). The idea of ruling instead of God, in fact, does not originate from the Islamic period. Even before the Islamic Revolution, as Katouzian (2003) argues, the monarchs believed that they were God's shadow on earth. In addition, Marineau (2010) states:

Traditionalists are explicit that legitimacy (*mashru'iyat*) is only bestowed on a government by God and that the people can only recognize the functionality of a political system and signal their willingness to accept it (*maqbuliyyat*). For a government ruled by the fiqh, its legitimacy is bestowed by the fact that God is the true sovereign, as the government acts according to His law (p.95).

Consequently, it can be argued that the Iranian regime is designed by Iranian traditions, Islam/Shi'a religion, and the ideology of the regime itself. An apparent character, which is bestowed by the tradition and also has links to religion and ideology, is patriarchy. Indeed, Iranian women are an active and strong agent of Iranian society and have a better status in comparison with most of the Iran's neighbours. However, in comparison with developed countries, Iranian women suffer more (Shojaei et al, 2010). Iranian women and their participation in previous regimes also were not notable. This demonstrates that different Iranian regimes could not survive the patriarchal characteristics of society. In the Islamic era, not only society and its traditions, but also the regime and the institutionalised religion are not in the favour of women (Moghadam, 1989 & 2004; Sedghi, 2007). This gender inequality could be understood as a result of the patriarchal character of Iranian society and Islam, which has been reflected in the Iranian regime's structure.

All of these factors have participated in reshaping the nature of the Iranian regime. The Iranian regime does not always trust people's activities, and sees them as a threat. In Iran, those who are not following the Islamic regime's policies called as betrayer, renegade, plug-ugly, gangster, anti-revolution, elements of sedition, and the like. The Islamic regime, as any regime, tries to limit threats. However, the matter, here, is what could be considered a threat to the regime? How does the regime define acts of the public sphere as threats? How does the regime enforce its power and deactivate the public sphere and its agents? The next section will discuss the regime's acts in the public sphere.

### **5.2.2. The Regime's Mechanisms to Increase the Public Sphere's Vulnerabilities**

The Islamic regime in Iran tries to have an impact on the public sphere as a source of its acceptance by the people. In order to achieve its religious and ideological goals, it tries to

create a kind of public sphere which supports the regime's national and international goals. For the Iranian regime, a *good* public sphere is not a threat, but an opportunity. A good public sphere, however, may not be in favour of society as being isolated will guarantee the security of the regime and protect it from both domestic and foreign threats. Thus, the regime tries to make the public sphere a tool in which it serves the regime, more than the public. For this, regime has its own methods.

The Islamic regime in Iran, as well as other regimes, tries to protect itself from external invasions and internal chaos. The Iranian regime has its own criteria to determine its national security, interests, redlines, and national values (Varasteh, 2013). Sometimes, these are excuses to limit free thought, speeches, and acts. It also has its own methods which originate from its ideology, geopolitics, and the other structural elements of state. These methods and limitations are not limited to only the Iranian regime, as Chehabi (2001) highlights:

While alcohol is now licit in all industrial democracies, smoking marijuana is still outlawed everywhere except the Netherlands. [...] Likewise, almost all societies enforce some sort of dress code, and in France state schools can refuse admission to Muslim girls who wish to cover their hair. As to censorship in the arts and the press, it is not limited to totalitarian regimes and also occurs under authoritarian (and very occasionally even under democratic) regimes (p.53).

The main agents of the Iranian contemporary public sphere are: students, academics, and intellectuals; NGOs and journalists; women and Human Rights organisations, and youths (Engeland-Nourai, 2004). The regime has several restrictions for each one of them, and also for all of them as citizens at the same time. Generally, the state uses the constitution and laws, media tools, religious and formal educational institutions – including mosques, and

even armed forces to discipline agents and control their undesired activities. By using these tools, the regime tries to deactivate society and increase the public sphere's vulnerabilities. Besides, what is more crucial in Iran is the regime's perspective on the relation between state, people and religion. It believes that Islam puts the state alongside, not against, people; thus, the regime itself is protecting and defending people's rights (Eftekhari, 1999; Kamrava, 2001). It, simply, means that there is no need to organise institutions or associations to defend people's rights beside the state, as the state does it. Here are examples of some tools that the regime uses to interfere/guide the public sphere.

### The Constitution and Law

Fundamentally, the constitution is to limit/guarantee people's liberty. Hence, the constitution is a written version of social contract which guarantees the rights and freedoms of the individuals, groups and institutions of the country. However, in general, the constitution is written in order to, before everything, apply a system and avoid chaos. Thus, the way the constitution is written and its dominant ideology determines allowed or forbidden activities. Nonetheless, the role that constitution plays in a country is different from one country to another. It is, indeed, related to the constitution itself in terms of its own mechanisms to guarantee its strength and elevation. It is also linked to the will of the regime to apply/ignore the constitution's articles (Ben-Dor, 2000).

Iran was ruled under an arbitrary rule until 1906, when the first constitution was written as a result of the Constitutional Revolution. Iran's second constitution, the Islamic one, *Qanun-e Asasay-e Jomhoory-e Eslamy-e Iran*, was written and adopted in a referendum on October 24, 1979, following the success of the Islamic Revolution. On July 28, 1989, it was amended to make some small changes – such as removing the post of Prime Minister in the Iranian

political system (Hasib, 2004). The main characteristic of the Iranian constitution is that it is written in an Islamic version based on Shari'a, Islamic law, to Islamise the country. In Article four, for example, it is read that:

All civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle applies absolutely and generally to all articles of the Constitution as well as to all other laws and regulations, and the fuqaha' of the Guardian Council are judges in this matter.

The first regime's act towards the public occurs in the constitution and in its application. Some articles of the constitution and also some concepts like the regime's interests are quite flexible. This helps the regime to issue different laws and regulations from it, and also to interpret the articles as it wants. The Iranian laws, and especially the penal code law, all are based on Islamic texts and traditions (Iran's Constitution, 1979/1989, Chapter 11). The regime uses them to make society passive as they are being used directly over criminals, and indirectly over all people. For example, in a public execution the criminal and/or guilty person is punished by the law to death. However, ordinary people also will be punished, psychologically, as they are witnesses of the death. The places that the public executions are done in it are public ones and close to where the Iranian ordinary people live their daily life. The public executions in Iran are usually be done in the city centres, bazaar. They are open to all and even people are invited to see the process. Here, the 'public places' are used/occupied by the state's agents, military. The locations are close to resident areas, where people living their own life. Besides, witnesses are ordinary people, including women and children. This is a way to show how much the state is powerful in defeating its enemies, or the enemies of society, and religion. This is how the Iranian regime uses the public places to manoeuvre its power and to control the public sphere, materially and psychologically.

The judicial system in Iran is used as a mechanism to discontinue any reform presented by the civil society agents. Thus, the main challenge for human rights regards the relationship between the Iranian judiciary system and Iranian individuals (Engeland-Nourai, 2004). Most of the examples of human rights violations in Iran are connected to the judicial system and its application. Besides, the elements of the Iranian regime and its supporters prefer the Islamic Republic to democracies by highlighting that argument that the law of the Islamic Republic is made by God, not the people. Moreover, the application of laws in Iran, such as public executions, in some cases, is something accepted and also appreciated by some Iranians. There are cases of the people's appreciation for governors in applying a public execution. In Jiroft, an Iranian city, for example, people wrote on a billboard in the execution location their appreciation for the governors for executing the murders and for their efforts regarding to the matters of stability and security. Audience, moreover, are, sometimes, very interested to watch the process as a notable number of them are gathering in a very early of morning, even before sunrise.

In relation to the Iranian Islamic constitution, Saffari (1993) thinks that it was written to make a balance of power among different revolutionary forces, despite its attempt to Islamise the country. It was to unite different wings of Islamic powers under the hegemony of *velayat-e faqih* (Hasib, S. 2004). According to the constitution, only male Muslims are qualified to be *vali-e faqih*, as well as president and judge (Nilsson, 2012; Kian, 1997). The constitution's second function is to guarantee the religion of Islam and Islamise society. Freedoms and rights of Iranians should be based on Islamic criteria. It, in fact, reduced the non-Islamic activities of the public sphere's agents. However, in terms of Islamic activities, it became a guarantee to activate the Islamic public sphere. Overall, it has an impact on reshaping the nature of both private and public domains in Iran.

In Iran, the law has a strong impact on nearly all issues. It interferes in people's private lives; as in its nature, it is law of the state and Shari'a of. As an example to clarify the extent of the state's intervention and the way of using/issuing law based on Shari'a; in May 2015, a group of people in Qazvin, in an open letter asked governors in Tehran to deal with the matter of epilation, as it is haram, based on an Ayatollah's fatwa. It is considered forbidden under Islamic law, thus salons which do it should be closed down by law (entekhab.ir, 2015). In 2014 also, the parliament considered both vasectomy and Tubectomy surgical procedures to be forbidden and that those who perform them should be jailed for 2 to 5 years in prison. That was due to the regime's plan to enlarge the nation's population (alarabiya.net, 2014). Another example, which clarifies how law interferes with people's private life and decreases the public activities, is that, in a new law, cars and shared parts of the apartments are considered as public spaces (yjc.ir, 2014, online). Depending on this, activities inside these places are considered public and will fall under public-related laws, which are mostly retrieved from religion and public mores/morals (McLarney, 2011). The following photo shows a car which has been seized and whose driver and passengers have been arrested, due to being 'bad-hijab' and making 'noise pollution' (the photo can be found on: iranian.com, 2014).



## The Media Tools

In Iran, media and its tools, in all of its different types, printed, broadcasted, and online, should be Islamic. They are mostly in the hand of the regime and especially the conservatives, which is linked to the supreme leader. In this regard, Article 175 of the Iranian constitution reads:

The freedom of expression and dissemination of thoughts in the Radio and Television of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be guaranteed in keeping with the Islamic criteria and the best interests of the country. The appointment and dismissal of the head of the Radio and Television of the Islamic Republic of Iran rests with the Leader. A council consisting of two representatives each of the President, the head of the judiciary branch and the Islamic Consultative Assembly shall supervise the functioning of this organization.

The regime uses media tools to apply its ideology and to promote Islamic culture and values in the country (Semati, 2007). In terms of the public sphere, the regime limits the independent media and makes obstacles in the front of their activities (Katouzian, 2013). Journalists, human rights activists, labour syndicates, and other NGO activists face

challenges in having access to information and also in publishing what they have accessed (McNair, 2000). Nonetheless, Iranian newspapers and televisions are not a space to occur rational-critical discussions between the agents of the public sphere, freely. This is because they are to publish/broadcast only Islamic and revolutionary thoughts.

The regime uses media tools to broadcast its ideology and strategy in order to create a revolutionary atmosphere. It also tries to broadcast what it wants, as it wants. Thus, it is not only about controlling media, but also about using it to support the regime. There are examples of faking information, manipulating photos and speeches by the state media. For example, Iranian state media distorts the speech of the Egyptian president, Mohammad Morsi, when he delivered a speech at the Non-Aligned Summit in Tehran, 26 to 31 August, 2012. Almost all mentions of 'Syria' were manipulated to be 'Bahrain', for political reasons (CNN Arabic, 2012); the regime then claimed that it was unintentional and due to errors in translation. Another example is related to the announcement of an Oscar winner, Academy Awards, 2013. Some Iranian official and semi-official news agency, such as Fars News Agency, altered, Photoshopped, the image of Michelle Obama, who announced the Oscar winner. They changed her sleeveless dress to a short sleeve one (the following photos, available on: ABC News, 2013).



In another similar case, a photograph of Catherine Ashton, EU foreign policy chief, standing with Saeed Jalili, chief Iranian nuclear negotiator, was Photoshopped, and then published in the Hamshahri newspaper, due to public mores - *adaab 'amah* (the following photos, available on: [enduringamerica.com](http://enduringamerica.com), 2011).



The published photo, Photoshopped one

The original photo

This kind of manipulation has different impacts on the public sphere. On the one hand, it shows the Iranian public sphere as something different than its fact. On the other hand, it decreases people’s awareness and also misleads them about what is happening. The regime’s ownership over the media also has negative impacts of the media’s functions, as media in Iran became a realm of state’s ideology and activity (Tsekeris, 2008). Theatre, sports and arts are under the regime’s censorship, and newspapers are always threatened with closure (Karimi-Hakak, 2003). Cinema and movies are under the control of the regime and there are redlines for filmmakers, actors, actresses, and other related staff (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2010; Callamard et al, 2006; Naficy, 1995a & 1995b). The Internet and social media tools are mostly filtered. Moreover, the state has a plan to “nationalise the Internet” in order to stop the negative impacts of globalisation and to defend the country, its people, and Islamic-Iranian civilization from so-called the *Western Cultural Attacks* (BBC Persian, 2014). This is because it believes that it has its own values, culture, arts, and lifestyle, and does not need import new ones.

Iranian state media, besides, broadcasts global events such as the Olympic games. It rebroadcasts them live, with a delay of a few minutes or in a recorded version due to censorship and filtering (Farhangi et al, 2010). Images of non-veiled women in sport stadiums, especially Iranian women, are also always filtered (the following photo, available on: morahem.com, 2014).



**Some Iranian female fans of the Iranian national team in World Cup, 2014, Brazil, "Censor! Well Done!"**

Iranian women also are banned from being in sport stadiums inside the country, as the following photo proves (available on: observers.france24.com, 2014).



**A child holding a sign that says: "Hi mom, I wish you could have been here".**

This is also reflected in Iranian street art, as the following photos show (available on: [designobserver.com](http://designobserver.com), 2014). This could be interpreted as people's awareness about the position of women in their country. It is also a clear message regarding the dominant politics and tradition in underestimating women's capacity. As the art shows, a woman is considered to be at home and do house works. Moreover, what she deserves is not a jam (cup) but a *jaam* (washing-up liquid). Besides, this piece of artwork can illustrate that the voice of opposition will be silenced by the regime, as it has removed on the wall.



**Street art, by Black Hand, in Tehran, 2014. A girl in the football shirt of the national football team holding a yellow bottle of washing up liquid of the brand "Jam" (meaning Cup). The piece survived for only a few days.**

These above photos, once more, demonstrate the women's appearance and performance in the Iranian public spaces and their limitations in being in the public. These can narrate various stories of the life of Iranian women under the Islamic regime. Indeed, the provided freedom for women in Iran is fewer than it for men. Thus, women in Iran are suffering much more than men, in both private and public spaces. This is because neither Islamic law nor Iranian tradition is not in favour of women's interests. Limitation for the Iranian women includes their performance outside Iran, too; as their images will be filtered and also they may face legal investigations, if they unveil their hijab. This is, however, mostly, about Iranian cinema and art stars. What else can be seen is that Iranian sport stadiums are men dominated ones, and also the regime as elsewhere in Iran, try to use its physical spaces by posting and hanging the pictures of its leaders.

Khorrami (2004) discusses how the regime, by controlling media tools and using them, tries to create public opinion in favour of its interests. It wants public opinion to give it legitimacy

and acceptance. For this, the media has been used to have an impact on people's thoughts, especially in terms of political participation. Besides, the media have been used by the regime to manage crises. Shaditalab (2006) states that:

Iran is one of the countries that have always been subjected to various political, economic and social crises. Whenever a crisis arises, it should be managed by various means, media included. Because of their ability to shape public opinions, media play a crucial role in various stages of a crisis. Dual role of media in creating and resolving a crisis, overstating and understating an issue, hope generating and hope shattering, etc. is obvious at least for the experts and professionals in this area (p.74).

Levitsky (2002) suggests that the media, in the competitive authoritarians, plays an essential role. It usually has several characteristics such as being owned by the state, censored, and also filtered. The government controls popular TV and radio stations. Magazines and newspapers are restricted by the constitution and law. Those journalists that the regime considers as working against the regime are threatened with capture, exile and even execution. The terms of media, Iran is similar to those countries which has described by Levitsky as competitive authoritarian - Cuba, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Examples of violations of freedom of speech and expression and the rights of journalists in Iran can be found easily in the reports of national and international human rights organisations.

#### Educational institutions

In Iran, education is another tool of the regime to guide/dominate the public sphere. It is, generally, divided into two kinds. First, the formal or state educational institutions, which include schools and universities. Second, religious educational institutions, which include

mosques and *hozehs*, are also under state's supervision. Education in the literature of the Islamic Revolution has a high status. Ayatollah Khomeini stated that 'teaching and learning are kinds of worship'. Thus, the regime considers education as a religious duty. Moreover, religion is accepted as a philosophy for political, economic and sociocultural systems of the life by the regime. It is, indeed, a philosophy of the life for Muslims who want to live as the Quran dictates (Afshar, 1985). This is what the Islamic regime in Iran aims to endorse. Hence, education is an important pillar of life; it also should be administrated based on the Islamic criteria and must promote the Islamic values (Groiss & Toobian, 2006). Islamising education could be the first and an important step of Islamising the public sphere's agents and then the public sphere's performance, as an Islamic public sphere requires having Islamic agents. Here, the following table shows the change of the focus on religious modules in the Iranian educational system after the revolution (Retrieved from: Paivandi, 2012, p.4).

**TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL TIME (FORMAL AND REAL) SPENT ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

	BEFORE REVOLUTION (1975)	AFTER REVOLUTION FORMAL (2005)	AFTER REVOLUTION REAL (2005)
PRIMARY SCHOOL	7%	17%	24%
SECONDARY SCHOOL	5.5%	11%	26%
AVERAGE (ALL LEVELS)	6.4%	12.7%	25%

See also the following tables, which show how the curriculum was changed by the regime after 1979 (Retrieved from: Nafisi, 1992, pp.115-116).

The highest frequencies and percentages of political/ideological themes in Pahlavi textbooks (2nd through 5th grades)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>G.2</i>	<i>G.3</i>	<i>G.4</i>	<i>G.5</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Persian (pre-Islamic) myths/traditions	7	9	4	5	25	39
The Shah's praise	0	8	3	0	11	18
Government propaganda (modernization efforts)	0	6	3	0	9	14
Patriotism	1	2	4	2	9	14
Benign ruler	0	2	3	1	6	9
Extreme patriotism	0	0	0	4	4	6
Total	8	27	17	12	64	100

The highest frequencies and percentages of political/ideological themes in the Islamic Republic's textbooks (2nd through 5th grades)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>G.2</i>	<i>G.3</i>	<i>G.4</i>	<i>G.5</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Islamic faith	4	6	9	13	32	40
Allah	7	6	4	12	19	24
Anti-authority messages	2	1	4	12	19	24
Martyrdom	0	2	0	6	8	10
Khomeini	0	0	0	2	2	2
Total	13	15	17	35	80	100

These changes were due to attempts to change the non-Islamic values which the Pahlavis tried to promote (Rucker, 1991). Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution, criticised the universities in the era of the Pahlavis, as they are Westoxicated (Boroujerdi, 1992). He wanted to Islamise them, and at an event stated that:

Our universities are foreign dependent. Our universities are of the colonial type. Our university students are Westoxicated (*gharbzadeh*)... Many of our university professors are at the service of the West. They brainwash our youth [...] Now that we want to set up an independent university and make fundamental changes, so that it would not be dependent

on the West and Communism, dependent on Marxism, they confront us. [...] The university must become Islamic (cited from: Behdad, 1995, p.194).

In general, all educational institutions in Iran should follow Islamic and Islamic revolutionary values. Attempts to achieve this aim started from the early years of the Islamic Revolution, by Islamising the universities (Rucker, 1991). Here, Islamisation, briefly, means removing non-Islamic [or what are called Western/secular] values, and replacing them with Islamic ones. The process of Islamising education in Iran embraces several aspects. According to the regime's revolutionary ideology, academic staff, curriculum – and especially those modules related to the human sciences, and the education's environment – including relationships and the dress of students and teachers, should be Islamised (Paivandi, 2008).

In order to Islamise the universities, the regime tried to Islamise students first by choosing about 40 per cent of the university students from the children of the Iranian martyrs, veterans and those who had a role in previous Islamic and/or revolutionary organisations (Behdad, 1995). Furthermore, Islamising educational institutions was/is also about Islamising the atmosphere of the educational institutions themselves. For this, the regime tried to separate men from women and enforce hijab (Paivandi, 2008; Tavassoli et al, 2000). These processes are still under way. There are also several academic fields/courses at Iranian universities, such as scientific and technological faculties, which are only for men, and women are not allowed admittance to those faculties (Afshar, 1985). Iranian women students have faced more challenges than their men counterparts. Ironically, the majority (more than 60 per cent) of the students at Iranian universities are women (Shaditalab, 2006). To make the sociopolitical environment of the universities more Islamic, the regime tested different methods. Behdad (1995) highlights that:

Depoliticization of the highly politicized students in the major universities and the overt imposition of a state ideology on the educational system are the most fundamental changes. When the universities were reopened in 1984, there was an extensive ideological cleansing (*paksazi*) of the students and professors. The professors who were critics of the regime, or were tagged as "non-Islamic," were retired or expelled (p.211).

Since the early years of the revolution, the regime has tried to target pivotal agents of the universities. However, there are still young students, especially seculars, liberals and feminists who are challenging the university militia [*basij-e daneshgahee*] (Ehsani, 2006). Iranian universities, especially the University of Tehran, have played a significant role in historical and contemporary events of Iranian society. They are among the most respected institutions by Iranians. They are also, because of their dynamism in discussing and spreading new ideas and events, called *laboratories of theories and ideas*. University students do activities at the universities and on the streets too. Inside the universities, debates on daily issues take place involving university students and professors. Outside the universities, they arrange and also activate public events. They prepare slogans for the public sphere's agents to be used in both actual and virtual public activities (Engeland-Nourai, 2004).

The regime's policies towards educational institutions make the public sphere vulnerable and decrease its activity mainly because university students and staff are usually known as active agents of the Iranian public spheres. They have a history of participation in Iranian social and political movements during different periods. They contributed to activities in the era of Pahlavi, the years of the revolution, and also in the era of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic regime, indeed, has benefited from university students in both eras of the revolution and the republic. They took part in pre-revolution events, published Khomeini's messages and encouraged their family and friends to join the revolts. Then, their role in the events of

the revolution and the collapse of the Shah's regime, and even after that in the events of the US embassy, was apparent. They also took part in the events of the Green Movement in 2009, protesting the result of the presidential elections. Iranian university students are still a vital element of the Iranian public sphere as they have several annual activities, and also are active in different public activities in both actual and virtual spheres (Ma'roufi, 2006; Karimian, 2001).

Consequently, the Islamic regime, more than previous regimes in Iran, has knowledge about the significant role that university students can play in Iranian society. That is why it tries to make universities safe and secure places for the regime, by dominating them in both ideological and material terms. Besides, the processes of gender segregation in the universities are impacting the relation between students in a negative way. It, in fact, reduces the communications between students and causes to decrease group activities. It, finally, has a negative impact on an effective agent of the public sphere - students. Nowadays, Iranian intellectuals are mostly Islamists. Despite their criticisms, they still adhere to the values of the Islamic Revolution. They, indeed, are not against the principal basis of the regime. However, they are attempting to reform, not to change, the Iranian system, and it is claimed to be inside an Islamic framework (Engeland-Nourai, 2004; Abdo, 1999).

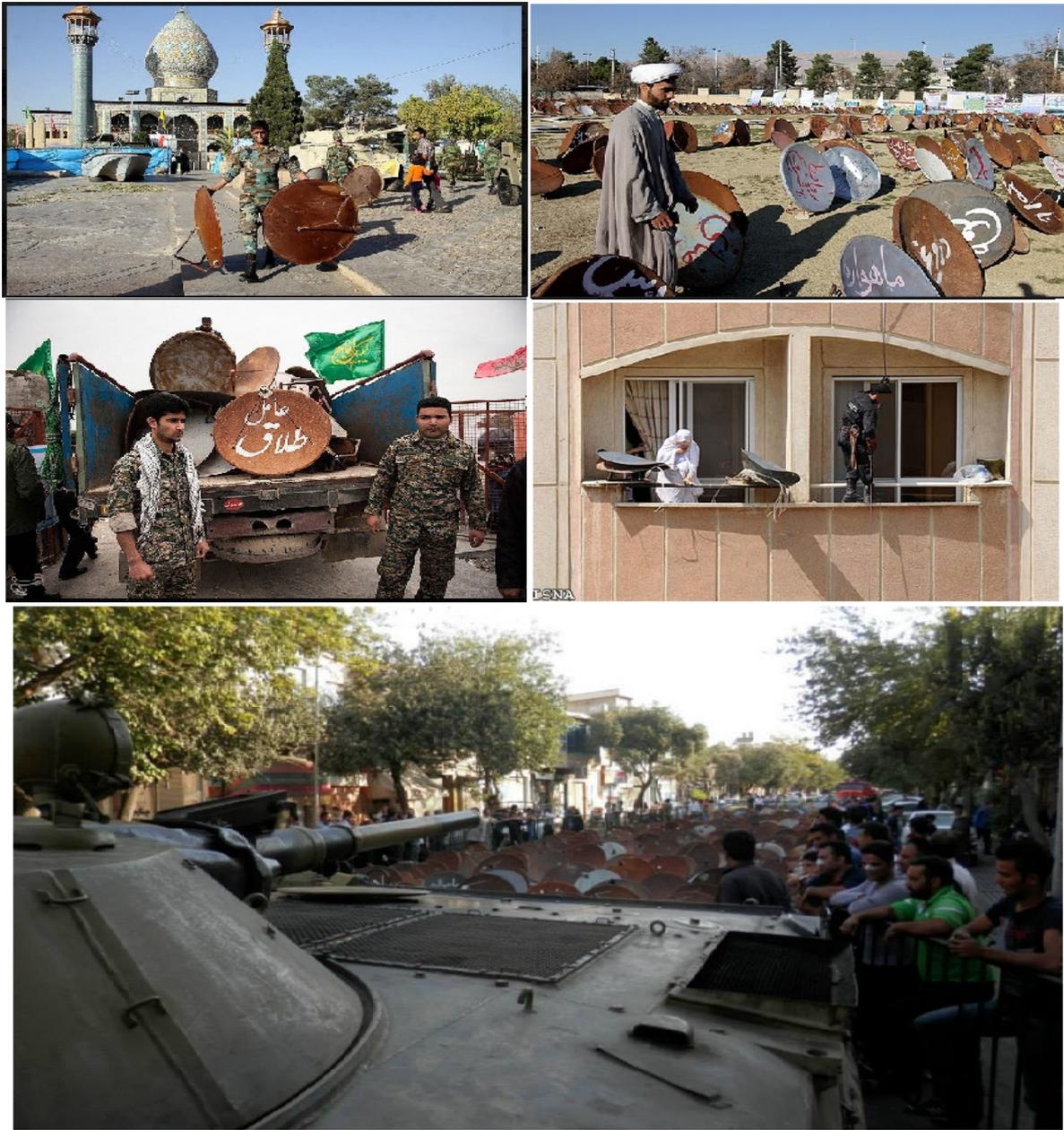
#### Armed Forces

The armed forces could be described as the regime's hard tools to control society and its agents. These forces have a role in drawing, applying and protecting state policies. Their significance comes from legal texts such as the constitution and laws, and also from the historical roles they played, especially in the Islamic Revolution and its aftermath. Armed

forces in the years 1978-1979 decided to be neutral and then to join the revolution. Moreover, in the years of the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), they fought for Iran and Iranians and protected the country. They still protect the country and its people from internal and external threats. The armed forces also are the most visible and powerful symbols of the regime and its law. Their public appearance represents the law, which law/liberty is something appreciated and desired by Iranians during the last centuries. Their historical status forces armed forces to play a notable role in today's Iran's (Eisenstadt, 2001). However, their institution is not fully independent. It, always, in its decisions, refers to the supreme leader. It is, in fact, under the rule of the civic powers. Nonetheless, the leaders of IRGC (the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps) consider themselves as the regime's forefront. Thus, they are interested in political issues to make sure that politicians respect the revolution's goals and values – as the role that military institutions play in both Pakistan and Turkey (Byman et al, 2001).

Armed forces in Iran, according to their tasks, are divided into several groups such as the Islamic Republic of Iran Army (IRIA), the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (IRGC), and the Law Enforcement Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran (NAJA) (Crane et al, 2008). The NAJA also has different branches, such as the Prevention Police, the Intelligence and Public Security Police, the Traffic Police, the Cyber Police, the Anti-Narcotics Police, the Immigration and Passport Police, the Diplomatic Police, the Criminal Investigation Police, the Border Guard Command, and the Special Unit (police.ir, 2015). NAJA forces, due to their different functions, are the most visible in the Iranian public sphere. They have several functions, such as upholding the law, security, and people's safety; protecting, enforcing and application of the judge's decrees such as public executions, collecting and destroying satellites; arresting bad or improperly dressed, etc. The following photos show Iranian

armed forces collecting and destroying satellite dishes (more photos are available on: [isna.ir](http://isna.ir), 2014).



The above photos embrace several themes that are worth to analyse. They can be evidences for what has been written about the use of the armed forces by the regime to control the public sphere. What is interesting, here, is that these photos and their related

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news have broadcasted by the formal/state media. This shows how the regime is applying its own ideology openly and even broadcast it; thus this is something that regime does it as something normal and based on the law. This, in fact, can feed the regime's maintain, as it is fed by these kinds of ideas and policies. The more regime following fundamental ideas, more conservative groups support it. It is a way to confirm its religiosity as a source of its legitimacy. Besides, while the regime uses military tanks for destroying satellites to show its hard power over people and warn them, clergymen and also ordinary people can be seen beside the armed forces. It means that this is an operation supported by various groups of the society, and is not only a part of state's willing. Moreover, writing some slogans on the satellite dishes could be interpreted as a way to make people aware about the disadvantages of satellite and also link it with the interests of the society. For example, it is written on one of them that 'this (satellite) is a reason for divorce'.

Other effective forces among the Iranian armed forces are the IRGC. They have played a notable role in different public activities. In the Qazvin protests of 1994, some of their elements refused to carry out orders to go into the city and to use force. Five years later, in student protests in Tehran, commanders of IRGC criticised the reformist president for destabilising the country and endangering the regime (Byman et al, 2001). Generally, the armed forces and especially IRGC are the proper elements of the supreme leader that represents the conservative wing of the regime. There is no dispute among their commanders and all try to be the best in revitalising and protecting the revolution/regime. They always support, not threaten, the regime and system. Nonetheless, they play a neutral role in cases between the regime and reformers, when it does not threaten the stability of the country (Wehrey, 2009). They are also the sincerest elements of the regime and the revolution's values. They all try to guarantee the regime's security and protects its *redlines*. In general, the regime's redlines can be highlighted as "a threat to the rule of the Faqih",

"open disrespect of Khomeini or for his legacy", "social reforms that threaten the existing view or equilibrium of society", "jeopardizing the unity or sanctity of the state", and "moving too close to Israel or the United States" (Byman et al, 2001, pp.51-52).

The Iranian armed forces are responsible for protecting the regime and the people, from both internal and external threats. Their attitude about public activities was clarified in a speech of the Iranian interior minister (June 14, 2006) during several demonstrations. He states that "NGOs are not for political activism. Whomever wants to do political activism should apply for a permit to form a party", and he believes that "NGO gatherings are not the place to discuss politics" (Cited from: Ehsani, 2006, p.7). These speeches demonstrate the regime's limitations on public activities in terms of politics by using force. However, what makes the issue more difficult for the public sphere agents is that politics in Iran is linked to almost everything. Besides, the high status of the armed forces in Iran, make them try to militarise society (Alamdari, 2005). The armed forces also help the regime to enforce its ideology on society and its agents (Ehteshami & Zweiri, 2007). In Iran, both soft and hard powers of the regime are in use in order to control the public sphere; this spread fear and caused to decrease the public sphere's activity.

### **5.2.3. The Case of *Hijab* and its Functions in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

This subsection discusses how the Islamic regime in Iran tries to dominate the public sphere and change its facade due to symbolic dominance of the public sphere. It considers hijab and some more related and similar issues, such as state street art and religious places as themes. The themes will be analysed in order to find out some more aspects of the Iranian public sphere which are greatly affected by the regime. They are also examples to clarify how the Iranian public sphere's appearance is formed by the regime, more than the

society's agents. Moreover, the regime's symbolic dominance in the public sphere can have more than symbolic functions.

*Hijab* is an Arabic word. It has the same spelling and almost the same pronunciation in Persian too. The meaning of *hijab*, linguistically, is to veil, mask or cover something. Historically, it means covering a part of the body or covering it from head to toe. It is, traditionally, respected in many religions. Nowadays, *hijab*, especially the headscarf, has become a symbol of religious people in different religions. In democratic systems, it has been recognised and respected that everyone is free in choosing the type, colour, design, and style of his/her clothes (Morsink, 1999). However, in some countries, there are several limitations.

According to Islam, *hijab* is not related to women only, but to men too; albeit, in a different version. There are different interpretations about the status of *hijab* in Islam and its versions. However, nearly all divisions of Islam are agreed that *hijab* is an obligatory duty for Muslims. Indeed, it is not only about dress, but also size, colour, design, etc. Nilufer Gole argues that:

The veiling is not only just covering the head; it indicates a way of behavior, which is called to be more modest, more pure -Puritan maybe- which means you limit your presence in public life. For instance, the way you look at people. You have to cast down the eyes. The way your body occupies the space in public. That means you shouldn't be too loud-laughing, for instance. So it means a way of behaving, more modest behavior. It comes from *hija*, meaning being more cautious, being more modest. So I think it's not only just a kind of dress code, but a dress code which indicates a set of manners, bodily manners, in relation to the other sex, but in relation also to public behaviour (Cited from: Amir-Ebrahimi, 2009, p.329).

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, and according to its Islamic law, people are free in choosing their dresses, but it should agree with Islamic teaching. Hijab in Iran became obligatory gradually. In 1980, it became obligatory only in governmental offices. Then, in 1983, it became enforced for all women (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2009). Nowadays, hijab is an obligatory duty for Iranian citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims, and also for those non-Iranians who are visiting and/or living in Iran.

Hijab in Iran has different religious, social, legal, and political functions. It, generally, is not a goal *per se*, but is a mechanism to reach a grade of chastity, modesty, purity, prudence, and so on. For the Islamic regime of Iran, hijab is a symbol, and became a symbol of the Islamic republic and regime. The regime, in fact, has an interest in iconography in both religious and political affairs. In both formal and informal occasions, it uses symbols to show its nature in terms of its ideology, power, strength and compassion. It, commonly, uses flowers, ornaments, graffiti, Quranic texts, pictures of the regime's leaders and martyrs, and other billboards with political purposes. Here, hijab is considered as an icon of the state, and as a theme to analyse. Thus, it is plausible to start analysing hijab by understanding other symbols, icons, of the regime, namely street arts.

Generally, Iranian street arts could be classified into two branches, state art and people's art. The art of the regime supports its revolutionary ideology, Islam and Islamic-Iranian lifestyle, and also criticises the U.S. and Zionism (Mir-Hosseini, 2001). The regime's art is usually appearing in drawing the pictures of the Iranian and Islamic leaders and martyrs and also writing Islamic-Quranic texts. People's art, however, can be classified into allowed and banned works. Allowed art is made by people and allowed by the regime. These works mostly support Iranian values and its civilization and/or to make the cities look more beautiful. It, usually, includes more classic and less contemporary art genres. Banned art, however, is made by anonymous artists, such as the Black Hand and A1one, and mostly use

contemporary art genres, such as graffiti. The regime's police, usually, will clean up these art works, as soon as possible. Altogether, there are struggles between state and society to be more appeared in the public sphere's arenas. However, the regime's works are more visible. What is interesting is that, public places, such as city walls, should usually be used/controlled by people. Nevertheless, the Iranian regime uses these places. This is because they are important for the regime and also because the regime considers its works as they are people's works too (Khosravi, 2013). The following photos show some of these art works (Khosravi, 2013; Jamshidi, 2014; laleheskandari.ir, 2015; mehdighadyanloo.com, 2016).



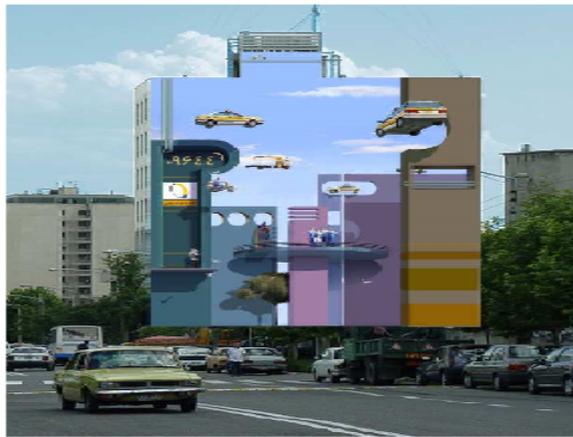
**Examples of the regime's street art; images of Iranian leaders and martyrs.**



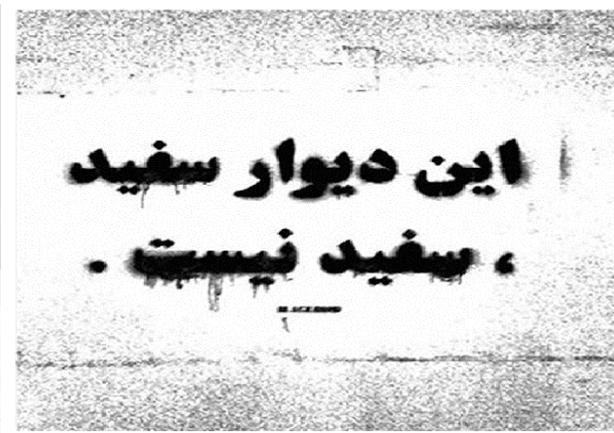
**Examples of the regime's anti-US street art.**



**Street Art of Laleh Eskandari, Tehran**



**Street Art of Mehdi Ghadyanloo, Tehran**



**Street Art of Black Hand, Tehran**

In Iran, almost all religious places, including mosques and especially the *Jamkaran* Mosque in Qom, have become public places for the agents of both state and society. These places are being used for different religious and also political purposes such as delivering speeches, doing election campaigns, and more. Regarding the use of the public-religious places in Iran by the regime, one of the most apparent symbols in Iran is the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini. It has become a monument to both Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This tomb, with regard to its huge size, strategic location, and Islamic-Iranian design, has different functions. It has become a respected symbol of the regime, which is visited by local and international visitors including schoolchildren, university students, diplomats, and also head of states. It also has become a symbol of both the state of Iran and the religion of

Islam – particularly Shi’a (Rizvi, 2003). The related photos show the inside and outside of the tomb and how it also became a public place with public-related activities (more photos can be found on: [harammotahar.ir](http://harammotahar.ir), 2015). The *Behesht-e Zahra* cemetery in Tehran is another outstanding symbol of the revolution and the martyrs of the Iraq-Iran war are buried there. It also became a public place for people to gather (more photos on: [panoramio.com](http://panoramio.com), 2015).



**The Mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini, Tehran**



**The Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery**

There are also lots of mausoleums of Islamic and Shi’a leaders and clerics who became religious symbols. People gather there in order to carry out religious activities together.

These places all have public characteristics and people have access to them. There are actual shrines inside Iran such as the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad and Fatima al-Ma'suma in Qom (razavitv.aqr.ir; masoumeh.com, 2015). Moreover, the regime made lots of sculptures, images and drawings to represent the real shrines, which are not inside Iran, such as the shrine of Imam Husain in Iraq. As Ehsani (2009) argues, the basic function of those symbols and icons is to show the state's control over public places and its ability to create a kind of meaning which serves the regime and its ideology. Here, it should be noted that those icons have an impact on the identity, thoughts, and consciousness of the Iranian individuals (Habermas, 2001). However, the most popular and visible symbol of the regime and religion in Iran is the hijab, veil, or women's headscarf, which has different functions.

#### The Religious and Legal Functions of Hijab in Iran

As argued, *Law* is something respected by Iranians, as they suffered from the arbitrary rulers. The Constitutional Movement, in fact, was in order to establish the rule of law. Then law has become a synonym for the concept of freedom (Katouzian, 2000; Ma'rifat, 2007). Controversially, Iranian regimes after the Constitutional Revolution used the law to enforce their power and to persuade people to accept their rule through clarifying the problems of the absence of law/order, i.e. chaos. Thus, in Iranian political culture, order, which can be made by drawing and applying law, is something valued and should be obeyed, as it is better than chaos.

Here, a psychological point, which needs to be spelled out, is the notion of dualism in the Iranian mentality. It fundamentally has come from Zoroastrianism, which believes in the presence of Good [God - *Ahuramazda*] and Bad [evil - *Ahriman*] powers (Boyd & Crosby, 1979; Gnoli, 1996 & 200). Islam also focuses on a kind of dualism between God and Satan,

the world and the otherworld, heaven and hell, etc. It is impacted, and also enhanced by, the Iranian political and educational systems. Consequently, in terms of law and order, in the Iranian mentality, there is either a brutal system or no system; there is either despotic law or no law. For the matter of hijab also, there was unveiling hijab and then enforcing it. In terms of enforcing hijab by the regime, which is partly accepted, it is indeed linked to an indirect meaning of hijab as it represents the law, order and the system.

Hijab has been enforced by the regime for several reasons including protecting women from men, and also men from women. Moreover, non-Muslims also should wear Islamic hijab. This can be considered as a way of protecting men from being 'guilty' – as looking at a women's body and also their hair is not allowed in Islam. The regime, therefore, by covering women, protects men's faith too. In other words, women should be veiled to protect men's faith, as well as their own. Consequently, women's hijab can be considered as something valuable for men too.

The regime does not look at the hijab as a burden for women. It is discussed as a grace from God and the revolution/regime for Muslims. According to this argument, Iranian women should *thank* the regime for that, but not criticise it. However, there is a paradox in the regime's philosophy of hijab. On the one hand, hijab is a good value. It is a symbol of chastity. It must be accepted and respected. Who does not respect this will be punished (Nayyeri, 2013). On the other hand, hijab is a "shameful" thing. It is a punishment tool. Whoever breaks the law, in some cases, will be punished and the punishment is wearing women's dress in a public arena. An example is when on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2013, an Iranian man was punished to wear women's clothing in Marivan town centre (see the following photo).



This event led social media users to make a campaign against gender discrimination under the name of *Being a Woman is not a Tool to Humiliate or Punish Anyone*. In this activity, a number of men, by wearing women's clothing, took part and showed their support for women (more details on: [nnsroj.com](http://nnsroj.com), 2013).

The paradox, here, is that, if hijab is *bad*, then why does the regime enforce it? And if hijab is *good*, why does the regime use it as a punishment? Of course, the other use of this kind of punishment is related to the case of gender, not just the dress. Thus, it can be argued that enforcing a man to wear women's dress symbolises that the man is *not* a man but a woman. Thus, being women is a shameful thing, and what makes the difference between men and women, in the eyes of the public, is their dress, hijab. The regime's supporters argue that by enforcing Islamic law the regime respects and protects women. However, some, like Haleh Afshar (1985), do not agree with this conviction. She argues that the regime believes that women, by nature, are unwise and unequal to men. This notion leads the regime to exclude women from their rights by drawing new legislation based on Islamic criteria.

Women in Iran face several difficulties because of their gender and sex, or because they are women. However, what has been covered in the International media, as Obermeyer (1994) argues, is more about the enforcement of hijab as a symbol of oppressed citizens by their regime. The violation of human rights, moreover, especially in terms of gender equality, lessens the role of women in public places and decreased activities in the public sphere. In fact, both the regime and society have role in weakening women's role in the public sphere. Both applying the Islamic law and promoting patriarchal ideas are attempts to send women back to their home. In this way, the regime can weaken an important agent of the public sphere, women. Thus, hijab could also be mentioned as the regime's tool to attain political objectives.

#### The Political Functions of Hijab in Iran:

Hijab in Iran, in both monarchy and Islamic republic periods is used as a mechanism of the regime for, not just religious, but also political purposes. In the previous chapter it was discussed how the monarchy unveiled women's hijab in order to 'secularise and modernise' Iranian society. During the period of the Islamic republic, however, hijab was enforced as a mechanism to Islamise Iranian society. Both regimes see clothes as the most visible symbol of Iranian culture. Thus, Iranian regimes have focused on the visual elements in society, as they can represent fundamental elements of society.

By enforcing hijab, the regime is trying to prove that Iran has become an Islamic country. Accordingly, the Islamic Revolution has succeeded. As Afshar highlights, the regime recognised hijab as a keystone of the Islamic Revolution. It defines hijab as both a basis of the Islamic ideology and a religious duty for women (1985). On this, Mortaza Moghtadaei, a Shi'a scholar and the deputy chairman of Society of Seminary Teachers of Qom, argues that

"women's hijab is linked to the prestige of the Islamic Republic of Iran" (digarban.com, 2014, online). Here, veiled women prove that the regime's ideology is accepted by people. By this, each headscarf, indirectly, confirms that the Islamic regime in Iran is alive and accepted. Each headscarf could also be seen as a flag of the Islamic Revolution, which is facing its domestic and foreign challenges. The presence of the headscarf means that the regime exists. Headscarves are everywhere, so the regime is everywhere too. Thus, hijab has become a symbol of Islam, Iran and the power of the regime. Furthermore, as Afshar (1985) states:

Iranian women have become the reluctant standard bearers of the public face of the Islamic regime. The republic's fragile honour can now be threatened by the mere appearance of women. National honour is now secured by women covering themselves from top to toe at all times, except in the privacy of the husband's bedroom (p.44).

Nowadays, in Iran, it is hard to distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims, based on their appearance. The regime, by enforcing hijab over all Muslim and non-Muslim citizens, tries to show that Iran is a country with an absolute majority of Muslims. Hijab, for the Iranian regime and its people, has become a common identity (Honarbin-Holliday, 2008). This new symbolic and superficial identity has its own benefit for a pluralistic society in terms of nations, languages, religions, sub-religions, denominations, cultures and also political ideologies. Thus, hijab is a mechanism to reintegrate Iranian society under *the umbrella of Islam*. This internal integration also has impact on the Iran's appearance and its policies in international relations. Hijab, as a symbol of an ideology and a regime, also has become the state's facade for its foreign friends and enemies. Therefore, a veiled country is different from other countries. That is what Iran wants – to separate and then protect itself from the outside world, and also to have its own values. It, finally, protects Iran from waves of

globalisation. Additionally, Iran can view itself as the representative of Eastern and Islamic civilization (Mohammadi, 2013).

There are differences between what the Shah did under the name of modernisation in unveiling women and what the Islamic Republic is doing under the name of Islamisation in veiling women. Both can easily be seen as regimes acting against people's freedom of choice. However, with regard to the nature of the act, unveiling versus veiling, the latter seems to be more accepted than the former. That is, firstly, because it is easier for an unveiled woman to veil than a veiled one to unveil. Secondly, it is linked to several religious, traditional, and cultural issues. Iranian society, as a Middle-Eastern and Islamic one, considers hijab as a social and religious value. In Iran, even some non-Muslim minorities wear hijab optionally. This means that wearing hijab for them is not about a religious duty, but about respecting the tradition. Nonetheless, enforcing the hijab in Iran is not only related to the regime, but also society, as it is a patriarchal one. Here, the case of hijab for people is a symbol of chastity of their females, and they, by enforcing the hijab over women, try to protect their *honour*. Consequently, for Iranians, veiling would be easier than unveiling – albeit, if there is no third option, being free to choose.

Hijab, in fact, has its own advantages and disadvantages. It has been discussed by different scholars who support or criticise it. Here, the main point of the analysis is not about hijab *per se*, but about it being enforced. Enforced hijab also has been defended by some as a religious duty which men have to enforce and women have to accept. However, here, what is going to be discussed is the enforced hijab.

Generally, enforcing hijab is an attempt to equalise unequal individuals. Enforcing hijab, as a symbol of an ideology, religion and regime, could be the first step to enforcing the contents of the ideology. There is no doubt that it is a totalitarian act. It is, indeed, an act

to remove the differences between individuals and a way to enslave society. Relationships, meetings, and cooperation among individuals in a society with no differences, will be decreased. Nevertheless, enforcing hijab, alone, could not make a society passive.

Hijab, indeed, is an icon of fear (Saktanber, 2006). Enforced hijab, the headscarf for instance, represents a permanent tangible oppression of the regime. It makes her to feel that she has been deprived of her liberty. Here, the possibility of becoming a passive person is much stronger than becoming an active one. Further, the enforced hijab is different between women and men. Women should wear a style of clothes, but men should avoid wearing certain styles of clothes. Therefore, women must do something, and men are not allowed to do something. Here, if it is plausible to say that women's positive liberty and men's negative liberty are violated – in terms of Isaiah Berlin's conceptualisation for liberty (Berlin, 1958). Taghva (2005) discusses that recognising the varieties of cultures, manners, and languages in the public sphere is necessary for activating it.

Enforcing hijab also raises the issue of gender discrimination once again. Nonetheless, gender discrimination is not appeared only in the case of the hijab. It, in fact, can be seen in nearly all elements of the regime and its political system. The constitution could be considered as the most powerful legal, political, social, and religious element which makes the gap between both genders bigger (Ganji, 2008). In Iran, both state's laws and society's traditions emphasise gender discrimination, as the principles of patriarchy are easy to find in both religious texts and also in traditions (Higgins, 1985). Here, it should be noted that what is widely known as 'gender discrimination' does not have the same meaning to the Iranian regime. Thus, what is a kind of discrimination for some could be a kind of justice for others. Shaditalab (2006) clarifies the religious arguments about the case of hijab which believe that accepting and wearing hijab and gender separation is for the sake of women's own safety in society.

Gender segregation, which can be noticed easily in nearly all sects of Iranian society, weakens communications between the society's individuals. It also reduces rational-critical discussion - a key element of having an active public sphere. Accordingly, it also has a negative impact on collective actions in the public sphere. That is because, according to Habermas, which also refers to Arendt, power cannot be defined as Max Weber defined it - "the possibility of forcing one's own will, whatever it maybe, on the conduct of others" (Villa, 1992, p.713). However, he agrees with him in defining power as "the human ability not just to act, but to act in concert" (p.713). Thus, people who are not in touch with each other do not enjoy having a common power. Besides, discrimination is not only related to gender, it has its roots in nearly all other fractions of society (Katouzian, 1995).

Isolating women in Iranian society means that the regime is isolating part of the public sphere's agents from being and acting in public places. Moreover, the public sphere has become a men dominated sphere. In this regard, Kian (1997) makes the link between development and equality in opportunities by arguing that society cannot develop when it ignores half of its population and consider it as 'nothing more than second best citizens'. Indeed, separating men from women can reduce people's power in acting in public to demand their rights and also to face the regime's policies.

### ***5.3. The Iranian Regime and the Public Sphere's Potential***

Despite its attempts to make the public sphere passive, the Islamic regime of Iran, in some cases, supports it. Since 1978, the Islamic Revolution is working within the Islamic Republic of Iran alongside the Islamic regime as a concept, an ideology and a machine. What the regime is doing in terms of supporting/activating the public sphere, indeed, is not related to the regime's desire to liberate/democratise it. It is, however, related to the regime's desire

to use the public sphere as a source of its power and legitimacy/acceptability. The regime's task in using the public sphere is to lead/guide people towards 'the right way'. Ironically, sometimes, the regime's policies, directly and/or indirectly, serve the public sphere's activities and increase its potential in favour of people.

Despite its functions to transform the public sphere, the Islamic Revolution as an event, *per se*, could be measured as an outcome of the Iranian public sphere's activities. It is still an outstanding issue for individuals and agents of the Iranian public sphere to gather together and have rational-critical debates about it as a public concern. The pivotal role which the revolution played, and is playing, in people's daily lives made it a common point for people and peoples in Iran. It, especially in its first years, changed the atmosphere of Iranian society and unveiled nearly all veiled ideologies inside Iranian society. For some few years, Iranian society enjoyed having heated debates between different political and ideological tendencies. Then, the events of drawing the constitution, the war with Iraq and the state's plans to draw and achieve the revolution's goals, all activated the public sphere again. There were different rational-critical discourses in society, from *majles* (parliament) to coffee shops, regarding common issues. However, the point that should not be ignored is that the semi/free atmosphere, fundamentally, linked to the regime's vulnerabilities and its disability to discipline and control society. Then, when the revolution enhanced and stabilised itself, tried to limit freedoms.

The Islamic regime, as a result of the Islamic Revolution, benefited from mass mobilisations to establish and enhance itself. Thus, the regime has a good grasp of the significance of the masses. That is why it carries out its functions by depending on mass mobilisations. This policy has boosted the Iranian public sphere's potential. People in Iran gather for various religious, sociocultural and political occasions. The regime, in fact, uses these occasions to

show its legitimacy and popularity to its internal and external 'friends' and 'enemies'. That, simply, encourages the regime to try to *trick* those masses and force people to take part.

Faking public events by the regime means that, on the one hand, there are events which are organised by the regime itself, not by society's agents. Moreover, those who are taking part, are not ordinary people or the public sphere's agents, but agents of the regime. The Iranian regime calls these "spontaneous" events *khod-joosh*. However, the regime's critics argue that these kinds of activities are designed by the state itself and also participants are regime agents - namely *basij*. On the other hand, there are several regular/annual events that the regime forces people to take part in, such as general elections and the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. These could be called *forced gatherings*, as people are forced to partake; of course, there are also people who take part voluntarily. The regime has its own tools to know who takes part and who does not. One of these techniques, for example, is that in general elections the voter's national ID will be stamped. This means that, whoever does not have a stamp on his ID did not vote. Whether people's attendance at public events is real or not, optional or mandatory, it can serve the public sphere in several aspects. Whether the aim of this gathering is to serve the regime or society, or both, it also can be helpful for the public sphere's agents. This is because these gatherings provide an environment for people to appear in public spaces and also meet each other; accordingly, they can have rational-critical discussions on public-related issues. Usually, these are opportunities for people to discuss public issues, and are more likely to be in favour of the participants rather than organisers. These events will let people meet each other and make discussions on the event itself and other related and even non-related matters. These meetings and discussions will have role in activating the public sphere.

The following photos show a demonstration involving women condemning human rights in the US, after the murder of Miriam Carey, who was killed by US security forces in

Washington in 2013. Two points can be noted and can be helpful for clarifying the authenticity of the demonstration. First, the name of the murdered woman is written incorrectly. Second, there are men wearing uniform, which could be from the armed forces, giving the women placards. This means that the event is organised by the regime and is not spontaneous (more photos and information available on: [theiranproject.com](http://theiranproject.com), 2013).



**Women gathering in Tehran to condemn the murder of Miriam Carey by the US security forces in Washington on October 3, 2013.**

The regime also prepares a number of demonstrations at annual religious ceremonies such as those historical events which are related to the Shi'a tradition – especially Tasoo'a and 'Ashura in Muharram, a holy month beside Ramadan (Chelkowski, 2010). It also has made some more new annual religious/political demonstrations such as Quds Day, the last Friday of Ramadan, to demonstrate in streets to support Palestine against Israel/Zionism (Ardalan, 2013). The regime, also, has added several political occasions to the Iranian calendar and

uses them to make popular gatherings, demonstrations and marches. Examples of these occasions include the anniversary of the revolution and its major events, the Iraq-Iran war, the death of Khomeini, and presidential and parliamentary elections. The most popular and crowded ones are those which are related to Shi'í traditions and especially the events of the battle of Karbala. Historically, as Chelkowski (1985) states, for the first time, on 'Ashura, 963 A.D. Sultan Mu'iz ad-Dawla ordered to close the bazaar in Baghdad, Iraq, as a respect for the memory of Imam Husain's martyrdom; this was the first recorded public mourning ceremony.

These Shi'í rituals, then, came to Iran in the era of Shah Ismail Safavid, who in the early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century decided to make Shi'a the formal sub-religion of the state. The events of Muharram and Safar, and also other Shi'í ceremonies became legal, formal and also royal with state support. These events, also, can be considered as the earliest public events in the history of the Iranian public sphere's activities. Then, the Pahlavis reduced their support for these rituals for the sake of modernisation, secularisation and Westernisation. After the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic regime supported these events as religious and political at the same time.

Ironically, the Iranian opposition also uses these occasions to challenge the regime – especially in the events of the Green Movement in 2009. The Iranian public sphere can benefit from these demonstrations organised by agents of state and/or society. These events increase people's consciousness towards what is happening, encourage people to be beside each other in common places, and look for common good. These activities also make people care about common-related issues and decrease their selfishness. People being beside one other will let them feel their strength and see their common points. It, moreover, becomes an opportunity for people to do several different activities. Despite the main aims of this sort of gathering, these demonstrations also make people aware about

what is happening around them, and the events, *per se*, become a matter of public debate. Before, during, and after these activities, people are discussing them and also discussing other related matters. Thus, these are all activating the public sphere. Interestingly, state demonstrations indirectly teach and encourage people to demonstrate too.

The regime not only supports practical activities, but also supports several theoretical matters which increase the public sphere's potential – in some cases. Here are three kinds of concepts that the regime is trying to spread among the Iranian public spheres with the use of educational institutions, media tools and religious tribunes. Firstly, the regime supports and spreads those virtues and values which originated from the religion of Islam and the tradition of Shi'a. Secondly, the regime carries out its functions with regard to the aims and goals of the Islamic Revolution. Thirdly, the regime has its own plans and policies which originated from its own interests which will change from one period to another. Generally, the regime's philosophies, which have a moral aspect, are theoretically useful for the public sphere's activity. Furthermore, the regime's recognition of the formation of different groups and associations, leads society to have and/or ask to have its own groups. Article 26 of Iran's constitution reads:

The formation of parties, societies, political or professional associations, as well as religious societies, whether Islamic or pertaining to one of the recognized religious minorities, is permitted provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic republic. No one may be prevented from participating in the aforementioned groups, or be compelled to participate in them.

To activate the public sphere, the regime uses almost the same mechanisms which are used to deactivate it. Thus, the regime attempts to reshape the Iranian public sphere by using the state's tools in various ways. It, essentially, emphasises those methods to make the

public sphere vulnerable in order to protect the regime from internal threats, and also to enhance the public sphere's potential in order to use the public as a source of its power and acceptability/legitimacy. Consequently, both are followed for the sake of the regime, not the public. However, as discussed, the public can also benefit from the state's plan and policies, even if they are against the public. For instance, the state's concentration on virtues and values causes society and its agents to focus on the common good more than individual interests. Subsequently, public debates will be rational-critical ones and also will be about common good.

Nowadays, the main points of public debates in the Iranian public spheres, and also in the Iranian web-spheres, are mostly about religious and moral matters, political and governmental issues, and sociocultural phenomena. For example, in 1393 (21<sup>st</sup> March 2014 to 21<sup>st</sup> March 2015), the most debated issues on Iranian social media, according to Meherzad Fotoohi (2015), were hijab, freedom and social mores using the hashtag of #MyStealthyFreedom; arresting members of Happy Group whose reproduced a video clip of a song of Pharrell Williams using the hashtag of #FreeHappyIranians; Iranian supreme leader's illness; Iranian national football team; Iranian nuclear program negotiations; the death of Mortaza Pashaei, an Iranian pop singer, and the like.

While Harry Styles' One Direction dominated Twitter in the UK in 2014 (Smith, 2014), in Iran My Stealthy Freedom was number one (Fotoohi, 2015). In the UK, moreover, 2014 was the year of Selfies (Wiltshire, 2014). However, in Iran, it was the year of discussing freedom (Fotoohi, 2015). By looking at the quality of the mentioned stories, it can be argued that the Iranian web-sphere is more likely to be about serious matters related to the values and virtues of society. However, the UK web-sphere, for example, is mostly about entertainment and self-related issues. The stories which dominated the Iranian public spheres are mostly related to matters of value and virtue, common good. The significance of this is that the

proper function of the public sphere is seeking common good, but not self-benefit, through activities. Here, it can be argued that the Iranian public sphere is interested in ethical and public-related concepts, such as freedom and justice. This makes it an arena in which to discuss common-related issues. The Islamic regime, nevertheless, is supporting those ethics which are in favour of an active public sphere.

In fact, both the Islamic regime and the Islamic Revolution's values, in some cases, are central in activating the Iranian public sphere. In other words, there are several positive principals in the Islamic and the Iranian traditions which can be used to support the public sphere. Not just in texts, but also in the contexts of the Islam and Shi'a, there are several useful notions and values which can serve the public sphere in both theoretical and practical terms. Responsibility about the public-related issues, protesting against unjust rulers, deliberations, etc. in theory; and religious gatherings, charity, etc. in practice, are some examples of Islamic values which can be considered as useful principals to support the public sphere. In this regard, the regime is trying to enhance these values in Iranian society, instead of Western values to protect society from values like profit and pleasure. Hence, it can be argued that the main pillars of the regime are based on ideals, not material, principles. What increases followers for the regime, enhances its popularity, and maintains its rule, is defending and protecting the spiritual benefits/aims of individuals. While the country is experiencing an economic crisis and the regime is unable to get people's satisfaction through materials, spirituality might survive the regime, as it can be produced easily with the help of the clergy.

The Islamic regime of Iran has also supported the public sphere in an indirect way. What the regime is doing in terms of deactivating the public sphere and making its agents passive, in some cases, has a counter result. The totalitarian and authoritarian elements of the regime in Iran, which limit freedom of expression and act in both private and public

arenas, and also the absence of the application of concepts such as liberty and human rights, democratic system and good governance, openness and transparency, secularism and modernisation, and the like, all encourage people to have discussions and activities in the Iranian public sphere. These circumstances, *per se*, have become a reason to appear an active public sphere.

Nowadays, Iranian society has become active in terms of debating the Islamic Revolution, the regime and their aftermaths. Besides, the regime itself can be considered as the most powerful and appeared agent of the Iranian public sphere. It, indeed, has its own material and spiritual powers in politics, the media, the army, educational institutions. It is also a popular regime which is supported by notable number of people, because of various political, religious and economic reasons. The regime, because of its material and spiritual power, has role in activating and reshaping the Iranian public sphere.

The Iranian regime, in fact, is not that closed and freedoms are not banned, as described by some scholars and media. The transformation of the public sphere by the Islamic Revolution, however, developed the public sphere's activities in terms of both quality and quantity, in comparison with the previous regime. All of these freedoms, even if they are small, can serve the public sphere's agents, if not the public sphere itself. Furthermore, what is occurring in Iran's today is something 'legal' and based on the country's constitution and law. It is true that the laws are not democratic or equivalent with human rights standards and circumstances are not good for the public sphere's agents; however, the Iranian regime is not isolated by its people, as it is described by some Iranian opposition groups. Here, it can be argued that what is happening in the Iranian public sphere is something accepted and respected by a notable number of Iranians. Moreover:

Iran is unique among nondemocratic polities in having regular parliamentary and presidential elections in which voters have a genuine (but limited) choice. Inside parliament debates are passionate and criticism of the executive branch frequent. Newspapers have different editorial lines, and sometimes engage in polemics from which the nature of the disagreements within the regime can be deduced. But before the elections candidates are screened, genuine opposition candidates are prevented from running and political parties are discouraged (Chehabi, 2001, pp.64-65).

As a consequence, the regime is activating the Iranian public sphere in two various ways. Firstly, the regime itself and its policies have become matter for rational-critical discussions among the agents of the Iranian public sphere. Secondly, the regime is doing its own tasks and playing an active role in the Iranian public sphere as an agent.

#### ***5.4. Findings, Evaluations, and Conclusion***

To sum up, it can be argued that the Islamic regime in Iran has an important impact on the nature of the public sphere. It plays a considerable role in formulating the principal characteristics of the Iranian public sphere in both negative and positive ways. In terms of vulnerabilities, the Iranian public sphere has relatively been Islamised, controlled, disciplined, and dominated by the Islamic regime. The Islamic regime uses its soft and hard powers in order to occupy the public arena and make it serve the regime, revolution and Islam. In fact, in Iran, the regime's power has transcended society and the public sphere's power. While the regime considers itself to serve people; people, however, find it as an obstacle for having activities in the public spaces, freely.

Statism, by depending on the militarisation of society, is an obvious feature which can be easily found in icons and symbols of the Iranian public sphere (Alamdari, 2005). Nowadays,

Iranian society looks more religious; these religious characteristics can be found easily in the facades of the society. State graffiti on the walls in streets, the regime's TV programmes, the leader's speeches, educational curriculums, sex segregation, fake demonstrations, manipulated information, the filtering of social media, censorship of publishers, limitations of freedom of expression, barriers for art activities, and the like, all made the Iranian public sphere vulnerable and powerless in terms of being active and strong.

Besides, the Islamic regime, which could be considered as an outcome of the Shi'i Islam tradition and the Islamic Revolution, because of its nature and power is the most powerful agent in reshaping the public sphere. The regime, *per se*, is not a kind of democratic regime; it also does not hide its task as a tool of God, Imam, or religion. It follows Quranic texts and Islamic Shari'a law to guide its people towards the right way. It is, in fact, a worldly regime with worldly and otherworldly tasks and missions. Moreover, it is not a fully theocratic regime. The Islamic regime of Iran, indeed, is a *sui generis* regime. It enjoys various characteristics related to the religion of Islam, sub-religion of Shi'a, Iranian culture, and the other related issues, too. Furthermore, the regime enjoys embracing elements of totalitarianism, authoritarianism, as well as democratic tendencies.

The regime also has several patriarchal characteristics which come from both Iranian tradition and Islam. This has impact on the regime to apply gender discriminations. This trait, patriarchy, also became a pattern to other kinds of discrimination against some other social elements, because of their identity, ideology, religion, language and ethnicity. In July 2013, for example, Khamenei, the Iranian supreme leader, made an edict to urge the Iranian people to have no contact with Baha'is – a banned religious minority (huffingtonpost.com, 2013, Online; See also: Baha'i International Community, 2008). This kind of discrimination separates Iranian sects from each other; accordingly, it becomes a

barrier for occurring rational-critical debates between religious and seculars, as a requirement for activating the public sphere (Habermas, 2006; Kadivar, 2008). The regime applies these rules based on its ideology and strategies trying to deactivate some agents of the public sphere. Here, it is believed that taking part in the country's social, political and economic affairs are prerequisites to the development of the country and having an active and strong society (Shojaei et al, 2010).

By promoting and preferring idealism over realism, romanticism over rationalism, immortality [otherworld] over mortality [world], and other religious values, the regime again has an impact on reshaping the public sphere. Moreover, the absence of a suitable atmosphere in which to express opinions, criticise what is happening, discuss what is wanted, organise common and popular [not formal] activities, has also impacted negatively the public sphere's activity. In fact, the state's limitation of the activities of the public sphere by both soft and hard powers did not make the Iranian public sphere passive, totally. However, those few activities which are happening in Iranian society are powerless and even meaningless. This is mainly because of the state's apathy in responding to their appeals. During the last three decades, there are lots of fruitless activities, but only a few examples of fruitful activities in the Iranian public sphere. Indeed, the most important activities are related to university students, women and human rights activists, and economic problems. The newest and biggest public activity was the Green Movement in 2009, which was an unsuccessful movement and could not bring any changes by its activities in actual and virtual spheres (Dabashi, 2011b). This means the most of the Iranian public sphere's activities are ineffective.

In terms of the public sphere's activity and strength, the Islamic regime, in some aspects, activated and strengthened the Iranian public sphere. Nonetheless, its attempts are not aimed at creating a suitable atmosphere in which rational-critical discussions occur. It is, in

fact, aimed at using the power of the public sphere for its own benefit – related to show its popularity and to confirm its acceptability/legitimacy. Furthermore, some acts of the state have a counter impact and the regime itself have become a matter to be debated by the agents of the public sphere.

In general, it can be argued that the regime cannot dominate the public and private spheres totally. There are still lots of activities in both the private and public areas [*zirzamini*: underground and *sarzamini*: aboveground]. Furthermore, globalisation, the hegemony of liberal values, global economic developments, the new generation of communications and media technologies, social media tools, and other outcomes of the revolution of information and technology mostly serve the peoples more than regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Hence, the Iranian public sphere is not developed enough and is reshaping itself, can be considered as a vibrant public sphere. Ironically, the regime, with its ideology and plans, is not the only obstacle, but society has also its own impacts on the Iranian public sphere's activity and strength. The Iranian public sphere, which characterised by a mixed nature of all religious, socio-economic and political traits, is challenging both state and society at the same time. Both state and society are trying to limit the public sphere and make its agents passive. Here, the public is usually limited by law, and private is limited by tradition (Taheri, 1990).

Consequently, the regime does not reshape the Iranian public sphere alone. Society also has a significant role in helping the regime to follow its own ideology, or in facing those challenges made by the regime. The next chapter will deal with Iranian society and its impact on reshaping the Iranian public sphere. It will discuss how Iranian society and its culture have an impact on the vulnerabilities and potential of the Iranian public sphere.

# **Chapter 6 Iranian Society and the Iranian Public Sphere: Vulnerabilities and Potential**

## **6.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter, it was discussed how the public sphere is a sphere of and for various private and public agents in which to carry out public-related discussions/actions. The state, however, is not the only agent in the public sphere. It, with regard to its attempts, is not able to dominate the public sphere completely. The public sphere, in fact, is a sphere both private and public, and state and society, agents in which they communicate. In other words, as it is understood, the public sphere is not excluded from the role state agents. It is, however, a space for gathering, acting, and influencing different agents in seeking for common good and forming public opinion through rational-critical discussions and various activities.

Furthermore, the public sphere has always been threatened with domination by its agents, in order to use it for their benefit. Thus, there is a concrete link between the public sphere and the concept of domination. During history, those who have 'power' always have tried to have more influence in public issues in order to privatise the public. Consequently, the public sphere could be argued as being a sphere of confrontation between various powers. Power, in fact, is not only related to a state's hard power, but also to people's soft/social power as independent and/or organised individuals and groups. Moreover, power has role in forming sociopolitical structures and even outline ethics and aesthetics of people and society. Therefore, it could be debated that there is no public sphere which is completely free from the impact of power. Here, to analyse the nature of the public sphere, it should be understood as a sphere for various discourses – including the state's discourse. Moreover,

the ideal model of the public sphere, even in the bourgeois era analysed by Habermas, has not existed (Azadarmaki & Emami, 2004).

Not only the state, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, but also society has its own power/potential and is playing an important role in reshaping the public sphere. Society's activities in the Iranian public sphere can be described as activities challenging the state's policies. Here, society will be analysed as an agent of the public sphere, which embraces and covers lots of sub-agents, including both individuals and groups. Besides, the chapter discusses the matter of civil society and social movements as sub-agent of society in which they play role in the public sphere, but not as a mechanism of democracy or democratising process. Here, both state and society are accepted as agents of the public sphere which are challenging each other, and their activities shape the nature of the public sphere.

This chapter is to discuss and analyse the vulnerabilities and potential of Iranian society in the Iranian public sphere. In doing so, the nature of society and its agents will be analysed in order to determine their positive/negative impact on increasing the public sphere's vulnerabilities and potential. It starts by analysing the structure of Iranian society and its nature through analysing the personality and mentality of the Iranian individuals. To understand society's nature, understanding the personality and mentality of its individuals as the main factors formulating Iranian national self-image is required. Here, the concept of personality is understood as the appearance and behaviour of individuals. Nonetheless, mentality is understood as the individual's thoughts, beliefs and opinions. Then, the chapter emphasises both private and public aspects of Iranians. By knowing what is occurring in private and public arenas, the whole image of the Iranian public sphere will be clearer. It uses the Iranian cyberspace and social media in particular as a theme to analyse. This is a good measurement by which to measure the activity of the Iranian public sphere.

In terms of methodology, the chapter is following the main methodology of the research. Nonetheless, it is going to set up and answer a question: can the new information and communication technology tools, which are based on the Internet, provide a new model of the public sphere, based on Habermasian model? Or in other words, to which extent the Habermasian theory of the public sphere can be helpful in understanding the impact of Weblogistan and social media on activating the public sphere? Or, can cyberspace be considered as a new public sphere? In answering such a question, the chapter could explain the models and levels of the public sphere in Iran. Moreover, it can be helpful in understanding the presence or absence of a proper public sphere in Iran, examining the presence of the preconditions of an active public sphere in the era of information and communication in contemporary Iran.

The chapter seeks to evaluate the ability of society to face the regime's dominance in the public sphere, on the one hand. On the other hand, it attempts to discover the aspects of the lives of Iranians, as individuals and as a community, which are decreasing the public sphere activity. While there are struggles between state and society, there are also struggles between different agents/tendencies in Iranian society. These are different, if not against each other, in terms of activating the public sphere. However, what makes the Iranian contemporary public sphere active is the rise of new and uncontrollable agents in society. These are created and activated by new information and communication technologies. These agents, by their nature and with the help of the Internet, which help them to stay anonymous, are able to circumvent both political/legal and traditional/cultural tendencies which are considered as obstacles for being active in the public sphere.

## **6.2. Iranian Society and the Public Sphere's Vulnerabilities**

Iranian society, as an ancient one, has its own structure and nature, which has been shaped through history. Both individual characteristics and societal traits play an important role in the ways of actions and reactions inside society. In terms of the public sphere's activity, Iranian society, in some aspects, is a vulnerable one. The society's vulnerabilities caused to increase the public sphere's vulnerability too.

Here, the research is going to analyse some of those aspects which are apparent, important and effective ones in order to clarify how Iranian society makes its own public be vulnerable. First, the personality and mentality of the Iranian people, who shape the image of Iranian society, will be described and analysed. Then, society as a whole will be discussed and analysed. Accordingly, this analysis will clarify the Iranian public sphere's vulnerabilities.

### **6.2.1. The Personality and Mentality of the Iranian Individuals**

In the literature, there are various studies which study Iranian society and its characteristics. These studies have been done to clarify issues most of which are not related to the issue of the Iranian public sphere. Nonetheless, the research will try to find out more about Iranian characters in terms of the personality and mentality of its individuals and then will analyse how they can have impact on the activity/passivity of the Iranian public sphere.

Sayed Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh was an Iranian scholar who studied the Iranian mentality and personality in a book entitled '*the Ethos of us, Iranian*', 1966. In his work, Jamalzadeh tried to collect and analyse what Iranians and foreigners said about Iranians. This is an early study on the topic. It is still considered as a good source to understand how the Iranian mentality works, regarding social and political issues. Overall, his work is

controversial. He focuses on matters such as rationalism and unawareness, tolerance and revenge, etc.

Iranians are also studied by non-Iranians. Shmuel Bar (2004) has analysed the Iranian self-image. He investigates Iranian values and self-images aiming at find a better way to negotiate with Iranians, in terms of politics. For him, a typical Iranian individual is described as being creative, capable and clever in finding a hope in hopeless circumstances. One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Iranian people, known by Iranians and non-Iranians alike, is individualism. It has become a social value for Iranians which should be respected and also encouraged. Individualism could be known as a result of various natural disasters and also political events in Iran.

Individualism made Iranians egoists which they have to rely on themselves as the only one who can survive them. This also made them not trust anyone, but themselves. Consequently, mistrust and suspicion will appear in the personality of the Iranian individuals. During their political history, because of internal despotism and external treachery, Iranians have learnt that no one should be trusted, especially in terms of governance. They believe that there are lots of devils wearing men's masques; thus, it is significant to know who is that one you are going to shake his/her hand (Bar, 2004).

The matter of mistrust and suspicion among Iranians is not something related to their private life, but their public life. Iranians have private/inner and public/outer life, their suspicion is mostly related to the others, *ghair-khodi*, not the relatives, *khodi*. Besides, not only individuals and foreigners/strangers, but also government, its institutions, and its governors are treated by Iranian individuals as something *the others*. The people's mistrust and suspicion to their regime is the highest level. Thus, for Iranians, even local/national governments, as they were not based on people's will, were just like foreigners. Ironically,

non-governmental organisations also have been treated by Iranians as untrustworthy. While an active and strong public sphere requires agents with common interests, individualism makes Iranians care about selfish issues more than common ones. The mistrust also can have a negative impact on the Iranian public sphere's activity, as collective actions require teamwork and teamwork requires trust.

Besides the mistrust between people, government and NGOs is mostly related to the issue of transparency. Both governments and most NGOs, according to some studies, are not open and can not build confidence. Moreover, "allegations of poor leadership, financial mismanagement, and even isolated incidents of fraud, have also all gone some way towards reducing the government and general public's confidence in Iranian civil society" (NPWJ, 2010, p.24). However, it should be noted that the trust between government and NGOs in the era of Mohammad Khatami (in office: 2 August 1997 – 3 August 2005) was enhanced to a better degree than before. Then, in the era of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (in office: 3 August 2005 – 3 August 2013) the regime was more suspicious with the NGOs, and especially those who had a foreign link.

The deep-seated mistrust among Iranians causes many difficulties for them when working together, especially in terms public and political activities which mostly require teamwork. Hence, the importance of trust in teamwork, and the importance of teamwork in public activities are apparent; the Iranian public sphere may be affected by this trait of Iranians. Both working together and seeking common good require having common sense. An activity can serve the public sphere's functions if it is aimed at common good, but not individualistic and personal aims of individuals. The replacement of society's values and virtues by selfish benefits of individuals will certainly decrease the public sphere's strength.

Another apparent trait of Iranians is their belief in conspiracy theories. This is an old belief and rooted in the Iranian history. Historical events related to internal and external issues have shaped and encouraged conspiracy theories in the minds of Iranians. It also affects the nature of society and increases the vulnerabilities of their activity in public sphere. This is because any event and activity in the Iranian public sphere is a suspicious one by its nature, as it is not accepted as a real public activity, done by ordinary people. It always might be interpreted as an event which is created and/or supported by the regime itself or by foreign regimes, especially the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Israel. To discover the origins of this belief, Katouzian (2003) argues that there are internal, external, economic and political factors which have encouraged this theory. He adds that:

The Iranian conspiratorial theory of politics and government had been an inevitable product of a system of absolute and arbitrary rule where law and politics in the normal senses of the term could not, and in fact did not, exist. This was accompanied by a certain degree of xenophobia which – at least in part – was a consequence of frequent invasions of the border provinces and regions, and the occasional conquest of the whole country by her western, northern and eastern neighbours (p.118).

Individualism, distrust, conspiratorial theories and the like all made Iranians pragmatic. Shi'ism, which became the formal religion in Iran in 1570, is another factor which enhances the theory of conspiracy and also some new characteristics, including pragmatism. Iranian pragmatism, indeed, is rooted in Shi'a history, especially in the era of Imam Hussein and Hassan, as both chose a self-sacrifice style of struggle, instead of pragmatism with Mu'awiya. However, Khomeini, the establisher of the Islamic Republic of Iran, tried to change this tradition by preferring pragmatism over self-sacrifice (Bastani, 2014). For Iranians, interests are primary and beliefs are secondary. They are always ready to change their beliefs and opinions, as Rhode (2010) claims, for the sake of interests. Iranian

pragmatism, moreover, is rational and depends on self-benefit. Individual pragmatism, by its nature, could decrease the public sphere's activity, as the public sphere should be about interest of public instead of individuals.

Furthermore, this pragmatism enhances, and also could be enhanced by, the issues of *Ketman* [Concealment] or *Taqiyeh* [Dissimulation], which are also originated from Shi'ism (Daniel & Mahdi, 2006). Literally, *Taqiyeh* means "Concealing or disguising one's beliefs, convictions, ideas, feelings, opinions, and/or strategies at a time of eminent danger, whether now or later in time, to save oneself from physical and/or mental injury" (Abbas, 1995, online). Thus, it is quite difficult to know the real beliefs of Iranians. These concepts, which also could be considered as values and virtues for Iranians, make measuring Iranian public opinion more difficult. Iranians will not be truthful regarding their opinion if they think it is dangerous and they might suffer. Consequently, the public sphere will be treated very carefully by Iranians, while it requires people's feelings/opinions on public-related issues, openly.

Nationalism can be highlighted as another trait of Iranians. Generally, Iranians have a strong sense of themselves and Persian civilization. Iran, for Iranians, is about history, culture and identity. However, there are several religious, secular and cultural sub-identities (Mashayekhi, 1992). Classic Iranian nationalism, in fact, was an emotion but not an ideology. However, modern Iranian nationalism, as Fazeli (2006) argues, is relying on European thoughts of nationalism. With regard to the Iranian self, Fazeli attempts to redefine it and argues that:

Nineteenth-century intellectuals drew on three different images of the self: a modern self, based on Western culture; a national historical self, based on pre-Islamic Iranian culture,

and a religious self based on Shi'ism. These images of the self, in turn, established three competing discourses: modernism, nationalism and Islamism (p.28).

Iranian nationalism, indeed, was created to make Iranian people feel united and differentiated from other peoples, especially from Arabs and Sunni Muslims whom are the majority in the region. In this way, Iranians attempted to protect themselves and to be not assimilated with others. This caused them to enhance their own culture and create new symbols, sub-religion, and culture. Nevertheless, Iranian nationalism, because of its valuable literature and poetry, is mostly relying on the book *Shahnameh* of Abolqasem Ferdowsi (935–1020). It includes a number of stories and is a good reference of Iranian myths (Karimi-Hakkak, 1991).

In fact, Iranian nationalism, just like the other Iranian values, is affected by poetry. Pre-Islamic and Islamic poetry, myths and arts have shaped the national consciousness of Iranians and become something to be proud of it. Moreover, the long history of Iran is another character of Iranian nationalism. It makes Iranians more loyal to their country and also to believe in patriotism. They believe in their own culture and identity as something which makes them different from others. Iranians, even, agreed with the rule of the non-Iranian powers, for the sake of their culture. They told the conquerors "come in and rule us, but do so using our ways, and assimilate into our culture" (Rhode, 2010, p.4). This strong sense of patriotism, which seems to focus on culture more than power, makes Iranians look for a strong ruler, whether Iranian or foreign, to protect their culture and themselves. Therefore, they respect strong, even cruel, rulers. This is mainly because of their fear of degeneration and also in order to survive themselves and their nation. Iranians expect to be ruled by cruel rulers and there are examples in their history of replacing a weak despotic ruler with a strong despotic ruler. Respecting strong rulers has made Iranian society less active in criticising the regime. In doing so, the regime has more roles and activities than

society in the public sphere and dominating public spaces by the regime seems to be something normal for Iranians.

There are several tendencies which are not happy with the assembly of Iranian peoples under the name of Iran. However, for Pan-Iranists, being Iranian does not mean the demise of the Iranian nations but the unification of them all in the framework of Iran. This makes them stronger towards both internal and external threats (paniranist.org, 2015). The success of this notion, even if not in the name of Pan-Iranism and as an ideology, has its own benefits for the Iranian public sphere. One of those elements which can help the public sphere be more active is a having interest regarding common good. Being Iranian, in fact, makes Iranians feel that they are sharing several interests and are care about several issues which have impact on their life. However, another element which also can help the public sphere be more active is the matter of pluralism. This is because differences among different groups are central for occurring rational-critical discussions, as a condition of the public sphere. Today, Iran is a plural and integrated country. It is a union for several nations, sub/religions, and cultures as the Iranian regime does not allow Iranian nations to be separated from Iran and have their own independent state; besides, it cannot, or does not want to, remove non-Persian nations inside Iran. These integrity and pluralism, in fact, feed the Iranian public sphere at the local and national levels.

Another trait of Iranian individuals is that they are highly religious. However, this is despite their mistrust and suspicion towards clerics and religious institutions. Both Shiite Islam and Zoroastrianism have affected the Iranian mentality and personality. This also shaped the nature of the Iranian regimes. Nowadays, even those who are looking for reform [not for a radical change] in Iran believe in religion and also do not want to totally separate religion from the state. What they are looking for is to reform the current regime (Shabani, 2014). On the effects of religion on Iranians, Bar (2004) states that:

Many of the customs and beliefs unique to Iranian Shiite Islam have their origins in ancient Iranian Zoroastrianism. This is especially true about the Iranian concept of leadership. Popular Iranian Shiite Islam inherited from Zoroastrianism the belief in reincarnation. Thus, much as King Darius proclaimed himself the reincarnation of the mythical hero Fereyidoun (who saved Iran from the tyrant Zahaak and the devil Ahriman), Khomeini's claim that he guides Iran on behalf of the hidden Imam was popularly interpreted as his being the reincarnation of the hidden Imam (p.18).

Being religious for Iranians, in fact, is not only about religion. However, religion for Iranians has become a value, virtue and main character of their culture and personality. Moreover, being religious for Iranians, does not necessary, refers to Islam, but the metaphysics and other religions too, namely Zoroastrianism. The roots of this go back to ancient Iranian religions and the use of religion as a method to life and rule. This phenomenon is not new and also is not only related to the Islamic Republic, but its roots are in Iranian history. Furthermore, "Islamism in Iran did not only emerge since the Islamic political revolution, it had already long been rooted in the folk culture and the psycho-spiritual realm of the society" (Parvin & Vaziri, 1992, p.86). If in the era of the Islamic Republic the daily issues are regulated by Islamic Shari'a law, in the ancient era it was considered to be regulated by God's Grace. As Katouzian (2004) states "anyone in possession of the Grace would have the right to succeed or accede to the throne, and his rule would therefore be regarded as legitimate" (p.4).

Ironically, Iranians do not totally agree with everything that religious men think, say and do. It is true that both ordinary people and clerics are religious, but the latter are criticised by the former for what they do. The impact of religion on the Iranian personality after the success of the Islamic Revolution has dramatically increased because of the regime's plans and policy to Islamise society and support the Islamic lifestyle. The Islamic regime is able to

have more influence on Iranians as it controls and administers the most effective elements of education; educational intuitions, media and mosques (Parvin & Vaziri, 1992).

Being religious and making a Shi'a Islam have hegemony over non-Muslims and non-religious people decreases the public sphere's activity. This is because it has a negative impact on occurring rational-critical debated between different religions which represent different thoughts and opinions on public-related issues. However, religiosity, and especially Shi'ism with its characteristics which embrace lots of activities in public as a kind of worship, makes the Iranian public sphere active. There are several principles in Islam and Shi'ism which can activate the relationships among individuals which also activates the public sphere. Prayers and Friday Prayers, paying Zakat, doing charity, participating in festivals and other ceremonies all are examples of those events which occur in and could activate the public sphere in a specific way. These religious public events make individuals participate in common activities, discuss common matters, and do collective actions in both private and public arenas.

### **6.2.2. The Nature of Iranian Society**

This section is not going to reveal everything about the nature of Iranian society. However, it tries to explain some significant characters of Iranian society, as they could be helpful in examining the concept of the public sphere in such a society. Here, it is believed that Iranian society, as for other societies, could have some unique as well as shared traits with others. Overall, this is not an attempt to find out its democratic and/or non-democratic elements, as it is not something related to the research's framework.

The issue of analysing Iranian society, indeed, is a complex one, as the nature of a society is a complex matter and all of its hidden aspects cannot be discovered. As Katouzian (1997)

believes, most of the studies which have been conducted on state and society in Iran have been based on theories which have been developed for European society which is totally different. Besides, Iranian sociologists can be classified into two groups. The first group are those who are following the European-based theories. The second group, however, are those who study Iranian society using poem divans, stories and novels. Iranian poets, such as Ferdowsi, Saadi, Hafez, etc. have described, if not analysed, Iranian society, family and individuals. Moreover, examples of the works of Iranian authors are the works of Abuhamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058–1111), especially '*Kimiya-e Saadat*' (The Alchemy of Happiness); Sayed Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh (1892-1997), '*the Ethos of us, Iranian*'; Mohammad Ebrahim Bastani Parizi (1924-2014); and Mahmoud Dowlatabadi (born 1940) especially '*Kelidar*'. These works, in fact, offer information but not knowledge about Iranian society.

Katouzian (1997) argues that Iran has experienced a circle of chaos-arbitrary-chaos during its history and that it has continued until modern times. Here, what makes Iranian studies different is the arbitrary state and society in Iran, which "is completely independent of any theory" (p.69). In general, as Katouzian (1997 & 2003) argues, Iran has experienced a different sociopolitical history than European societies. Some of the most apparent characteristics of Iranian society, which have shaped its nature, are arbitrary state and society, chaos, foreign invasion and then foreign intervention, oriental despotism or *estebdad*, absence of law and presence of politics instead of the law or as law, kind of legitimacy which is based on power of ruler and the grace of God – *Farrah-e Izadyi*.

What is more is that during a long history, Iranians did not try to abolish arbitrary rule itself. However, they just replaced weak rulers with stronger ones. Thus, it did not involve changing the system – if it could be called as a system, but changing the rulers. The first attempt to change the system, instead of changing the ruler, was in the Constitutionalist

Movement (1905-1911). In fact, it was inspired by the European systems and an attempt to establish a system with a legal framework based on law, as law was a synonym for freedom (Katouzian, 2003).

The nature of the Iranian state and society, especially in terms of the circle of chaos-arbitrary-chaos, makes Katouzian refer to Iranian society as a 'short-term society', or *sakhteman-e kolangi* in Persian. This contrasts with the European 'long-term society'. It is, indeed, to argue that there is 'lack of community' in Iran. Nevertheless, he understands Iran's long history as a series of 'connected short periods', but not one long continued period (2003 & 2004). According to Katouzian (2004), the most apparent problems of a short-term society are related to the matters of 'legitimacy and succession', 'the tenuous nature of life and possessions - *jan va mal*, and 'accumulation and development'. He makes a link between short-term society and arbitrary rule by stating that:

'The short-term society' was indeed both a cause and an effect of lack of structure in Iranian history. This lack of structure, in turn, was a consequence of the arbitrary state, which represented personal arbitrary rule, and the arbitrary society, which tended towards chaos whenever the weakness of the state loosened its grip over it (p.19).

The Iranian short-term society, moreover, has its own characteristics. During the different phases of history, its mosaic has been changed. In the past, there were first, second and third classes in Iranian society. Then in the era of Pahlavis, there were the royal family and elites; lords, mullahs, bazaaris, intellectuals; and common or ordinary people. After the Islamic Revolution, there were revolutionary agents: clerics; middle class: white collars; and *Mostaz'afin*- depressed or disinherited people. Generally, in Iran, there were upper, middle, working and lower classes, as well as nomads (Curtis & Hooglund, 2008).

Nowadays, in fact, there are no economy-based classes in Iranian society. Nonetheless, what shapes the structure of Iranian society are those who are close to the Islamic regime, Iranian opposition groups, intellectuals, human rights activists, students, women and feminist groups, and other non-governmental organisations. These groups are, mostly, active in urban areas and especially in Tehran, the capital. In the Iranian rural areas, however, there is still classic version of classes, *tabagheh*, and also there are nomadic groups which do not care much about public affairs. The potential of each class or group to have role in Iranian society is mainly related to their closeness to the regime, economic independence, the level of literacy and awareness, and access to new information and communication tools. Urban agents of the public sphere, indeed, are the active agents of the public sphere which play role in reshaping it.

In terms of Iranian political culture, it can be argued that it is strongly affected by both internal despotism - or arbitrary governance, oriental despotism, and external invasions/interventions. Persia, even after becoming Iran, had been affected by external powers. It seems plausible to argue that, according to its history, Iran does not have lots of allies internationally. Thus, Iranian people support their own state, regardless of the unfairness of its political system. The United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Israel are the most apparent 'enemies' and 'threats' to Iran and Iranians, according to Iranian state media (ana.ir, 2015).

The CIA coup of 1953, in the era of Mossadegh, to return the Shah to the throne, is an example of what makes Iranians suspicious about foreign powers and especially the USA and UK. The US hostage crisis, in which diplomats were held hostage for 444 days by so called 'Islamic Students of Imam Line', after the revolution of 1979, can be considered as the result of the 1953 coup, which remained alive in the Iranian's collective memory. Briefly, between 1951 and 1953, the Iranian people revolted against the Shah under the

supervision of Mohammad Mossadegh, an Iranian secular nationalist. However, the protests were repressed by the coup planned and conducted by the US embassy in Tehran with the help of the UK embassy. In 1979, in order to avoid a repeat of this, the Iranian revolutionary students occupied the US embassy in Tehran (Houghton, 2001).

During the Iraq-Iran war (1980-88), the US supported the Iraqi Ba'th regime. This, again, increased the mistrust of the Iranian people of foreign powers and especially the USA. Because of these events, Iranian leaders have called the US 'the Great Satan' and the UK 'the Dirty Satan'. Non-friendly acts by both the US and the UK against Iran, as Iranian leaders argue, are still in process. Israel, on the other hand, is considered as another Iranian enemy. This because several religious and political reasons including: occupying the Palestinian territories and attempting to murder the Iranian nuclear scientists, as Iranian state media argue. Nonetheless, on some occasions, small political groups have been calling for a good relationship with the outside world. However, this is rejected by the conservatives who are the main stream and also has not had a considerable impact on Iranian political behaviour. Furthermore, because of several religious and political interests/differences, some countries' regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq (in the era of Ba'th), Bahrain, Egypt, and more are not friends to the Iranian regime. These circumstances make Iranians defend their regime as it can protect them. This, in addition to several other reasons, makes the Iranian public sphere not conduct lots of political activities against the state.

The mixture of politics, religion and other social affairs in Iranian sociopolitical history has led Iranians to think like their regime. This also made the Iranian opposition leaders think about reforming more than changing the system. Moreover, the demand is, mostly, about the reform under the authority of the regime itself (Shabani, 2014). In particular, after the crises of instability and insecurity in Afghanistan and Iraq, these ideas promoted more than

before. Paradoxically, the Arab Uprisings, or Arab Spring, made Iranian society think about changing the regime without the help of foreign forces. However, the negative results of the Arab uprisings in Arab countries, in terms of stability and security, especially in Syria, frustrated Iranians and caused them to stand by their own state and continue with their demands for their rights and freedoms.

Consequently, the hostility of foreign forces against Iran, the failure of democratisation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and also the failure of the Arab Spring, all taught Iranian society the importance of security and stability over other matters such as freedom and rights. Besides, in order to remain under a safe state, Iranian society should negotiate, compromise, and even cede some of its own rights. Now, contemporary Iranian society plays an active role in its public sphere. However, most of these activities are social, cultural, legal and humanitarian, and are not concerned with politics or changing the regime. Thus, it weakened the Iranian public sphere, as it is not evaluating the regime's legitimacy and rationality (Benhabib, 1992). The significance of this is that "the rational-critical public is equipped with the discursive capacity to question the legitimacy of arbitrary forms of power" (Susen, 2011, p.46).

Furthermore, not only external intervention, but also internal despotism and anarchism have led Iranian people to prefer having a strong and despotic regime instead of a weak one. These internal and external events have played a significant role in shaping Iranian political culture. Here, political culture is analysed as a system of experimental thoughts, indicative symbols, virtues and values of a nation which has an impact on the nature of its political action (Farsoun & Mashayekhi, 1992). Despite its long history, and its notable events such as the Constitutional Movement, contemporary Iranian political culture is also affected by the Islamic Revolution. It is, in fact, a mixture of revolutionary ideology and Shi'ism. The main significant goals of the Islamic Revolution could be classified as "first, the

establishment of an ideal divine rule; second, the creation of true Islamic society and person; third, restoration of Islamic economic justice; and fourth, the restoration of the independence of Iran and other Muslim nations” (Parvin & Vaziri, 1992, p.80). Moreover, Farsoun and Mashayekhi (1992) highlight nationalism, populism, and social justice as the principal concepts of this regime which define its ideology and also shape its political culture.

Once again, these sociopolitical features made Iran different from other societies in the region. Thus, the Iranian national self-image is also different from other nations in the region, especially Arabs. It could be argued that, in Iran, being Iranian even for non-Persians has become a value. The national self-image of Iranians is a mixture of Persian/Iranian civilization and Shi’i/Islamic identity. Shi’ism, moreover, is another feature of Iranian society which encourages Iranians to obey the regime as a religious duty. The strong sense of Shi’ism, which has spread among Iranians, is rooted into the Iranian history. It is also linked to national and non-religious matters. Here, it is illustrative to quote Rhode regarding the reason why Safavids chose Shi’ism. He (2010) argues that:

By choosing Shi’ism, the Safavids – who were themselves Turks – provided Iran with another layer of protection against the surrounding states and thereby gave Iran another way to preserve its unique cultural and political identity. Even more amazing is that most of Iran, which had been overwhelmingly Sunni prior to the Safavids, converted to Shi’ism within 100 years (p.8).

The Iranian political culture, in fact, serves the regime more than society. The public sphere, therefore, is experiencing kind of inactivity. Nonetheless, this political culture does not always make the Iranian public sphere passive. In contrast, on several occasions, it activates the public sphere and increases its potential. The Islamic regime in Iran, as

discussed before, because of its awareness of the significance of being popular, wants to have an active, not passive, public sphere. However, it is required to be under the regime's control and serve its ideology and goals. Iran has always supported by its people, streets, demonstrations, protests and public activities that support the regime and criticise local and external threats. Iranian society, besides, has its own potential to face the regime's domination of the public sphere. Furthermore, the economic condition of society and its individuals, legal barriers, police control, and state-censorship and self-censorship, all have a role in increasing the vulnerabilities of the Iranian public sphere.

### ***6.3. Iranian Society and the Public Sphere's Potential***

Iranian society, despite its nature which increases the vulnerabilities of the public sphere—in some cases, has its own potential which can play role in activating the public sphere. Generally, the structure of Iranian society and its components have capacity to an active public sphere. There are several internal and external factors that can play a positive role in activating the Iranian public sphere. Educated people, active university students, youths and women, and society's desire to be open, free, and involved in common sense, can be considered as potential of Iranian society. Besides, global media, translated works, access to the Internet and new social media tools, and the role of INGOs, all make Iranian society aware and active. Here, to clarify the potential of Iranian society, several features of Iranian society will be analysed.

Religion, in Iran, plays a dual role in society and in activating the public sphere. Moreover, its status in the system and society has become a debatable issue for almost all societies. Nowadays, the Islamic Republic of Iran believes in that, as Ayatollah Khomeini argued, there was no separation between mosque and state in the Islamic tradition (Nafisi, 1992).

Thus, religion is something that mixes with people's daily lives and also with the state's domestic and foreign policies. Besides, the religion itself, its texts, and its application have become a matter for discussion in the public sphere. It makes the public discourse to be more rational and critical, as people are discussing to how extend the regime is legitimate, rational and also religious.

Religion and its related issues in Iran, not only among Iranian individuals, intellectuals and groups, but also among the politicians, is a matter for dialogue and debate. The Islamic Republic elites urge people to believe in religion, not just as a matter of daily life, but also as a matter of governance. Here, politicised Islam in Iran has emerged as an ideology of the opposition to the Pahlavis. Revolutionaries, before and after the Islamic Revolution, have used religion and religious occasions as a base of mass mobilisation (Farsoun & Mashayekhi, 1992). In regard to the role of religion in governance, in Iran, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, society's view of the concept of religion and its application is divided into three main groups, each of which supports its theory and criticises the other. They are the supporters of the caliphate style of governance, the supporters of secular government, and another way which advocates an Islamic-democratic government (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006).

Iran, after the Islamic Revolution, has somewhat succeeded in applying religion in both political and sociocultural aspects of the lives of Iranians in order to create an Islamic system, society and person. Regardless of its negative impact on the public sphere's activities, religion and its related issues has become a matter of common concern. Further, these debates help the public sphere to have rational-critical discussions on serious and common matters - religion and its application.

One of the groups most affected by religious rules is women. However, women are active agents among Iranian society's agents. They take part in different activities for different

purposes, including non-gender related ones. Their activities not only involve matters like gender equality or feminist demands, but also human rights and citizenship. Women in Iran participate in human rights campaigns, environmentalism, and journalism, and as well as gender affairs. Their participation and struggle in Iran could be considered as one of the most significant in terms of political, humanitarian and cultural struggles. They struggle not only as women, but as humans and citizens of Iran too. Matters of concern for Iranian women are not only related to their group, but also to other groups of the whole of society. Thus, they are taking part as agents of the public sphere and have various goals.

The women's struggle in Iran is not only related to reforms of the Iranian political and educational system, but its sociocultural structures too, as they suffer from traditional and religious taboos. They are fighting for the rights and freedoms Iranians, regardless of their gender. Of course, because of both the state's policy and society's tradition towards gender, women in comparison with men have more barriers and face more taboos in public. Teimoori (2012) highlights two main kinds of taboo. First, *feminine taboos* are particular to women. Second, *masculine taboos* are particular to men. Here, a third one can be added as *shared taboos*, which are not particular to any specific gender, but general to all citizens, regardless to their gender. Besides, it should be noted that some of these taboos did not start with the emergence of the Islamic Republic, they are part of the religious and traditional beliefs of Iranians. As Curtis and Hooglund (2008) spell out:

With the notable exception of the Westernized and secularized upper and middle classes, Iranian society before the Revolution practiced public segregation of the sexes. Women generally practiced use of the chador (or veil) when in public or when males not related to them were in the house. In the traditional view, an ideal society was one in which women were confined to the home, where they performed the various domestic tasks associated

with managing a household and rearing children. Men worked in the public sphere, that is, in the fields, factories, bazaars, and offices (p.117).

Gender segregation, for example, was an Iranian tradition, even before the Islamic Revolution. The following photos, which show a traditional Iranian door, clarify something in that regard. The door has two different rings to knock, which make different sounds. One is for men to knock the door, which a man or a woman with *chador* preferred to answer or open the door. Another one is for women, which a woman preferred to answer or open the door (outtheresomewhere.ca, 2010).



Men's door knocker



Women's door knocker

**“There is a separate and different door knocker for men. This is so the person answering the door knows which sex to expect on the other side. If it is a man knocking and a woman is answering the door then she must first cover up with her head scarf and chador” (outtheresomewhere.ca, 2010).**

This trait of Iranian culture was developed by the Islamic regime after the Islamic Revolution. The gender segregation, in fact, has been applied in different aspects in the lives of Iranians, including public transportation, such as buses in Tehran city (demotix.com, 2008). Gender separation, of course, has a negative impact on public activities, as it does not allow men and women to meet, debate, and act in public places. Here, it should be noted that while both tradition and law tried to separate genders from each other, however, in reality, in both public and private spheres, men and women are not separated that much. The following photos prove this (more photos available on: theatlantic.com, 2012).



**Some aspects of the life of Iranians, on the street, public sphere.**

What can be concluded, regarding to the above photos, is that the regime's policy is inspired by the Iranian tradition. However, contemporary Iranian society is trying to survive

both patriarchy tradition and religious laws. Moreover, the regime is not able to force Iranians to be separated from each other in their daily life, as they are separated in a bus, for example. Nonetheless, this is not the whole story; but there are more spaces for Iranians in real, aboveground and underground, and virtual spheres for being active.

In general, women in Iran suffer in both private and public spheres. As Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Laureate in Peace, says "it is not easy to be a woman in Iran". This is mainly because of some laws and traditions that do not let women to be active, especially in public. However, Iranian women are not passive, but they are involved in the politics of resistance. As Sedghi (2007) discusses, they "exert pressure on the system, pose important questions, express their concerns, and above all demand that they have rights as women and citizens" (p.246). Compared with most the other countries in the region, the condition of women in Iran, in terms of their political, legal, cultural and societal status, is better. However, the international media's focus on Iran because of its other problems, such as its nuclear programme, has exaggerated the case of hijab in Iran. Here, the status of Iranian women can be clarified by looking at the unbiased statistics. For instance, "94 percent of Iranian women attend school, and women comprise over 60% of all university graduates" (Salehzadeh, 2013, p.13).

Women in Iran, not just in education, but also in other fields such as academic and scientific research, sports and arts, activities in both actual and virtual spheres, media, and generally in the country's development, are active. They, even more so than men, have academic and scientific triumphs. They are also more active in criticising the regime's policies. Women are also active on social media, especially Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. They have created lots of active social media accounts with having lots of fans, subscribers and followers. A good example is a Facebook fan-page account for women's stealthy freedoms in Iran, entitled 'My Stealthy Freedom'. It posts women's symbolic activities to show their critic on

human rights violations and especially the case of hijab. Iranian women, by unveiling their hijab in public places and then posting their photographs online, are criticising both regime's law and society's tradition. They have motivated discourses and debates on freedom and hijab in particular among Iranian people, including politicians. Accordingly, they activated the Iranian actual and virtual public sphere.

Iranian women, not just in the real and virtual spheres, but also in underground activities, especially underground music, are active. There are lots of music video clips on YouTube created by Iranian women using pseudonyms. These songs mostly criticise the regime's policies and society's traditions. Moreover, even if their content is not about politics, they, *per se*, can be considered as critic to the regime's policies, as women singing solo is not allowed in Iran. A good example for women's resistance is 'My Stealthy Freedom' Facebook page, which has about one million fans ([facebook.com/StealthyFreedom](https://facebook.com/StealthyFreedom)). It, then, became a campaign for the same purpose, which has activities in different social media tools, including YouTube and Tweeter, demanding "the right for individual Iranian women to choose whether they want hijab". The page claims that it "does not belong to any political group and the initiative reflects the concerns of Iranian women, who face legal and social restrictions." It, however, belongs to Iranian women. "All of the photos and captions posted have been sent by women from all over Iran and this is a site dedicated to Iranian women inside the country who want to share their "stealthily" taken photos without the veil."

The following photos show some examples of Iranian women's activities posted on the Facebook page mentioned. It shows Iranian women unveiling their headscarves in public places where there are regime billboards to encourage wearing hijab. This kind of symbolic activities can represent Iranian women's resistance against what the regime is trying to enforce. It, moreover, shows how they 'stealthily' have taken the photos, as they are still in very modest dress and some of them do not want to show their faces. Nowadays, there are

lots of these kinds of online campaigns in the Iranian virtual public sphere. Furthermore, plenty of these kinds of demands can easily be found among personal accounts of Iranians on social media. However, the state's main respond is having no respond and ignoring these demands. Of course, there are also examples of arresting activists for their activities in writing on weblogs.



**Women post pictures of themselves without scarves on Facebook.**

Iranian women, not only on virtual sphere, but also in actual sphere, can be considered as an active group. Their participation, however, does not always involve criticism of the regime's policies. There are groups of women which demand that hijab be enforced more

and discipline bad-hijab women. They take part in official regime demonstrations and non/political rallies. The next two groups of photos show women's rally for the mentioned purposes (mehrnews.com & radiofarda.com).



Women staged a rally to demand the government fully enforce obligatory rules of hijab, Tehran.



Iranian women in different rallies to: criticise dog-killings and Iranian elections result; and also to take a part in a pop-Singer's funeral and support the regime.

Iranian women participate in public activities as women and also as youths. As they are students, educated, journalists, environmentalists, and citizens, they are also in youth groups. Youths are another active group in Iran. Iran has a young population. The majority of the Iranian population is under the age of 35. This group is well-educated, effective and active (NPWJ, 2010). Young people, by their nature, are more able to appear in the public sphere than others. They also have potential to be active in the public places, and to be at risk.

Iranian youths have access to social media and global media. They take part in both public and underground activities. Their activities embrace the arts, music, sport, graffiti, human rights campaigns, journalism, environmental activities, etc. However, they face barriers. There have been several occasions when both the state, with its laws, and society, with its traditions, have tried to limit youth activities. Consequently, there is a noticeable number of young Iranian people who are in prison or in exile. However, the youth in Iran is still one of the most vital and pivotal components of Iranian society.

One of these reasons that have made Iranian youths more powerful is education. Education helps them be aware about daily and intellectual matters which occur in society. In fact, the significant role that the intelligentsia has played in the history of the Iranian public sphere has made it be known as an intellectual public sphere (Abdul-Elahian & Ojagh, 2007). Iranian intellectuals in Qajar, Pahlavi and Islamic Republic eras have always been the top public opinion makers. They experienced different discourses on issues such as the monarchy, modernisation, constitutionalism, religion and theocracy, nationalism-liberalism, communism, traditionalism, Islamism, Khomeinism, secularism, religious reformism, human rights, feminism and journalism.

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the state's policy towards education changed (Rucker, 1991). In fact, the Islamic-Iranian education system, in comparison with the era of Pahlavis, is more developed, especially in terms of raising the rate of literacy in the country. Moreover, now, the Iranian education system is not democratic, developed and modern. The Islamic regime has tried to Islamise all aspects of the state and society, including the education system (Paivandi, 2008). However, it is not something rare in developing countries, as education is known as a sub-system of the state which is used to support the ideology of the regime, and legitimate the state and its system. Compared with the era of the Pahlavis, for example, the Iranian education system, in terms of its textbooks, has less focus on pictures and sayings of Khomeini or Khamenei and their families (Nafisi, 1992; Mehran, 1992).

Today, in Iran, there is a huge number of university students, more than half of whom are women. Some universities have good global ranking, with a good level of knowledge and science (Hassan-Yari, 2012; msrt.ir, 2014). Furthermore, the Islamic regime supports education and its plan to increase literacy in the country was successful (Mohsenpour, 1988). In this regard, Article 30 of the Iranian Constitution reads that "the government is bound to make available, free of charge, educational facilities for all up to the close of the secondary stage, and to expand free facilities for higher education up to the limits of the country's own capacity". The significant role of literacy in activating the public sphere has always been something valued because the new ways of communication, which are not based on face-to-face discussions, require at least the ability to read and write as communicating occurs throughout newspapers, weblogs, and the like. Besides, literacy helps agents to know what is happening in the country, and in this way they can have their own view, think about it and then do something in the public sphere. Schools and universities, indeed, can become good semi/public places for students to exchange their

ideas in meetings and gatherings. Further, with a high level of literacy, intellectuals can play the role of elites for the ordinary agents of society and guide them.

Intellectuals, journalists and social media users are other active Iranian groups which have a role in activating the real and virtual Iranian public spheres. These are rich and wealthy sources of Iranian society which encourage the public sphere's activity in a non-democratic regime (NPWJ, 2010). Since the 1990s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of these groups, especially environmentalist groups (Fadaee, 2011). With the help of new information and communication technologies, creating these groups has become easier. Moreover, some of them are just online campaigns, which do not look for any government license. However, sometimes matters like environmentalism and some other activities are masks to hide and cover their main aims which are to do political-related activities. Their activities are mentioned as aimed at environment; however, they are aimed at political issues. This increases mistrust and suspicion in the state and society and makes government deal more robustly with NGOs and their activities. It can be argued that, in Iran, almost everything has become politicised (Borghei, 1992). When the regime uses non-political matters for political purposes, other public sphere agents also do the same.

As an example, an Iranian pop singer, Mortaza Pashaei, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, 2014, died from cancer. The people's reaction to his death and their participation in his funeral could be described as an example of people using non-political issues for political reasons. The attendance at the funeral, and singing a pop song of Pashaei by people, could be interpreted as showing their desire for pop music, which is not approved of by the regime. Moreover, by this, Iranians tried to be appeared in public places, and to feel that they are stand shoulder-to-shoulder. For Iranians, being beside others in public is something valued, respected and needed; they have learnt it from religious and political rituals. Since 2009, the events of Green Movement, Iranians have needed another public event to be beside

each other and to feel and also to display their power; they used this event and it became the biggest one after the events of 2009 (nytimes.com, 2014).

The potential of Iranian society and the energy the Iranian individuals, both require a way to be exercised. If not, as Simmel (1910) argues, it leads to radicalism. By looking at small events, like Pashaei's death, which have had a huge response from people, it can be argued that Iranians are seeking to find a way or event in order to exercise their energy. It also can be interpreted as there being a lack of proper places and spaces in which Iranians can exercise their energy. Besides, it makes them use daily and usual events as an opportunity to be appeared in the public sphere.

### **6.3.1. Public and Private Life in Contemporary Iran**

The matter of public and private life in Iran is a controversial one. It is, however, a critical one in terms of understanding Iranian society. There are several studies which have focused on this issue. Here, it will be described and analysed with regard to the concept of the public sphere. As is known, public, to some degree, is the extension of private. However, in the case of Iran, it is different and more problematic. Public, in Iran, is not always the extension of private life. Private, also, is not always a sphere in which to carry out private acts. There are different public-related activities which occur in private spheres because of the nature of the Iranian regime and society which changed the nature of both private and public places.

In a study conducted by Leila Papoli-Yazdi (2010), entitled *Public and Private Lives in Iran: An Introduction to the Archaeology of the 2003 Bam Earthquake*, the issue of public and private life in Iranian society was investigated. Usually, the common way of studying Iranian society is analysing what has been revealed, published, broadcasted and/or what

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has been argued by Iranian people. In contrast, Papoli-Yazdi analyses the stuff of those Iranian families who are died because of the 2003 Bam earthquake. She describes and analyses the Iranian families in terms of 'the outside' and 'the inside', and also the micro, short-term, and the macro, long-term, of their lives.

The significance of this study is mainly because of the mentality and personality of Iranian individuals which is highly formulated and developed by the concepts like *Ketman* and *Taqyiyeh*. These concepts, which also have become values, make it difficult to find the real thoughts and feelings of Iranians regarding their real circumstances. Psychologically, Iranians conceal their real beliefs to protect themselves from state law and society's traditions in order to not be punished and/or blamed. They also hide their real desires from appearing in public. This makes them have a dual personality, one for private and another for public realms. In this regard, Papoli-Yazdi (2010) adds that:

At work, I act as if I am a very religious person. But at home, in my own private space, I do not have to pretend, so I do not. The evidence for this discrepancy in my own life is found in the material culture I daily handle: the books I read, the love letters I write, and the films I watch. These practices of concealment result in paradoxical behavioral patterns between how people act inside their homes and how they act outside their homes. As with most aspects of human behavior, these patterns leave signs and markers in material culture (p.44).

The Islamic Revolution and its aftermath have strengthened the paradoxical behaviour of Iranians and also have made the gap between the private and public bigger. That is mainly because of the regime's attempts to Islamise society and its laws to protect what is called public mores. As has been discussed by Mehran (2003), there are differences between a Muslim society and an Islamised one. The latter is marked by politicised Islam. In doing so,

not just society, but also the state is in the process of becoming more Islamic. This requires Islamising not just state institutions, but also society's spheres and people's appearance. Therefore, post-revolutionary Iran could be considered a developing country, an Islamised regime, and a revolutionary society. Nonetheless, there are different factors affecting the nature of society and its private and public activities. As has been described before, the regime has its own plans to apply its ideology and Islamise all aspects of society. Besides, there are other powers which have a tendency towards an open and modern society – of course in an Iranian version. In relation to this, Mehran (2003) states that:

The realization of the importance of industrialization, technological advancement, and, more recently, political development has led to a drive to modernize. Yet modernization in Iran is consciously and deliberately separated from Westernization, and a modern society is not viewed as necessarily a Westernized one. Once one accepts the separation of modernization from Westernization, one can clearly view the Iranian society as a modernizing one (pp.272-273).

Furthermore, the nature of the Iranian political and legal system made the public different from the private. *Adaab-e Ammeh*, or public mores, which are legalised in the constitution, are encouraging this lifestyle. However, it should not be ignored that this matter is not an innovation by the Islamic regime. It is, in fact, part of the Iranian mentality which is reflected in Iranian law which believes in *batin* and *zaher*, inner and outer (Zonis & Joseph, 1994). Ironically, this value also affects Iranian politics. Thus, not just inside society and family, but also in politics, there are *khodi* and *gheir-khodi* whose represent the regime's inner and outer. In other words, the state has almost the same point of view as society has towards insiders and outsiders, albeit in a political version.

Here, it does not mean that Iranian people are happy with what happens in Iranian society, in terms of the differences between the appearances in public and private. In fact, there are attempts to change the appearance of the Iranian public sphere, which is shaped by the state more than society. Therefore, the lifestyle of Iranians in private is something different to their lifestyle in public. Public spaces have become spaces for being/doing according to state and society's standards. Nevertheless, private spaces have become spaces with less restriction. Private spaces have become spaces in which to do public-related activities too. They have become places in which to do some of those activities which are forbidden in public. In other words, private places in Iran are playing the role that public places should. Underground art is a good example of this dilemma. The following photos show some examples of what is happening in the Iranian underground, which is quite different to its appearance in public. Forbidden things such as having pets, drinking alcohol and dancing can be seen. However, there are, as shown in the photos, people for whom their private sphere is an Islamic one (hybridtechcar.com, 2014).



**Some aspects of the life of Iranians, at their own homes, private sphere.**

Music is another activity of Iranians, which is divided between public and private spheres. After the Islamic Revolution, Iranian music in public or on the radio and TV has had several traits. Ghazizadeh (2011) highlights the characteristics of the Iranian post-revolutionary music as absence of women, traditional music as the main genre, hegemony of the war and revolutionary hymns, religious music, pop music, and then imitation of Los Angeles musicians. In addition, in the private spheres, there is underground music, which is known as voices of protest. The genres of the Iranian underground music are mostly about dance, pop, rock, folklore and fun music (the following photos, available on: [jeremysuyker.com](http://jeremysuyker.com), 2015).



**Some Underground Activities in Tehran: Theatre, Music Concert, Music Recording, Cafe Meeting.**

The impact of this underground lifestyle and its products on the public sphere's activity is something worth discussing. As discussed, rational-critical discussions and seeking for common good are basic elements of the public sphere. Then, when these elements can be

found, whether in public and/or private spaces and by public and/or private agents, it can be considered as a public sphere. In fact, these kinds of underground activities caused several aboveground activities. An example is the Iranian Happy Group who re-recorded and reproduced a song of Pharrell Williams. The video clip and their arrest by the regime show how underground activities can activate both actual and virtual public sphere.

Consequently, private spheres, regardless to their limitations by their nature and/or by tradition and family rules, could be considered as an element of Iranian society which can have role in activating the public sphere. Nowadays, private spheres in Iran have become more productive than public spheres in terms of producing forbidden art and music, especially Persian Rap, *Rap-e Farsi*. Here, the issue of underground activities, again, supports the argument which claims that regimes, including non-democratic ones, cannot shutdown the public sphere. Besides, the Iranian public sphere can be vibrant even inside a non-democratic state and society. Hence, the non-democratic regime in Iran tries to dominate public places and stalise them; society, regardless of its non-democratic culture, tries to use its own private places as an alternative to dominated public places.

### **6.3.2. The Internet: Weblogistan, Social Media and the Iranian Public Sphere**

The contemporary model of the public sphere is greatly affected by the information and technology revolution. The most outstanding product of this revolution is digital communication tools, especially Internet-based ones. It has changed the nature of the communication among individuals, groups and even international organisations. In terms of communication among people, social media tools have become more popular and also more useful. This has both positive and negative aspects. Social media and other communication websites, regardless of their benefit in activating the public sphere, have their own negative

aspects too. As is known, the Internet and especially its social media websites are relatively new. SixDegrees.com was the first social networking website to be launched in 1997 (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Nowadays, there is a huge number of these kinds of websites, software programs, and hardware tools, such as smart phones and their applications; the most common feature among them is that they are Internet-based tools.

After the appearance of social media as a new space for the public sphere, discussing several issues was becoming apparent in the related literature. The discussions are about the suitability of the use of the Habermasian theory of the bourgeoisie public sphere to study the contemporary style of the public sphere. Besides, it is reasonable to ask: do Internet-based tools provide a new model of the public sphere? Or, they are just becoming another tool of the public sphere, as replacement for the old versions of media tools.

Here, these issues and other related ones will be discussed in order to find an appropriate method to analyse cyberspace and its tools. Moreover, this is in order to explain the use of these new social media tools by the agents of the Iranian public sphere. In the case of Iranian society, the Internet and social media users have become contemporary agents of the Iranian public sphere. Nowadays, new information technology and especially social media tools have transformed the public sphere into a new phase. New public sphere activities, including both traditional activities and virtual ones, mostly depend on the Internet. Thus, the potential of the Internet in Iranian society and its role in activating the contemporary Iranian public sphere needs to be analysed.

One of the problematic issues related to cyberspace is that it is a private space, used by private agents, and mostly for individual purposes. However, it can also be used as a public space, by public agents, and for a common purpose (Poster, 1997). The Internet, in fact, has moved on from the 'one-to-many' model of mass media and has become a model of

distributing and exchanging information and opinions based on the 'many-to-many' model. Moreover, because of its global character, the Internet has also impacted many levels of the public sphere and has shifted it from the local to the global level (Zubair-Khan et al, 2012). Cyberspace, therefore, could be seen as a public sphere at a national level, plays a role at a global level of the public sphere and has become a sphere for discussing global matters (Poster, 1997). In other words, with the help of the Internet, almost all local public spheres also have a global aspect to their activities.

As rational-critical discussions, public opinion, and reactions are the main structures of the public sphere, and can be found in cyberspace; thus, cyberspace could be called a public sphere. Moreover, the Internet, or cyberspace, has more advantages than the real public sphere, as it is global, fast, accessible to all, cheap, difficult to control, more equal to all, allowing its users to hide their real identity - which enhance free and frankly opinions -, and the posts or sayings remain forever or at least for a long term (Mehdizadeh, 2010). This helps dialogue occur, and also helps agents have more time to think and discuss issues.

Besides, as Dahlberg (2001) argues, there are six main criteria that need to be accomplished for the Internet to be considered a public sphere. These criteria are "autonomy from state and economic power; exchange and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims; reflexivity; ideal role-taking; sincerity; and discursive inclusion and equality". Therefore, the public sphere is not an organisation or an organised institution, but a network of communication in order to express, exchange, discuss and form opinions and ideas among citizens on matters related to the common good. The most important idea regards having a rational-critical debate on common matters, not about its places and places. Indeed, it is not linked with any physical domain, but with the people's activities. This is, also, clarified by Lundell (2010), who states that:

According to Habermas, the public sphere was constituted by private persons who came together to discuss among themselves how civil society and the state should best be regulated. The periodical press did not constitute the public sphere. Individuals did. The public sphere was neither a medium nor an arena, neither newspapers and magazines nor salons and coffee houses. It consisted of communicating people (p.436).

Here, it could be argued that what makes cyberspace different from the real public sphere is that the former is a virtual sphere, but the latter is an actual one. Thus, if the matter is about their agents, elements and functions, then, cyberspace is a public sphere, with some differences (Poster, 1997). However, the cyberspace could be argued as a new generation of the public sphere.

Though Habermas model of public sphere was framed for describing the public and sphere at the state-level however, its principles and mechanisms are postulated as relevant to the theory and practices of global public sphere (GPS) and global civil society (GCS). The emerging digital technologies and particularly global connectivity through Internet and social networking have added new dimensions to the existing GPS thereby generating a new public sphere (NPS). The determinants of NPS like globalization, social software etc. do not seem to stand against the Habermas view of public sphere rather stand supportive and enhancing to the principles and requirements of an ideal public sphere both at the national and global levels (Zubair-Khan et al, 2012, p.43).

According to the above argument, it is not problematic if there will be a mixture of both old (Habermasian) and new (Internet-based) models of the public sphere. However, it should be noted that cyberspace is not the public sphere itself; but, in fact, it is just a spaces for the public sphere's activities. Consequently, it will increase the public sphere's activity. Cyberspace, therefore, is not an alternative to the real public sphere, but an instrument.

Here, the public sphere will remain the same, but some of its features will be reshaped. This new model of the public sphere might be called the networked sphere. The networked public sphere is, in fact, still the public sphere but different from the Habermasian model in terms of its structures, functions, and also the nature of the communications among its agents (Friedland et al, 2006). Habermas himself, as Ubayasiri (2006) highlights, has also been slow to think about the role that the Internet can play in the public sphere and also as a public sphere. Habermas, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, 2006, upon accepting the Bruno Kreisky Prize for the Advancement of Human Rights stated that:

The use of the Internet has both broadened and fragmented the contexts of communication. This is why the Internet can have a subversive effect on intellectual life in authoritarian regimes. But at the same time, the less formal, horizontal cross-linking of communication channels weakens the achievements of traditional media. This focuses the attention of an anonymous and dispersed public on select topics and information, allowing citizens to concentrate on the same critically filtered issues and journalistic pieces at any given time. The price we pay for the growth in egalitarianism offered by the Internet is the decentralised access to unedited stories. In this medium, contributions by intellectuals lose their power to create a focus (p.8).

With regard to social movement theories, the spread of new information and technology tools has also changed the nature of social movements and other public sphere activities. However, there are also counterarguments on the role of the Internet and social media in the public sphere and its impact on new social movements. Some argue that new social movements are not very free and capable because of factors such as "government limitations of use; structural forces of capital organized either nationally or globally; and the problems of fragmentation" (Shangapour et al, 2011, p.5). Besides, virtual gatherings still have their own significant influence on the real public sphere. The significance of these

virtual actions and their impact is more notable in non-democratic states where people cannot exercise their political and sociocultural rights and freedoms in society's public spaces. As Amir-Ebrahimi (2009) states:

In countries where public spaces are controlled and monitored by conservative and restrictive cultural and/or political forces, cyberspace provides a means to circumvent the restrictions imposed on these spaces and may in turn become more 'real' for users than physical public spaces. Due to the absence of the body and of face-to-face relationships, as well as the possibility of hiding one's real identity, cyberspace becomes in many of these countries an important space for self-expression, communication and information- three aspects of life that are limited and monitored under authoritarian states (p.325).

The virtual public sphere, indeed, has several disadvantages and could be criticised in some perspectives. Mostly, the dialogues, which are occurring on social media, are not about something related to common good. Besides, the virtual sphere is also occupied by values of capitalism, materialism, consumerism, brands, jocks, selfies, pornography, fake information, and the like. In terms of issues related to the common good, as Mehdizadeh (2010) argues, because of the variety of viewpoints, the dialogues, most of the time, are not occurring in a rational-logical way and will not end by reaching an argument accepted by all, or by majority. The Internet, nonetheless, is not available to all. It is accessible to those who have a computer or a smart phone connected to an Internet network, and is not free of charge. Thus, the Internet is not for all, but for the elite, especially in developing and semi-developed countries.

What is posted on the Internet, moreover, is not always democratic and does not support and spread democratic values. There are a number of non-democratic or even anti-democratic groups, such as racists and terrorists, which use the Internet and social media in

an advanced way to spread their non-democratic principles (Mehdizadeh, 2010). The Internet, Weblogistan and social media, have all become an arena for those groups who do not have a legal, real, and/or popular status in *de facto*. The ability to be anonymous on the Internet helps lots of these people and groups take part, say what they want, and then be free from any legal investigation and social responsibilities. Thus, the democratic role of the Internet on the online public sphere cannot be guaranteed (Correia, 2011).

Anonymity, as an outstanding character of cyberspace, which helps the Internet users mask their real identities, encourage users to have a more open and free discussions on public issues, it also increases the number of participants (Zubair-Khan et al, 2012). This anonymity, however, contains some disadvantages. The most apparent point is that, it allows people to have fake accounts to argue matters without accepting any responsibility regarding what they say. If dialogue occurs face-to-face, people will be responsible about what they say.

Marketing and advertisements also occupy a considerable space in Weblogistan and social media spaces (Correia, 2011). It is true that on their accounts/pages, people are discussing matters like quality and the price of goods; however, consumerism and consumption culture do not serve the common good as a virtue. It, in the end, commoditises society, and a commoditised society is less interested in public related issues and common good.

In terms of the use of the Internet, because of the nature of Iranian society and its regime, cyberspace has a good potential to Iranian society and its agents. In this regard, according to Amir-Ebrahimi (2009):

Internet and weblog writing became a tool of empowerment for youth and women, as well as for intellectuals, journalists, artists, ex-politicians and other marginalized social groups. For youth, this empowerment begins with a redefinition of the self through the consolidation

of new identities and the exercise of self-expression because many of them believe that their 'real/true' identities have been 'lost/repressed/hidden' in Iran's public spaces. Women use weblogs to voice their frustrations, needs and interests on a personal and social level. Intellectuals, journalists and artists see the opportunity to create a new public sphere where they express themselves, interacting and exchanging their points of view with their publics inside and outside Iran (p.325).

In analysing the potential of Iranian society, it should be noted that traditional and new media tools are mostly used by the middle and upper classes. More than half of Iranian people do not have access to the Internet or do not believe in/want to use it (entekhab.ir, 2016). These classes also do not represent all Iranians. Thus, it is hard to describe Iranians relying on their use of the Internet. Notwithstanding, discovering the nature of Iranian cyberspace and what is occurring there will help to reveal a significant and effective part of the agents of the Iranian public sphere. This group also, in some cases, cares about the demands of those who do not have access to the Internet, especially those in Iranian villages.

What makes cyberspace useful for analysing the public sphere is that it is usually an arena for non-state agents. It is also, to some extent, free from state intervention. Therefore, it partly reflects society and its individuals. In Iran, cyberspace is a symbol for respecting individualism, pluralism and academic work. The Internet has lots of advantages for Iranian society and is considered as a valuable tool, because it has changed Iranian culture from an oral to a written one. Besides, the use of Internet-based tools is a good method for the Iranian diaspora to take a part in Iranian public events inside Iran (Graham & Khosravi, 2002). The Internet itself has become a new feature of Iranian culture. In 2001 alone, more than 15,000 cyber-café's were open in Tehran. Nowadays, not only do residents of bigger

cities have access to the Internet, small towns and even villages do too (Tishehyar & Pakizadeh, 2010).

The rise in literacy, the increasing numbers of university students (especially women), and the use of filter-breaking programs have all made the Internet in Iran popular and easy to access. The state also has a desire to use the Internet as a way to develop the economy, reduce administrations bureaucracy, and broadcast its own ideology. Not just the state, but also clerics, Grand Ayatollahs, and especially *maraja' e taqlid* – sources of imitation, are using the Internet to be in contact with their followers and answer their questions speedily and frankly. Thus, some clerics consider the Internet to be 'God's gift for spreading the Prophet's mission'. The Iranian regime, moreover, has experienced using technology in its political history. In both the Constitutional Movement of 1906 and the Islamic Revolution of 1979, technology and the media played an important role - newspapers in the former and cassette tapes in the latter.

In comparison with its neighbours, Iran has a greater number of Internet users - individuals with their own computer, laptop and/or smart phone. In 2001, there were nearly one million Internet users in Iran. This number increased to five million users in 2006. In 2005, when there were about 100 million weblogs globally, around 700,000 were in Iran alone (Lundqvist, 2007). The Iranian people, for several reasons, including the nature of their regime and the level of their education, have benefited more from cyberspace than other people in the region. The spread of the Internet and social media in Iran was dramatic. Hussein Derakhshan established the first Iranian Persian weblog, in September 2001 (Berkeley, 2006). Later, in 2003, by arresting Sina Montallebi, Iran became the first state in the world to arrest someone for expressing an opinion on a weblog. Then in 2004, Iran designed a set of new laws to deal with so-called 'cybercrimes' (NPWJ, 2010, p.35). In the beginning, the Iranian regime limited the use of the Internet.

In 2004, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, the head of Iran's judiciary, one of the key coercive arms of the Iranian regime, denounced the Internet as a 'Trojan horse carrying enemy soldiers in its belly.' He announced new laws covering 'cyber crimes': anyone 'propagating against the regime, acting against national security, disturbing the public mind and insulting religious sanctities through computer systems or telecommunications will be punished,' he vowed (Berkeley, 2006, p.72).

Over time, having access to the Internet in Iran has become easier and cheaper. It has become more accessible and also more popular among different classes, especially those who are living in urban areas. Moreover, the Islamic regime's understanding of the Internet has changed slightly. This change was due to the election of President Mohammad Khatami, an Iranian reformist, and also because the Internet began to be used by the regime and religious sources as a tool to spread the regime's ideology and Islamic values. Nowadays, the state in Iran has its own laws and policies dealing with the Internet and social media. Its intervention to the cyberspace is both directly and indirectly; as it has its own weblogs and accounts, and also is designing sets of laws and regulations to limit the use of the Internet and cyber freedom, as well as has filtering and blocking programs. It filters many websites, especially those which have pornographic contents and publish anti-regime political discourses (St-Louis, 2010). The regime also filters social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Viber and WhatsApp (Abadi, 2010). Paradoxically, most Iranian politicians have and are active on social media. Furthermore, the regime interferes not only by blocking/filtering websites, but has also issued a decree related to the speed of the Internet at the end of 2006. According to this decree, "no Internet access to private homes could be of higher speed than 128 kilobit per second" (Cited from: Lundqvist, 2007, p.4).

Both filtering and blocking websites and social media has impacted negatively the access to new information, people's communication, and then activities in both virtual and real

sphere. However, Iranians have their own way of breaking filters. They usually use and apply software programs in order to overcome these obstacles. With regard to these barriers, Iranian cyberspace is active in the region. A good example of the significant role of the Internet and social media tools in the Iranian public sphere are the events of the Green Movement in 2009 (Clay, 2011). Nonetheless, control of the Internet after the Green Movement by the regime increased (Carrieri et al 2013). There were, and still are, heated debates about Iranian elections, the Iranian political system and other common sociopolitical issues. Most of these virtual debates use hashtags like #iranelection and #gr88 (Green Revolution 1388) (NPWJ, 2010).

Here, it can be noted that each hashtag has its own followers who discuss related matters and almost have the same view. For example, the regime's critics debate and protest under the hashtag #estebdad (Despotism). Nevertheless, the regime's supporters take part in debates under the hashtag #fetneh (Intrigue). There are several reasons for this. One could be analysed as the admins delete the unpleasant comments and/or block those who comment on their posts and are not on their side. Moreover, fans/followers try to increase the number of likes/comments of pages they favour and support them by leaving comments. Furthermore, when discussions involve politics and religion, social media users usually become more conservative; but, when it concerns other daily matters, they become open and more active. Hence, there are some social media accounts which seem to be less biased than others; these have more fans, as well as more discussions. What this might mean is that social media and the virtual sphere can embrace almost all divisions of Iranian society, but cannot gather a huge number of users with different thoughts in one account and/or under one hashtag. This makes the gap between different agents of the public sphere bigger, in terms of the virtual sphere; and also makes the discussions more radical, as there is more support and less criticism of an argument.

In their study of Iranian cyberspace entitled *'Mapping Iran's Online Public: Politics and Culture in the Persian Blogosphere'*, John Kelly and Bruce Etling (2008) try to understand Iranian politics and culture. They classify Iranian bloggers into four main groups which are secular/reformist, conservative/religious, Persian poet and mixed. They add that it could be easy to find Hezbollah members, Tehran teenagers, Qom students, Los Angeles artists, journalists, parliament members, politicians, and other Iranian individuals and groups in weblogs. Nevertheless, most of the website users have activities on the new social media websites too. By observing these, Kelly and Etling (2008) argue that as different agents of Iranian society use the Internet to express their own opinions and criticise the regime, the government also block weblogs, jail webloggers, etc.; however, cyberspace is still a better and safer space for Iranians' activities.

In relation to the above argument, it should be noted that the matter of anonymity could also help users to lie in discussing issues and expressing their opinions. It also, as Ubayasiri (2006) highlights, might increase extremism through comments and posts showing the darkest beliefs and prejudice which may lead to a kind of 'tyranny of the masses'. Moreover, in general, only analysing the virtual sphere is not enough to understand real Iranian society. This is because, usually, those who have access to the Internet are educated people, the middle classes, urban residents, and the modern generation. However, those who can represent another aspect of Iranian society are those who do not use the Internet, because of their beliefs or lack of access. Nonetheless, it is only a few years since the Internet, and especially social media, have become a tool for supporters of the Iranian regime. A fact that should not be ignored is that the majority of social media users are those who are not happy with the regime's philosophy and policy. These are trying to find a more open and freer space than the physical space in the real world. However, those who agree with the regime are doing what they want in the real spheres, more than in the

virtual sphere. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that Iranian cyberspace is mostly an arena for the Iranian opposition, more so than for the Iranian regime's supporters. Regardless of its quality, it could be argued that cyberspace in Iran is an active space. Furthermore, weblogs and social media have a part in activating the Iranian public sphere. As Kelly and Etling (2008) state:

The Iranian blogosphere supports a political discourse that is rich, contentious, and varied. A wide range of opinion is represented, on a large number of specific issues of concern to Iranians. Competing points of view are found on issues that are on the agenda of the international community, like human rights and nuclear development, and even more so on issues that are more salient to Iranians, like the economy, drug abuse, prostitution, and the environment (p.5).

Both state and society in Iran, as elsewhere, use the Internet and social media tools, and have an impact on each other. Society, by being more active in different spheres, attempts to have more impact on state policies. The state also tries to dominate and control cyberspace, including both the Weblogistan and social media spheres, for its own interests. Cyberspace, however, is much less controllable than the physical sphere and still an arena of conflict between state institutions and society's agents. Contemporary Iranian cyberspace, in fact, has become a new space for those who have no ability, time, freedom or courage in which to be active in the Iranian actual sphere. Generally, "young people more than old ones and females more than males are interested in using cyber social networks" (Shangapour et al, 2011, p.7). Cyberspace, in addition, has become another realm for the Iranians to appear, and their appearance on the Internet is different than it on streets (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2004).

The Internet, and especially the Weblogistan and social media tools, has been used by Iranians for different purposes. As an example, in 2015, all photos and news of Mohammad Khatami, former Iranian president and an active Iranian reformist, were banned from Iranian media, which is normally the state media. Khatami's supporters created a Facebook page, and also a Twitter account, named *we are becoming Khatami's media*. Thus, social media became a sphere to report his activities.

Moreover, Iranians use social media to post and spread their own views globally. In 2014, for instance, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, in describing the Iranian regime, stated that Iranians are not allowed to wear blue jeans by their regime. To answer this speech, a campaign was declared on the Iranian cyberspace (Weblogistan and social media). These activities included articles, jokes, and also photos of people wearing blue jeans in Iranian streets (independent.co.uk, 2013).

Because of the nature of the Iranian regime and society, cyberspace could be more useful for Iranian people than the real public sphere. It also could be more useful for them than for the people of other societies. This is why Iranian cyberspace, in comparison with some other countries, is more active. This activity of the Iranian cyberspace, at first glimpse, seems to be a positive phenomenon. However, regardless of its impact on activating the virtual and actual public sphere, the Internet makes people 'lazy' in physical spheres mostly because social media users usually *say* what they want to do instead of actually *doing* it (Morozov, 2011).

#### **6.4. Findings, Evaluations, and Conclusion**

This chapter has investigated and discussed the main vulnerabilities and potential of the Iranian public sphere. The fieldwork was conducted by emphasising the nature of Iranian

society, the personality and mentality of the Iranian individuals, and the private and public life of Iranians. This is because these are the main factors shaping Iranian society and have a role in reshaping the Iranian public sphere. Individuals, as the main components of Iranian society, were also considered as a theme to analyse.

Then, the chapter tried to explain and explore the nature of society as a whole. The method involved understanding society through its individuals and their private and public life. It enabled us to find out the nature of Iranian society, which affects the nature of its public sphere in both positive and negative ways. Generally, it was found that culture and the personality and mentality of Iranians play a significant role in shaping the Iranian public sphere. Nonetheless, in most cases, Iranian culture increases the vulnerabilities of the public sphere and decreases its activity.

In the second part of the analysis, there were attempts to figure out the potential of this society towards the public sphere's activities. There are arguments which claim that there is an undeniable will of society to be active, and it has potential to play role in reshaping the public sphere, as the state also has. However, on several occasions, the state's attempts to control society's domains have been counterproductive. This is with regard to the will of the state, in some cases, to have an active public sphere in Iran.

With regard to society's potential/will to be active, issues related to Iranian culture and Islamic values, again, have mutual impacts. In some cases, they are helpful and supportive; in some others, they are not. In general, the regime's limitations in public spaces make Iranian private and indoor spheres more free, open, creative, and active. These underground activities also have an impact on the public sphere, aboveground. Similarly, the difficulties of being and acting in the physical public sphere, again, make Iranian

Weblogistan and its virtual sphere free, open, creative, and active; this also has an impact on the real public sphere.

To sum up, it can be argued that the texture of Iranian sociopolitical culture is mainly due to the influences of Iranian/Persian civilization and the Islamic religion/Shi'i sub-religion. Nonetheless, both state and society in Iran are affected by religion. Thus, it is believed that, as Katouzian argues, in Iran both state and society were arbitrary (2003). Therefore, the matter of dominating the public sphere and controlling its agents is not only linked to the state, but to society, too. However, there are several tendencies inside both state and society which go against the main stream. Generally, the dimensions of Iranian culture, as distinguished by Abdolkarim Soroush, an Iranian Islamic thinker, could be classified into three main streams; national, religious and Western cultures (Farsoun & Mashayekhi, 1992).

The short-term nature of society, besides other sociopolitical and intellectual obstacles, has affected the structure of Iranian society (Katouzian, 2003/2004). It is also a reason for the absence of an active and developed civil society in Iran. This has become one of the most debated issues in the Iranian public sphere. Ironically, discussing the absence of a phenomenon is, indeed, spreading and strengthening its idea in the public sphere. In fact, the concept of civil society in Iran is understood by some Iranian politicians and intellectuals as something not related to Iran as an Islamic-Eastern society. As they argue, the Islamic state itself is the protector of civil rights and freedoms; thus there is no need to have a civil society. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that there is no need to have civil society's agents; but civil society should not be built against the state.

In Iran, state, society and individuals are also affected by historical oriental despotism and foreign interventions. The state's intervention in private spheres and the nature of society

and its patriarchal beliefs have affected the public sphere's activity. Nevertheless, the Iranian private sphere can be considered as a good potential for the public sphere. Furthermore, private agents, in private spheres, have rational-critical discussions and concern public-related issues. Consequently, understanding the Iranian private sphere is required to understand the Iranian public sphere as they embrace public-related activities too.

Moreover, Iranians have always had their own mechanisms with which to express and exchange their opinions on common matters. The activities of the Iranian public sphere started with the religious gatherings in the era of Safavids, then the events of the Constitutionalist Movement (1905-1911) and finally the Islamic Revolution (1978-1979). In all of these different phases, different methods were used to discuss common matters in a rational-critical way. It started by gathering in public places for religious purposes, occurring face-to-face dialogues, and then using newspapers, cassette tapes, and radio and television stations. Finally, the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere is relying on online spheres and is an Internet-based model.

The development of information and communication technology has made the 21<sup>st</sup> century model of the public sphere different to the 18<sup>th</sup> century one (Zubair-Khan et al, 2012). The Internet and social media offer a new space in which to form a new public sphere, which is not a face-to-face model of dialogues (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2009). The virtual sphere, moreover, in terms of activating the public sphere, regardless to its negative aspects, could be argued as a good potential for Iranian society. It has become a space for those who have no accessibility to the Iranian physical spheres. Both supporters and critics of the regime and all groups of Iranian society, especially women, youths, politicians, human rights activists, journalists and other groups are take part in the Iranian Weblogistan and other social media. Consequently, as Kelly and Etling (2008) argue:

If the Iranian blogosphere is a place where women speak out for their rights, young people criticize the moral police, journalists fight against censorship, reformists press for change, and dissidents press for revolution, it is also a place where the Supreme Leader is praised, the Holocaust denied, the Islamic Revolution defended, Hezbollah celebrated, Islamist student groups mobilized, and pro-establishment leaders, including President Ahmadinejad, reach out to their very real constituencies within the Iranian public (p.5).

Here, it is reasonable to argue that what is written in the Weblogistan does not reflect the whole of society. It, in fact, reflects only a part of it, which has access to the Internet and dares to share its opinion. In the case of Iran, it also should be added that Tehran is only the capital of Iran and not the whole of Iran. Thus, what is posted on social media websites is mostly related to Tehran which is different from the other Iranian cities, especially in terms of the freedoms which its residents exercise. This could be because of different reasons such as the presence of a big number of students and educated people, its large population which is not controllable easily, etc.

To conclude, it can be argued that in most cases religion, culture, regime, mentality, social media, etc. have mutual impacts on the public sphere. Nonetheless, the Iranian public sphere, as a multi-level, multi-model, and multi-agent sphere, has remarkable number of activities in both real and virtual public spheres. The Iranian public sphere's potential also let it to play role in reshaping and renewing itself. Iranian society, also, could be seen as a vibrant society which always has its own methods to adapt new circumstances.

# Chapter 7 Conclusion

## **7.1. Introduction**

The public sphere is one of the most challenging topics which has not been addressed completely, yet. That is mainly because of the continuous changes which are occurring within its structure and change its nature. Moreover, it is different from an era to another one, and also from an area to another one. Iran also remains under-researched in many aspects by social scientists, namely its contemporary public sphere. These make the public sphere and the Iranian public sphere an important area for study. The present study has tried to understand the concept of the public sphere firstly. Secondly, it tried to describe, discuss and analyse the nature, vulnerabilities and potential of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 through analysing the most affective agents in reshaping the public sphere, which are state and society. Here, the study has its own significance as its application is only on the public sphere, not other related concepts or theories such as civil society, social movements, human rights, democratisation, etc.

The thesis has tried to obtain its aims as contributing to the body of knowledge of Iranian public sphere studies, setting up and answering several questions, and discussing several hypotheses. The research questions are mainly related to the nature of the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution and the role of the state and society in reshaping it. Its hypothesis, nonetheless, is that there is the possibility of having an active public sphere in a society ruled by a non-democratic system, as the regime cannot disable society and dominate all of its spaces. These were all achieved by conducting a suitable methodology for the research. The method used was thematic analysis in the frame of qualitative analysis,

benefited from both primary and secondary data, and with the use of visual data which is mostly retrieved from online materials.

By conducting the mentioned methodology in such a structure, the thesis has obtained several results. As each chapter has been summed up in a section, this chapter summarises the findings and evaluations of the whole thesis.

## ***7.2. The Concept of the Public Sphere***

The study has tried to answer several questions which one of them is related to the concept of the public sphere. It tried to understand the concept of the public sphere through rethinking the public sphere in a way that is more suitable to understand its application in contemporary Iran. According to the data, which has been collected and analysed, it is concluded that the public sphere is where, real and/or virtual, which the agents of society act in it, aimed at finding common good through having rational-critical discussions.

Nevertheless, the public sphere is a place or a space in which to do something meaningful with clear targets. It is concerned with forming public opinion in order to find a common good. It, in fact, concerns individual's freedom and performance, too. The public sphere is as a mechanism towards achieving a good/free life for the agents of society. Thus, it can be understood as an arena for society's agents, including individuals, groups and institutions, in which to practise liberty and seek for the common good through rational-critical discussions. It can cover the agents of both state and society, as their activities are occurring inside the public sphere.

Here, it can be concluded that there are preconditions for a proper public sphere. The public sphere's basic preconditions are the presence of a public arena, several active agents, rational-critical discussions, and seeking the common good. It should be, and also should stay, public. Publicity, more than other conditions, can help the sphere of society to obtain

its goals. However, the main threat on the publicity of the spheres is privatism and statism, which are seen in non-democratic political settings.

Nowadays, as a result of the revolution of information and communication technologies, individuals play role at different levels of the public sphere. Not just local, national and supranational, but also can play role at the global level of the public sphere. They take part in global-related issues, namely environmental issues like global warming. Nonetheless, all individuals do not have an equal opportunity in the public sphere, and this is because different political systems/ideologies and different societies/cultures have made different models of the public sphere. In fact, different regimes and societies, in different areas and eras, are reshaping different models of the public sphere. They can be classified as active-strong [which has activities and can change], active-weak [has activities but cannot bring change], and passive-weak [has no activities and cannot change] models of the public sphere. It is obvious that the actions and functions of each one are different.

### ***7.3. The Applications of the Concept of the Public Sphere in Iran***

The roots of the Iranian public sphere are linked to the Shi'i religious events in the era of the Safavids. The Safavids decided to make Shi'ism the official religion of the state, and made Muharram a public event that occurred in the public places. The most outstanding feature of these events is that they were related to state and religious matters. However, after Safavids, in the era of the Qajars, issuing newspapers, huge events such as the Tobacco Protests and the Constitution Movement played an important role in developing the public sphere. These public events could be distinguished from the previous ones as they were based on public opinion, and were conducted by people - not the state, against the monarchical regime, and linked to the people and related to the political issues, not religious

matters. Then, in the era of the Pahlavis, the nature of the public sphere changed dramatically. The White Revolution transferred the Iranian public sphere into a new phase, as the regime tried to make the country more modernised, industrialised, Westernised and secularised.

After the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian public sphere experienced a different model of the public sphere. From 1979 until today, there were ups and downs in terms of the public sphere's activity/passivity. Nonetheless, in all eras, the public sphere stayed as a sphere with the intervention of the state, in order to make it more Islamised. Nowadays, Iran is experiencing a contemporary style of the public sphere. This is with the help of the new information and communication technologies, especially with the appearance of Weblogistan, spread of weblogs, social media tools, and smart phones. Today, Iran, beside the actual public sphere, has an active virtual sphere too. Iranian cyberspace has become a sphere for/of different Iranian agents, especially those who are not allowed to be in, or have no access to the actual sphere. Here, NGOs, journalists, feminists, environmentalists, and human right activists all are appearing beside the radical and religious agents.

The nature of the Iranian public sphere originated from the history of Iranian society that is also affected by all of what happened there through history. Political regimes - because of their material power, and religion - because of its spiritual power, have a bigger role in re/shaping the Iranian culture and formulating the mentality of Iranian individuals. Moreover, there is a mutual impact between culture and the socioeconomic and political systems of society. Additionally, individual-based activities will also affect the culture and participate in reforming the public sphere.

The nature of the state and society in Iran maps the nature of the public sphere's activities. Thus, understanding the Iranian public sphere requires understanding the Iranian state and

society. Iran, as a country and also as a state, has experienced different historical eras until reaching this one. Its culture, because of those factors that took part in reshaping it, is quite complex. Iranian individuals, also, because of all of those domestic and foreign factors that affect their psyche, are also quite complex. Nonetheless, it is plausible to argue that Iranian society is not that barbaric and is not that democratic, but a mixture of different characteristics. There are, in fact, state's attempts to make Iran more Islamised, and also society's attempts to make it democratic.

#### **7.4. The Islamic Revolution of 1979**

The era of the Islamic Revolution (1978-79) can be argued as the era of the structural transformation of the public sphere, includes change of the regime and constitution. It is characterised by as the significant role that religion and clergymen played in it. Furthermore, post-revolutionary Iran is recognised as a patriarchy – in terms of gender and social affairs; and a religious one – in terms of the regime itself, law, education, etc.; and closed one – in terms of domestic and foreign policies.

One of the most influential events in the modern and contemporary history of Iran is its Islamic Revolution. It also can be called the *only* revolution which happened in Iranian history; as it could transform structures of Iranian society, change the dominant ideology, and also change the monarchy to an Islamic republic (Arjomand, 1986; Skocpol, 1998). Nonetheless, nearly all of the other events in Iranian history were only movements, revolts, coups, etc. Additionally, the Islamic regime could not be totally free from the impact of the legacy of previous regimes. The Islamic Revolution, furthermore, has been institutionalised to be an institute of governance alongside the republic/government. It is trying to change/Islamise nearly all substructures, if not all infrastructures, of the Iranian regime and

its society. The supreme leader of Iran, for example, is known as the supreme leader of the revolution at the same time. Thus, it can be argued that the Islamic Revolution in Iran is started from 1979 and continued until now.

The Islamic Revolution, briefly, changed not only the structures of affairs related to the public, such as the constitution, but changed the lifestyle of Iranian people too. The Islamic regime, as the most fundamental outcomes of the revolution, is continuing to carry out influential acts in regard to both private and public spheres. Yet, for instance, enforcing hijab is considered a revolutionary act. In fact, the Islamic Revolution is still able to boost itself and reformulate the Iranian regime and society. This makes studying the Iranian public sphere significant.

In the period of the revolution, because of the power vacuum, the collapse of the old order and non-establishment of the new one, a semi-democratic [or an anarchical] sphere created worthwhile opportunities in terms of political and ideological debates and dialogues (Halliday, 1980). This was not because of the desire of the Islamic Revolutionary forces, but because of the lack of a controlling authority and organised institutions (Bill, 1982). The revolution itself was a great phenomenon and a suitable matter for activating the public spheres. It also became a phenomenon for encouraging the agents of society to discuss matters of revolution, governance, freedoms, justice, human rights, and other matters related to the common good. It was, indeed, an event that reintegrated the Iranian peoples and classes seeking for common good. Nowadays, even the events of the Islamic Revolution, its missions, agents, forces, and its outcomes are still arguable matters for the agents of the Iranian public sphere.

### **7.5. The Role of the Regime in the Iranian Public Sphere**

As the research has asked about the nature of the Iranian public sphere, according to its analyses, the regime has an impact in reshaping the principal characteristics of the public sphere. In terms of vulnerabilities, to some extent, the Iranian public sphere has been Islamised, controlled, disciplined, and dominated by the Islamic regime. The regime uses its soft and hard powers in order to occupy the public and make it serve of the regime, revolution and Islam. In fact, the regime's interventions have transcended the public spheres, and entered into private ones, too. While the regime argues that people accept it; however, people sees it as a limitation for its activities.

The role and impact of both the state and religion are apparent in both private and public life of Iranians. Regardless of their marginal role in activating the Iranian public sphere in an indirect way, regime and religion made the public sphere vulnerable and powerless in terms of being more public and active. The Iranian regime, in fact, because of its nature, power and geopolitics, has an impact on reshaping the public sphere more than anything else. The regime, *per se*, is not a kind of democratic regime. It also does not hide its task to be a tool of God, Imam, or religion. It follows Shari'a to guide people towards *the right way*, in order to attain God's satisfaction. It is a worldly regime with worldly and otherworldly tasks and missions. Moreover, it is not a fully theocratic regime, but is a *sui generis* regime. It enjoys various characteristics related to the religion of Islam, sub-religion of Shi'a and Iranian culture. It also involves some totalitarian, post-totalitarian, authoritarian, and also democratic tendencies. All of these have impacted the Iranian public sphere too.

Furthermore, the patriarchal features of both tradition and religion have an impact on the nature of the regime and its ideology. Thus, the regime itself also could be described as a patriarchal one, which discriminates against gender. Here, it can be argued that gender discrimination has become a pattern for other kinds of discrimination against other social

elements because of their identity, ideology, religion, language and ethnicity. Consequently, there is a lack of dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslim/secular agents, which is a requirement for activating the public sphere (Habermas, 2006; Kadivar, 2008). These discriminations and separations have weakened the activity of the agents of the public sphere.

The regime, by promoting and preferring idealism over realism, romanticism over rationalism, immortality [otherworld] over mortality [world] and other religious and clerical values, makes the public sphere to be not active enough. Moreover, the absence of a suitable atmosphere in which to express opinions, criticise what is happening, discuss what is wanted, and organise common and popular [not formal] acts, again has impacted the public sphere's activity in a negative way. However, the regime's argument in doing so is that, all of what it does is for the sake of God and the people.

In fact, the state's limitation of the activities of the public sphere by using both soft and hard power has not totally disabled the Iranian public sphere. These limitations are, *per se*, a reason for having a number of rational-critical activities in the public sphere. However, what is more interesting is that most of those activities are fruitless. This is mainly because of the state's apathy in responding their appeals. During the last three decades, there are lots of fruitless activities, but only a few examples of fruitful activities in the Iranian public sphere. Those activities are mostly related to university students, women and human rights activists. The newest and biggest public activity was the Green Movement in 2009, which was an unsuccessful movement and could not bring any changes by its activities in actual and virtual spheres (Dabashi, 2011b). This means that the most of the Iranian public sphere's activities are ineffective. Therefore, the Iranian public sphere could be considered as an active, but at the same time, weak public sphere.

On the other hand, the Islamic regime, in some aspects, increases the potential of the Iranian public sphere. The regime's support for the Iranian public sphere is an important issue. It considers the public as a source for its power, popularity, and acceptance/legitimacy. These include both domestic and foreign dimensions of the state's policy. Iran has always been criticised by states and the INGOs especially for human rights violations. Thus, the regime tries to show Iranian society as an alive and active one with lots of activities indicating freedom of expression and liberty. The regime is also benefited by this policy inside Iran. This is an attempt to 'calm down' Iranian agents. These are also becoming the regime's response to those who criticise the lack of freedom in Iranian society. In order to activate the public sphere, the regime usually supports religious gatherings, national rallies and political events. Nonetheless, its attempts are not aimed at creating a suitable or democratic atmosphere in which rational-critical discussions can occur. It is, in fact, aimed at using the power of the public sphere to serve its own benefit, popularity and acceptance/legitimacy.

Overall, the regime is not totally successful in dominating the public and private spheres. There are still lots of activities in both private and public areas [*zirzamini*: underground and *sarzamini*: aboveground]. Furthermore, globalisation, hegemony of liberal values, global economic developments, new generation of communication tools, and other outcomes of the information and communication revolution, especially social media tools, mostly serve peoples more than regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Hence, the Iranian public sphere is not developed enough, but it also can be considered as a dynamic one. Ironically, the regime, with its ideology and plans, is not the only obstacle at the front of being active and exerting freedoms in public. Society, however, has also its own negative/positive impacts on the Iranian public sphere's activity and strength. In fact, both the state and society have been impacted by socioeconomic and political circumstances. There are tendencies in both the

state and society, which try to limit the public sphere and make its agents passive. In Iran, the public by law and the private by tradition are limited (Taheri, 1990). Consequently, the regime does not reshape the Iranian public sphere alone. Society also has a significant role in helping the regime apply its own ideology, or in criticising it.

### ***7.6. The Role of Society in the Iranian Public Sphere***

The research has tried to discover and discuss the main vulnerabilities and potential of the Iranian public sphere, which are related to Iranian society, its agents and individuals. For this, the research has tried to clarify the nature of society through analysing the personality and mentality of Iranian individuals. Generally, what is achieved is that Iranian culture and the personality and mentality of its individuals are playing a significant role in shaping the public sphere. Nonetheless, it should be noted that in various cases, Iranian culture is increasing the vulnerabilities of the public sphere and causing it to be passive more than active. However, there are arguments which suggest that Iranian society has the desire and ability to activate and strengthen the public sphere.

Generally, it can be said that the success of society in activating the public sphere is linked to the suitability of both the regime's policies and society's culture. In some cases, they are helpful and supportive; in some others, they are not. Ironically, the regime's limitations in public make Iranian private spheres more free, open, creative, and active. The activities of the private sphere also have an impact on the public sphere's activity. Similarly, the difficulties of being and acting in the physical public sphere, again, make Iranian Weblogistan and its virtual sphere more free, open, creative, and active, which is also having impact on the real public sphere.

The texture of Iranian sociopolitical culture is influenced by Iranian/Persian civilization and Islamic religion/Shi'i sub-religion. According to an Iranian Islamic thinker, Abdolkarim Soroush, the dimensions of the Iranian culture can be classified into national, religious and Western cultures (Farsoun & Mashayekhi, 1992). Nonetheless, both state and society in Iran are affected by religion. Homa Katouzian (2003) argues that both state and society are arbitrary. Therefore, the matter of deactivating the public sphere and controlling its agents is not only linked to the state, but to society, too. However, there are several tendencies inside both state and society which go against the mainstream.

Different Iranian subcultures, moreover, are characterised by the traits of a short-term society. The short-term nature of society, beside other sociopolitical and intellectual obstacles, has affected the structure of Iranian society and is a cause of the absence of an active and developed civil society in Iran. The absence of an active civil society, as an important part of the public sphere's agents, itself, has become one of the most debated issues in the Iranian public sphere. Ironically, to some extent, this is activating and strengthening the public sphere. In fact, the concept of civil society in Iran is understood by some Iranian politicians and intellectuals as something not related to Iran as an Islamic-Eastern society. They argue that Islamic state itself is the protector of civil rights and freedoms; thus there is no need to have a civil society (Eftekhari, 1999).

In Iran, the state, society and individuals are affected by historical oriental despotism, foreign interventions, and religion. It, in fact, makes the public sphere more vulnerable and decreases its activity. The non-democratic values inside both political and sociocultural systems also play a negative role in the public sphere. Regardless to these mentioned reasons, the Iranian private sphere, as a productive sphere, has increased the potential of Iranian society in terms of the public sphere's activity. Moreover, Iranians always have had their own mechanisms which to express and exchange their opinions on common matters.

Discussing common matters in a rational-critical way began by gathering in public places for religious purposes and then using newspapers, cassette tapes, and radio and television stations. Finally, the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere is mostly based on cyberspace and is an Internet-based model.

The development of information and communication technology has resulted in lots of differences between the 21<sup>st</sup> century model of the public sphere and the 18<sup>th</sup> century one (Zubair-Khan et al, 2012). As the face-to-face model of dialogues in the actual public sphere has been lessened, the Internet and social media offer a new virtual sphere for online dialogues (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2009). The virtual sphere, moreover, in terms of activating the public sphere, regardless to its negative aspects, could be argued an advantageous tool. It has become a space for those who do not have accessibility to the physical spheres. Both supporters and critics of the regime and all other groups of Iranian society, especially women, youths, politicians, human rights activists and journalists take part in the Iranian Weblogistan and social media (Kelly & Etling, 2008).

Here, it is reasonable to argue that what is written on Weblogistan does not reflect the whole of society. It, in fact, reflects only the online part of society which has access to the Internet and dares to share its opinion. Offline Iran, however, is a more crucial part of society which also has its own agents in the public sphere. Furthermore, online Iran mostly reflects Tehran city, which is only a part of Iran, not the whole of Iran. Tehran is quite different from other Iranian cities, especially in terms of the freedoms which its residents practise. Tehran, in fact, is different from Iran, just as Qom, the most religious Iranian city, is also different. Tehran could be compared with China's Hong-Kong in terms of being more open, free and active than other parts of the country. This is partly because of its large population which is not easily controllable, and also because of the large number of educated people who are living there.

To sum up, it could be argued that political and sociocultural structures of Iranian society have impacts on the Iranian public sphere in both positive and negative ways. Nonetheless, there are lots of activities that occur at different levels of the Iranian public sphere. Its actual and virtual public sphere is also an active one. These activities mostly are come from the Iranian society, whose culture is rooted in its long history and is a vital one. The agents of Iranian society are also characterised by their potential in using contemporary methods and tools of communication.

### ***7.7. The Contemporary Style of the Iranian Public Sphere***

The study aimed to find out the nature of the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere, and it found that it is linked to the era of the Islamic republic of Iran. It also could not be described as a pure result of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, as the new information and communication technologies also had role in transforming the structures in the Iranian public sphere. The main characteristic of the contemporary Iranian public sphere is that it is an Internet-based model, as well as still involves religious and traditional characteristics. Ironically, the new information and communication technologies have been used to illustrate and spread the old version of ideas, arguments, and events. It also has been used for organising religious and traditional events in public places. In 2014, for example, there was an application, called *Nazri-Yab*, to install on smart phones to find the places and events of *Ashura* gatherings in Tehran (nazriyab.com, 2015). However, Iranian individuals also use new technologies to challenge the regime's applied policies in society. For instance, *Gershad* is an application to install on smart phones to show where the moral police is located and has checkpoints. This helps people to avoid passing roads and streets where moral police is there and looking for bad-hijabs (gershad.com, 2016).

Nonetheless, the contemporary Iranian public sphere is still influenced by the historical events of the Shi'i tradition, Iranian old civilization, and the classic lifestyle. Consequently, the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere is not totally different to the modern and classic version. It can be argued that new information and communication technologies just added something new, without removing the essential features of the original Iranian public sphere. This makes the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere a multi-model one, as well as a multi-level one. It still uses classic and modern tools and methods – such as the use of mosques, Husseiniyehs, coffeehouses, newspapers, street theatres, etc. It is also still fed by classic and modern issues such as the annual remembrance of the Battle of Karbala of 680 AD, the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979, the events of the Iran-Iraq war, etc.

Another important characteristic of the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere is that it has a dynamic nature. Always, the agents of the Iranian public sphere could play their role and be active in common issues. They have tried to cope with new circumstances and been partly successful. The dynamism of the Iranian public sphere is related to both its theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, with regard to the limitation of having access to information and news, they always tried to be aware about public policies and common issues. This encouraged them to have rational-critical debates and also to have activities in public places. Practically, with regard to the limitations, they have tried to cope with new tools and methods for expressing their opinion, namely, Internet-based ones.

Another feature of the contemporary style of the Iranian public sphere is that most of its activities are occurring in virtual spheres. There are various reasons that make cyberspace more active and even more public. Unlike the real and actual spheres, such as newspapers, TVs, coffeehouses and streets, Weblogistan and social media tools cannot be recognised, controlled, disciplined, and blocked easily. They offer more freedom, less cost, more safety

and less risk to all of those who have access to it. It gives more equal opportunities to everyone who takes part in it. As users can hide their real identity, Weblogistan and social media could become a space to express opinions and argue matters which are not allowed to be expressed and argued in the real public spaces. Nevertheless, even if those matters were allowed to be discussed in public spheres, the nature of the discussions in both online and real public spaces will be different. Nowadays, the virtual public sphere's activities are mostly related to society. However, activities in the actual spheres are mostly related to the state. In other words, society's agents in cyberspace and the state's agents in public places are dominant. Nevertheless, the Internet-based model of the public sphere could be considered as an appropriate model for the activities for both the state and society.

Social media and online spheres, as discussed before, cannot represent all classes and groups of society. Cyberspace, in fact, does not represent the whole society, but only its online part. Moreover, social media users cannot always be argued as real people and their ideas also cannot be described the fact of their thoughts. That is mainly because namelessness and facelessness of some social media users, encourage them to write what they want with no responsibility. Nowadays, because of the presence of different groups, the online sphere is not only for liberals, but for religious and fundamental people too.

Religion, as an essential aspect in the daily lives of Iranian individuals and also as a base for the regime's ideology, is playing a significant role in reshaping the Iranian public sphere. As is known, the Iranian public sphere events began when the regime asked people to gather for religious rituals. In this sentence, three main elements of the Iranian public sphere are illustrated, which are regime, society, and religion. During different periods of the Iranian political history, religion was/is a pivotal issue for different Iranian regimes. Once, there were attempts to isolate realign and clergy; and once there were attempts to make them dominant. Nowadays, with the regime's enhancement of religion in all aspects of the

sociopolitical life of Iranians, religion has become a more challenging notion in the public sphere. In fact, most of the activities in actual public spaces, as they are supported by the regime, have a religious flavour, even if they are not purely about the religious issues. Hence, criticising the religion and religious issues are forbidden in real public sphere. Almost all anti-religion and anti-religious activities occur in the virtual public sphere. Here, religion has a role in shaping the Iranian public sphere. It has also become a matter for common concern and the most debatable issue – as it is considered as a source of Iranian’s happiness/misfortune by different Iranian agents.

The Iranian contemporary public sphere is a multi-level and multi-model one. The Iranian public sphere’s activity embraces all macro, micro, national and global levels. There are public places with public activities related to an issue related to a village, town, city or the whole country, and even the globe. The Day of Quds, Jerusalem, which is the last Friday of Ramadan, is a good example for the global level of the Iranian public sphere’s activities. Every year, that day is a huge public event across the country to support the Palestine people against Israel and Zionism. Usually, state-supported activities are linked with political and religious matters. However, society-supported activities are linked with the matters like human rights, environmentalism, journalist activists, university students, judiciary issues, and the like. Ironically, approximately all of the society-supported activities were not successful. Consequently, it can be discoursed that in terms of their quality, the Iranian public sphere’s activities, mostly, are fruitless and have no impact on the regime’s policies. The Green Movement is a good example of the Iranian public sphere’s activity and weakness.

In fact, there are misleading tendencies in various studies, media channels, and political speeches in describing the Iranian regime and society. There are also various reasons for exaggerating the human rights violations in Iran. There are people which their attempts

targeting Iranians, Shi'ism, and the Islamic republic. Besides, all cannot fully understand the Iranian regime and Iranians due to different reasons. The most apparent reason is that there are tendencies that consider the 'West' as the role model for all in politics and life; and also considering the rest just as 'rest'. To investigate the Iranian regime they use democratic measures and to examine Shi'ism they use secular measures. This, moreover, made understanding the nature of the Iranian public sphere complex. Believing in enforcing Iran and Iranians to follow non-Iranian models cannot be helpful to understand the real Iran. Discovering Iran, indeed, needs an in-depth understanding of Iran as it is.

### ***7.8. Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research***

The research, by setting up and answering several questions, collecting and analysing data through conducting qualitative methodology, has tried to obtain its aims and objectives. It has achieved several findings, as discussed in this and the previous chapters, which can be described as a small contribution to the knowledge. What the research has provided is a whole image of the Iranian public sphere, through analysing various themes. It also has provided a whole image of the Iranian public sphere which is something new in the literature. In this way, the research has made the gap smaller. Besides, with the use of some data collected from the micro levels of the Iranian public sphere, the Iranian undergrounds and private spheres were investigated. Further, several problematic issues related to the models, levels and applications of the concept of the public sphere in Iran have been clarified. In doing so, the research has offered a new understanding of the Iranian public sphere, including its state and society. That is through analysing them in an original perspective, based on the concept of the public sphere itself rather than other criteria.

More importantly, Iran is being used as a case study to understand the operation of the public sphere in a non-democratic system. The concept of the public sphere, moreover, is being used to describe contemporary Iran. The thesis argues that the public sphere is not something related to only certain regimes and societies, but also to others, even non-democratic regimes, too – albeit in a different model. Furthermore, democracy does not necessarily activate the public sphere, and non-democratic regimes do not have enough power to deactivate society completely. Iran, which is ruled by a non-democratic system, possesses an active public sphere. The Iranian regime itself is playing an important role in reshaping, and even activating, the public sphere having activities in the name of itself and/or in the name of its people. Besides, there is a good potential for Iranian society to play an active role in the public sphere. Overall, the Iranian public sphere can be measured as an active, but also weak one. Accordingly, it can be stated that activity does not necessarily mean strength. To sum up, the thesis will be helpful and useful for scholars who are going to understand and study the Iranian public sphere after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Finally, the research has several recommendations and directions for scholars for further applications and research. One of those eras which are believed that needs to be more analysed is the functions of the Iranian cyberspace. This is because of its significant role in the contemporary Iranian public sphere, as well as civil society and social movements. In the present research, it has partly been discussed and analysed. However, it was not central to the study, as providing a whole image of the Iranian public sphere was. This recommended study can be done using a comparative method, comparing the quality of the activities of the Iranian social media, for example, with a democratic/developed country. Moreover, the thesis did not try to offer solutions for the Iranian public sphere's

vulnerabilities, as it was not its aim. Thus, further research is necessary, aimed at finding ways of activating and also strengthening the Iranian public sphere.

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