

CHAPTER ONE

EMERGING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, VICTORIES, AND SETBACKS IN THE BATTLE FOR RIGHTS

Iran is experiencing one of the most dynamic periods of its recent history. Change is occurring in all spheres of life. A powerful movement for reform has emerged. Tired of the old order, seeking a free life, energized by the new discourse of change, ordinary people have broken their silence, joined together by the millions, and created a formidable challenge to the Islamic state. Defying the suffocating behavioral demands of political Islam, they seek the privatization of religion through their bold everyday actions. They demand freedom from religious codes of conduct, repression of thoughts, and limitation of individual rights.

Alongside the grassroots movement for reform, a group within the state has questioned the Islamic Republic's past, its place in the world, and its road ahead. An official movement for reform has emerged within the Islamic state. Finding the earlier project of the Islamic Republic incompatible with the dominant global politico-economic and cultural/technological imperative, a group from within the state has called for abandoning the old order, and embracing a new Islamic state imbedded in the rational synthesis of modernity and tradition. Facing a population hostile to strict Islamic cultural values and a world increasingly shaped by the new technological and information revolution, they seek the modernization of Iran's economic and political structures and the adaptation of the Islamic Republic to the new order. They call for the

restructuring of the relationship between religion and the state, and the rationalization of the role of Islam in society.¹

The official movement for reform is struggling to create a new Islamic Republic—a democratic Islamic state. They seek the building of an Islamic state with a human face—a new Islamic Republic accepted by youth, disempowered women, and citizens tired of two decades of religious monitoring of the most private aspects of their lives. The movement for reform is penetrating the inner soul of Iranian society, becoming institutionalized, changing the dominant political culture, and making a lasting imprint. Perceptions are changing. A sense of empowerment is emerging. Restricted by the entrenched power of the supporters of the old order, attacked and slowed down by the limitations of the official movement, reform is nevertheless taking place. Young people, the urban poor, struggling wage earners, men and women are pushing the limits of the official movement for reform, testing the commitment of the old architects of the Islamic state to the project of reform.

The project of creating a society based on Islamic values and codes of conduct is being challenged by the children of the Islamic Republic, youths with no memory of the old cultural paradigm, the generation born and raised under the Islamic state. Two decades of violent enforcement of Islamic values have led to the emergence of a powerful grassroots movement for the right to live a free life. All attempts to isolate Iranian youth from the increasing flow of global information have failed. A generation of young Iranians is emerging under the influence of the globally dominant youth culture. The Islamic state is most seriously challenged by its own creation—the children of the Islamic Republic. Cultural “deviance” is becoming a norm. All that was condemned, scorned, and banned is becoming dominant. The cultural project of the Islamic state is defeated. It is becoming history.

Politically, the theocracy is being weakened from within. Its own architects are questioning its viability in a modern world. It is a system, in the view of some within the state, unfit to fulfill the requirements of a state in a modern society. The system is archaic. It leads to stagnation and demise. It has to be reformed. The early antagonism to the West and the East must be replaced with the “dialogue of civilizations.” Isolationism is being abandoned for coexistence, pluralism in international relations. Angry faces and words are being replaced with smiling faces and a plea for dialogue. Burning the U.S. flag is scorned and repudiated by those who occupied the U.S. embassy in 1980.

THE 1997 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION—
A NEW CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

On May 23, 1997, more than twenty million Iranians poured into the voting stations and defeated Mohammad Nategh-Nouri, the presidential candidate of Iran's "supreme leader," Ayatollah Khamenei, and the dominant political circles within the state. The unprecedented victory of Mohammad Khatami in the 1997 presidential election was the result of a spontaneous and grassroots effort by ordinary people who defied all expected behavior, organizing a most energetic and vibrant campaign after eighteen years of apathy and hopelessness. The election created a new sense of activism, hope, and trust in the power of ordinary people to change the existing order. It replaced the fear and hopelessness of the past with courage and enthusiasm about the future.

Mohammad Khatami's electoral victory was the result of an informal coalition that included millions of women, youths, intellectuals, journalists, writers, artists, clergy, technocrats, and members of the propertied classes, as well as a broad spectrum of individuals advocating some notion of democracy and justice. Despite their different political, economic, and ideological perspectives, diverse and antagonistic social forces and classes united around Khatami's platform. They voted for the creation of a civil society and a government of law, freedom of association and political parties, citizens' right to the privacy of their own space, protection against widespread lawlessness and the violence of the police and armed gangs.

The presidential election was a revolt from below and an open outcry against the institutionalization of people's disempowerment. The defeat of Mohammad Nategh-Nouri was a profound challenge to the political structure set up by the Islamic Republic. It reflected ordinary people's defiance and rejection of the *faghib*—the supreme leader—a quiet revolt against an institution that, situated above all branches of the state, had the power to issue enforceable decrees, nullify legislated law, and act as the commander in chief. The vote against Mohammad Nategh-Nouri proved the people's open opposition to this most sacred institution of the Islamic Republic. May 23, 1997, was a vote for the "republic" and against the *velayat-e faghib* (Supreme Islamic Jurisconsult), a public protest against all that was sacred in the Islamic Republic.

The election was a peaceful referendum against the political, social, and cultural system set up by the Islamic Republic. It was a

vote of no confidence for the system's central tenet through the rejection of Mohammad Nategh-Nouri, his candidate of choice. The vote for Khatami was, indeed, a vote against Mohammad Nategh-Nouri, and a vote against the supreme leader.

The presidential election on May 23, 1997, was a quiet revolution for rights on the part of the ordinary people. It was a revolt against eighteen years of violence, of random attacks on youths and women by bands of bearded men armed with clubs and knives, of teenage boys and girls randomly rounded up and detained without reason, and of frightened mothers in search of their missing children.

The presidential election of May 23, 1997, was the beginning of a popular call for rights and the rule of law. The youths' and citizens' latent protest against the *faghib* and the Islamic Republic became a classic street riot later in July 1999. Protest through voting escalated into an open war between young people, on the one hand, and the *faghib* and his loyalists, on the other hand. The events of July 1999 were a warning to the Islamic state that, for the children of the Islamic Republic, voting stations were only the first step on the road to achieving their demands. The children of the Islamic Republic, who had no memory of the 1979 revolution, were prepared to reproduce that experience, this time against the Islamic Republic.

While capturing the imagination of youth and energizing a large section of the population, the 1997 election was also a sign of spreading fractures within the Islamic Republic and the political divide among social forces and groups that shared power for nearly two decades. The victory of Mohammad Khatami and the emergence of a movement for reform from within the state brought into the open the Islamic Republic's political divide. Factional battles were waged using legal and extralegal methods, force and brutality. A crisis emerged. A seemingly united state was splintered into fighting factions, each accusing the others of "betraying Islam," and "weakening the revolution." Twenty years after its victory, the Islamic Republic was shaken by a battle from within. Established practices and policies were questioned. A new future was mapped out. The old and new stood in a haunting competition for control of the Islamic Republic. The competition for hegemony reached a scope and dimension observed only in the formative years of the Islamic Republic.

The election was a struggle fought over different interpretations of the constitution, the institution of the *faghib*, and the republic. While Mohammad Nategh-Nouri and others called for the creation of a Society of Islamic Justice, ruled entirely by the *faghib* and the

clergy, others rallied behind Khatami's campaign for a civil society and the strengthening of the republic. Mohammad Khatami's campaign was a call for a rationalized bourgeois civil society within the premises of the Islamic Republic. The support for Mohammad Khatami and his platform by politically powerful and influential groups and individuals reflected a questioning of existing political and social structures and practices from above. It reflected the resurfacing of the power divide relating to the nature of the Islamic Republic, its position within the world community, its future, and its methods of survival. The election was an open manifestation of different paths perceived by the architects of the Islamic Republic about its future—the end of oneness and a crisis from above.

The 1997 election heightened the questioning of the past by those loyal to the Islamic Republic. Tensions rose higher in the following months. Defiant public statements appeared, and old loyalists questioned the Islamic Republic, demanding reform—a demand for change by the architects of the Islamic Republic. “We cannot proceed in the new world by having two or three people making decisions for the country. ‘Republic’ means the government of the people. . . . We have the ‘*velayat-e faghih*’ mentioned in our constitution. But this does not mean that he runs everything,” said Ayatollah Montazeri, who had been instrumental in installing the concept of the *faghih* in the constitution, a powerful clergyman once appointed by the late Ayatollah Khomeini as his heir.

Ayatollah Montazeri's anti-*faghih* sermon was a lecture delivered to a group of seminary students in the city of Qom. The complete tape of the lecture was leaked out and its contents appeared in the press. Violence erupted in Qom. Montazeri's residence was ransacked on November 19, 1997, and his house was seized by a mob of hundreds as the “seizure of the second spy net in the hands of the *Hezbollah*.”²² For days following the attack in Qom, the nation witnessed the outpouring of statements, public proclamations, interviews, and press articles by leading figures of the Islamic Republic about the role and importance of *velayat-e faghih*. But the outpouring of supportive statements and harsh words against the opponents of *velayat-e faghih* itself was a reflection of a need to defend publicly an institution that was once beyond questioning and did not require a defense in the public arena. It reflected the emergence of a new reality and the need to rally forces to save and fortify a pillar of the Islamic Republic. In the eyes of the public, this was a sign of the weakening of the system. Thus, the challenge would continue

throughout the months to come.³ The state's political divide widened. Challenges to the *faghib* led eventually to the public rejection of the official narrative of the revolution by the loyalists and pillars of the Islamic Republic.

"With the victory of the revolution, four currents wished to gain hegemony in the process of building a new system: the traditionalist clergy, modernist-Islamic left, liberals, and the Marxists. Among them, the clergy and their traditionalist allies gained control. . . . They created a totalitarian system through a comprehensive control . . . of all political, ethical, social, and economic matters. The sphere of private life too, to a large extent, became under the supervision of state agents. . . . Freedom of thoughts was officially banned. . . . The state control of peoples' thoughts and lives expanded even to their homes."⁴ This was a narrative of the revolution by Habibollah Payman, general secretary of the Movement of Militant Moslems, member of the Council of Revolution after the victory of the Islamic Republic, and a trusted loyalist of the new system. This was a narrative on the twentieth anniversary of the Islamic Republic!

The challenge to the existing order continued in the days of the state's celebration of its twentieth anniversary. "We have been successful in eliminating the surface of monarchy. But . . . we recreated old relations in new forms. . . . We now have an Islamic monarchy," said Mohsen Kadivar, a theological researcher and devotee of the Islamic Revolution, who was tried and jailed for his unofficial reading of the past twenty years, charged with "propaganda against the system," and "weakening the Islamic Republic."⁵

In the days of the celebration of its birth, the devotees of the Islamic Republic charged the state with preserving the old relations in new forms and creating an Islamic monarchy. Judging freedom by "the degree to which those who oppose the state . . . can participate in society and speak their mind," Kadivar rejected the official claims about the freedom of citizens in Iran. "Without these two years [of Khatami's presidency], it can be said that we have not had a passing grade on freedom in the past two decades," declared Kadivar.⁶

MOHAMMAD KHATAMI AND THE MOVEMENT FOR RIGHTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY—TENSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The 1997 presidential election was a turning point in the battle for rights. Despite the victory of Khatami, a severe struggle remained

between the coalition for rights and those defeated in the election. A period of intense confrontation was underway.

The coalition for reform faced formidable political challenges from within the state. The presidential victory of Mohammad Khatami proved to be only the beginning of a long and bumpy road to reform. The *faghih* and his supporters had fortified their position of power in various institutions of the state, further reducing the power of the elected president and weakening the republic. The regular armed forces, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (*Pasdaran*), and the security force remained under the control of the *faghih*. The judiciary was left under control of the *faghih* and his loyal forces. Mohammad Nategh-Nouri remained Speaker of Parliament (the *Majlis*) while the antireform members of Parliament maintained a majority position. This did not change until February 2000.

The political division of the state and the entrenched opposition to reform by those in control of most organs of power led to open confrontations. Unable to regain their earlier social legitimacy and defeat the project of reform, the conservatives concentrated on creating social and political crises, and undermining the achievements of the young reform movement. Assassinating writers and intellectuals, jailing prominent journalists and shutting down the pro-reform press, and threatening the president with a coup d' état, the opponents of change attempted to create an atmosphere of terror, fear, and hopelessness among everyday people and within the reform movement.

The president's pro-reform interior minister, Abdollah Nouri, was impeached in the first year of Khatami's presidency. The reformist minister of Culture and the Islamic Guidance was condemned in Parliament for his lax attitude toward the press although an attempt by the conservative members of Parliament to impeach him failed. On numerous occasions, freedom of the press became subject to ideological and political assault. Journalists were persecuted and jailed. Abdollah Nouri was finally charged with anti-Islamic activities and convicted in a court system controlled by the conservatives. Nouri's pro-reform daily, *Khorad*, was shut down and he was sentenced to five years in jail.

The assault on the press became a centerpiece of the conservatives' challenge to the project of reform. Defeated and humiliated in the February 2000 parliamentary election, the conservatives waged a new, and seemingly final, campaign against the free press. Sanctioned and guided by the supreme leader, the Justice Department ordered

the closing of all pro-reform dailies and journals in April and May of 2000. Prominent journalists and writers and advocates of reform and rights were jailed without trial. The assault on the press was regarded as the least costly and most efficient strategy to defeat the reform movement.

The April attack on the press was preceded by a series of maneuvers designed to create social chaos and pave the way for a coup d'état and intervention by the armed forces. "The children of *Ashoura* [the day Imam Hossein, the Shiites' third Imam, and seventy-one comrades were killed in a war in the desert of Karbala] are awaiting a grand and victorious Karbala. . . . The day of action might be near. We must await the final victory," wrote *Alsarat al Hossein*, the organ of *Ansar-e Hezbollah*. And Massoud Dehnamaki, the managing editor of the biweekly *Shalamcheh* said, "Iran will never become like Turkey. We will not allow our future to become like that of Pakistan and Turkey. Iran will become Lebanon and not Turkey if the situation worsens. We are talking here in codes. Today is no longer a day of silence for the *Hezbollah*. This is the *Hezbollah's* day of uprising. [Our] forces are ready to act behind barricades. Do not think the revolution is over."⁷ Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards issued a warning to reformers and the reformist press a week before the last assault on the press. Attacking "those who defend American-style reforms in Iran," the *Pasdaran* threatened that "when the time comes, these people will feel a blow to the head delivered by the revolution."

Responding to the mounting assault against the press and the process of reform, Mohammad Khatami declared to the nation in a press conference in August 2000, "The president is responsible for implementing the constitution, but sometimes he does not possess the levers required to carry out his obligations."⁸

In addition to weathering the political assault by the conservatives, the future of reform also depended on the ability of the new government to deal successfully with Iran's endemic economic problems. Mohammad Khatami's coalition included both the well-to-do and millions of poor and economically disenfranchised Iranians, and his campaign revolved primarily around the issues of rights and building a civil society. Despite their persistence and significance in the lives of the majority of voters, inflation, unemployment, deterioration in the standard of living, and other economic problems were only marginally addressed by Khatami. The burning issue of privatization, the state's role in the economy, trade policy, and commitment to social justice were, by and large, excluded from the presidential campaign.

Regardless, the economy continued to suffer from many deep-rooted ills. The average residential rent in Tehran remained nearly twice the monthly salary of college graduates and the educated work force. Most wage and salary earners received incomes below the state-defined poverty line and were forced to hold two or three jobs to sustain the bare necessities of life. The gap between the poor and the rich continued to widen. Political and social repression, coupled with economic disenfranchisement, created an explosive situation in most corners of Iran.

A commentator wrote, nearly two years after the election: "How long can the desire and enthusiasm for a free and lawful society be a substitute for bread and jobs?" This was, indeed, a fundamental question for Khatami and his coalition for building a civil society.

Mohammad Khatami's coalition in 1997 was supported by social groups with competing economic perspectives: advocates of free markets and *laissez-faire*, and those promoting the state regulation, planning, and control of the market. This, too, was to become an obstacle in formulating a cohesive and workable economic platform.

Khatami was supported by *Kargozaran-e Sazandegy* (Executives of Construction), led by Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's previous president. A loose collective of technocrats and clergy, *Kargozaran* had been, since 1989, responsible for the implementation of the structural adjustment policy in Iran. The group was an open advocate of privatization, a balanced budget, the dismantling of state subsidies, and the reduction of the state's role in the economy. By most accounts, the implementation of *Kargozaran's* neoliberal policies was responsible for a massive shift of income and resources from the most vulnerable sections of society to the propertied classes and speculators.

Mohammad Khatami's coalition benefited from the selfless participation of millions of unorganized wage earners that, despite their deteriorating and insecure economic status, energetically supported his presidency on the basis of his political and social platform. They were, for the most part, victims of the neoliberal policies of Hashemi Rafsanjani and the *Kargozaran*.

In addition to the advocates of neoliberalism, Mohammad Khatami's coalition included the clergy, Islamic organizations, and individuals with views diametrically opposed to those of the *Kargozaran*. The coalition included Behzad Nabavi (the left-wing minister of industry during the war with Iraq) and many other influential

members of the Organization of Mojahedeen of the Islamic Revolution. It enjoyed the support of Mir Hossein Moosavi (prime minister and architect of a quasi welfare state before the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani), and the participation of the Collective of Militant Clergy, and as well as opponents of the neoliberal policies of the Rafsanjani administration. Unlike the *Kargozaran*, these groups supported and advocated state regulation of the foreign exchange market and international trade, commitment to “social justice,” and the creation of a blend of a Keynesian/welfare state in Iran. Mohammad Khatami thus inherited both an ailing economy and a divided coalition, and it was this coalition that Khatami put in charge of managing and resolving the economy’s endemic crisis.

But the mounting political and economic problems did not halt the process of change that had begun in 1997. The demand for reform continued despite difficulties and setbacks. The crack in the Islamic Republic could not be closed. Twenty years after its birth, the Islamic state was experiencing its slow demise.

NEW MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE—
ORDINARY PEOPLE DEFYING THE ISLAMIC STATE

Social Movements in the Making

The May 23, 1997, presidential election resulted in the surprising defeat of Mohammad Nategh-Nouri, the candidate supported by the Ayatollah Khamenei—the *faghib* (supreme leader)—and the dominant political circles around him. What caught many observers’ attention in those early days after the election was a deep and genuine feeling of victory and joy, the joy of having achieved the seemingly unachievable: a new nation in the making, a new people, a nation of those believing in their own power. This was a nation of citizens on the path of defiance. May 23, 1997, was the first moment of universal defiance in nearly two decades, defiance that took on new forms and magnitude in the days to come, each time creating a more remarkable manifestation of resilience, creativity, and readiness to fight for change.

Such was the case on May 23, 1998. The anniversary of the presidential election became the day of an unprecedented event, the day of the emergence of a new image and a new face in the Islamic Republic of Iran—the face of young men and women joyfully defying the codes of conduct of the Islamic Republic. May 23, 1998, was

the day thousands of young men and women demanded the right to live a free life, to be happy, and to be beautiful. This was the day thousands of well-dressed, clean, happy, vibrant, and indeed beautiful young men and women assembled at Tehran University to celebrate the first anniversary of the Khatami presidency. May 23, 1998, was the magnificent assembly of the face of joy, life, and defiance—faces of those who dared to clap their hands together, scream aloud in happiness, whistle instead of crying *Allah-o Akbar* (God is great), and laugh instead of angrily chanting “Death to America.” This was May 23, 1998.

The youths that had made possible the defeat of Mohammad Nategh-Nouri a year earlier now created a new volcano—the volcano of young men and women clapping their hands, smiling, and enjoying their defiant existence. This was the rupture of joy and defiance, a revolt for happiness by the children of the Islamic Republic—men and women who clapped to defy. Happiness—this was a new weapon used by the children of the Islamic Republic: beautiful and creative, defying the bearded men in slippers, creating a theater of joy. May 23, 1998, was the official inauguration of a new social movement—the social movement for joy!

A new reality was emerging—a reality created by women, the immediate targets of control and subjugation in the Islamic Republic. Brave, creative, and persistent, women played an instrumental role in the creation of the movement for joy, collective action for rights, and the transformation of their reality. Not confined to narrowly defined institutional forms, they created a profound movement for women’s rights through their everyday practices. They fought for the right to live freely, equal to men. Challenging the Islamic dress code, they used everyday life as the site for gaining rights and respect from the society and the state. They demanded the right to live as free women. Humiliated, assaulted, and arrested randomly for being women, they gained resilience, lost their fears of confronting the state, and battled the repressive social and cultural Islamic codes of conduct. Using deviance as a weapon, they created a reality unimagined by the architects and masters of the Islamic Republic. Unorganized and not trained in political ideology or theory, but led by an instinct for freedom, young women created a powerful collective resistance through private acts of deviance and defiance, proving to be a force undefeatable by the Islamic State.

They waged legal battles to change the status of women in society, established a press dedicated to women’s issues and problems,

took part in direct street actions fighting the hooligans and the state police, and used the ballot to defeat the Islamic state. They moved to the forefront of collective action for rights, created a new image of women and a reality most feared by the Islamic republic, and formed a women's movement not confined to traditionally experienced forms and institutions. Not limited to activists and vocal advocates of women's rights, their movement included all women engaged in the battles of everyday life. It embraced schoolgirls challenging and ridiculing their religious teachers, teenagers wearing loud lipstick and makeup under the watchful eyes of the moral police, and older women demanding respect and recognition from men in the streets, shops, and the workplace. It became undefeatable. A return to the past seemed impossible in 1998.

The year 1998 was also the beginning of another movement that grew in power and became a formidable force, a force unprecedented in the recent history of Iran—the movement for a critical press, a movement inaugurated by the birth of *Jame'eh* (Society), “the newspaper of civil society.” In a few weeks *Jame'eh*, a paper founded by old devotees of the Islamic Republic, became the symbol of new thinking and the demise of the old from within. It was a sign of the death of the old and the birth of the new—a critical press. This was a movement for political and social reform in the absence of political parties and other institutions of civil society.

The publication of *Jame'eh* was soon followed by *Rah-e No* (New Path), *Azadi* (Freedom), *Tavana* (Powerful), and others who dared to challenge the old and demand a new order. New papers and magazines surfaced everyday, and the existing press became more courageous. Colorful magazines and papers for youths, teenagers, women, and elderly people decorated the public displays of newsstands.

This was the birth of a new movement, leading to a fierce counterattack by the pillars of the old, entrenched institutions of the Islamic Republic. A new space was created: a fragile space whose boundaries were constantly pushed beyond its original limits, opening opportunities for the voices of the “other.” The state was challenged. Authorities were publicly questioned. Taboos were broken. The untold stories were told. And the unquestionable was questioned.

A specter was haunting the old structure—the specter of critical press. A war was thus waged against the newly born free press. The press was assaulted, papers were shut down, and journalists and writers were imprisoned. Free press became the leading front in the battle for rights.

The year 1998 was also the year of new discourse, the emergence of new concepts, and the generalization of language that had once belonged to small circles of intellectuals and the educated. This was the year when “pluralism,” “diversity,” “respect for others,” and “tolerance” became a part of the everyday language, and an image of postmodernity penetrated the inner soul of premodern Iranian politics and social debate. Diversity was desired rather than scorned. Difference was colorful and a sign of social health.

A postmodern discourse surfaced in the press, in political and intellectual circles, and in society. Those who had supported the destruction of pluralism during the early years of the revolution now campaigned for tolerance of others. Soldiers of intolerance became crusaders for pluralism and diversity. “Political development” substituted for “economic development,” and democracy and freedom of expression, association, and participation became the new buzzwords of the development discourse. The year 1998 saw the familiarization of unfamiliar words, cracks in old structures, unexpected ruptures, and new voices of discontent.

The year 1998 was the year of new movements in the making. It was the year of the erosion of the old, the birth of the new, the citizens’ rising courage to defy and question the unquestionable. The year of intensified battles within the state. The year when old alliances were changed, new alliances emerged, and the elected government became the “legal opposition.” This was the year of rising tensions and conflicts, the deepening of the fracture within the state, defiance from below, new hopes, old disappointments, retreats, and progress.

*The Student Uprising of July 1999—
A Voyage from the Voting Stations to Street Action*

The selfless participation of youth, women, and many other sections of Iranian society who used ballots and conventional democratic means to voice their opposition to the existing order achieved the presidential victory of Mohammad Khatami. The election proved the political maturity of the people and their readiness to use the limited available democratic institutions in defeating the ruling theocracy and moving toward a free and more democratic society. It echoed the people’s hunger for democracy, their flexibility, creativity, discipline, and the magnificent power to organize one of the most energetic and grassroots political campaigns in the recent history of Iran. That was May 1997.

In July 1999, seeking freedom of expression and the press, respect, and the right to live a free life, the students and their supporters poured into the streets, turned their energy into nationwide street actions, and demanded an end to the rule of the *faghib*. They left the voting stations for the streets. Their fists in the air, chanting defiant words, marching for rights, they demanded an end to the old order. They voted with their feet.

Between July 8 and 14, 1999, six months after the official celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Islamic Republic, tens of thousands of jubilant and defiant youths poured into the streets in more than twenty-one cities and gave birth to a phenomenon that shook the foundations of the Islamic Republic. The state's most sacred institution, the *faghib*, was challenged and discredited as the students shouted, "Death to the dictator." The unquestionable was questioned. All taboos were broken. The Islamic Republic's growing crisis of legitimacy was brought into the open. The system lost all vestiges of its legitimacy through street protests by the youth, the children of the Islamic Republic.

The student protest in July 1999 was the first open explosion of the children of the Islamic Republic against the state and all that it represented. It was a loud cry for change by those who were no longer willing to succumb—a social rupture and a revolt by those who, nearly two years earlier, in a peaceful theater of defiance, had made possible the victory of Mohammad Khatami in his bid for the presidency of Iran. The youths had made history, and achieved the unachievable. Now, in July 1999, they were out on the streets with masks covering their faces, and with fists in the air demanding an end to dictatorship and the removal of the *velayat-e faghib*. They demanded the realization of their hopes and aspirations and the promises of the election held on May 23, 1997.

July 1999 was the time for collection, a declaration of existence—the existence of a growing independent movement, independent from the state and all its factions, an independent movement for rights—the right to live a free life.

The July uprising was put down by the use of unprecedented force and violence. More than two thousand students were jailed. Some received long prison sentences. Three were sentenced to death. But, despite the violent clampdown, a new era began in July 1999. The leader's ouster was demanded in the streets of Tehran.

*A Return to the Voting Stations:
The Parliamentary Election of February 2000*

May 23, 1997, was the inauguration of the new movement for reform in Iran—a revolt at the voting stations. It weakened the Islamic state, fractured its structure, questioned its legitimacy, defied its mandates, and began the process of its demise. The parliamentary election of February 2000 was the second revolt at the voting stations, a damaging blow to the Islamic state, a loud rejection of the old order by the people in the young civil society of Iran. The election shattered the state's already weakened legitimacy and humiliated its leaders. It proclaimed aloud that their time was over, that they were the undesired past. The new Iran had passed them by.

The youths that created the July uprising returned to the voting stations in February 2000. Along with other men and women, old and young, they created an unprecedented political scene, surpassed the magnificence of the May 1997 presidential election, and defeated those who had maintained their power through terror and violence. The voters said no to the old guard and elected new faces to the parliament. The proponents of the new discourse of pluralism and rights chose women and the men in ties and Western suits and captured the parliament with ballots. They rejected the old structure and the images of the past. They shouted with their pens and their ballots. They were deviant.

The February parliamentary victory followed a period of intensive preparation for a determining battle. The violent clampdown on the student movement had created a temporary setback for the movement for rights. The hot summer of 1999 was a time of retreat by the battered student movement, proclamations of victory by the guardians of the old order, increased terror against the youths and ordinary people, and a temporary return of the feeling of despair. The opponents of reform seemed triumphant. They had defeated the street action—the collective voice of the youths outside the voting stations. They had tamed the pro-reform president, threatened him with a coup d' état.¹⁰ The old guard was on the offensive.

But September began with unexpected results. The clampdown had not succeeded in silencing the new student movement. Protests against the imprisonment of comrades and further demands for rights emerged on campuses. And the assault continued.

The winter of 1999 was the winter of war between the old guard and the press. The critical press was attacked. The dailies *Neshat* and

Khordad were shut down. Abodollah Nouri, the license holder of *Khordad* was jailed. The press continued to expose the opponents of rights, assumed the leadership in the battle for the domination of Parliament, and prepared the public for the February election. It became the voice of the movement for reform.

January 2000 was the month of the final preparation for the voting stations. Writers, journalists, intellectuals, artists, and the leading reformers announced their candidacies for Parliament. They were all declared disqualified by the Guardian Council.

February 19, 2000, was a day of festivity, feeling empowered, collectivity, and triumph. The legislative branch was conquered through the mass turnout at the voting stations despite the disqualifying of pro-reform candidates, the jailing of popular and vocal reformers, and the shutting down of the pro-reform press. Young and old, men and women created a historic turnout at the voting stations across the nation. They forced out of the parliament prominent and powerful figures that had been entrenched in the state and its power structure. They ousted Javad Larijani, Mohhammad Reza Bahonar, Ali Zadsar, Ahmad Rasouli-Nejad, and other conservative politicians who symbolized the past, the years of pain and terror, the arrogance of the rulers, and the political and social system despised by the citizens.

They said no to those who represented the existing power structure, defeated Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the president of the Islamic Republic for eight years, the chair of the powerful Expediency Council of the Islamic Republic, and the third most powerful political figure in the nation. Supported by the old guard, Hashemi Rafsanjani joined the race hoping to capture the seat of Speaker of Parliament. Exposed by the press for creating a financial empire for himself and his family, distrusted by the voters, rejected for his role in the Islamic state, Hashemi Rafsanjani could barely hold on to thirtieth place in the voting in Tehran for thirty seats in the parliament. The voters said no to the *Sardar-e Sazandegi* (caesar of construction), the man behind the economics and politics of the second decade of the Islamic Republic. The vote of no confidence in Rafsanjani was a vote of no confidence in the Islamic state. It was a loud cry for a new Iran.

In July 1999, the youth demonstrated their alienation from the Islamic state and their desire for the establishment of a new order through defiant street actions. Their fists in the air and their faces disguised, they shouted for freedom, rights, and democracy. They made their mark.

With ballots in their hands and their faces undisguised, they ousted the leaders of the Islamic state in February 2000. They set the stage for the next triumph of rights.

Social Movements—“Old” and “New”

The years after 1997 were the years of a deepening economic crisis, the fall in the price of oil, decline in state revenues, rising prices, a continuous drop in the value of the national currency, and the increased impoverishment of wage earners. The economy was trapped in one of its most severe crises since the 1979 revolution. The dramatic drop in the price of oil had drastically cut Iran's primary source of foreign exchange from \$11 billion in 1993 to \$172 million at the beginning of 1998. The reserves were predicted to reach zero by the end of the year. The tumbling oil prices had left a suffocating impact on the economy (see chapters 8 and 9).

The year 1998 was the year of unpaid salaries and wages by factories, of bankruptcies, layoffs, frustration, and the loss of hope. This was the time of a near collapse of the economy and the potential for social crisis. It was a year when, according to the deputy finance minister, state employees earned an average monthly income of 48,000 tomans (480,000 rials), while average monthly expenditures of a family of four was estimated to be around 113,000 tomans (1,130,000 rials). And a total of 150,000 people, 400 of whom held bachelor's degrees, responded to an advertisement by the Ministry of Education for the hiring of 500 custodians.

Signs of the people's response to the declining economy were indeed emerging. Though still in formative stages, and not entirely outside the control of the state, collective actions around unpaid wages and labor rights increased in number in 1998 and 1999. Fueled by the deepening economic crisis, the sharp decline in wage earners' standard of living, the spread of poverty, and lack of rights at the point of production, struggles emerged with a focus on employee/employer relations and wage earners' share of output. Wage earners seemed to be on the road to questioning their economic status, challenging the state from the point of view of the economic interest of a singular class—the working class. Though not widespread or autonomous, early signs and nuclei of “old” social movements could be observed after 1997 (see Chapter 7).

But, apart from the issues of distribution and economic relations, youths and ordinary men and women created a formidable movement

with demands that transcended the interest of a singular class and challenged the state's cultural mandate and its political power. Transclass movements seeking basic civil liberties and rights of "citizenship," based on non-class cultural identities emerged, and movements not associated with the idea of revolution, but with democracy and rights.¹¹ Mobilizing around a free press, freedom of expression, and the right to political participation, the citizens created parallel movements against the authoritarianism of the state. They fought for a new political and cultural reality, a new image of the citizens not framed by the Islamic Republic.

They gave rise to "new" social movements.¹² Shaped by the cultural and political deprivations of nearly two decades of life under the Islamic Republic, they created movements of deviance, embracing the scorned, desiring what was not to be desired, longing for the forbidden fruits of the life of "decadence," consumerism, and the Satanic West. They lustfully desired and demanded what the new social movements of Europe despised and organized against. And unlike in Europe "where the grand theory had seen social movements as responses to the secular process implicit in Habermas's account of the colonization of the lifeworld, namely the increasing commodification, bureaucratization, and massification," the deviant youth embraced the "colonization of the lifeworld." They desired and used all symbols of massification and commodification, and constructed powerful movements against the state. The Iranian youth created forms and sites of collective action unforeseen by the theorists of new social movements.

They dressed in the symbols of "Western decadence," clapped their hands, danced in public, looked jubilant and defiantly beautiful, demonstrated, voted in elections, and created colorful "reper-toires of collective" action and contention.¹³ By challenging the cultural mandates of the Islamic Republic in individual acts of defiance (such as looking non-Islamic), their everyday life became a site of public manifestation of youth's discontent. The battle for a new identity—the non-Islamic identity—was carried out boldly by individuals who defied the state-imposed culture and codes of conduct, and transformed the most mundane acts of everyday life into the building blocks of a new powerful movement. Individually, they transformed everyday life into a movement for rights. Together, they formed a new collective identity and made "sustained challenges to power holders . . . by means of repeated display of" their "worthiness, unity, number, and commitment."¹⁴

The following chapters are primarily based on an eyewitness account of the emerging “new” and “old” social movements in Iran. Social movements are explained through people’s everyday practices and living histories, their thoughts, fears, and their “repertoires” for changing their realities. As accurately articulated by John Foran in his 1994 anthology about social movements in Iran, “We need to know more—much more—about the everyday lives of many classes and groups . . . their daily concerns, ways of thinking and feeling.”¹⁵ My book is a contribution to this project.