The London School of Economics and Political Science

Intellectuals, Reform and the Making of a Modern Iranian Civil Society (1997-2005)

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Declaration of Authorship

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Abstract

The aim of my thesis is to investigate the reason for why and how the language and concept of civil society was used to enhance positions of power by reformists in Iran. In particular, this thesis examines how reformist public intellectuals used civil society to craft their vision of Iran's socio-political future. Special focus is placed upon reformist public intellectuals as *agents* of change, due to their particular role in introducing new ideas to a wider public audience. Their role as critical thinkers and figures affiliated with a political movement for reform provided them with a unique position on the boundaries between civil and political society. In contrast to reformists, this thesis also examines how conservative figures with different underlying values appropriated the language and concept of civil society for their own ends. Ultimately, it is argued that although civil society is a politically charged concept that can be employed to serve different objectives, it leaves behind a residue of pluralism and an opening up of the public sphere.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The events that followed Iran's contested June 2009 presidential elections garnered the world's attention. However, what made international headlines in the immediate aftermath was not commonly a detailed analysis of regional and global implications of political instability and power struggles inside the country. Rather, the focus was on the overwhelming mass mobilization of citizens who took to the streets (Addis, 2009). The pictures that emerged from these rallies revealed that class, gender and age were irrelevant and what unified these individuals was a demand to have their voices heard by government powers as they expressed their frustrations with the country's current state of affairs[1]. Western media consistently featured news of the election results and the ensuing protests on behalf of reformist candidates alongside campaigns by conservative factions of the state to suppress dissent through means that included, at minimum, intimidation and imprisonment. However, as stories about women, youth and the elderly defying guards and plainclothes police officers faded, the focus inevitably shifted to talks of Iran's special role in the region and beyond. Moreover, Iran's nuclear programme was once again presented as an issue of global security by Western media and policymakers. The political infighting and citizen dissatisfaction, as expressed through the mobilization of various forms of protest, strengthened the voices of Iranian activists; at the same time, politicians in the West who opposed the Islamic Republic increased their assertion that the country's political instability makes its nuclear energy programme a key global concern that must be mitigated. Along those lines, regime change and international 'pro-democracy' support for dissidents intensified among both Western governments and non-governmental forums abroad.

However, while the events that followed the 2009 summer elections represent a critical point in a nation's struggle against repressive rule, it is vital to understand the reality of a country with a complex and diverse make-up of people and viewpoints. These post-election events should not be considered in a vacuum given Iran's rich history of social movements (Hashemi, 2010). Rather, they need to be understood as part of a dynamic process of social, political and economic development. It is now

[1] For analysis of the diverse range of women participating in these protests, see (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010).

more necessary than ever to examine the people, ideas and events that shape a country that is so often mentioned in the world's media but remains largely misunderstood. The civil society protests that attracted the Western media's attention in 2009 were not one-off or new; they were part of a broader social movement pre-dating the emergence of reform in the Islamic Republic. Moreover, cursory or outside observations fail to grasp a holistic understanding of civil society's demands and the actors who compose it.

Though the study of Iran in Western institutions is not new, particularly given the rise of Iranian Studies in university settings and undertakings by independent think-tanks and government-sponsored programmes, there is still a major gap in the academic analysis obtained through primary sources and fieldwork, particularly on topics that do not necessarily capture popular attention. One of the issues explored by the media in the weeks leading up to and in the aftermath of the June 2009 elections was Iran's vibrant citizen-based activism. This was depicted in countless photographs and videos posted on news and social networking sites that showed individuals participating in rallies. What garnered less attention was reflection on the reality that such vibrant social expression was not new to Iran. In fact, the notion of civil society in Iran has roots that arguably began at the start of the twentieth century with the Constitutional Revolution and continued in waves to the present day. More specifically, the proponents of reform who challenged the incumbent conservative president and lost in the disputed 2009 election were at the heart of an eight-year period in modern Iranian history, from 1997 to 2005, that made the development of civil society a core state project. This thesis examines that timeframe and the actors and ideas surrounding reform of the Islamic Republic.

The core of this thesis analyses the role of reformist public intellectuals in the development of the concept of civil society, or *Jame'e-ye Madani* in Persian, during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami and the ensuing civil society building that took place. Civil society building refers to a dedicated drive to cultivate social and political spaces independent of the state structure that is favourable to citizen engagement in formal and informal organisations and movements. However, the view of civil society as an independent third sector limited to organisations is also rejected. In the words of Neera Chandhoke, "Civil society is not an institution it is

rather a process whereby the inhabitants of the sphere constantly monitor both the state and the monopoly of power in civil society" (2001, p. 22). This thesis explores how people use civil society language and concepts for different purposes, engaging with the questions of what ideas about civil society mean and their effects.

Though Khatami's election in 1997 initially signalled a shift towards democratisation in the Islamic regime, conservative factions regained political power by the end of Khatami's second term in 2005 and reinforced a restrictive interpretation of the Islamic Republic's constitution. However, the complex nature of Iran's political structure and the consequences of the reform movement did not allow for a total defeat of the principles introduced in the reform period. Ray Takeyh, a leading scholar of contemporary Iranian politics who has served as a senior advisor in the U.S. Department of State, writes in his book *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (2006, p. 3):

> Despite all the sensational setbacks of Muhammad Khatami's reform movement, the one enduring legacy of its electoral triumphs in 1997 and 2001 has been to make it impossible for Iran to become a rigid authoritarian state. The call for representation and the rule-of-law, for accountability and equality, have transformed the average Iranian from a passive observer of clerical politics into an active agent of change.

The concept of civil society was at the forefront of the reform movement's attempt to bring about their contentious calls for a state based on features including rule-of-law and accountability. This thesis identifies and analyses how reformist intellectuals and leading figures of the reform movement during the two-term presidency of Mohammad Khatami, from 1997 to 2005, envisioned the role of civil society in transforming the Islamic Republic of Iran. The research considers whether civil society promotion, by internal actors such as public intellectuals, is relevant to states not based on liberal-democratic norms. The answer to this question can also have bearing on the role of civil society promotion by external agents, such as foreign states or international aid agencies. Specifically, the research question posed is why, how and to what effect was the language and concept of civil society used to enhance positions of power during the period of reform, circa 1997-2005, by political and social actors in Iran. Furthermore, this thesis addresses the appropriation of civil

society language and structures by figures in the regime opposed to the reform movement following the reformists' loss of political office.

Civil society, a concept emerging from the Scottish Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century, appeared to have disappeared from intellectual discourse throughout the early twentieth century (Keane, 1988). However, with the end of the Cold War, it resurfaced as a leading force for change and in the 1990s and early 2000s and was frequently considered a panacea to political and social underdevelopment. Local and international actors have used resources for the various institutions that embody civil society as a tool to establish the governments and social settings that most benefit their end goals. Nonetheless, it remains a contested topic, with scholars debating its theoretical and practical applications. Therefore, it becomes ever more important to fully grasp the nature and potential of civil society in different settings.

On a theoretical level, this thesis strengthens the notion that civil society "…has become 'useful to think with' in the sense that it has a striking capacity to inspire" (Lewis, 2002, p. 583). Rather than evaluating civil society according to the establishment of organizations, more value is given to the role of civil society in instigating change. This is in contrast to theoretical and empirical studies of civil society that focus on the organisational aspects of civil society and evaluate its strength based on quantitative measures of civil society institutions such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). As a point of reference, donor agencies focused on utilising the potential of civil society have embraced institution- and capacity-building, partnerships and coalitions and financial sustainability as ways to support and strengthen civil society (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 102). In essence, donor agencies have placed a high burden on the ability of organisations and the projects they undertake as vehicles for achieving what they perceive as civil society's rewards. As a result, the informal aspects of civil society are ignored alongside actors calling for civil society development outside donor-recipient contexts.

Moreover, this thesis attempts to break away from a propensity to examine modern Iranian history as a binary conflict between state and society, as "This binary outlook does not adequately explain the complex ways in which state goals and social ideals

converge in order to produce certain political outcomes, or more generally to define continuities and changes in national debates" (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 8). This thesis also differs by rejecting an organisational approach to civil society. The study examines public intellectuals and political figures that, in this case-study of Iran, often have overlapping roles. The aim is to obtain data on how public intellectuals, broadly defined as individuals engaging in critical thought within the public sphere, working with or within the state can inspire the development and direction of civil society. While public intellectuals exist outside the state structure, often times in opposition to the state, the focus of this thesis is on public intellectuals affiliated with the Khatami administration, and therefore in some way affiliated with the state. Thus far, little attention has been paid to the role of public intellectuals and political leaders in the literature on civil society.

1.1 The Civil Society-Democracy Connection

Throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, the discourse of civil society was the central theme in solutions to most development concerns. In the 1980s, the concept was 'reinvented' in Eastern Europe and Latin America and "A 'blueprint' model of civil society based on the construction or support of certain organizational forms can be observed throughout the world" (Glasius, Lewis, & Seckinelgin, 2004, p. 6). Civil society re-emerged as a universal solution to political, social and economic underdevelopment in both the North and South[2]. "[I]n the late 1980s civil society came to be seen as an *alternative* to the sphere of organised politics and formal representation" (Chandhoke, 2007, p. 53, emphasis in original). This was largely in response to authoritarian rule in Eastern and Central Europe. Though academics, policymakers and development practitioners, in areas stretching from economic development, democratization and social inequality, paid particularly close attention to civil society for two decades, the topic appears to have slipped to the background. Studies have indicated that civil society development programmes are not always able to produce the dramatic results promised by various practitioners and theorists. The elusive term began to lose its favoured position as the politics around civil society began to change. Reasons for this backlash included questioning of the

[2] A detailed account of the history of civil society as a concept from its emergence during the Enlightenment through the 20th century will be provided in Chapter Two.

legitimacy of Northern NGOs representing the needs of populations in the South, the professionalisation and de-radicalisation of NGOs, and finally the growing climate of fear that emerged as a result of the Global War on Terror (Howell, Ishkanian, Obadare, Seckinelgin, & Glasius, 2008; Howell & Lind, 2009a, 2010).

However, the dramatic impact the surge of this term produced in the last decades of the twentieth century is hard to ignore. In fact, it is vital to examine why and how this long-dating and contested concept re-emerged with such force in various geographic and ideological spheres in the late 20th century. More importantly, it is critical to examine how a concept elaborated by the European enlightenment was appropriated and adapted to fit diverse contexts, even those often labelled as incompatible with liberal democratic ideals. In the neoconservative and liberal pluralist understanding of civil society, civil society organisations are considered as regulators of state powers[3] (Macdonald, 1994). Furthermore, civil society remains a widely used concept by international and domestic agencies and policymakers as a benign indicator or agent of liberalisation. "As within the comparative politics literature, liberal writers are primarily distinguished by their assertion of the analytic separation of civil society from the state, their view of civil society as a sphere of freedom, and by their lack of attention to class relations" (Macdonald, 1994, p. 274). This thesis seeks to problematize the dominant neoconservative and benign liberal views of civil society as a concept in both literature and practice; similar to Howell and Pearce (2001), it challenges the normative assumptions about civil society used to guide action. The politics of civil society is discussed further in Chapter Two.

A principle foundation of this thesis is that while civil society has the potential to support democracy it does not inherently endorse or entail it. It agrees with the critical theory approach that questions the overtly positive or benign view of civil society, and "…highlights the multiple forms of oppression within civil society…" (Macdonald, 1994, p. 268). As argued by Neera Chandhoke, while the organs of civil society, such as nongovernmental organisations, "…may be in the business of democracy, they are not in the business of being representative of the popular will, or

[3] According to Laura Macdonald, the neoconservative and liberal pluralist views of civil society see it "…as harmonious spheres of free association" (Macdonald, 1994, p. 268). In this thesis, the neoconservative and liberal pluralist approaches are broadly referred to as the 'liberal approach'. The 'benign' approach is generally linked to this liberal approach.

accountable to the people for their acts of omission and commission. Nor do they have any necessary link with the sphere of participative politics" (2007, p. 50). She explains that civil society groups can enhance, or 'deepen', democracy by widening the political agenda, but these organisations or the actors in them are not necessarily accountable or representative of popular will (*Ibid*). Therefore, the question remains as to how civil society and democratisation are linked?

The emergence of the term civil society in the public and political discourse on Iran's social and political development in the 1990s is not surprising given the global surge of the term. Following political, social and economic transitions across the globe, particularly Eastern Europe, the concept of civil society and its actors emerged as the champion of democracy. As a panacea for populations facing dictatorship, social inequality and economic underdevelopment, civil society captured the attention of individuals involved in foreign aid as well as those working on domestic reform. Following a revolution, eight-year war and a short period of re-development (all in less than two decades), the country was prepared for and receptive to new ideas. As a result, the concept of civil society entered Iran's political and social sphere with relative ease. This openness to new ideas can be attributed to what Diane Stone calls 'soft' forms of transfer. She emphasises the importance of:

> ... 'soft' forms of transfer – such as the spread of norms and knowledge – as a necessary complement to the hard transfer of policy tools, structures and practices. Learning can make the difference between successful transfers as opposed to inappropriate, uninformed or incomplete transfer. (Stone, 2004, p. 546).

Civil society as a modern concept entered the socio-political consciousness of Iran as a result of work by both non-state and state actors, such as women's rights activists and public intellectuals and political figures who produced the reform movement.

The notion of civil society, as an analytical tool for social and political enquiry, has strong roots in the intellectual discourse of the mid-1990s, particularly among groups of religious intellectuals who had begun discussions on the future of the Islamic state. Broadly speaking, these individuals are identified as writers and academics that directly or indirectly supported what became the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 and later re-evaluated the dominant state ideologies and sought to reform them.

However, it was not until the presidential elections of 1997 that the notion of reform entered mainstream Iranian society when a cleric who was little before seen on the central political stage captured some seventy per cent of votes in an election that gave recognition to the reform movement. The public face of this reform, Mohammad Khatami, used the rhetoric of rule-of-law and civil society as central themes to his presidential campaign in 1997, themes that continued for eight years through his two-term presidency. This thesis examines the crossing of these two paradigms, that of the emergence of reformist intellectuals and the vigorous attention given to civil society during the eight years of Khatami's presidency from 1997 to 2005.

From an international perspective, a study of how political and social transformation takes place provides vital data for public diplomacy. With the end of Cold War politics, conflict in the Middle East has come to play a central role in the international arena, with the Islamic Republic of Iran considered a leading player in the region and its conflicts. Broad-based theories, such as Samuel Huntington's famous *Clash of Civilizations*, have often overshadowed other aspects of study and policy related to the greater Middle East, with the role of Islam becoming a key focus. Aside from this, much of the work carried out under the label of 'civil society' in Iran has focused on organizations with less examining of the role of human agency[4]. This mirrors the broader trend in civil society studies that focuses on organisations and their behaviour with less attention to actors such as public intellectuals. The trajectory of academic studies of NGOs is partially in response to what has been referred to as the 'NGOisation' of various movements, such as the women's movement (Alvarez, 2009), by agencies and foreign donors that actively promote particular organisational forms and practices. With intellectuals playing a prominent role in the development of Iran's reform agenda, it is reasonable to consider their role, particularly those who became a symbol of change through a new and less restricted press. This research looks specifically at the role played by such leading intellectuals and reformist figures in the development of Iranian civil society by looking at how their notion of civil society developed and ultimately influenced decision makers and civil society activists.

[4] For example, the work of the Hamyaran Iran NGO Resource Centre and Iran CSOs Training & Research Center (ICTRC), which were both active during the Khatami administration.

1.2 The Role of Agency

This thesis brings to the forefront the role of agency in social change by exploring the functions of individuals in positions of authority or power. As noted by Zhand Shakibi (2010, p. 16), "The notion of agency implies more than mere political action or conduct. In particular, it implies a sense of free will, choice and autonomy". Ontologically, this thesis considers what motivates individuals and their interpretations of concepts and contexts in relation to civil society. Their motivations and interpretations are constructed by history and experience and reflected in the actions of these agents. This is in contrast to views that depict organisations, markets or ideologies as the basis of civil society and development, the study of which can overshadow the role of individual agency. In terms of the types of agents, both civil society and political actors are key ingredients in democracy and civil society building. In his comparative study of Gorbachev and Khatami, Shakibi challenges the theories of democratisation and transition that devalue the role of human agency, arguing that:

> The reformist periods under Gorbachev and Khatami can rightly be considered challenges to these theories for, if anything, they emerged to positions of power in polities in which according to common logic serious reform from above would not take place and the elites would ensure the maintenance of the status quo. (2010, pp. 16-17)

On the whole, the notion of patrimonialism, with power at the behest of a ruler, is a key concept in Iranian politics. As argued by Ali Ansari (2000, p. 20):

> Certainly, when considering *traditional* forms of legitimacy, Weber's notions of partimonialism and charismatic leadership capture facets of Iran's political and social structures, for example, the *ulema*, while also allowing for an explanation of the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini as the quintessential 'charismatic' ruler. [Emphasis in original]

Based on this explanation, the concept of agency in the building up of civil society takes on an increasingly significant role. In order for new ideas and change to be injected in this society, the leader takes centre stage.

Separately, as argued by Chandhoke (2007, p. 56), there is a need to strengthen the link between civil society agents and political representatives in order for public opinion to feed into policy, "This really means bringing the sphere of participative

and democratic politics closer to the domain of policy making via the representative". However, the way in which these two spheres are linked is complex and difficult to formulate both theoretically and in practice. Ultimately, these individuals have access to power, whether in government or public opinion, which allows them to guide the direction of civil society growth. Similar to the "polity-centred' approach introduced by Lavalle, Acharya and Houtzager in their study of Sao Paulo, Brazil, citizen participation requires engagement by organisational *and* individual citizens, while those in the best position to represent interests of individual citizens have connections to democratic representatives (2005, p. 959). The empirical subjects of this thesis, public intellectuals and civil society building in Iran, were chosen as platforms for the study of agency as a factor in structural change.

1.3 What Iran Offers as a Case-study

A study of Iran can apply to the practice of international diplomacy and also shed light on the theoretical understandings of democratization, civil society and the role of intellectuals in political reform. The realities of international sanctions and domestic restrictions have played a role in not only isolating the country but also limiting the role of direct foreign influence in areas of civil society development through monetary incentives. As a result, Iran provides a unique setting to study civil society building efforts that are based less on international aid and more on domestic initiatives. Although the intellectuals, politicians and social activists in Iran were not immune to the global fascination with civil society and were subject to some external influences, this influence was not at the same level as that found in countries where civil society development was under the full or partial control of Western donor states. Therefore, a study of civil society building in Iran can both enhance an understanding of social and political development of Iran and identify broader theoretical issues related to the advancement of civil society in authoritarian and illiberal contexts that are relatively distanced from Western hegemony.

The overwhelming image of Iran that filters through international mass media is that of a repressive state, dominated by Islam and sponsoring terrorism. Since the 1979 revolution which was closely followed by the taking of American hostages on 4 November 1979, diplomatic ties between Iran and the United States have been

severed with strained and inconsistent relations with other global powers. Consequently, the Iranian state has remained a common fixture on news outlets that often focus on the country's de-stabilizing role in the region and its oppressive domestic policies. The country that in 1977 was deemed by then American president Jimmy Carter as 'an island of stability' in an otherwise conflict-ridden region, became the face of state-sponsored terrorism, an image that was further solidified by President George W. Bush's naming of Iran as a member of the 'axis of evil'.

The current impasse in Iran's diplomatic relationship with the United States and Europe, or simply the West, has not been a result of historical animosity between heads of state on either side. Though not completely representative of reality even then, President Carter's declaration, mentioned above, during a state dinner with the Shah of Iran, is just one example of the special status Iran held in the eyes of the West. Iran's wealth of natural resources, including the world's third largest oil reserves, has made the country's domestic politics a topic of interest for energy dependent countries in the West. The Iranian state, on the other hand, relies on foreign markets to purchase its resources. This structure of mutually beneficial exchange made Iranian and Western relations, up to 1979, rather amicable. While western countries enjoyed generous concessions and access to Iran's natural resources, the West offered the ruling elite of Iran financial as well as political support. To this day, the 1953 CIA-backed coup against elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq in favour of the Shah is referred to by some members of the Iranian public and political figures as key evidence for distrusting good-will statements and gestures towards Iran by Western states, particularly the United States. The relationship between Western powers and the Iranian state disintegrated swiftly after the 1979 replacement of the same Shah who had been brought back to power in 1953. The rising clerical regime based its popularity with the masses on an anti-Western stance. For the Iranian public, the appeal of this position was not in large part an expression of opposition to Western lifestyle but rather to the corruption and elitism that former Iranian heads of state shared with Western leaders at the expense of Iranian citizens.

Since 1979, the Iranian state has come to be largely ostracized by the international community, led by the United States and Western European powers. Faced with

economic sanctions and political pressure, leading conservative figures in Iran continue to target the United States for what they consider the Western power's injustice towards the downtrodden. This anger is embodied in bold anti-American speech and support for states, groups and individuals fighting against American interests. Currently, Iran is at the centre of a dispute over its nuclear power programme and debates on this topic often lead to discussions of further economic sanctions and military strikes that could lead to a regime change. While the disadvantages to these options are plenty for both those inside Iran and the international community, they are never 'off the table' by those keen to see leadership change in Iran.

However, before irreversible decisions are made with regard to Iran, it is vital to better understand Iran's history and people, particularly the how and why certain events have unfolded in the country since the start of the twentieth century. Of special importance are the numerous examples of mass mobilization, civil activism and calls for democratic change. Historically, highlights include the Constitutional Revolution of the early twentieth century, the democratic election of Prime Minister Mossadeq in 1951 and the accompanying movement for nationalization of oil and the activities that led to the 1979 revolution. When it comes to contemporary studies of Iran, citizen-led action that has taken place for social and political change since the 1979 revolution offers not only a vastly different view of Iran than what is usually seen by those outside of Iran, it also offers rich lessons on issues related to civil society development and activism.

Modern references to Iran in Western media are often focused on foreign policy issues[5]. References to the internal situation reflect upon the repressive role of the state, including issues of human rights abuse. It is generally left to the more specialized research centres and researchers[6] to study and address internal activities

[5] The takeover of the American embassy in 1979 by supporters of the revolution and holding of 52 American hostages for a total of 444 days continues to provide a reference point in accounting for the hostile relationship between Iran and the US. The Iran-Iraq war and subsequent enmity between the countries, tensions with the Taliban in Afghanistan and the role of Western powers in the region have all played out on the international stage. In addition, the influence and role of Iran in countries such as Lebanon and its antagonistic rhetoric against the state of Israel have dominated discussions of Iran in Western media.

[6] For example, Prof Ali Ansari, based at the University of St. Andrews in the UK, is one of the leading scholars on Iranian history and contemporary developments and is Director of the Institute for Iranian

and achievements made in the areas of economic, social and political development. Therefore, dynamic movements taking place in this diverse society, which has sought various levels of change and development since the start of the twentieth century, are often missed by outsiders. However, even studies emerging outside of Iran from the latter perspective suffer from a lack of sufficient fieldwork, due in part to difficulties with access, and understanding of the historic, cultural and religious nuances that characterize Iran's distinct situation in the region. As tensions in Iran mount, it becomes increasingly important for policymakers in countries with a vested interest in regional and international politics to have an accurate understanding of the reality of Iranian society, the problems it faces and the domestic actions directed towards reform.

The 1997 election of Mohammad Khatami as the Islamic Republic of Iran's fifth President is recognized as a dramatic step on the path to reform the Iranian regime that emerged after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Khatami, a cleric who had received limited public attention for his roles in government and public service, campaigned under the banner of reform, with democracy, rule-of-law and development of civil society taking a front seat through his two successive and successful campaigns for presidency. During his eight years in office, there was much speculation about the extent of change possible in a government where final authority rests in the hands of an unelected Supreme Leader, or *Velayat-e Faqih*. Numerous academic and popular journal articles are available on the initial changes that took place and prospects for Iran's future following Khatami's initial election (i.e. Abdo, 2000; Roy, 1998). Reformist refers to individuals and a loose coalition of political groups considered as the opposition by conservative-run factions of the state. Since the Revolution, conservatives have dominated government posts that include, the Office of the Supreme Leader, the Guardian Council and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)[7]. Reformists were in control of key positions, including the office of the president and seats in newly formed local councils, for the eight years of Khatami's

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Studies at the University of St. Andrews, which was launched in 2006. In the US, Abbas Milani is research fellow and co-director of the Iran Democracy Project at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. Haleh Esfandiari, Director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, is another high profile expert referred to in discussions on democracy and women in Iran.

[7] Additional details about the relationship between conservative factions and the electorate and the internal divide amongst conservatives will be explored in Chapter Six.

presidency, 1997-2005, and parliament for four of those eight years. The primary slogans of Khatami and his supporters focused on the promotion of civil society and rule-of-law. However, it is only after Khatami's presidency came to an end in 2005 and the reform movement seemingly lost its momentum with losses in parliamentary and presidential elections that we can fully investigate the political and social ramifications of the eight years from 1997 to 2005. This period represents the time in which Iran appeared to be on the road towards democratic reform after centuries of monarchy and over twenty-five years under a so-called Islamic regime.

It was with Khatami's election that the discourse in which intellectuals and political figures had been engaging, in narrow circles, came into the national spotlight. However, despite the optimism, energy and support that surrounded them, the reformists slowly lost momentum and power as a result of the country's political structure that allowed the positions held by reformists to be over-ruled by the Supreme Leader who influences a host of other social, economic and political issues. The eight years of reform efforts culminated in the election of a conservative and populist candidate who promised economic incentives and a belief that the reform movement had failed. However, as recent events show, the reform movement should not be discounted. In fact, now that there is a sense a re-birth of the momentum that began with Khatami's first election victory, it is important to look back at the vision and strategies that governed policy and thought during those critical eight years and ask whether reform is even possible given Iran's political structure.

As mentioned above, civil society formed one of the core issues of Khatami's eight-year presidency. As one scholar has noted, after two decades in power, the ideology of "Islamism" which gained control of Iran's social and political structure after the 1979 revolution had run its course and reform appeared to be the only way forward to maintain the Islamic state (Banuazizi, 1999). This reform included references to the concepts of democracy, rule-of-law, dialogue between civilizations and civil society (Gheissari & Nasr, 2004). But, the true nature of what has been referred to as a civil society *project* is a contested one, with analysts observing the level of Western interest in, and influence on, its development (Chaichian, 2003, p. 19). While some may consider Iranian civil society discourse as a potential turning away from the current political structure towards Western ideals (Boroumand & Boroumand, 2000),

others can look at the possibilities of indigenization of civil society in practice (Kamrava, 2001). Either way, it is vital that the speculations on Iran's future development, both socially and politically, consider the actual events as well as the visions held by people whose lives are most affected by any change, Iranians themselves.

Iran provides an exemplary case study of a social and political movement that injects the concept of civil society in a country dominated by the state in all aspects of life, from the economy to the personal. However, this domestic movement, at times pushed by external forces, did not have a detailed plan or even a fully open space to debate the values and attributes that make up a civil society. There was a dramatic increase in civil society organisations, particularly nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), at the same time that the reform movement gained momentum. For example, a UNDP-Iran document reports that in 1997, 15 environmental NGOs existed, but after Khatami's election and at the time of the paper's publication in 2000, 150 registered and unregistered NGOs from the field of environment were in existence (Namazi, 2000, p. 47). Between 1995 and 2003, there was a 512 per cent increase in the number of women's NGOs, from 55 to 337 (Baba Moradi, 2005, p. 36). However, many of these organisations lacked essential resources and led a vulnerable existence, with many either disbanding after a short period or only ever existing on paper. Moreover, organisations are only one aspect of civil society. In fact, Chandhoke refers to civil societies in the plural, asserting that it is a sphere encompassed by different languages and agents engaged in different projects (2007). Civil society is a complex and dynamic sphere and concept, a notion that becomes apparent in the way it is conceived and applied by different actors. This thesis looks at how civil society was employed by actors in positions of power.

1.4 Research Design: The research questions

The following section details the research problem and questions. The research problem stems from the premise that strengthening civil society was considered vital to Iran's social, economic and political development by reformists and civil society actors immediately leading up to and during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami.

However, this premise, and the potential power of civil society in creating democratic change, can be contested. Despite a partial opening-up of the social, economic and political spheres by Khatami's government, no significant structural changes pertaining to civil society were instated and conservative forces reclaimed the legislative and executive branches of government in 2004 and 2005, respectively. As a result, political reform through civil society empowerment does not appear to have succeeded according to reformists and observers of Iranian politics. The problem is, both the meaning of success and analysis of outcomes pertaining to civil society promotion were vague and varied according to the perspectives of each observer or player. As a result, there are few objective accounts of how the concept of civil society impacted Iran at the height of the reform movement. Moreover, insufficient studies are available on the relationship between civil society and the public intellectuals who established the concept as part of the reformist vocabulary.

The main questions guiding this doctoral research are as follows:

- Does civil society promotion, i.e. discourse and action endorsing the concept of civil society as a public good, by elite voices contribute to social and political change in non-liberal states?
- In the context of Iran, why, how and to what effect was the language and concept of civil society used to enhance positions of power during the period of reform, circa 1997-2005, by political and social actors?

Subsidiary Research Questions:

- What is the role of public intellectuals and political figures in strengthening civil society?
- Specifically, how did the public intellectuals affiliated with Iran's reform movement [attempt to] impact the evolution of contemporary Iranian civil society and, potentially, encourage a turn away from a theocracy to a liberal democracy? Did the activities of these individuals establish a formal (i.e. institutional) or informal public sphere that allowed citizens to articulate their demands to the state?

1.5 Research Methods

This section focuses on the methodology used for the collection and analysis of data. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted predominantly in Tehran in late summer and early fall of 2008, the key source of data, representing direct accounts of public intellectuals and individuals involved in arenas where the language of civil society was applied, such as government sectors, print media and the social sphere. Other sources include literature on the state of Iranian civil society, written inside and outside of Iran, and legal texts that pertain to action in or by components of civil society spaces. Informal discussions were also conducted with knowledgeable informants before, during and after my travels. In addition, I attended forums, such as the election meeting for a major journalist association in August 2008, where I could obtain background information and speak with activists in the reform movement and civil society. The section on data collection is followed by explanations about how the data was analysed. In addition, more detailed accounts of the data collection process such as limitations and complexities are included, given the sensitivities around studies of Iran, particularly those involving fieldwork.

Qualitative interviews

With regard to data, the main goal was to gather and employ unique primary sources from Iran, namely face-to-face, in-depth interviews. The objective behind the use of interviews is to gain better insight into the vision and underlying intentions of the respondents. It is the preconception and perceptions of public intellectuals, reform leaders and members of civil society that the interviews explore. A majority of the aforementioned individuals encompass a select group of influential actors, i.e. the elite, as opposed to a broader sample of the general Iranian population. The purpose of interviewing elites, as opposed to relying on literature analysis, is to gain insight into those individual's theoretical positions, perceptions and beliefs; in other words, the elite interviews aim to grant "…insight into the mind-set of the actor/s who have played a role in shaping the society in which we live and an interviewee's subject analysis of a particular episode or situation" (Richards, 1996, p. 200). Interviewing was deemed preferable over other methods, such as surveys, because they allow a

more nuanced and detailed set of data to be captured (details of how this data was analysed will be discussed later in this chapter).

As can be expected, there is no comprehensive inventory of Iranian intellectuals, who are a central component of this thesis. However, there are a number of partial references available, particularly with regard to religious intellectuals working during the 1997-2005 period who were involved in some aspect of the reform movement. Therefore, a sample frame was created based on available data. In order to create a feasible list of public intellectuals who would meet the criteria for this research, an initial list of Iranian intellectuals was compiled using various academic papers and news articles on the topic of Iranian intellectuals and reform during the Khatami era. This list was narrowed down to include those who fit the category of 'public intellectual'. The determination of whether an individual is a public intellectual was made by considering their popularity, citations in general articles (not aimed at specialists) appearing in print or on the web, acknowledgment in various publications as having sway over the general public, or citations for giving significant public lecture(s) that attracted wide attention (i.e. high attendance). A relevant point to mention is that most individuals who appear on this list fit the category of 'religious' intellectual. However, this is not an indication of the religious-secular breakdown of Iranian intellectuals. Rather, intellectuals who have chosen to follow the route of reform within the Islamic regime rather than its absolute overhaul are more likely to have had an opportunity to give voice to their views, even if it is stifled at times, than those who completely oppose the basis of the government. Most individuals who fall in the latter category are either censored within Iran or live in exile. The theoretical underpinning of the definition of public intellectual used is discussed in Chapter Two.

In total, over forty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in person, over a three month period. Most interviews lasted one hour, with a few taking less time and a significant portion lasting over ninety minutes. Fieldwork took place from August through October 2008 in Tehran, Iran. A list of potential interview subjects was prepared, as described above, before embarking on the fieldwork. However, upon arrival in Tehran, the list was re-evaluated and discussed with key contacts on the ground. The original contacts on the ground were based on

individuals met through former volunteer work with Iranian organizations and references made by individuals contacted during the first phases of research. Based on information and suggestions from these contacts, a first set of individuals were contacted for interviews. The remaining interview subjects were chosen and reached through a growing network of contacts, i.e. snowball or chain referral sampling.

After an informal introduction by other contacts or direct communication with a potential interview subject, individuals were largely open to being interviewed and a meeting was subsequently arranged. When meeting with academics, members of research institutes or political parties, members of government institutes and leaders of civil society organizations, interviews were generally arranged at their personal office or that of their organization. Students were met either at university campuses, even if they were no longer studying there, or, in several instances, in coffee shops. Journalists were met at the offices of the newspaper. When necessary, other arrangements were made, such as meetings in private offices. Further details on the issue of interview location will be provided in in the section on case complexities. In general, it was up to the interviewee to decide where meetings took place.

Upon contacting a potential interview subject, I introduced myself as a doctoral candidate, based at the London School of Economics, conducting research on civil society development during the Khatami administration and the role of public intellectuals. My background was also typically raised at the start of an interview where I would mention that I was born in Iran but raised in the United States. Also addressed was my previous education at the University of California, Berkeley in the field of political economy. A discussion of my background was part of a process to build rapport with the interviewee and allow them to ask questions that may make them more comfortable once the interview began. By emphasising my academic credentials and interest in Iran, I attempted to encourage the interview subject to feel comfortable and not obliged to provide sound bites, which is more commonly the case in interviews with journalists. The emphasis on my role as a social scientist, not a political activist, was an attempt to discourage engaging in ideological debates. Moreover, the importance of providing my background was part of a broader effort to acknowledge and mitigate factors that may degrade research quality. Though my experiences as a dual national of two countries with a hostile relationship may bear

on how I approach the issue of Iranian politics, measures were taken to minimise the effect. During interviews, the two main ways in which potentially negative consequences arising from my background were mitigated include the design of the questions used in the semi-structured interview process and a conscious effort to maintain focus on the personal experiences of the interview subject. The above notions are important due to the concept of reflexivity in qualitative research. Reflexivity refers to how our understanding of a social reality both describes and creates that reality at the same time; in other words, our understanding of a social reality is intimately connected with the objects, persons or circumstances we refer to and the language we use (Miller & Fox, 2004, p. 36). While my connection with Iran, as both an outsider and insider, had the potential to create bias in the data collected, the notion of reflexivity was taken into account and encouraged the importance of acknowledging my background in all stages of the research process.

As a semi-structured interview method was employed, the design of opening questions and interview techniques were given careful consideration. The rationale behind the use of semi-structured interview is that it has the right balance to capture the needed information while allowing an opportunity to amass information on processes and garner depth. Opening questions were used to direct the interviewee towards topics that should be covered, such as personal objectives in the reform movement and visions of civil society, while providing enough space for the interviewee to intervene and expand upon the issues he or she finds significant. Interviews were undertaken with the assumption that interaction itself constructs data and knowledge (Mason, 2002, pp. 62-63), adding to the insight gained from written script. The opening questions ensure that all key points of the research are addressed in some manner by the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews are intended "…to reveal existing knowledge in a way that can be expressed in the form of answers and so become accessible to interpretation" (Flick, 2002, p. 84). This goal would not be as effectively reached if the interview method used was the *unstructured* or *exploratory* one. On the other hand, a strictly *structured* interview, whereby very specific questions are provided alongside a set of response categories, would be useful if the aim was to test a specific hypothesis or acquire a basic set of information from a large set of respondents (Chadwick, Bahr, & Albrecht, 1984, pp. 104-105). Such a structured interview format would limit the potential to extract

revealing and valuable data based on the interviewees' individual perspectives or experiences. As the interviews for this research were primarily conducted in person on a one-to-one basis, the semi-structured interview format provided an exceptional opportunity to delve into a subject with a rich sample of high profile participants in the Iranian political and social sphere. As described below, over forty interviews were carried out, almost all exclusively in the Persian language.

Research assistant and documentation of interviews

A majority of interviews were conducted along with a research assistant whose role was to provide support during interviews as necessary. Several factors prompted the decision to take a research assistant along to these interviews. As a female researcher born after the 1979 revolution and travelling from abroad, I felt that attending meetings, particularly with former government officials, accompanied by another individual with better familiarity of local social norms and political sensitivities could help eliminate potential obstacles. In addition, the assistant would provide language support as needed.

My research assistant, a trusted acquaintance, is a female, within the age bracket of 30-35, who works in the private sector with undergraduate education in graphic design. During the timeframe that the research examines, she was not a member of any particular social or political group which would cause tension in interviews. However, having lived most of her life in Tehran, she is an active member of society, with interest in the arts. She closely followed the country's social and political changes and read three to four reformist newspapers a day during the Khatami administration when press formed a key aspect of the reformist movement. While she is clearly knowledgeable about the issues at hand, it was helpful that she was not herself a member of any particular social or political organization that may have contributed any particular bias to the interview. Her presence was conducive to preventing a standstill in interviews when language issues arose. In addition, there were times when an interviewee felt more comfortable addressing someone with more experience of life in Iran, as opposed to an individual coming from abroad. In these cases, her understanding of the situation on the ground helped put the interviewee at ease in addressing sensitive issues raised by the interview questions.

She was briefed on the thesis topic and questions, as well as the background of the interviewees, beforehand.

During the interview, I asked pre-defined questions and any follow-up questions based on the answers received. However, under special circumstances, the research assistant would contribute to the interview by elaborating upon or re-phrasing the questions and areas of discussion in order to overcome any standstills in the interview process. Another reason for choosing to attend interviews with a research assistant was for the purpose of taking additional notes. Throughout the interviews, we would both take hand-written notes which were consolidated into one transcript subsequent to the interview. Using this method, it was possible to document information in greater detail without the aid of a tape recorder. A tape recorder was used in some sessions but not in the bulk of the interviews. While interviewees did not object to its use in general, it was felt that the tape recorder was not conducive to creating a comfortable atmosphere for discussion given the sensitivity of the topics covered. The presence of a recorder has the potential to create a situation in which interviewees guard or hedge responses (Peabody et al., 1990, p. 454). Without the device, more topics could be covered in a candid manner while the presence of an assistant assured a detailed transcript.

Categories of informants

A discrete classification of interview subjects is not necessarily informative as individuals take on numerous, and at times overlapping, roles that can be categorised in different ways. However, for the purposes of this research, the following general categories have been formulated, with individuals being placed in the category that best reflects their role with reference to Iran's social and political arrangements while taking into account self-identification. The main categories are: reformist public intellectuals and actors, civil society actors and conservatives. To easily identify each informant, while maintaining anonymity, each informant is labelled by a letter or letters and a number (the issue of anonymity will be discussed in a later section). The lettered prefix refers to the category to which they belong and the number demarcates each individual. Reformist public intellectuals are demarcated by the abbreviation 'INT', followed by a number. Reformist actors who do not fit the

category of public intellectual are demarcated by the letter "R" and a number. Students are identified by the letter "S", women's rights actors by the letter "W", journalists by the letter "J" and other civil society actors by the label "CS", all followed by a number. Finally, conservative actors are identified by the letter "C" and a number. A full list of informants in each category with descriptions and codes is provided in Appendix I.

1. Reformist public intellectuals and political actors

The bulk of Chapter Four is dedicated to interviews with reformist public intellectuals and political figures. 'Reformist' refers to individuals affiliated with what is by and large considered the 'reform movement', in reference to the coalition of groups and individuals who called for change in the existing government order and ultimately supported Mohammad Khatami's bid for presidency in 1997. The reform movement is also called the '2nd of Khordad movement', which signifies the date of Khatami's first election in 1997 in the Iranian calendar (2 Khordad 1376, corresponding to 23 May 1997). The ideas behind reform predated Khatami's election and their development is central to interviews with intellectuals, as will be evaluated in Chapter Four. The label of 'public' intellectual has connotations beyond a profession or form of activity; the specific definition of intellectual used is discussed in Chapter Two. For this section, the point of relevance is that reformist public intellectuals were identified due to their affiliation with the reform movement as individuals who either served as advisors to political leaders or who themselves filled a role in the reformist government at one point. In addition to public intellectuals, a number of reformist political actors who worked in government posts that directly engaged with civil society organisations and actors were interviewed. The main point of differentiation between the public intellectual and reformist political actors referred to here is that the reformist political actor may not necessarily have the same role in creating or disseminating ideas in relation to civil society as the public intellectual. The simple 'reformist' label in this research indicates the individual's political affiliation to the reformist movement as a politician, political advisor, government worker or supporter (either through the electoral process or self-identification as a reformist).

2. Civil Society Actors

Women's rights activists, student group leaders, and others

In addition to the public intellectuals interviewed, civil society actors typically affiliated with the reformist political movement are also included in the study to better understand how they were affected by and responded to the civil society vision and language expressed by public intellectuals and reformist political figures. The civil society activists interviewed fall into a variety of categories. In order to best control the study, a focus was placed on civil society activists working on issues pertaining to women and students, as two of the leading issues upheld by civil society actors at the time. However, individuals working on other areas of civil society were also interviewed for further anecdotal evidence; this included NGO activists in fields such as poverty reduction, the environment and education.

Journalists

Seven interviews were conducted with journalists and other figures associated with print media, specifically reformist newspapers. A number of other respondents not included in this category also identified themselves as journalists; however, as their fulltime occupation was not in this field, they were included in the category with which they had the strongest link. The names of newspapers are withheld for security reasons. Newspapers were a critical medium for conveying the thoughts of the reform movement and were at the centre of the struggle between reformists and conservative elements of the government. In tune with other laws dealing with the public sphere, the Iranian press law is complex and includes both formal and informal boundaries. Formally, newspapers and other published works must obtain a permit from the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance. Moreover, to receive and maintain permission, the work must not contravene Islamic thought and values as judged by the state. Newspapers came to represent a battle for freedom of expression that was previously resisted by the state. The respondents were mainly journalists active before, during and after the 1997-2005 time period. In addition, interviews included one newspaper editor, as well as a leading board member of the main newspaper writers' association.

Reformist dailies have included *Salaam, Jame-eh* and *Neshat.* However, individual paper titles are of less relevance than their founders or publishers due to the adaptive practices of journalists responding to persistent state interventions. As various conservative entities ordered one newspaper to be shut down, individuals who ran the paper would immediately apply for another permit under a different title in order to continue their work until they would be imprisoned or receive a court ruling barring them from working in the press. These newspapers are different from those aligned with conservative factions, generally under the control of the office of the Supreme Leader, which rarely take on issues or writings in opposition to the state.

3. Conservatives

Due to the nature of the subject, it was not possible to conduct a significant number of interviews with conservative leaders. First, it must be pointed out that the conservative stream is not a unified body in and of itself. There are hard-line figures, such as Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi, once considered Ahmadinejad's mentor. Other figures such as Ali Larijani, who has served as chairman of parliament representing the conservative faction, have deviated from traditional conservative thought by leaning towards pragmatism in areas such as international relations. Figures associated with conservatives have at various points expressed ideologies and beliefs similar to those within the reformist camp. The dividing boundaries between conservatives and reformists, however, have to do with the way conservatives seek to employ power and the extent to which they want to allow pluralism and opposition to be expressed by the public. One of the most obvious examples is the conservative faction's history of using, or at least approving the use of, physical violence against dissenters.

Since the conservatives were in power during the time of fieldwork, individuals falling within this category and considered for interviews were often serving public posts. As a result, interviews with them would have required clearances with the risk of attracting further attention as a foreign researcher. After taking the current political and social climate into consideration and having discussed the matter with individuals knowledgeable of the situation, it was agreed that this exposure was not

advised. Applying for additional clearance would lead to questions and scrutiny by security forces that could halt the research project all together. Where possible, however, individuals with links to conservative movements were interviewed. This included a leading conservative intellectual, who had previously served as editor of a key conservative newspaper. Other academics with links to conservative factions, including the head of a public, government affiliated research institute, were interviewed.

At one point, an interview was prepared for and arranged with the then Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. However, this was during a time of heightened security and, following the arrest of another foreign researcher, it was decided this interview would be postponed and, ultimately, did not take place.

Secondary sources

Document analysis was conducted on primary and secondary literature. Primary references included legal texts, such as the constitution and the Civil Code. A number of studies and surveys were carried out by Khatami's government; one in particular, on social behaviour, was reviewed as a source of reference on citizen engagement with the public sphere. Newspaper articles dating back to the reformist period were read and analysed to gain insight into the ideas being written about in the public forum during Khatami's presidency. Literature by reformist intellectuals and conservatives was read to enhance the data collected and analysis of interviews. In addition, brochures and printed newsletters of civil society organisations, such as NGOs, were examined for information on the types of activities in which they were engaged during the period being studied. Document analysis was used to verify or compare evidence obtained during interviews. Comparing findings from more than one research method, triangulation, is used in qualitative research to verify results. While triangulation may be considered controversial as a test of validity, it can support inclusiveness and reflexivity (Mays & Pope, 2000, p. 51).

In Chapter Five, the Iranian constitution will be briefly addressed in order to provide the context in which the Khatami administration was operating. Sections pertaining to civil society and the rights of citizens are discussed to show the discrepancies and

complexities in the original vision of the Islamic Republic as it was codified in the constitution. To simply consider the state a fundamentalist autocracy is unconstructive. Rather, the constitution serves as an example of the importance of looking at the intricacies and nuances of the Islamic Republic. This thesis does not further delve into laws, regulations and policies as that would fall outside the scope of the research. Instead, the focus is on individual actors in positions of power and how they interpreted and applied the concept of civil society.

Method of analysis

Qualitative analysis was carried out on the collected data, namely interview notes and transcriptions, in an iterative manner through coding. Coding refers to the procedure of conceptualising and reducing data, elaborating categories and relating claims (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). In other words, coding infers a categorisation of data. The codes are the identifying label of each category. As described by Kathy Charmaz, "Qualitative codes take segments of data apart, name them in concise terms, and propose an analytic handle to develop abstract ideas for interpreting each segment of data" (2006, p. 45). However, it is important to note that coding is not a precursor to analysis but rather an integral component of it (Weston et al., 2001, p. 382). As the data is examined and codes are proposed, new and potentially alternative perspectives are revealed. Essentially, coding is a process used to identify key themes within a case, for example, an interview, and determine patterns across data sources, for example within and across informant categories.

Although a first round of coding was done manually on print-outs of interview notes and transcriptions, the coding process was ultimately carried out electronically through the use of NVivo 8 software. The reason for the switch was because the software tool allowed several rounds of coding to take place in a more organised and precise manner. Before coding commenced, interview notes were separated based on the above informant categories. Next, each interview was read with the aim of gaining general understanding of the main concepts revealed from that source. In this round, significant events, organisations and individuals were noted and were later researched further and included in the writing-up phase. A second round of *a priori* coding was carried out to identify sentences or sections based on concepts and

questions that make up this thesis's theoretical frameworks, each section received a 'code' or label called 'nodes' in NVivo. *A priori* code categories were supplemented by grounded codes that surfaced in examination of the interview notes independent of assumptions made in hypothesis. Analysis was supplemented by axial coding, where principal categories are related to subcategories in order to enhance the explanatory power of a concept (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 124-125). The NVivo software helped this task as nodes, the term used for codes, were categorised and ordered as 'Tree Nodes'. The different rounds of coding provide answers to theoretical and case-based questions and clarify relationships between concepts and informant categories. Analysis, writing up of results and revisions were carried out concurrently, in an iterative and reflective manner.

Guiding the analysis was the notion of framing, taken from social movement theories, which will be further discussed in Chapter Two. In the initial stages of research, the civil society frame itself was central. In other words, the focus was on how civil society as a concept shaped individuals, movements and socio-political development. However, over a period of time that included in-depth literature review and fieldwork, the focus of analysis shifted from the frame to the *process of framing*. This shift was largely guided by the work of Robert Benford and David Snow. Framing represents (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614):

> …an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction…It entails agency in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations or movement activists. And it is contentious in the sense that it involves the generation of interpretive frames that not only differ from existing ones but that may also challenge them.

From this perspective, a more revealing account of Iranian society was garnered, stemming from the reality that in the same way that individuals grow and change, so do their ideas and beliefs. Analysis focused on individuals viewpoints of civil society, how their understanding and beliefs took shape and the resulting implication for practice.

Limitations to data collection

Clearly, numerous other individuals, reformist and conservative, not interviewed could have potentially contributed to the research. However, they were not included for a variety of reasons. One significant obstacle was access. While the best efforts were made to contact key individuals, there were instances when an interview meeting was not feasible due to circumstances that included the individual's schedule or, in some cases, unwillingness to speak with a researcher from a foreign institution regarding a sensitive political matter. In addition, there were instances when the individual sought was, at the time, imprisoned as a result of their activism. Some of these issues will be further discussed in a dedicated section on fieldwork complications.

Fieldwork interviews were limited to individuals based in Tehran, although these individuals may have held posts or worked in other cities and regions. This limited geographic reach is not expected to weaken the general outcome of the research. First, Tehran has leading Iranian universities and other types of research institutions that house many of the intellectuals whom I sought to interview. As the capital city, key social and political actors often reside there, making it an ideal setting for contacting them. Many of the individuals who have come to reside in Tehran have previously lived, worked or served political posts in other regions of the country in the past. This experience contributes to their understanding of the country as a whole and, where possible, this issue was touched upon in interviews. Second, as the capital city of the country, Tehran sets an example for various social and political activities that take place throughout the country. Key political parties and nongovernmental organizations are also based there. Finally, in terms of practicalities, my knowledge and previous contacts in Tehran made it a much more feasible space for research. As a large and diverse city, there are fewer challenges for an independent, female researcher than those potentially present in other smaller cities where my movements may have come under greater scrutiny.

1.6 Case Study Complexities and Impediments

Almost all research initiatives, including the social sciences, present their own obstacles and ethical considerations, regardless of the issue or context being examined. However, there are certain topics and environments that present the researcher with additional challenges that, if not dealt with accordingly, can control the direction or results of the research. These include, but are not limited to, the availability of interview subjects and the subsequent validity of responses, the extent to which probing, sensitive questions can be asked from interview subjects, the accessibility of documents and legislation and, finally, the ability to maintain a balanced outlook in a volatile setting.

Interview response

Research methods that depend upon interview responses must consider the extent to which the responses given reflect the actual views of the respondent or are affected by outside factors. If a respondent mistrusts or feels uncomfortable with the interviewer, they may alter their responses to reflect this dynamic. This issue arises often in cases dealing with matters of political or social sensitivity, and is particularly significant in environments where controversial responses may lead to social, political or even legal repercussions. For the researcher, it is not possible to decide what a respondent 'meant' to say or interpret a response in a way that does not reflect what was actually stated. However, it is possible, and often necessary, to make note of issues that may have moderated interview responses. In addition, other details may be used to corroborate a response. However, it is not usually possible to negate a response unless mitigating circumstances are present.

In the interviews conducted for this research, one way of obtaining accurate responses was by seeking responses to the same topic from different angles and through follow-up questions when time and other circumstances permitted. Where possible, themes emerging from interviews were crosschecked with available literature by interviewees to determine issues such as: does the intellectuals' public voice match personal accounts? Have the intellectuals' views, presented in past literature, sustained the test of time according to interviews? Examining similar themes across categories of interviewees and documents serves to cross-check data

and add to the study of individuals' commitment to ideas of civil society and the impact of time and environment, i.e. triangulation.

Interview location

The physical location of interviews presented a challenge on several occasions. Obstacles were present in cases where the interviewee did not have access to an office or space for a meeting as well as in cases where the individual's office was located in a public building, such as a university, where visitors, particularly those with foreign identification, were required to obtain special permission or submit their details to a central security office. If the interviewee had his or her own private office in a non-public building, or access to one, a meeting was generally arranged at that location. This was the case for several individuals who also worked within the private sector. Individuals who worked in public sector research institutes, not based in larger universities, also arranged meetings at their offices. In these instances, the offices were generally located in buildings where the entrance was not under strict security control and entering the building without official letters or identification did not present a major obstacle.

As discussed, a number of reformist leaders and intellectuals were, at the time of interviews, academics at leading universities in Tehran. To enter the university campus, an identification card was required, which was held by security personnel for the duration of the stay on the campus. In the instance that the individual provided a foreign identification card, such as a university ID belonging to a foreign university, the front security staff was required to provide this information to a central security office affiliated with the government. In some cases, university security asked that formal security clearance be obtained before allowing visitors to enter the university campus. The same circumstances applied when entering buildings for state run newspapers. The use of foreign identification was avoided in most cases in order to limit future obstacles.

In one instance when meeting a respondent in the main building of the Ministry of Interior, an official security clearance was required. After discussions with an expert researcher, it was advised to cancel the meeting as it could potentially lead to further scrutiny and hamper future research efforts, given recent arrests that had taken place.

One meeting with a senior figure serving in the Ministry of Interior office for civil society affairs took place in a section of the Ministry of Interior that did not require security clearance. The respondent played a key role during the reform period in developing civil society programmes and establishing local city councils. However, after the interview, the subject advised that further meetings with individuals currently affiliated with the government not be arranged, with the advice being to look back on documents rather than focusing on speaking with individuals. The underlying tone suggested that security forces were monitoring these meetings.

Several meetings, particularly with student leaders and civil society activists, such as members of NGOs where an office was not available, were arranged at local coffee shops. However, it was soon discovered that such public meetings presented their own security risks for all parties involved and were therefore not frequently used. Specifically, after one meeting at a popular coffee shop, the owner approached my research assistant and myself, advising us that all owners and managers of similar facilities have been contacted by security officials and asked to report any meetings of this nature, i.e. where an interview is taking place. Failure to report such meetings could lead to problems for store owners and revoking of their license of operation. Furthermore, it was pointed out that such meetings could be easily monitored.

Of course, the above issues raise ethical questions as to why I declined to obtain official security clearance in cases where such clearance would allow the interview to proceed or take place at the interviewee's place of work. However, these issues were discussed with the research assistant in a transparent manner and guidance was sought from other researchers. The overwhelming advice was that in order to best carry out interviews without creating unnecessary and avoidable exposure, it was best to limit state attention to the research project. Considering the academic nature of the research and attempts to seek unbiased opinions on non-security related subject matter, occasions to create public scrutiny that would hinder the research goals were avoided.

Post-election crisis

The events following the disputed June 2009 elections presented their own challenges to the research. Follow-up fieldwork was cancelled as a result of the

domestic situation and additional scrutiny placed on foreign researchers. More importantly, a large number of individuals interviewed during fieldwork were taken into custody and imprisoned for various lengths of time. First, the risk that these individuals chose to take by expressing their ideas must be noted. Although a number of individuals stated they did not mind their interview statements being attributed to them during the time of the interview, considering the current situation, it has been decided that all interviewees will remain anonymous. It is no longer possible to verify and follow up on the interviews. Even in situations where the interviewee is free and not in prison, they will not be contacted due to the potential security risk involved for them.

Following the election protests and trials, a number of foreign academics, including those working on the issue of civil society, have been cited by government officials as agents of foreign governments attempting regime change. For example, Jurgen Habermas, John Keane and other scholars were accused by the Iranian government of causing unrest in the country (Kurzman, 2009). Therefore, the topic of this thesis became an unintended subject of political tension. As a researcher, it has been a great challenge to maintain the integrity of academic research and neutrality without having the issues presented be misconstrued by political factions. Therefore, it has been necessary to leave certain issues unwritten and to shift the focus of the writing at times. However, this should be viewed not as a lack of academic rigour but rather considered in light of the current situation and indicative of a strong commitment to ethical research.

Translation and transliteration

Translation of quotes and paraphrasing of Persian language sources has been carried out by me, and decisions have been made to provide the most accurate representation of the original document. In contrast to the more formal format used by the International Journal of Middle East Studies, the format used for original terms and names as well as transliteration is similar to that outlined by (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. vii) and used by many other authors in the field of Iranian studies. Therefore, standard English spelling is used for terms and names, such as Shia and Khatami; Persian terms and names have been transliterated “for ease of reading”.

1.7 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters which are divided as follows. *Chapter One: Introduction* introduces the research problem and presents the methodology used. It also addresses conceptual and practical challenges to this thesis. *Chapter Two: Theories of Civil Society* focuses on the theories relevant to the research, including the transformation of civil society as a concept and the role of public intellectuals. *Chapter Three: Exploring the Iran Case Through Literature* provides an historical overview of the Iranian context along with analysis of the shortcomings of literature on the reform movement and civil society in Iran. *Chapter Four: Public Intellectuals of the Reform Movement* is one of three substantive chapters and based on interviews with reformist public intellectuals affiliated with the reform movement. One of the findings that emerge in this chapter is that theories that impact political and social development are created by intellectuals who are themselves shaped by, and a product of, personal experiences and society. The second substantive chapter, *Chapter Five: The 'Practitioners' of Modern Iranian Civil Society*, explores civil society from the viewpoint of practitioners and players, such as women's rights and student activists. The findings reveal the ways in which these actors coped with and developed as a result of their experiences during Khatami's eight-year presidency. *Chapter Six: Adopting and Adapting a Liberal Concept – Conservatives and Civil Society* presents the way in which the use of civil society language and structures can be misappropriated by opposition forces. In the case of Iran, the conservative faction Iran has its own model of 'civil society' structures while simultaneously challenging the idea of civil society presented by reformists as a Western ideal that is detrimental to the Islamic Republic. The key argument in this chapter is that civil society language, even when introduced by domestic actors, as opposed to foreign donors, is not necessarily benign or conducive to the provision of democratic values. The concluding chapter provides final remarks on policy implications and future work.

Chapter 2: Theories of Civil Society

The overarching concept underpinning this thesis is that of civil society and the agents who construct it. The key issue initially driving the research was the structure of contemporary Iranian civil society and the role it played, as both a concept and in practice, in the reform movement of 1997-2005. While the theoretical literature on civil society was the first point of reference, additional concepts and theoretical tools came to light allowing for new and complementary perspectives to be taken into consideration. Rather than a static entity composed of organisations, civil society is better understood as a political and dynamic construct which generates and is generated by discourse among a heterogeneous group of individuals. Social movement theories helped explain Iranian civil society and the reform movement at the macro-level, as social movements are considered in this thesis to be components of civil society. Finally, the role of intellectual leadership, namely as transmitted by public intellectuals, makes a significant contribution to the theoretical and empirical development of this thesis. The following chapter critically addresses civil society, from its liberal roots to its contemporary applications, theories pertaining to the role of public intellectuals and individual agency and relevant elements of social movement theories. In particular, attention is directed at the concept of framing, which forms part of the structure of analysis. Specifically, this thesis explores the process of framing civil society as it was generated by social and political reformists and their opponents, who were embedded in the state structure during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the early 21st century, policy makers and institutions dealing with the political and economic spheres continue to acknowledge the role of civil society. However, the nature of civil society does not naturally provide it with an equal place alongside the market and state as a separate, independent sector responsive to individual policy agendas. While this is in part due to the diverse nature of civil society organisations and spheres, it also results, in part, from the way theorists and practitioners recognize civil society. Specifically, civil society is characterised as a domain that is marginal to the more influential political and economic institutions that appear to have greatest power in establishing social rules and regulations. A deeper awareness of civil society and its various components, can, however, reveal that civil society is itself a

driving force for change in both developing and developed countries, a notion that can enhance its scope of influence through better understanding and improved policy. Moreover, the actors involved in social movements, a key component of civil society, are themselves "…agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613, first cited in Snow & Benford 1988). Movement actors play a significant role in shaping the movement, its concepts and how they are perceived. Framing, as will be further discussed in this chapter, is how actors achieve the task of creating meaning. Iranian reformists and their opponents alike used civil society as a frame to pursue their social and political visions.

In this thesis, Sidney Tarrow's theory of contentious politics in social movements is used to look at the period of Khatami's presidency, the height of Iran's reform movement. Tarrow defines social movements as "…*collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities*" (Tarrow, 1998, p. 4, emphasis in original). Described in another way, social movement refers to "…sequences of contentious politics that are based on underlying social networks and resonant collective action frames, and which develop the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents" (Tarrow, 1998, p. 2). Using this definition, the reform movement can be identified as a social movement that gave a platform to a number of sectors, allowing them to make their voices heard. Contentious politics, as argued by Tarrow, "…is triggered when changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for social actors who lack resources on their own" (*Ibid*). The reform movement fits this model, particularly when taking into account the challenges to the state by actors such as intellectuals and academics, political figures, women's rights activists, student leaders and other human rights advocates. These individuals and groups raised their collective voices against oppressive measures taken by conservative state factions before, after and during Khatami's presidency. Most importantly, while Khatami and his colleagues in political office were unable to make substantial statutory changes, they provided political opportunities by creating a more open space in which civil society actors could engage, as explained in Chapter Five.

The term ‘reformist’ is used to denote a broad coalition of actors who labelled themselves as such and adhered to a political group, or supported individuals or ideas that encompassed Khatami’s presidential campaign and presidency. As a social movement, reformists brought the concept of civil society into the mainstream of Iranian society. Movements have historically been central to the institutionalisation of civil society, as asserted by Jean Cohen (cited in Buechler, 1995, p. 450), with civil society standing for “… a sphere that is both differentiated from and connected to the state and that gives social actors the space to translate lifeworld concerns into systemic priorities for change”. The reform movement not only intentionally promoted civil society by emphasising its organisational aspects but also inadvertently encouraged civil society’s development by creating a space for critical dialogue and active engagement by actors from different sectors of society. In this sense, social movements are themselves a component of civil society.

Another critical concept is that of the ‘public sphere’, which, similar to civil society, emerged alongside capitalism in Western society. The most prominent scholar of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas, firmly differentiates between the public sphere and the ‘public’. His reasoning is similar to the notion that civil society is not the same as ‘society’ (it is also inaccurate to equate civil society with the public sphere). These differentiations are central to analytic scholarship that considers concepts of the public sphere and civil society as ones bearing ideological or political implications, particularly as they relate to democratic states and processes of democratisation. For Habermas, the modern public sphere is the space for battle between the state and society (Habermas, Bürger, & Kert, 1992). “In this public sphere, practical reason was institutionalized through norms of reasoned discourse in which arguments, not statuses or traditions, were to be decisive” (Calhoun, 1992, p. 2). Essentially, the public sphere is the space for political discourse that is based on reason and rationality and comprises a key component of civil society.[8] However, it is important to appreciate that the public sphere is a normative concept, which Nancy Fraser argues requires the elimination of inequality at different levels in society

[8] It should be noted that the difference between the concepts of civil society and public sphere is not a definitive one, particularly due to the diverse definitions of civil society. In the case of this thesis, the distinction between the two concepts is particularly fluid as the definition of civil society used is less concerned with organisations and more concerned with formal and informal associations, action and agency.

(Fraser, 1990). Therefore, attention should not be limited to the existence of this space (i.e. public sphere) but should also be directed to observe the opportunities provided within it for all voices.

The argument made in this thesis is that analysis of civil society by scholars and practitioners should go beyond definitions of civil society that focus solely on organisations. A more comprehensive understanding of civil society and appreciation for a public sphere that allows different voices and ideas is needed. The capacity for critical dialogue and engagement is a significant legacy of the reform movement that endured electoral losses and played a role in the 2009 presidential election and its contentious aftermath. This chapter will first examine the modern roots of civil society, paying particular attention to theories that shaped the contemporary understanding of the term. Then, the role of actors as agents of change will be explored by examining the role of public intellectuals in social science theory. The main argument presented is that a more inclusive and integrated approach is needed regarding civil society theory and practice. Such an approach should move away from an emphasis on organisations in civil society and acknowledge civil society as a space in which a constant process of transformation is taking place, where deliberation, organisation and action continually occur. This view addresses the problem of looking at civil society as an independent third sector, as argued by Chandhoke (Chandhoke, 2001) and discussed in Chapter One. How we conceptualise civil society influences our expectations of it and how we attempt to shape it. At the same time, the limitations of civil society as a tool for democratisation and liberal reform must be taken into account as notions such as civil society have been granted unmerited status as a panacea for socio-political problems.

2.1 The Role of History on Contemporary Understanding

One of the first challenges a researcher faces when dealing with the topic of civil society is that of defining civil society. The contrast is not limited to differences in characterisation between those using civil society in practice and those writing about civil society at the theoretical level. Rather, it is often the case that each individual theorist, practitioner or researcher takes on her own view of what civil society does

or should constitute. These differences range from the very specific, which define exactly what type of organization or aspect of society are deemed to be a part of civil society, to very generalized and ambiguous definitions that appear to offer little value in explaining what gives civil society merit to be considered as a distinct component of society. Rather than providing a list of all definitions, a selection of definitions that typify those found more generally in contemporary literature is provided. These definitions are of most relevance to the case of Iran during the reform. To provide context, the following section will present a historical account of civil society that offers the basis from which contemporary perspectives arise.

The historical section examines several key texts and thinkers to trace the changing nature of civil society from both historic and theoretical perspectives. Rather than providing a complete historic overview of civil society, the selected literature and thinkers represent a series of phases in which historic events and influential thinkers have altered the ways in which social and political actors view and apply the term civil society. While definitions of and influences upon civil society often overlap, each text provides a unique perspective from which the term is examined, providing a wide-range debate on the complexity of civil society and, just as importantly, how the definition of a term can manipulate social and political action and outcomes. By looking at the emergence and evolution of civil society, we can gauge the value of perception and examine civil society's current effects and potential for future transformations in social, political and economic spheres.

Ferguson and the origins of a "civil society"

Civil society as a modern phenomenon has been an evolving concept with which academics and political activists have come to associate in varying degrees of significance. Although diverse understandings of civil society as a concept can be traced to classical thinkers, the term really began to take shape in the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment. Of particular influence is Adam Ferguson, who was one of the first to use 'civil society' as a distinct term in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. Ferguson first used the word 'civilisation' in English as a term to denote the elimination of violence from human affairs and where "'civil society' is understood as a 'polished' and 'refined' form of society with 'regular government

and political subordination'" (Keane, 1998, pp. 117-118). The legacy of associating civil society with 'civilised' societies free from aggression and brutality remains today, particularly as the development of civil society is linked with development and modernity.

However, as Keane points out, a weakness of interpreting non-violence as civil society, as done by Ferguson and his contemporaries in the eighteenth century, "…is its secret commitment to an evolutionary or teleological understanding of history as a process of transformation from 'rude' societies to 'civilized' societies" (Keane, 1998, p. 118). With the level of violence still witnessed in contemporary society, this linear approach does not offer a comprehensive stepping stone for understanding civil society. Moreover, the relationship between the individual, community and ruling elite, has from the onset been a key factor in civil society debates. Of particular relevance are the questions: what is the role of the individual and what obligations does she owe to society's greater good? Ferguson writes, "If this follow from the relation of a part to its whole, and if the public good be the principal object with individuals, it is likewise true, that the happiness of individuals is the great end of civil society: for in what sense can a public enjoy any good, if its members, considered apart, be unhappy?" (Ferguson & Oz-Salzberger, 1995, p. 59). The objective of a 'public good' is a tenuous assumption without guidelines as to who or what defines that good. On the whole, Ferguson's introduction of civil society into the language heralds a new era in the study of societies by opening dialogue on the role of the state and the citizen without a clear path forward. However, the relationship between the individual and the ruling elite or the public good remains unclear.

What Ferguson does unmistakeably shed light on is the precarious nature of an industrialised, commercial society. Ferguson warns readers that a more active marketplace and, in effect, an increased desire for a life of luxury, leads to the loss of a public spirit and potential decline into corruption. He (Ferguson, 1768, pp. 402-403) writes:

> On the contrary, when wealth is accumulated only in the hands of the miser, and runs to waste from those of the prodigal; when heirs of family find themselves straitened and poor, in the midst of affluence; when the cravings

> of luxury silence even the voice of party and faction; when the hopes of meriting the rewards of compliance, Or the fear of losing what is held at discretion, keep men in a state of suspense and anxiety; when fortune, in short, instead of being considered as the instrument of a vigorous spirit, becomes the idol of a covetous or a profuse, of a rapacious or a timorous mind; the foundation on which freedom was built, may serve to support a tyranny; and what, in one age, raised the pretensions, and fostered the confidence of the subject, may, in another, incline him to servility, and furnish the price to be paid for his prostitutions.

In simpler terms, the accumulation of wealth in the hands of some, occurring at the same time as the impoverishment of others, coincides with the gaining of public voice for one sector at the expense of another. The pursuit of material goods stifles the quest for political and social variety and discourse. Ferguson's concern for the public spirit, as embodied by civil society, with the growth of manufacturing and commerce, continues to bear relevance to advanced industrial and post-industrial societies.

Hegel, de Tocqueville and the complexities of the political and social sphere

As civil society became more entrenched in Western intellectual thought, the relationships between families, the state and market were debated. Another key historic contribution to civil society debates is the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who was the first thinker to adeptly expose the complexity of civil society as a theory (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 91). According to Hegel, "Civil society is the [stage of] difference which intervenes between the family and the state, even if its formation follows later in time than that of the state, because, as [the stage of] difference, it presupposes the state; to subsist itself, it must have the state before its eyes as something self-subsistent" (Hegel & Knox, 1952, p. 266). Hegel's explanation sheds light on the complex relationship between the state and civil society, where the state must exist before civil society can materialize such that the state mediates within civil society where necessary.

In addition, the topic of individual freedom plays a significant role in Hegel's discussion of civil society. He writes (Hegel & Knox, 1952, p. 267):

> In civil society each member is his own end, everything else is nothing to him. But except in contact with others he cannot attain the whole compass of

> his ends, and therefore these others are means to the end of the particular member. A particular end, however, assumes the form of universality through this relation to other people, and it is attained in the simultaneous attainment of the welfare of others… Particularity, restricted by universality, is the only standard whereby each particular member promotes his welfare.

While civil society signifies a collective idea, space or organisation, Hegel emphasises that individual autonomy remains at its centre, reflecting processes of capitalist development. Stillman, in examining Hegel's theories, describes how the individual's participation in the social sphere is initially based on impulse, but in this process comes to the realization that this participation holds rational roots which add value to both the individual and members of the community (1980, p. 627). This reinforces the idea that social actions and institutions must be regarded in the context of what or who enriches them.

In terms of how civil society comes into existence, Hegel diverged from the notion that civil society is a natural condition of human freedom and "…understood civil society as a *historically produced* sphere of ethical life which comprises the economy, social classes, corporations and institutions concerned with the administration of welfare and civil law" (Keane, 1998, p. 50). Civil society is not a natural occurrence but rather an outcome of changes which take place over a period of time. In addition to this, Hegel understood modern civil society as a battlefield of potentially conflicting interests such that "…the exuberant development of one part of civil society may, and often does, impede or oppress its other parts, which is why civil society cannot remain or become 'civil' unless it is ordered politically" (*Ibid*). Hegel's two points are, in summary, that civil society is a product of human history and that a constructive civil society requires a degree of regulation.

If Hegel's stance on civil society is undertaken, we are left with a number of implications for how to view and, more importantly, facilitate the growth of modern civil society. One potentially important implication is the degree of freedom afforded within civil society. For example, taking Hegel's account, it will be difficult to justify what Isaiah Berlin terms as a negative account of freedom, where freedom means non-interference. Here, a free civil society, using the definition of negative freedom, is left to mature and transform on its own. However, if, as Hegel

stated, political order is required, freedom must be sacrificed to prevent conflict. With Hegel's definition, we can also infer that regulation and active participation are required features of civil society as a mere hands-off approach will not lead to an effective civil society. Ultimately, the form and extent of interference remain unclear, particularly for proponents of civil society enrichment.

Another key thinker in the historical understanding of civil society is Alexis de Tocqueville. Whitehead summarises the characterisation of civil society by de Tocqueville succinctly (1997, p. 98):

> Tocqueville was perhaps the first major theorist to present civil society as the indispensable counterpart to a stable and vital democracy, rather than as an alternative to it. But the voluntary associations which constituted the core of his notion of "civil society" were quite distinct from the self-defence compacts envisaged by Hobbes, or the corporate enterprises envisioned by Hegel or the bourgeois class in Marx. Indeed, whereas the pursuit of material self-interest was what distinguished civil society in the minds of these two German theorists, it was the containment of such materialism within the confines of benevolent voluntary institutions (which could be viewed as extensions of the family, or as practical applications of religious faith) that inspired the French liberal.

Modern works on civil society continue to reference De Toqueville, particularly in Western contexts, as his approach to civil society allows for the sphere of civil society to co-exist with the state in relative harmony. This notion fits in with a broader agenda of global democratisation by the United States and its Western allies. His version of civil society is most aptly applied to contexts where a democratic state is already in place. This is in contrast to more contemporary accounts of civil society, such as those that consider civil society independent from the state, such that they are able to develop as a force of resistance to tyrannical regimes found in Eastern Europe in the 1990s (Foley & Edwards, 1996). As indicated in sections below, the view of civil society as benevolent voluntary institutions receives wider support by actors and institutions that advance an organisational characterisation of civil society. However, before this organisational approach gained popularity, other theorists provided more nuanced approaches to our understanding of civil society.

Gramsci and the politicisation of civil society in the 20th Century

One of the leading thinkers of civil society in its twentieth century revival is Antonio Gramsci who, according to Norberto Bobbio, draws his theories of civil society from Hegel (Keane, 1988, p. 84). Writing in the early 20th century, it was not until the 1970s and 1980 that he became influential (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 33). As Gramsci does not provide a direct definition of civil society, Roger Simon offers a valuable summary of what civil society entails for Gramsci based on selections from the *Prison Notebook*, a key source of Gramsci's thoughts (Simon, 1982, pp. 79-80):

> Civil society is the sphere where capitalists, workers and others engage in political and ideological struggles and where political parties, trade unions, religious bodies and a great variety of other organisations come into existence. It is not only the sphere of class struggles; it is also the sphere of all the popular-democratic struggles which arise out of the different ways in which people are grouped together—by sex, race, generation, local community, region, nation and so on. Thus it is in civil society that the struggle for hegemony between the two fundamental classes takes place.

Based on the above description, two key principles can be ascertained: first, the entities that constitute civil society, and second, the purpose of civil society as a distinct sphere. The organisations and associations that make up civil society are those that fall outside the realm of the market, i.e. process of production, and institutions of the state. Moreover, civil society is about the particular *relations* that form these organisations or institutions. In contrast to civil society, *political society* is used by Gramsci in reference to coercive relations that exist in certain bodies of the state (though Gramsci does not infer that all institutions of the state are about coercion) (Simon, 1982, pp. 80-81). The two distinct forms of relations help us better understand the role of civil society according to Gramsci, although it should be noted that a particular organisation can consist of both types of relations.

Crucially, civil society serves as a space for contestation. For Gramsci, civil society provided "a strategic arena against efforts to reproduce capitalist values and ideas among the exploited" (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 34). This vision of civil society offers one of many examples of how civil society can be used as a tool against coercive powers of an existing state structure. In other words, Gramsci's "…civil society is the arena, separate from state and market, in which ideological hegemony

is contested, implying that civil society contains a wide range of different organisations and ideologies which both challenge and uphold the existing order" (Lewis, 2002, p. 572). Alternatively, according to one scholar, Gramsci's vision illustrates that the quest of civil society goes further than a dual state-civil society clash. It is contested that for Gramsci, the state consists of political *as well as* civil society (Kumar, 1993, p. 382). In this regard, civil society is not the antithesis or alternative to the state, rather it is where ideas, including hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideas, are contested rather than imposed through coercion. Separating the coercive from non-coercive relations to identify political and civil society, respectively, is particularly relevant to how Iranian intellectuals characterised civil society to include various institutions of the state, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

2.2 Contemporary Discourse

While Ferguson initiated the notion of a civil society in the eighteenth century and thinkers such as Hegel, and later Gramsci, contributed to its theoretical basis, the concept was largely ignored in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, since the mid-twentieth century, civil society has witnessed a revival as discussed in this section. This revival can be broken down into several phases with loose associations to both historic events as well as the emergence of literature by influential thinkers. According to Keane (1998), this renaissance, as he calls it, occurred in three phases. A look at each phase provides a better understanding of civil society's trajectory in the mid-to-late twentieth century and offers insight into key attributes affiliated with it. The first phase, which is also the most short-lived and least influential, can be attributed to the emergence of the Civil Society School of Japanese Marxism during the second half of the 1960s. The key argument here was that a weak civil society, and therefore unobstructed political and economic control from above, paves the way for the growth of capitalism. This principle was applied to countries such as Spain. It can be contended that Spain's free-market economic system was able to develop in the late 1950s only through reforms enforced by an undemocratic state. However, the argument made by this School disregards the nuanced social development that took place alongside the growth of a capitalist economic. Regarding this wave of ideas, Keane states, "Insofar as it was

ultimately driven by the reverie of abolishing civil society by means of civil society, the Civil Society School of Japanese Marxism was undermined by its deep dependence upon the Gramscian approach, which emphasizes the tactical importance of non-market, non-state institutions in the struggle against the exploitative power of capitalist society" (Keane, 1998, p. 14). The shortcoming of this phase was its over-reliance on framing civil society as an opponent of itself, signifying a contestation between different interests in civil society, as cited by Keane, which fails to give sufficient attention to the political sphere and the relationship between the different realms of society.

The next two phases were ones with the most links to the outlook of civil society that have carried through to present day. The second phase of civil society's renaissance, according to Keane, had its roots in the central-eastern half of Europe during the 1970s, when civil society was considered the struggling voice against despotism in favour of democratic political and social order that broke ranks with the values of Marxism. During this time, the state moved to obliterate the effects of the civil society movement by placing it under its own control. Nonetheless, "…the language of civil society functioned as an effective moral and political utopia in central and eastern Europe" (Keane, 1998, p. 21). Following the trail of this phase, the third phase of civil society's renaissance took place in the 1990s, with the language of civil society moving beyond Europe in unprecedented regions of the globe, including Latin America, East Asia and Arab states. In this phase the language of civil society took on its most diverse range of applications and definitions. The ideas emerging from the second and third phases are theoretically and practically relevant for the case of Iran in the 1990s and early 2000s and will therefore be discussed in further detail below. The following sections will examine the path of civil society from an academic theory into a policy tool, particularly in the sphere of development.

Civil Society as a liberal project

Following the social and political changes of the 1980s and 1990s, social scientists, policy makers and practitioners have come to rely on civil society as a sphere that works with, or counter to, the state and market as a third sector. Definitions or understandings of civil society are based on assumptions and ideology, with liberal

thought serving as a key driver. Civil society as a check on state power has played a central role in liberal political thought. According to thinkers such as Francis Fukuyama, the role of civil society is to, "…balance the power of the state and to protect individuals from the state's power" (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 11). This is particularly true of neoconservative theorists of civil society, for whom the organisations of civil society, such as nongovernmental organisations, moderate the powers of the state (Macdonald, 1994). "In the neoconservative vision, civil society exists as a sphere autonomous from, and morally superior to, the state. Part of the contemporary neoconservative attack on the state then, includes a championing of the democratic potential of civil society in both the Third World and the West" (Macdonald, 1994, p. 270).

In order to achieve the aspirations of curtailing state power as set out above, civil society has commonly come to represent a set of voluntary organisations separate from the market and state, often used in reference to democracy-promoting programmes. For example, in a paper on Middle East democracy published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, civil society is defined as a term referring to "the zone of voluntary associative life beyond family and clan affiliations but separate from the state and the market" (Hawthorne, 2004, p. 5). More specifically, civil society entails "nonprofit organizations, religious organizations, labour unions, business associations, interest and advocacy groups, societies, clubs and research institutions, as well as more informal political, social, and religious movements…" (*Ibid*). The end notes of the paper further notes that state political parties are excluded from civil society because of their objective to seek public office; although it is acknowledged that civil society groups may strive to influence the political process, they do not seek public office (Hawthorne, 2004, p. 22). The definition of civil society is further expanded in the notes by maintaining that media is not a component of civil society because it is market-based and its "role as a vehicle for public communication differ from civil society's voluntary character and role as a vehicle for citizen association and collective activity. However, political parties and independent media are often closely intertwined with civil society, in that civil society organizations can share their philosophy, political agenda, and membership" (*Ibid*). The advantage of this definition to others is its inclusion of non-formal associations, such as informal movements, in the realm of civil society.

Nevertheless, the definition contains some weaknesses. For one, its exclusion of media is problematic because it is often difficult to differentiate whether media is a tool for civil society or if the dialogue that takes place in media constitutes a component of the less formal, non-institution based civil society itself. Moreover, it does not address new forms of communication, including Internet-based media sources, which are not market-based but rather rely on independent users.

Exemplifying this liberal perspective is the work of Ernest Gellner for whom modern civil society presents an idea which counters the consequences of communism. His interpretation of civil society is "…that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society" (Gellner, 1994, p. 5). However, he adds to this description by insisting that civil society requires individual autonomy, in contrast to "…the segmentary community [that] avoids central tyranny by firmly turning the individual into an integral part of the social sub-unit" (Gellner, 1994, p. 8). Gellner's definition, therefore, restricts civil society to a particular domain where individual autonomy supersedes any collective autonomy. While this definition is suited in theory for liberal democracies, it is less relevant to practice, particularly in socio-political contexts in which liberalism does not prevail.

One main shortcoming with liberal definitions in line with Gellner's view is the assumption that the role of civil society is carried out by 'nongovernmental institutions.' These definitions do not address the possibility of informal networks and associations that take on the same roles and may still be considered part of civil society. Moreover, the definitions focus on the state-civil society relationship and do not address other factors that affect civil society, such as market forces and familial or tribal ties, among many others. For example, scholars have not reassessed theories of civil society from a gender perspective after examining the role of gender relations (Howell, 2007, pp. 416-417). Others, such as Cohen and Arato (1992), discuss the issue of free markets versus the welfare state in civil society, offering a supplementary dimension for analysis. Overall, the liberal definitions mentioned above are a useful starting point from which different political and social schools of

thought can make additions in order to fit their vision and understanding of civil society.

The ideological angle from which civil society is perceived here creates a backdrop to views on how it can be developed or enhanced in different contexts. As an example, Gellner makes the following statement in the conclusion to his analysis of Adam Ferguson, "…the splendid thing about Civil Society is that even the absent-minded, or those preoccupied with their private concerns or for any other reason ill-suited to the exercise of eternal and intimidating vigilance, can look forward to enjoying their liberty" (Gellner, 1994, p. 80). While seemingly straightforward, the statement contains preconceived notions of a society's political nature, namely the dominance of liberty. His argument makes the assumption that there will be a sector in society that will ensure the positive outcomes of civil society for those not so inclined. Furthermore, Gellner's view does not address the issue of potential conflict that can arise in civil society and how it should be regulated. Promoting civil society without this recognition can prove problematic, particularly in contexts where ideas such as liberty are not practiced. Therefore, getting a clear understanding of the differing definitions of civil society and the historic context from which they are derived becomes even more important.

Keane is one of the most prolific writers on the topic and underscored the significant role of civil society even before it reached its peak level of popularity after the fall of the Soviet Union. He has used the term in a way that highlights the institutionalised or organisational aspect of civil society, while leaving space for interpreting the specific nature of the organisations. Keane describes civil society as:

> …an ideal-typical category that both describes and envisages a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions that tend to be non-violent, self-organizing, self-reflexive, and permanently in tension with each other and with the state institutions that 'frame', constrict and enable their activities. (Keane, 1998, p. 6)

What constitutes civil society is the actual set of organisations that meet the criteria he sets out and their role, relative to the state, is a dynamic, mutually dependent one. Keane's definition provides a sense of both the general nature of civil society and how the different attributes associated with it can have extreme bearing on its

relationship with other sectors of society, namely the state. However, by limiting civil society to organisations, this definition leaves out social movements and activism that do not take place in an institutional setting. In order to study civil society activity in a diverse range of contexts, a more nuanced definition of civil society is required. Even the nongovernmental organisations that have come to represent civil society fail to meet the standards associated with them. As Asef Bayat points out in reference to Middle Eastern NGOs, "Apart from cultural and structural reasons—such as clientelism and hierarchy—the problem is that very often NGOs are attributed with development qualities and abilities that they do not possess" (Bayat, 2000, p. iv).

When defining civil society in the late 20th century, a normative approach is often taken when relating its traits (Howell & Pearce, 2001). Rather than detailing what civil society entails, definitions are geared to what components a civil society *should* demand. While for all intents, certain definitions or interpretations of civil society attempt to provide the concept with an even-handed and neutral characteristic, civil society is also used in a manner that seeks to encourage a liberal outcome. Put another way, the usage of civil society language is connected to "efforts to calculate the tactical *means* of achieving or preserving certain ends" (Keane 1998: 41, emphasis in original). Civil society was considered an instrument by which state control and despotic power could be curtailed. The origins of this strategic use of the term can be found in the eighteenth century and sources such as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* which outlines ways of challenging despotic power through civil society (Keane, 1998, p. 41). This linkage reveals that the normative usage of civil society should not be simply assumed as part of the modern re-interpretation of civil society in the late 20th century.

Putting the issue of power at the forefront of the debate, however, has proven to be problematic. Keane, for example, takes issue with what he considers modern political philosophy's penchant to focus on capturing power or curbing state power in his theory of the politics of retreat (Keane, 1998, p. 42). What this theory highlights is the role of politicians whose aim is not to capture power but rather do away with despotism and allow for the growth of civil society (Keane, 1998, pp. 43-44). Ultimately, the result for politicians of retreat is as follows:

> In disarming the Leviathan, the politicians of retreat encourage the growth of self-organizing civil society, whose chattering, conflicts and rebellions unnerves them. …For all these reasons, the politicians of retreat typically sow the seeds of their own downfall. In the end they usually prove no match for the political and social forces which they help to unleash. They become victims of their own success. Sometimes their experiments in reform breed revolutions. (Keane, 1990, p. 343)

The politics of retreat can be a useful tool in the study of modern Iranian politics and the reform movement that ran on platforms of rule of law and civil society during the 1997 presidential elections, as is discussed in later chapters. In one sense, the pluralism that reformists promoted was what they practised politically, leading to divisions amongst reformist political groups and multiple candidates splitting the reformist vote, which can be cited as a factor in their electoral losses in subsequent elections[9]. Thus far, what has maintained the Islamic regime in Iran has been the ability of conservative forces to continue their domination of the state. It is unclear how the regime, or reformists, would have fared if the reformist calls for limits to state power had taken strong root. Reformists in the spotlight during Khatami's presidency would have required a strong platform of offering for society (i.e. social and economic development), if they wanted to survive after having pushed back the power of the state and generated civil society activity. Ultimately, the politics of retreat provides evidence that placing limitations on state power while strengthening civil society should not be considered an end in itself but rather the start of a process for redeveloping a political structure. In this light, civil society building as a liberal project needs to be re-evaluated.

Civil society and Islam

When looking at 'Islamic' countries, Islam as a theory of political rule is a main factor that leads to questioning its compatibility with civil society, "Analysing civil society in Muslim countries requires that we recognize Islam not only as a religion, but also as a political theory and the major source of a legitimization of political power" (Kamali, 2001, p. 457). Gellner is prominent among thinkers who find Islam incompatible with the conditions of civil society. In the first instance, Gellner imagines that "…Civil Society is an a-moral order" (1994, p. 137, capitals in

[9] For example, Mehdi Karroubi and Mostafa Moin both ran as reformists in the 2005 Presidential Elections, splitting the vote. At the same time, other reformists called for a boycott of the elections.

original). With this seemingly 'neutral' view of civil society, it becomes difficult to reconcile it with a religious order. Moreover, Gellner argues that Islam lacks the space for divergent political institutions, sufficient individuals and intellectual pluralism (1994, p. 29). As a result of these limitations, Gellner believes Islam and civil society are incompatible. Amyn Sajoo summarizes various thinkers challenges about the application of civil society to Islam by stating: "…its adherents inhabit a lifeworld that is tied inextricably to a religious discourse" (Sajoo, 2002, p. 7). Therefore, the inability to disassociate Islam from the social and political aspects of society due to its comprehensive rules of personal and social conduct have led to questions regarding the compatibility of civil society with the Muslim world. However, Sajoo calls attention to the fact that such challenges do not properly factor in the "…diverse ethno-cultural, historical and political realities of the Muslim world" (2002, p. 8). The application of civil society to the Iranian context is a direct example of civil society theory and practice in a non-Western, Islamic setting.

Civil society's relationship with development

The revival of civil society as a concept has come to play a major role in theoretical and practical views on development. Civil society development emerged as part of the donor agenda in the 1990s, having been taken up by the United States government, bilateral donors, international institutions and private American, European and Japanese foundations, mainly in connection with democracy promotion (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000, p. 3). To examine civil society through the lens of development, it is necessary to consider the various methods used to judge what constitutes civil society, how these views have been formed and how the push for civil society capacity building has affected the development process. Each approach describes a unique attitude towards social, political and economic development. The "mainstream approach" considers civil society by evaluating the role of the individual, the state and society from a liberal perspective. In this instance, individuals are free from kinship ties and "[are] deemed to have been born with rights; political society or the state [is] the expression of their social needs, regulating interactions that might otherwise stay in permanent conflict" (as described by Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 18). This approach is based on a number of assumptions regarding how stability and order can be achieved, including the belief

that, “Societies develop and commerce flourishes when individuals abandon the notion of freedom as autonomy in favour of freedom as security grounded in law. Civil law and civility itself distinguishes more developed from less developed societies” (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 30). Statements such as this are an example of the way assumptions regarding basic notions like autonomy can have far reaching consequences on the development of political structures. Based on this assumption, it is not surprising that the value of a ‘vibrant’ civil society as a positive force for democracy has come to represent an undisputable fact that necessitates civil society development for democracy-building (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000, p. 4). Alternative approaches to the mainstream are those which, according to Howell and Pearce, do not emphasize values associated with the rise of capitalism and therefore, “…shift the meaning of the concept away from its liberal, eighteenth-century roots to a distinct and new normative content by the end of the twentieth century” (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 31). However, it is also noted that this approach is, on the whole, under-theorized and implicit.

Irrespective of the approach, the demarcation of civil society by donor agencies and other parties involved in development work is significant, particularly with respect to the dividing line between civil and political society. Unfortunately, in practice, the boundaries between the two are often blurred leading to potentially arbitrary or constructed boundaries. The reason for insistence on segregation is to support a claim by donors that they can support democracy without interfering in a country’s domestic politics (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000, pp. 10-11). With this assumption, donors support voluntary organisations that they judge to fit within their model. Donor agencies are also more exact in defining the nature of what they consider civil society for operationalization purposes. In order to accomplish the task of developing and strengthening civil society, donor agencies are compelled to come up with a description of civil society that is generally a range of organisations that are not-for-profit and, unlike the state, nonauthoritative (Howell & Pearce, 2001, pp. 111-112). Donors need a working definition when it comes to implementing their agendas, something that is not required in theoretical work on civil society which can take on a more ambiguous understanding. As a result, civil society from the vantage of donor agencies becomes limited to a type of entity with which they can interact, often a particular form of organisation. However, once this belief is carried forward

by actors interested in civil society building in isolation from international donor agencies, the entire elaboration of the concept can take a different turn.

As seen in following chapters, donor agencies had less direct involvement in Iran leading up to the Khatami presidency than in some other developing countries. However, the case will show that definitions favoured by donors, namely civil society based on organisations, was the description maintained in the analysis of Iranian civil society development by practitioners and scholars. As a result, important aspects of civil society building, taking in a broader perspective, were missed. Therefore, it is useful to accept Jean-Francois Bayart's argument that 'actually existing civil societies' should be recognised in favour of normative models as they provide a realistic understanding of associational life in a given context; based on this assumption and in the context of Africa, Bayart extends the argument to acknowledge that expansion of a civil society without democratic ideals will not necessarily imply political democratisation (cited in White, 2003, pp. 10-11).

Flawed assumptions

Although civil society building is cried out by many as a solution to most social, political and economic challenges in a fast-changing society, there are a great deal of assumptions about the current meaning and potential of civil society, without taking into account theoretical and empirical evidence about the realities of what 'civil society' represents to different actors in diverse contexts. Civil society has come to be defined in three broad categories, namely as a space for critical discourse, the space where individuals negotiate with political and economic control centres and a collective of formal nongovernmental institutions with particular characteristics, such as peaceful and self-organising (Ishkanian, 2008, pp. 12-13). While each of these three visions of civil society addresses an important component, the reality of civil society is much more complex and intertwined. Civil society has a different meaning depending on the historical and cultural context in which it is used. Moreover, the expectations of, or agenda behind, the use or study of civil society also influences the definition applied at a particular time.

Thomas Carothers (Carothers & Barndt, 1999, p. 21) presents a useful overview in "Civil Society" of the flawed assumptions of many activists, policy makers and other individuals when making claims about policies towards and the potential impact of civil society. Of course the article (Carothers & Barndt, 1999), found in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace published *Foreign Policy Magazine*, does have its own limitations. Written in a manner to attract a diverse and wide-ranging audience, it does not rely on in-depth theoretical explanations or ample references for its claims. Despite these drawbacks, it offers sufficient evidence that individuals involved in the study or promotion of civil society must maintain an objective outlook on the complexities of civil society, and, more importantly, not make the critical mistake of assuming that civil society necessarily represents a unified sphere with constructive development as its goal. The points raised in the article are used in this thesis as a starting point to shed light on some of the key erroneous assumptions and expectations held by advocates of civil society development in Iran.

Challenging inaccurate conjectures regarding civil society is critical. Civil society, if understood better, does have the potential to significantly aid in developing better quality of life for people across the globe, even if it is not a final solution in itself. Moreover, civil society can be one tool in the promotion of democratic states and provide invaluable assistance in social and economic development. However, the latter two objectives are general in scope while the merits and structure of the former are disputed. Consequently, it is imperative to understand not only how different individuals define civil society, but also the reasoning and context behind their views.

The following analysis focuses on presenting a brief overview of several of the inaccurate assumptions made by policy makers, activists and academics alike regarding civil society, as presented in Carothers' (1999) article. This analysis sets the stage for more formative discussions regarding how civil society is considered by thinkers from varying social and political backgrounds and ways in which more tangible results can be reached.

1. Diversity and disconnect within civil society

One of the key arguments presented by Carothers is the fact that civil society is an amalgamation of a diverse group of actors, not a cohesive group of "noble causes and earnest, well-intentioned actors" (Carothers & Barndt, 1999, p. 20). Often, an erroneous assumption is that civil society always works for the public good and that it is a relatively cohesive force at odds with the state in situations where the state fails its citizens. As the article notes, public interest is itself disputed and frequently different groups have different and potentially conflicting interests, causing rifts within civil society itself (Carothers & Barndt, 1999, p. 21).

Here, it is also important to raise the issue of democracy. Carothers agrees that civil society can play a role in advancing democracy. He writes, "It [civil society] can discipline the state, ensure that citizens' interests are taken seriously, and foster greater civic and political participation" (Carothers & Barndt, 1999, p. 21). In a general sense, a participatory environment in which citizens are encouraged to take part in political life, without necessarily engaging in partisan conflict, can promote a representative and democratic political system. However, as the article goes on to say, some scholars have come to warn "…that the proliferation of interest groups in mature democracies could choke the workings of representative institutions and systematically distort policy outcomes in favour of the rich and well-connected or, more simply, the better organized" (Carothers & Barndt, 1999, p. 23). Here, we are warned that lobbying by civil society organizations that fall outside a democratically elected system can lead to misrepresentation and take-over of entities that could have, without such pressure, created a more representative environment. Moreover, others, such as Larry Diamond (1994, p. 7) have made a similar argument, contending that "…a vibrant civil society is probably more essential for consolidating and maintaining democracy than for initiating it".

It is also important to note here the article's view on the reverse impact of democracy on the extent and development of civil society. It is argued that democracy does not ensure a strong civil society by using examples such as Japan and Spain which have relatively weak civil societies alongside a democratic state. In the case of Japan, an argument can be made that its system of capitalism was able to grow because of its

weak civil society. The "civil society school of Japanese Marxism", for example, "…argued that Japanese civil society was weak, showing how the patriarchal family and a culture of individual deference towards power allowed Japanese capitalism to grow quickly with very little social resistance" (Lewis, 2002, p. 573). In the case of Spain, its democracy was also consolidated without a strong civil society sphere. "In Spain, the transition to democracy was orchestrated by state elites via the legal and institutional mechanisms of the old regime" (Encarnación, 2001, p. 60). Here, the writer makes an objection to the American approach which negates the extent of democracy in such countries because they do not have what is perceived to be an "optimal level of citizen engagement" from the perspective of American political analysts. In essence, it states that "A strong belief in civil society should not fuel an intolerant attitude toward different kinds of democracies" (Carothers & Barndt, 1999, p. 23). The lesson to be taken away from the argument related to democracy for civil society discussions is with regard to how a country's democratic credentials are evaluated and the role civil society plays in forming that perception. Unfortunately, the arguments presented in the Carothers article are insufficient in creating a clear account of how they reached their conclusions on the relationship between democracy and its impact on civil society. However, what they do represent is a useful stepping stone by exposing a number of false or, at least disputed, assumptions regarding the bearing democracy has on the formation of civil society and civic engagement in general.

Moreover, a debate on this topic is important in raising issues related to the common perception of democracy, which often conflate the notion of a democratic state with liberal democracy. A democratic state implies a system of government determined by a voting process. Larry Diamond refers to the aforementioned system as an electoral democracy, which he contrasts with liberal democracy, to signify a minimal level of civil freedom that ensures meaningful competition and participation (1996, p. 20). In this situation, the ideological stance of actors or bases of legislation are not limited to a large degree. In a liberal democracy, a stricter set of guidelines based on particular values, for which the standards and procedures vary, are applied to preclude elections being used as a tool to bring about illiberal regimes. In general, key features of liberal democracy include, but are not limited to, the control of power by elected officials, constitutional constraint of power and barring the prohibition of

minorities from expressing their interests in the political process (L. Diamond, 1996, p. 22). Therefore, the mere existence of elections that do not lead to accountability or institutions that are not based on ideals such as individual liberty, freedom of expression and rule of law, are not sufficient indicators of the liberal ideals often associated with democratisation efforts. It is useful to keep such issues in mind when engaging with other texts on civil society since a thinker's political perception on issues such as liberalism and democracy and socio-political background play a crucial role in how she defines and utilizes civil society in a policy debate. Political and social perspectives reveal a great deal of information as to why and how a certain thinker presents his or her views and, by understanding this background, the reader can ascertain a clearer meaning of an author's vantage point when discussing civil society and the potential policy intention behind its presentation.

2. State-civil society divide

Finally, the Foreign Policy article by Carothers emphasises the fact that the state-civil society debate is not a zero-sum situation in which the state and civil society are direct competitors. Carothers states, "Civil society groups can be much more effective in shaping state policy if the state has coherent powers for setting and enforcing policy. Good nongovernmental advocacy work will actually tend to strengthen, not weaken state capacity" (Carothers & Barndt, 1999, p. 21). Regardless of whether this statement is accurate in all cases or not, it is significant nonetheless for questioning the perception that civil society ultimately counters or clashes with the state. In fact, as noted first by de Tocqueville, civil society serves as an important arena for democratic institution building (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 16). Therefore, it is valuable for proponents of democratisation who base their advocacy of civil society on de Tocqueville's work to acknowledge the potentially constructive role of the state. This is critical for both academics and policy makers involved in setting the agenda for civil society organizations, whether in developing or developed countries. It is important to break away from a simplified state-civil society dichotomy.

By looking at the division as one of state versus civil society, we may disregard potential opportunities for collaboration and, moreover, ignore situations in which

civil society is working against the greater interest of the majority. Furthermore, divisions within the public sphere make it important to place judgement on the quality or type of action rather than the sphere or legal space in which it is undertaken. For example, "A rich family can plot to buy up a newspaper, and then use it to discredit their enemies, and with care the whole operation may be carried out within the law, but this would involve no manifestation of dual automony (sic), or of civility" (Whitehead, 1997, p. 107). We can also consider the role of government funding for civil society, which, as Carothers argues, occurs more often than generally recognized. An inaccurate assumption is that, as a competitor of government institutions, civil society is independent from their control. However, funding of civil society by the public sector, as is particularly prevalent in democratic countries, suggests that the relationship between the two sectors is much more complex, requiring further investigation into where the points of convergence and departure exist. This latter notion, as with other points and uncertainties raised above, will serve as a significant basis when examining the definitions and debates affiliated with civil society.

Social capital as stimulus for civil society promotion

The renewed interest in social capital has also played a role in popularising calls for civil society. Social capital is a form of capital "embodied in relations among persons" that serves as a facilitator in social structures (Coleman, 1988). The notion of social capital presented by Bourdieu consists of two elements, "first, the social relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources possessed by their associates, and second, the amount and quality of those resources" (Portes, 1998, pp. 3-4). The two elements are important because they imply a layer of complexity by placing weight on the substance of a relationship and present the basis upon which social capital can perpetuate various inequalities in a given context. This can be extended to exchanges in civil society whereby the type of opportunity afforded to actors in segments of civil society needs to be taken into consideration.

According to Robert Putnam, one of the most famous thinkers associated with the concept, social capital is a public good based on trust and the idea of reciprocity (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993). In practice, scholars have made claims similar

to the following, that "An abundant stock of social capital is presumably what produces a dense civil society, which in turn has been almost universally seen as a necessary condition for modern liberal democracy" (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 11). Social capital as embodied in networks and norms is associated with generating a positive environment in which democracy can thrive. In this respect, social capital has also come to play a key role in development language as it "…has seemed to promise answers which are attractive both to the neoliberal right—still sceptical about the role of the state-and to those committed to ideas about participation and grassroots empowerment" (Harriss & De Renzio, 1997, p. 920). Civil society promotion based on social capital is noteworthy in that is has been applied to both developed and developing states.

However, in the same way that the term civil society has been erroneously assumed as positive or benign and vague in nature, social capital as a foundation for civil society has its critics. "Social capital has become the latest elixir within discussions about development, becoming 'all things to all people'…" as it has ineffectively attempted to provide an over-arching framework for society (Putzel, 1997, p. 940). James Putzel explains that while networks and norms sustaining trust enable dialogue, the 'political content and ideas' are what determine the contribution of networks to democracy (1997, pp. 941-942). In addition to the aforementioned shortcoming of common references to social capital, there also exist negative consequences with the potential to create more harm than good. These negative consequences, as outlined by Alejandro Portes, include, "…exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling [sic] norms" (1998, p. 15). The final consequence of levelling norms refers to instances where group solidarity is based on mutual feelings of adversity in relation to the mainstream; if an individual overcomes this adversity, the original solidarity breaks apart. Overall, over-confidence in the concept of social capital serves as an important example of how seemingly constructive ideas can actually be manipulated or lead to adverse outcomes when put into practice

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the literature on social capital and civil society emphasises the role of organisations while paying less attention to social movements. Taking the understanding of social capital as outlined above, social movements can

result from, and produce, social capital. The following section provides an overview of what social movement means and how it needs to be considered as a component of civil society.

2.3 Social Movements as Civil Society

In light of the current shortcomings for dealing with civil society in literature and practice, this thesis argues that social movements can be included in studies of civil society. This outlook considers civil society as a politicised concept, in contrast to perspectives that attempt to present civil society as neutral or benign. Supporting the inclusion of social movements in civil society are Cohen and Arato (1992, p. 492), who argue "…that social movements constitute the dynamic element in processes that might realise the positive potentials of modern civil societies". Views regarding the nature of civil society can have far-reaching effects on how social movements are formalised and represented, and subsequently analysed and interpreted, resulting from the contentious balance of power between civil society and the state. Including social movements in civil society studies can offer significant insight into a given society as it draws on activities that take place on the boundaries between social and political spheres.

As argued by Tarrow (1998, p. 2), social movements result from the coming together of contentious politics with relevant social networks and resonant collective action frames in a way that allows them to interact with opponents in a sustainable manner. By accepting this position, the following chapters examine the Iranian reform movement through the lens of agency and the role of individuals in social movements. Particular attention is paid to elements of contentious politics embodied by political opportunities and constraints. The political opportunities include those afforded with the opening up of the public space once Khatami was elected, while the constraints range from the conservative state structure to limitations of reformist networks. Collective action frames are assessed in order to study how reformist actors, specifically public intellectuals, used the concept of civil society to construct meaning for their agenda.

Framing as a process

Snow and Benford's account of collective action frames is used in this research. This account stands for the principle that social movements are not simply vehicles for the transmission of existing ideas. Movement actors are the ones who are "…signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613). Therefore, the act of framing is a process that generates a movement's development and simultaneously impacts those outside the movement with which it interacts. From this perspective, examining the process and the actors involved provide a unique and substantial insight in the transformations of a civil society. It is not the frame itself that should take precedence in a study but rather the dynamic *process* of framing. According to Robert Benford (1997, pp. 414-415), by concentrating on frames as 'things' rather than the processes and dynamics of framing, scholars of social movements have belittled the utility of framing as an analytic tool.

One consequence is that current research and literature has come to largely ignore the role of agency in the construction of ideas that shape social movements. This shortcoming is related to a process whereby abstract notions of a movement are accepted as concrete reality, what Benford (1997) identifies as *reification*. In other words, Benford objects to "…the process of talking about socially constructed ideas as though they are *real*, as though they exist independent of the collective interpretations and constructions of the actors involved" (1997, p. 418). As a result of reification, the movement has come to represent the instigators of change rather than the actors who form the movement.

A parallel can be observed between the weakness of studying frames/framing and civil society. By focusing on the organisational and institutional aspects of civil society, a key ingredient, namely the actors who shape this fluid and dynamic sphere, are overlooked. Taking these shortcomings into account, this thesis will examine the role of agency in civil society building, paying particular attention to how the process of implementing the civil society frame (i.e. the framing itself) was shaped. The

following section delves into the theories of the public intellectual as they serve as strategic agents of change in the process described above.

2.4 The Public Intellectual (rowshanfekr)

There exists a significantly smaller body of literature addressing the specific role of public intellectuals in civil society from either the theoretical or empirical perspectives. The available theoretical literature tends to focus on the relationship between public intellectuals and an existing public sphere instead of focusing on the roles these individuals have in shaping modern conceptions of civil society. In the following sections, a brief analysis of theoretical literature on public intellectuals as defined in this thesis and considered relevant is offered. Subsequently, a theoretical analysis is provided of the relationship between public intellectuals and civil society in the context of societies undergoing socio-political development.

The goal of this section is to provide an understanding of the term 'public intellectual' used throughout this thesis and the term's bearing on the research methodology. Similar to civil society, defining the term intellectual has proven to be one of the more challenging aspects of the background research, as available definitions are elusive. There is no single, absolute definition of intellectual that can be applied to individuals across geographic and temporal boundaries, "…how we understand the term intellectual depends to a great extent upon the cultural traditions alive in a society and the reasons for this. Thus who or what an intellectual is, is more than a matter of self-definition, it is also a matter of historical consciousness and its realization" (Eyerman, 1992, pp. 33-34). Therefore, this section is dedicated to elaborating a working definition of the public intellectual that will be used throughout the study. In the English lexicon, "intellectual" commonly refers to a person using his or her intellect or mind in pursuit of knowledge. However, this general definition provides little value when studying a class of individuals who fulfil particular roles within a society.

Invariably, all individuals who engage in critical thinking in their life can be labelled as intellectuals if such a basic characterisation is used. To use Edward Said's definition, "An intellectual…[is] someone whose whole being is staked on a critical

sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever so accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do" (cited in Nabavi, 2003, p. 2). Gramsci's characterization of the intellectual provides a useful angle towards reaching the definition used in this research. According to Said (1994), "Gramsci's analysis of the intellectual as a person who fulfils a particular set of functions in the society…" (p. 8) is a close representation of reality, which he contrasts with thinkers such as Julien Benda, for whom intellectuals are "…a tiny band of super-gifted and morally endowed philosopher-kings who constitute the conscience of mankind" (pp. 4-5). As cited in Roger Simon's (1982) *Gramsci's Political Thought,* Gramsci considers all men to be intellectuals. He expands on this basic definition by separating the intrinsic characteristic of thinking from the function an individual performs in society. Therefore, the intellectual is the person who functions as an organizer in society (Simon, 1982, p. 92). Or, as Mohammad Khatami states, the intellectual understands challenges of her time and "…represents the only hope for finding solutions to those problems" (Khatami, 2000a, p. 111). In essence, the intellectual recognizes social obstacles and, more importantly, engages with potential answers. This thesis largely accepts the idea of intellectuals as 'class-bound', in contrast to views that consider intellectuals as a class-in-themselves, lacking a relationship to the means of production, or, alternatively, a 'class-less' group of individuals who rise above their class of origin (Kurzman & Owens, 2002). This is a significant point as it relays the inherent influence of the intellectual's class and origin in her intellectual activity.

In analysing the role of public intellectuals in Iranian civil society, 'intellectuals' refers to writers and thinkers who hold expertise in a particular field of study and express ideas and theories that add to the knowledge-base of a topic. These individuals may be academics or members of other professional groups, they include sociologists, philosophers, lawyers and journalists. It is important to note that membership in any of the previously mentioned professional bodies is not sufficient, but rather, emphasis is placed on the intellectual's contribution of critical analysis to the field. For example, journalists who report on an event or situation in a descriptive manner are not considered intellectuals for the purposes of this study. The intellectual, here, is the individual who engages with an idea or concept in a

critical manner and makes a personal contribution to the process of change. In other words, the intellectual is not just a thinker but an organiser in society. According to a leading author on civil society in Iran, Majid Mohammadi, intellectuals have connected the work of multiple organisations to themselves, similar to the way in which the press and student movements have taken on the work of political parties (Muhammadi, 1999, p. 193).

In the Persian language, the term used to refer to intellectuals since the emergence of the Communist Tudeh Party in 1941 is that of *rowshanfekr*. Since that time, the term has "…established its tradition within the ideological framework of opposition to and rejection of the state" (Nabavi, 2003, pp. 3-4). The literal meaning of *rowshanfekr*, also written as *roshanfekr*, is "enlightened thinker". The definition of intellectual used in this thesis is that of a thinker who is critical, but not necessarily opposed to the state. What constitutes a *public* intellectual is an individual's ability to express opinions on social and political topics relevant to her time in a manner accessible by the general population on topics beyond the narrow scope of her field. Of course, the extent of the public intellectual's ability to effectively express her views will be part of the analysis.

The 'religious intellectual', or '*rowshanfekr-e dini'*, represents the key actors affiliated with the reform movement, as will be discussed in later chapters. According to a central figure of the reform movement, Alireza Alavitabar, religious intellectuals have had two distinct, yet inter-related, roles in Iran over the last 100 years, namely a socio-economic function and that of idea generation (*andishegi*) (Alavitabar, 1998, p. 43). Most public intellectuals of the reform movement fall within this category. What differentiates a 'religious' intellectual from the intellectuals not identified as such are the following characteristics: (1) the holding of religious beliefs and acceptance of religion's role as an adjudicator, (2) belief in religion as a necessary condition for humanity's happiness, (3) commitment to increasing knowledge about religion and extending an invitation to others (Alavitabar, 1998, p. 44).

It should be noted that the term intelligentsia has also been used by scholars writing about Iran when referring to the class of individuals called intellectuals in this thesis.

One such author who provides a sound argument for this word choice is Hamid Dabashi. Dabashi wrote in 1985 (p. 151), "We shall use the concept intelligentsia as a distinct social stratum, conscious of its collective existence and concerned with the ideological solutions to actual or perceived social problems. Intelligentsia is preferable to intellectual because the former is a broader, more value-neutral term. It is a sociological category, as opposed to an ideological claim". Separating the intelligentsia from intellectuals reinforces a politicised characteristic of the individual, which Dabashi further distinguishes as anti-traditional. However, Dabashi's writing focuses on intellectuals from between the two revolutions that took place in Iran in the 20th century. While his distinction between the intelligentsia and intellectuals was deemed suitable in that context, it is less so when examining the thinkers addressed in the context of reform in the 1990s and 2000s. While the reformist group of intellectuals referred to in this thesis were largely affiliated with a political movement, they lacked a unified ideological base as was more common in years past. Forums such as the *otagh fekr*, roughly interpreted as the theory or idea room, where key reformists are said to have come up with the reform movement's strategies, were more informal, as stated by a leading figure in an interview. The intellectuals of the reform movement, as discussed in Chapter Four, took on different roles and identities at the same time as they contributed to the ideas underpinning the reform movement. Moreover, the widening public space and mediums through which individuals could disseminate their voice[10] contributes to breaking up the concept of the intelligentsia as an independent class and provides a case for using the term intellectual. Additionally, it has been noted that one characteristic of Iranian intellectuals is the limited level of dialogue amongst them (Muhammadi, 1999, p. 210). The absence of prolonged and structured dialogue between intellectuals can be attributed to a number of factors, including state restrictions on opposing viewpoints under different regimes. Another factor can relate to the self-segregation of individuals belonging to particular groups of thought, e.g. religious vs. secular. Overall, the issue of intellectual networks relates to the idea of social capital,

[10] During the Khatami administration, numerous daily newspapers from the perspective of reformists and journals in different fields, such as the arts, literature and philosophy, emerged. They represented a growing public space for debate in contrast to an earlier period when the state ideology dominated the tightly regulated communication industry. While the state has consistently controlled television and radio, the introduction of the internet paved the way for a new space for dialogue. Satellite television channels in the Persian language were also appearing at this time but they are not applicable to this period as they were the domain of a diaspora community that was disconnected from internal struggle undertaken by reformists.

particularly the role of relationships within and between intellectual circles. This may have in turn affected the impact of intellectuals on the rest of society as the establishment of bridging networks did not come about readily.

Furthermore, a distinction is made between 'primary' and 'secondary' public intellectuals. The 'primary' intellectual, as used here, is an individual who is the first to initiate a theory or ideology. The 'secondary' intellectual, in contrast, does not necessarily introduce the new theory of ideology but, rather, contributes to the critical discourse of existing ideas. What is termed 'secondary' here is similar to the notion of the intellectual as 'interpreter'. The 'interpreter' model of the intellectual represents:

> …someone who proceeded by working on the interpretation of 'texts', broadly conceived, with a view to *translating* or *juxtaposing* the goals, codes and norms of one perspective or form of life in terms of other available perspectives of forms of life. This model high-lighted the possibility of mutual understanding, but only through the recognition of difference. (Osborne, 2005, p. 52, emphasis in original)

The secondary *public* intellectual implies a more active agent who is engaged in transmitting their perspectives into the public sphere through their writings and lectures. This is similar to the intellectual as 'mediator' category, where the mediator is involved in 'vehicular' ideas; 'vehicular' refers to ideas "…designed as problem-solving devices, something that will simply 'move things along' and take us from A to B" (Osborne, 2005, p. 53). The intellectual as mediator not only uses vehicular ideas, she "…is a broker of ideas, and a facilitator of talk around them…The mediator is interested in the production of ideas-receptive cultures, for these are the necessary sources of innovation and dynamism" (Osborne, 2005, p. 54). The mediator is differentiated from the secondary as the latter designation places less emphasis on the intellectual's steady injection of new ideas.

In the case of Iran, the notion of civil society was not an original concept, but it offered a fresh approach for intellectuals who were seeking a platform on which they could base reform. Intellectuals affiliated with conservative political factions, referring to academics and those engaged in critical analysis, used similar ideas in order to promote support for conservative policies. This thesis focuses on the role of

the ‘secondary’ intellectual as an agent of civil society. A further argument can be drawn from this thesis that as grand ideologies disappear in political and social debate, the number and relevance of ‘secondary’ intellectuals increases.

The dual role of the public intellectual: A product and leader of civil society

Public intellectuals involved in civil society building take on two overlapping roles in civil society spaces. In an article examining the role of intellectuals as agents of change in Mexico, Roderic Camp writes:

> Few people recognize the large part intellectuals have had in weakening their own interrelationships and thus their effect on public life. In one sense, intellectuals appear to be far worse culprits than the government in effectively censoring their own kind through group domination of various journals and newspapers. (Camp, 1981, p. 314)

This group mentality can be seen in the rise of reformist intellectuals. Furthermore, on the one hand, public intellectuals focused on engaging or promoting a particular brand of civil society take on a leadership role. On the other hand, these intellectuals are themselves products of an existing civil society that is in constant flux. As a result, it becomes difficult to distinguish cause and effect when analysing the role of agency in empowering civil society within a particular context. The argument made here is that individual agency, on the part of the intellectual, is both a champion and product of civil society which cannot be disengaged from one another. Rather, civil society, as a public sphere in which formal and informal dialogue takes place, needs to exist for intellectual thought to grow and, in exchange, promotes civil society. However, this also implies that public intellectuals have the ability to hinder the strength and pace of civil society’s development as a result of the way in which they engage with the language of civil society in the public domain.

The issue of reputation is critical in giving an intellectual authority and voice. Reputation refers to the affiliation of an individual to particular figures or organisations as well as the extent to which the intellectual’s thoughts have been disseminated. In the case of reformists in Iran, intellectuals’ affiliation with both the state at large and the reform movement specifically was indicative of where they could express their thoughts and how far they could go in expressing critical or

controversial opinions. The newspapers or journals in which intellectuals published their work or the public forums in which they spoke depended on their social and political affiliations. Moreover, the extent to which an intellectual could criticise the regime or voice controversial opinions before being reprimanded depended upon their historical involvement with the 1979 revolution and connections with the base of the regime. The extent to which a person's affiliation with the revolution can protect them from punishment by the state has tapered since the 2009 elections and continues to fade as internal power struggles divide the conservatively dominated regime. Therefore, not only was the intellectuals own ability to connect with the public an issue, their chances of gaining initial access to public opinion was based on previous association. However, it is important to note that their status could, and often did, change as a result of the degree they pushed boundaries and were confronted by adversaries in the state. Their ability and willingness to push boundaries would ultimately stimulate the growth of civil society as it encouraged more citizens to express their opinions in a variety of forums, a sign of an evolving civil society. The relationship between the public intellectual and society is a reciprocal one, with the role society assigns to intellectuals and the reaction of the state to them determining the power of the intellectuals. "Intellectual self-image and definition, as well as the image and definition of intellectuals held by society as a whole, particularly political leaders, directly affect the intellectual's role and his ability to play a specific role" (Camp, 1981, p. 304).

2.5 Conclusion

The main argument that can be drawn from this chapter is that with the historical development and expansion of the concept of civil society, theoretical and applied literature on civil society has tried to claim neutrality, despite its clear roots in liberal thought and the emergence of capitalism. Moreover, the correlation between civil society and democratisation needs to be better understood, as it may be overstated at times. Based on these sweeping assumptions, decisions are made by policymakers and scholars regarding development and democratisation through the promotion of civil society which are unable to achieve their intended goals. Furthermore, not enough is known about the role of agency, particularly in reference to intellectuals who engage directly with civil society promotion. Therefore, policy makers and

activists working in the arena of civil society development need to be challenged with regard to the flawed assumptions made about civil society's inherent merits while engaging with a broader reading of civil society.

Despite the drawbacks and shortcomings described above, civil society is not without merit. The understanding of civil society used in this thesis is one where the arena is more than just organisations but also includes less structured collective actions such as social movements. Although the domain of civil society is that which is separate from the economic sector, or market, and the institutions of the state, the complexity of society dictates intersections and overlaps. Finally, the concept of civil society as used in this thesis is not about a static, independent sector of society or the path to the establishment of a distinct, utopian society. Rather, civil society is deemed as the arena "…where power relationships are not only reproduced but also challenged. It is an arena that neither determines nor is determined, but allows debate and contestation to take place with outcomes that are contingent" (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 3). A more encompassing perspective on civil society, which includes social movements, requires scholars and policy makers to examine and analyse the sphere in which actors create, reproduce and restructure the meaning of concepts that impact social order.

The next chapter provides an empirical overview of Iranian history focused on the role of civil society and how it has been analysed in the literature. The objective will be to reveal how an overreliance on perspectives that consider civil society to be only possible in liberal contexts, or which restrict it to voluntary associations, limits our ability to understand and engage with complex environments. Moreover, the remaining chapters are part of a wider assertion of this thesis of how civil society was used as a frame by reformists in line with social movement theories and collective action frames. Namely, collective action frames serve to reclassify as unjust what was once tolerated, and construct larger frames in order to adapt them to a given context (Snow & Benford, 1992; Tarrow, 1998). The chapters that follow will show how reformist intellectuals realigned their association with the state and began a campaign, using the concept of civil society, to enhance their positions of power, how civil society activists benefited from the new campaign of civil society

promotion and, finally, how conservatives appropriated civil society language for their own means.

Chapter 3: Exploring the Iran Case through Literature

While the last chapter concentrated on the theoretical literature underpinning this thesis, the following chapter explores the relevant historical context that led up to the period of the research focus, namely the rise and pursuit of the reform movement from 1997 to 2005. In addition to tracing key issues and the concept of civil society through the history of 20th century Iran, pertinent literature addressing civil society during the reform movement, and its limitations, will be examined. On the whole, the chapter will rely on two categories of literature, the first being works that deal directly with Iranian civil society by name, and its development. A second set of literature used is one that does not directly address civil society as a concept by name in the Iranian context but draws on related issues based on broader approaches to civil society explained in the previous chapter.

Although the inadequacies and overuse of civil society as part of the democratisation agenda of development practitioners was discussed in the previous chapter, the empirical study of civil society can still prove beneficial to a study of the democratisation process. Similar to Jenny Pearce's argument in reference to Latin America:

> ...the concept of 'civil society' encourages us to ask what difference a more diverse associational life can in fact make to the development of a rights-based state in the region. We can explore the extent to which the inequalities of the marketplace can be reconciled with the political equality premised in the concept of 'democracy', and whether associational life can contribute to such a reconciliation by re-shaping the political arena in ways that make it accountable to and representative of wider social groups. (2003, p. 114)

The following chapter is not an exhaustive account of Iranian history or literature as it relates to civil society; rather, it is intended to provide a snapshot of how components of civil society played decisive roles in bringing about or moving forward key moments of the country's modern history and helped shape present day Iranian society. Finally, the literature discussed below contributes to the application and understanding of civil society theory in non-Western contexts.

At this point, it is important to note two key issues that frame Iran's historical developments as it relates to civil society. The two points are, one, its history of survival as a rentier state and two, a tradition of Shia Islam as the dominant religion. As argued by the noted scholar Theda Skocpol (Skocpol, 1982), it was the vulnerabilities of a rentier state and the characteristics of Shia Islam that played a strong role in fomenting the 1979 Revolution. Rentier state refers to the country's reliance on abundant natural resources, including oil and gas, for government funds in place of taxation. As a result, the state's responsibility towards, and in turn expectations of citizens from the government, has played a significant role in how welfare is structured in the state. In other words, the state is expected to meet the basic welfare needs of its population from the sale of its resources instead of taxes obtained from citizens; accountability is also impacted as citizens are more demanding of governments when they have a higher tax burden. To an extent, if the state is able to support itself and its citizens financially, economic interests can lose colour in favour of other concerns. In Middle Eastern countries:

> …rentierism enhances state autonomy by eliminating economically motivated pressure groups and by making a segment of the bourgeoisie dependent on the state. But at the same time it leads to the emergence of culturally and ideologically based groups such as Islamist movements, for whom economic issues are of secondary importance. (Shambayati, 1994, p. 307)

It should be noted that while the role of economic welfare and equality may become secondary, it by no means vanishes. Economics can come to the forefront of internal politics at full force when the state is not able to manage its resources or loses income as a result of domestic or international politics.

In large part, the Iranian state, both during the various monarchies and in their aftermath, has been a key provider of employment as it manages an economy based on property and natural resources, such as petroleum and natural gas, rather than industrial production. Earning its wealth from the sale of these resources has a bearing on the state's relationship with international actors who serve as customers while diminishing accountability towards citizens whose tax burden is limited: "…external rents such as oil revenues are not the result of productive activity. The governments of countries such as Iran can not [sic] claim credit for increasing the national wealth based on their ability to enhance hydrocarbon revenues, nor can they

claim credit for economic and social development" (Shambayati, 1994, p. 310). As a result, "Unable to legitimize themselves on their performance, rentier states try to legitimize their rule on moral and cultural grounds" (ibid). The economy is secondary so long as the state is able to maintain economic stability:

> Politically, a rentier political bargain is stable only as long as sufficient resources are available. In times of abundance it hinders the emergence of independent political interests demanding democratization and strengthens the autonomy of the state vis-a-vis society. A vibrant civil society is unlikely to emerge and non-governmental interests are usually organized around the state's allocation system. Political reform and democratization can be expected in rentier states only in time [sic] of declining resources or in times of fiscal crisis. (Schwarz, 2008, p. 610)

In essence, a rentier state minimises interaction between citizens and the state that in turn minimises the space for civil society formation. In contrast, state formation in economically developed countries involves bargaining over citizens' ability to contribute the necessary resources of money and military service, whereas in poor countries the state has the option of ignoring or coercing citizens (Moore, 2001, p. 394). So long as the state meets the financial needs of citizens, challenge to its authority from the mass base of its population will be limited. The state's competitors are more likely to emerge from a smaller group of individuals, such as public intellectuals, who have loftier ideological goals than economic gain (for example, establishment of an Islamic state in the case of the 1979 Revolution and liberalisation in the case of the reform movement)[11].

The second issue, Shia Islam, specifically the Ithnā ʿAshariyyah branch, took on an influential role once it was adopted by the ruling Safavid dynasty in the 16th century. One significant factor of Shiism is the principle of *marja-i taqlid*, meaning source of emulation, which refers to a learned religious scholar and cleric who has earned the title of Grand Ayatollah and has the authority to rule on religious law and act as a source of guidance for his Shia followers. Shia Muslims are encouraged to select and follow a *marja* as part of their religious practice. This principle was used when establishing the role of Supreme Leader in the Islamic Republic and previous to that was instrumental in giving religious figures social and political power (Amirpur, 2006).

[11] This is not to say that economic wellbeing and control play no part.

A second significant factor is the practice of charity and volunteerism which have played a role in socio-political developments. These practices are embodied in doctrines such as *Khums*, the giving of one-fifth of a person's earning as an Islamic tax, often given to a *marja* for allocation amongst those in need.[12] This practice, in a sense, has played the role of taxation such that the relationship between religious leaders and communities is transformed into one of local governments, where the citizens provide cash that religious authorities must use to deliver goods and services to those in need (see for example Algar, 1969; Nasr, 2007). Communities often set up voluntary associations which are responsible for the actual distribution of the goods and services purchased using these finances. The traditional *bazari* (merchant) class were major donors who developed a strategic power relationship with religious figures (Bashiriyeh, 1984), which will be discussed later in this chapter. In addition to the payment of official monies, regular charitable giving on special holidays or to mark events such as weddings or illness is common practice. While charity may be given directly on these occasions, they are usually passed on to community volunteer associations which are familiar with the needs of local community members. It is beyond the scope of this chapter, and thesis in general, to examine the above issues in detail and how modern lifestyles and changes in government have swayed attitudes towards welfare and the practice of charitable giving. What is relevant to note is the existence of community participation, due to its bearing on civil society development as a whole, and the various links between different segments of society.

Hegel's understanding of civil society is useful as he supports the view that civil society is not a natural state but a product of history. The development of Iranian civil society, it will be shown, is also unique to its historical experience. The significance of the issues raised above in this historical development are twofold. First, the rentier state has played a significant role in how the Iranian state's relationship with its citizen-base has developed (Skocpol, 1982). Even after the establishment of a republic, the state was able to survive independent of taxes,

[12] The practice of *Zakat*, which represents the giving of one-tenth of a person's assets (assets used to calculate this amount are based on a specific list of items), is considered the duty of practising Muslims. However, this practice is less prominent amongst Shia Iranians than that of *Khums*.

remained a major provider of employment and did not pursue privatisation as the private sector represented competition rather than a source of income from taxation. Referring back to the Hegelian notion of civil society, the Iranian context diverges from Western history, where the state was considered a mediator in the civil society sphere that coincided with the emergence of capitalist interests: rather, in Iran, the state has historically stood at the top of society as a paternalistic figure with responsibility for welfare, which is based on its own discretion, and not reliant on taxes from the commercial sector for its survival.

Second, religious taxation resulted in the granting of power to the religious clergy within communities by controlling substantial financial wealth. Hegel's views from the last chapter can be used here as well to show that while liberal interpretations of civil society are not sufficient for the understanding of non-Western contexts, they provide a platform from which questions can be asked. Hegel argues that political power is needed to interfere and facilitate conflicting interests for the different forces in civil society in order to retain its 'civility'. Taking this viewpoint, scholars of modern Iran need to examine how different interests, such as the *bazar* and clergy, were reconciled with one another, particularly as certain sectors of civil society, such as the religious establishment (before being incorporated into the state), controlled vast amounts of wealth and played a significant role in welfare provision. In fact, with the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the state and religious authority were merged, and the new political authority appropriated many voluntary community associations. It was in this setting that reformists found themselves by the late 1990s and the civil society discourse transpired. Ferguson's view on the relationship between a reduction of public spirit and consequent rise in corruption corresponding with the growth of commercialisation, as discussed in Chapter Two, relates to the role of the *bazar* and expanding business interests in Iran. On the one hand, the *bazar* and private sector can be considered part of civil society as active agents for social change. On the other hand, members of the *bazar* and private sector have made political alliances and taken actions based on their own self-interests.

The first section of the chapter elaborates on the types of literature addressing Iranian civil society. The second section offers insight into key stages of 20th century Iranian history, up to the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. The third

section delves into the aftermath of the revolution and the establishment of strategic institutions that reveal the increasingly blurred boundaries between civil society and the public sector. The final section provides a critical look at a spectrum of academic literature that addresses Iranian civil society directly through its relationship with the reform movement in order to illuminate gaps in existing literature. By setting the contextual framework for the following three empirical chapters, Chapter Three traces the concept of civil society to reveal how it circulated, become appropriated, reinterpreted and contested in modern Iranian history. This allows for a more complete understanding of the situation as it existed when reformists came to utilise civil society for the purpose of enhancing political and social power.

3.1 Types of Literature[13]

While English language literature analysing the civil society discourse in Iran grew in the period surrounding Khatami's presidency, it is limited to several academics, with most in-depth theoretical work in English written by Masoud Kamali, an Iranian born professor of sociology in Sweden. This narrow group of work is analytical in its approach to discussing the origins of Iranian civil society, based on a particular definition given by the author, and how civil society developed historically, with particular attention given to the Constitutional Revolution in the early years of the twentieth century and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Unfortunately, this body of literature is limited in diversity and scope.

There also exists a second category of writers, consisting of a number of scholars in areas such as political science, philosophy and religion who touch upon the notion of civil society and its characterizations in, and implications for, Iran as part of their greater social or political discourse. Their ideas are of importance due to several factors, including their comprehensive understanding of Iran's past and present as well as their influence in various political circles. A great deal of this literature emerged in the 1990s and 2000s, parallel to the rise in global interest in civil society.

[13] The aim of this literature review is to gain an understanding of the civil society activity taking place in Iran as well as the theoretical discourses surrounding the topic. While some sections refer to English literature by scholars based outside of Iran who have greater autonomy in terms of what they write than individuals based in Iran, Persian language literature has been thoroughly investigated and included in the thesis, particularly in the section on the civil society discourse in Iran and Chapter Four.

Therefore, a portion of this chapter will examine their views and analyse their significance to gain a better understanding of why Iranian civil society has taken its present shape and how new ideas and different interpretations of Islam and Iranian society can influence future political and social change.

A third component of literature on Iranian civil society exists which is dedicated to the development of civil society organisations, particularly nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), since the 1997 election of Khatami. This type of literature follows a broader trend in development circles that are concerned exclusively with organisations and their role in economic development and political democratisation. The definition of civil society used here is in line with that used by donor agencies working in the field of development, as addressed in Chapter Two. Most work in this category can be found in the form of reports and studies on the emerging NGO sector as civil society is deemed synonymous with the NGO sector. Examples of literature that emerged from Iran during the reform period include those generated by organizations such as the Hamyaran Iran NGO Resource Centre, the Iran CSOs Training & Research Center (ICTRC) and other organizations working on capacity building programmes for Iranian NGOs. Literature in this field from outside Iran includes research on areas such as capacity building, NGO laws, youth, human rights and environmental issues and the role of information and communication technologies, (for example, see Katirai, 2005; Mostashari, 2005; Rohde, 2004; Squire, 2006). The significant point to take into account with this body of work is how they categorize an organization as an NGO (and whether this matches internationally recognized standards), their side-lining of traditional organisations as well as why and how the NGO, in this literature, is often conflated with all of civil society. A deeper exploration of these questions falls largely outside the scope of this thesis.

A bulk of academic literature on contemporary Iranian civil society, particularly fitting in the organisational category of civil society, places its focus on the women's movements. Examples include Elaheh Rostami Povey's study on trade unions and women's NGOs (2004) and numerous publications by Ziba Mir-Hosseini on gender issues in Iran, such as "Debating Women: Gender and Public Sphere in Post-Revolutionary Iran" in *Civil Society in the Muslim World* (2002). Haleh Afshar has

also written extensively on the topic of women in Iran, offering insight on topics such as Islam and feminism (see for example Afshar, 1998; Afshar, 2007). While the participation of women in Iran's political and social spheres is not a new phenomenon, Iran witnessed an outward surge in political and social activism by women and for women during the reform period that is reflected in this research and can be attributed to the reform movement's campaign for liberalization of rights combined with the effect of international campaigns for women's rights. Although this type of literature is valuable, its exclusive focus does not provide a broad understanding of the discourse that took place among reformists on the issue of civil society. Moreover, this type of work is often grounded in particular feminist perspectives, which is a complex area of study on its own.

Finally, a limited component of literature reflecting Iranian political and social development addresses the intellectuals who have played an important role in Khatami's campaign and the reform movement as a whole. Most literature, written primarily in the late 1990s and early 2000s is descriptive, setting out the various arguments of intellectuals. As this PhD thesis sets out to study the role of public intellectuals in the promotion of civil society, a component of the reform movement's agenda, the literature will also be addressed in the concluding section of this chapter.

3.2 Definitions of Civil Society in the Iranian Context

One of the first issues to be addressed, either directly or indirectly, in civil society literature is the definition of civil society with which the writer works. As discussed in the previous chapter, when various writers set out to examine and analyse civil society in theory or practice, they use a general theoretical framework from which their results are derived. Understanding *how* and *why* a writer defines civil society in the way he or she does is an important first step in comprehending the theoretical or policy implications they set out. It is for this reason that the following section focuses on how various authors dealing with the Iranian context understand civil society and how they apply to analysis of the current state, and future prognosis, of Iran.

Writers discussing Iranian civil society often differ in their approach as a result of the conditions and definitions of civil society they use as a backdrop for their work. This approach is necessary since Iranian society, with its history of authoritarianism and cultural ties to Islam cannot be equated with Western society, where the term civil society first came about. On the one hand, this "re-defining" of civil society to meet the needs of a particular social or political order can be seen as submitting to the illiberal traditions of a society and justification of present-day order. However, as literature such as *Civil Society and the State* (Keane, 1988) has shown, civil society, even in the Western context, does not have a uniform definition and authors with varying views have faced criticism in the way they have defined and used the term civil society. Therefore, interpretations that authors discussing Iran have used can lead to a better understanding of the way in which its society has developed and point the way forward. Rather than dismissing the notion that civil society has ever existed in this context, we can view the differing ways in which it has emerged and the mechanisms necessary to either strengthen this same form of civil society or transform it altogether.

While some authors spell out their working definition of civil society, some allow the reader to assume the definition or interpretation of civil society they employ. As such, many writers reviewed in research for this thesis have used Gellner's definition, or a derivative of it, in their analysis. As described in Chapter Two, Gellner equates civil society with nongovernmental organisations that hold the state accountable. Their points of agreement and departure in applying this definition of civil society to the Iranian context are interesting, particularly in light of the fact that Gellner did not see civil society as being compatible with Islamic society. In "Civil society in Iran: Past, present and the future", Ali Paya[14] defines civil society as "… 'social institutions', which act as a buffer between the individual and his or her 'social environment', and create breathing spaces for the individual *vis-à-vis* other individuals and powerful social institutions or socially constructed entities" (Paya, 2004, p. 165). He elaborates on this by defining powerful institutions as the state, similar to Gellner, but expands this definition to include large business corporations. While the definition may be useful in his brief overview, its use of the term "social

[14] The relevance of Ali Paya's work will be discussed further later in this chapter.

institutions" is too ambiguous, especially if considering Iranian civil society to be in a developing stage. What is useful from Paya's work is his reference to civil society as a social construct that is continuously changing (2004, p. 165). As a social construct, there can be greater freedom in the conceptual interpretation and practical application of civil society to development contexts.

It is in fact these interpretations that change the values and limits attributed to civil society, as can be seen below. Masoud Kamali, a key writer on Iranian civil society, as well as civil society and Islam, identifies civil society as "…a social sphere where non-political individuals and groups interact and organize their social life" (Kamali, 1998, pp. 35-36). He adds to this definition by separating society into the two spheres of civil society and the state, similar to the definitions used above. For him, there is a difference between the Western conception of civil society and the case of Iran. In Iran, "*It is a civil society of communities and institutions rather than individual citizens and their associations*" (emphasis in original, Kamali, 1998, p. 11). He departs from thinkers such as Gellner by challenging two key notions of contemporary civil society: that of individualism and democratic institutions. He states that the latter two factors are attached to the socio-cultural development of the West and are not relevant to Iran's history or that of other Muslim societies where groups and communities supersede the individual. In their place, he contends that civil groups and their affiliated institutions that counteract the state form the basis of civil society in Iran (Kamali, 1998, p. 11). In *Multiple Modernities, Civil Society and Islam*, he states that a civil society must meet the following conditions:

> 1-Relative autonomy of a societal sphere from the state
> 2-Relative autonomous access of some societal actors to the state or its elite
> 3-Existence of a relatively independent public sphere
> 4-Legal and/or normative protection of societal agents and institutions
> 5-Existence of a 'solidary sphere' based on redistribution of resources
> (Kamali, 2006, p. 40)

With this basis, it is much easier to see how civil society has historic roots in Iranian history, particularly with the *ulama*, or Islamic clergy. Kamali explains in detail the historic role of the *ulama* in Iranian society, with examples of the Constitutional

Revolution as well as the Islamic Revolution, as a powerful force, particularly against the state (2006, p. 222). The stance represented by Kamali adds an important dimension to any study of Iran by inferring that civil society should not be studied simply as a modern phenomenon but to also consider the socio-political precursors to contemporary debates.

Kamali further challenges the entire notion that civil society, as a Western concept, cannot exist in Muslim communities. He describes two different forms of civil society, that of "An indigenous civil society based on a core of quasi-traditional and indigenous-modern influential groups" and "A modern civil society built around a core of Westernized intellectuals and modern social groups" (Kamali, 2006, p. 255). With Kamali's depiction of civil society, we see a different side, one that has survived and can be further bolstered in Muslim societies. Overall, Kamali himself finds that the social movements that have evolved over time and found voice in 21st century Iran are promising despite the numerous obstacles they face, an issue that will be discussed in detail at a later point. However, this is not to say that Kamali's distinction between Western and non-Western models of civil society can be categorically seen as a positive move. While he allows, and effectively argues for a different view, his interpretation of civil society can potentially leave out certain activities aimed at changing society such as ideas and actions pushing for human rights and democratisation.

Even at this introductory point we witness how the different interpretations of civil society clash in a manner that may impact forthcoming analysis by looking at how Paya's arguments conflict with those by Kamali. While Kamali takes great care to distance civil society from the individual, Paya's definition of civil society makes direct reference to it. Here, as with all literature on the topic, we are reminded of the significant role the writer's definitions of each term play. Nevertheless, though Paya's understanding of civil society uses the individual as the point of reference, he continues to write of the existence of civil society in Iran. He notes the importance of the Islamic clergy, making particular mention of Shia jurists, and their role in countering state power, with another noteworthy group of individuals, the *asnaf*, or networks, resembling a more diverse set of European guilds (Paya, 2004). Overall,

the difference between the authors opens up space about how Iranian society's past should be examined and what this implies for the future.

3.3 Historical Background: 20th century Iran

This section provides a look at the historical backdrop of the issues central to this thesis, namely civil society development and the role of public intellectuals, by examining significant events and discourses from the Constitutional Revolution up to the revolution that abolished the monarchy in 1979. Civil society in Iran will be examined from a historical perspective, with specific focus on several key events in Iran's modern history. The role of intellectuals in major political shifts is also described. Although partly descriptive, the following sections support the argument that even though civil society is a theoretical concept born from Western thought, the ideals that it represents are not unique and have a long standing tradition in non-Western contexts, including Iran. While it has not always been referred to as civil society in name by social and political actors and observers, the attributes that make up civil society were not only present but have been influential in shaping social, political and economic life in the context of contemporary Iran. The crowd, as it is called by Ervand Abrahamian, has been used to articulate the wants of the masses in Iran, particularly in cities, through organised practices, such as strikes, public meetings and protests (Ervand Abrahamian, 1968). For Abrahamian, the crowd is not a mob but a more organised demonstration, representing the masses' form of expression. In a sense, this can be seen as a provisional basis of civil society, the definition of which will by the late 20th century include demonstrations, organisations and space with links to democratisation.

The Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911)

Iran's constitutional revolution, or *Mashrutiyyat,* took place in the early twentieth century, roughly dating between the years 1905 to 1911. The political setting was a monarchy, controlled by the Qajar dynasty that lasted from the late eighteenth century up to 1925. The outcome of this so-called 'revolution' was the establishment of the first national parliament (*majles-e showra-ye melli)* and a constitution. The term 'revolution' is placed in quotes because it can be disputed whether the

constitution was developed as a result of a movement or revolution. As Stephen Poulson (2005) argues in *Social Movements in Twentieth-Century Iran*, social movements and revolutions are closely linked in Iran, and, in the case of what is historically referred to as the Constitutional Revolution, not all of the 'revolutionary' goals of its instigators were realised. It is necessary to raise Poulson's argument here because it introduces the nuances that should be considered when analysing the actors and events that surround such significant moments in social and political development and will be relevant in this thesis.

As argued by Gheissari and Nasr, a domestic crisis arose by the end of the 19th century as a result of a European attempt to dictate the direction of the country's economy and politics, leading to a struggle that has in turn shaped Iran's modern politics. The struggle was, "…between, on the one hand, the ideals of freedom and rule of law and, on the other, the demand for stability, order, development, and the kind of state that can provide them" (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 23). In other words, conflict emerged from an effort to balance the desire for welfare provision from the state with the aspiration for individual autonomy and limiting state power. Making the situation more complicated, there existed multiple factions based on a diverse range of interests that formed, broke and recreated alliances within this struggle. A look at the constitutional revolution, and other defining moments in Iran's history, reveal the complexity of Iranian society. This complexity uncovers influential social circles and their formal and informal institutions, the discourse among and between different factions and the civil society sphere that emerged as a result.

One of the most striking features of the Constitutional Revolution was the activism and dialogue instigated among various social groups and a growing press. According to Masoud Kamali, the main social groups on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution were the aristocrats, the *ulama* (clergy), the landlords, the *bazaris* (merchants), modern urban groups, peasants and tribes (Kamali, 1998, p. 80). These social groups named by Kamali can be categorized as components of civil society which were organised around shared interests and mutual benefits. This is confirmed by Hadi Khaniki, an advisor to Khatami and intellectual, who states that on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution, a number of entities existed that can be attributed to visions of civil society, as entities with socio-economic roles, ideological vehicles,

etc. According to him, these civil society entities include but are not limited to networks of *ulama*, syndicates and *zurkhaneh* (translated directly as 'house of strength/power', *zurkhaneh* are traditional gymnasiums) (Khaniki, 2002, p. 93).

The following sections will outline how the different components of civil society eventually gave way to the Constitutional Revolution. The *bazaris*, for example, were the owners and leaders of commerce; however, outside the marketplace and their commercial pursuits, they also established associations among themselves and collaborated with other groups in non-commercial activities to meet collective and mutually beneficial goals. The *ulama*, for the most part, remained separate from the state and had consolidated their power by the 19th century as a result of growing support for the notion of high ranking clerics providing religious guidance and serving as sources of emulation (Azimi, 2008, pp. 30-31). As described below, members of the *ulama* and *bazari* class often supported one another's social and political agendas.

The Tobacco Movement (1891-92) as a precursor

While the Constitutional Revolution itself took place in the early twentieth century, its groundwork was laid earlier as a result of events that impacted the country's political and social landscape. By the late nineteenth century, the political rule of the Qajar dynasty was well established as were their ties to foreign countries through a series of strategic concessions that provided vast benefits to the royal court. Beginning in 1889, preliminary negotiations were complete for an agreement with the Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Great Britain whereby, "…all rights concerning the sale and distribution of Iranian tobacco inside Iran and in export were given to the English company, which, in return was to pay the Iranian government: £15,000 a year" (Kamali, 1998, p. 77). With the arrival of the English company's employees, the *bazaris*, who were impacted by such concessions to foreign companies, responded negatively to what they considered an incursion on their economic interests. Cooperating with the *bazaris* were the *ulama*; the cooperation between these two entities was based upon mutual interest due to the interdependence of the *bazar*'s economic power with the clerics' social power. In exchange for patronage,

the clerics, who were a respected group of individuals in Shia Iran, defended and supported the actions of the *bazari* class.

During the tobacco movement, the merchants shut down the trade in the marketplace and organised mass demonstrations across the country with support from the *ulama*, who mobilized urban people and established themselves as leaders of city dwellers (Kamali, 1998, p. 78). One specific form of support from the *ulama* was a *fatwa*, or religious edict, that opposed the use of tobacco on religious grounds. While the details of the *fatwa* and its origins are complex and subject to debate (for example, dispute over who actually wrote the edict versus whom it is attributed to), its overall consequence demonstrates the strong role of the clergy. The outcome of the public's actions was the annulment of the concessions and, ultimately, the *ulama's* lifting of the fatwa, effectively ending the boycott of tobacco. The tobacco movement signified the rising role of *ulama* and showed how "…the *ulama* played their traditional role as the true leaders of civil society of Iran and forced the state to accept them as its civil counterpart" (Kamali, 1998, p. 78). Ultimately, the events of the tobacco movement demonstrated to the public the role they could play in influencing the state, an understanding that motivated subsequent events leading to the Constitutional Revolution.

Intellectuals and the Constitutional Revolution

Another key component of civil society at the turn of the century was the role of intellectuals. Ali Gheissari offers a detailed account of intellectuals and their establishment as an independent group in the late nineteenth century and during the Constitutional movement in *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (1998). He describes the increase in journals and newspapers along with the transformation of writers and poets into professional journalists. The principles of the Constitutional movement were espoused in various forms of literature, and "Political writings, such as newspapers, leaflets, tracts and pamphlets, enjoyed a growing popularity among the literate public who became the new patrons for writers. New ideas were introduced and debated" (Gheissari, 1998, p. 17). In effect, the written word became a means to communicate differing ideas among the masses, albeit a platform

available for those belonging to literate groups. The emergence of a critical press represented the foundation for a public space and platform for civil dialogue.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the intelligentsia consisted of young students sent to Europe to study, from affluent families with ties to the royal court and government (Kamali, 1998, p. 98). Intellectuals were able to inject discourse with new vocabulary imported from European thought while "…infusing the old political idiom with a new content" (Azimi, 2008, p. 29). These intellectuals differed from their predecessors, who were affiliated with the royal court or seminaries, and "…perceived the world…through the French Enlightenment. They venerated not royal authority but popular sovereignty; not tradition but Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity; not Shadows of God on Earth but the inalienable Rights of Man" (Ervand Abrahamian, 2008, p. 35). It was these individuals who brought words such as *demokrasi* (democracy), *Kapitalism* (capitalism) and *sosyalism* (socialism) into popular discourse, introduced new terms, for example *chap* (left) and *rast* (right) and redefined other terms, for example, "*dowlat* from patrimonial court to national government" and '*mellat'* from 'religious community' to 'nation'" (Ervand Abrahamian, 2008, p. 36).

The contribution of exiled writers to public debates is also noteworthy. According to Gheissari (1998), a number of authors contributing to this literature were living in exile and their work was, at times, published as a result of financial support from Iran's merchant families who lived abroad while running their offices across India, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. In fact, it was these merchants who helped the spread of ideas along the three main routes of Bushire-Bombay, Rasht-Baku and Tabriz-Istanbul at the turn of the century, "While the ideas of nationalism and liberal democracy had come to Iran through Ottoman Turkey and British India, respectively, the more radical socialist and communist ideas were imported from Russia" (Gheissari, 1998, pp. 17-18). The presence of socialist theory also had a profound impact on the course of intellectual activity and on Iran's modern history as a whole. The Constitutional Revolution serves as an early example of the leading role intellectuals played in introducing ideas that eventually led to action by a broader section of society. Here we see a form of civil society in action, as it was embodied in the discourse amongst intellectuals, collective action by the merchant classes and

the role of the clerics. This type of discourse and power struggle between factions of society and the ruling state continued up to and through the revolution, as discussed below.

From a Constitutional Monarchy to an Islamic Republic: Between two revolutions

During the period between the establishment of parliament, as a result of the Constitutional Revolution, and the replacement of the monarchy with a republic by 1979, a host of significant developments took place. Civil society, as a space where ideas were debated and power contested through formal and informal structures, matured. The roots and causes of the 1979 revolution itself are a complex and debated affair with a dedicated set of literature beyond the scope of this chapter (Examples of detailed academic studies of the revolution include Ervand Abrahamian, 1982; Kurzman, 2004; Zahedi, 2000). During the lead up to the revolution, a vibrant civil society did indeed exist, some of which transformed in the revolution's aftermath. As previous and subsequent sections and chapters will show, a variety of institutions and actors from civil society were involved in the revolution, many of who were later altered and incorporated into the state. This highlights the complicated and dynamic nature of civil society and the problem of expecting it to conform to a single model.

Moreover, the revolution that saw the emergence of the Islamic government is part and parcel of a complex history that should not be reduced to "...narrating the conflict between the society and state. The revolution and what followed can be better understood by paying attention to the dynamics of competition between democracy and ideology in the decades before the revolution" (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 8). Gheissari and Nasr are referring to the "inherent tensions" between commitments to democratic values and ideological claims. This can be interpreted as a disconnect between a demand by a faction of society for an end to an authoritarian monarchy, while another faction, or at times the same faction, called for an ideologically grounded system of government not rooted in liberal democratic values. Their reasoning reflects the argument that a strict binary between society and state ignores nuances of the relationship as well as the diversity amongst the actors representing each entity. They argue successfully that, "It is important to place the

revolution of 1979 in its proper historical context: neither as end nor culmination of a historical process, but rather as an interregnum in a longer process of state-building that began in 1905 and is still unfolding" (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 9). Simply put, the events and discourses that emerged from the turn of the nineteenth century onward play a continuous role in shaping the country's political and social landscape and its actors. Neither the Islamic revolution nor the events that followed can be considered as a discrete occurrence, a theme emphasised throughout this thesis.

Chapter Six will provide more in-depth coverage of how sections of civil society were usurped and adapted by conservative factions in the revolution's aftermath. However, the following sections will address key events and groups in the period preceding the revolution. The rationale behind the selection of the particular topics discussed below is that they represent core issues that impacted wider socio-political changes in modern Iran, the role of public intellectuals and the influence of Western ideas and actions. All of these are contextually significant in a study of contemporary Iranian civil society and how the concept came to be used by reformist figures in the Islamic Republic.

The Tudeh Party

One of the key subjects mentioned above is the Tudeh Party. The Tudeh Party, roughly translated as the party of the masses, was launched in 1941 with efforts to continue the work of the banned Communist Party of Iran, though the Party was not definitively founded on the basis of communist principles. The Party is described here as a substantial representative of intellectual activity in the social and political sphere of Iran in the decades leading to the 1979 Revolution. The Communist Party of Iran was itself founded in 1920 and its activities included the establishment of trade unions in industries such as oil, and a women's movement. The parties represent the emergence of Marxist and socialist thought in Iran that were in large part a result of international communication and commercial lines between Iran and its neighbours to the north in addition to principles of liberalism and democracy. As a result of government persecution and foreign intervention, both under Qajar rule and followed by the reign of Reza Shah (1925-1941), the Communist Party was unable to remain a publicly active organization. However, after Reza Shah was

forced out of power in 1941, the Tudeh Party gained recognition as a social and political force. Upon its inception, trade unions were established across the country then followed by the Party's participation in parliamentary elections.

Intellectuals were a key component of the Tudeh Party that had become a symbol for change. Early on, '…the term "*Tudeh'i*" (a member of the Tudeh) was often equated with *rawshanfekr* (intellectual)' (Nabavi, 2003, p. 9). Discourse and scholarship were, therefore, core issues that contributed to the Party's value as an organ of civil society, going beyond a political party with explicit political goals. While the Party did not develop into an exclusive intellectual enclave, intellectual activity continued to play a role in the Party and, conversely, the Party played a role in generating scholarly dialogue. Many individuals who gained prominence in Iran's intellectual circles in the mid-twentieth century were in some way affiliated with the Tudeh Party. While a significant number of its members played a role in making the revolution of 1979 happen, the party gradually lost political power until it was outlawed by the Islamic regime. Nonetheless, the individuals, particularly public intellectuals, affiliated with the movement played a significant role in shaping social and political movements across Iran.

Mosaddeq, the National Front and nationalisation of oil

The Tudeh Party did not remain alone in its activities. In the 1940s, the National Front political movement was established by Mohammad Mosaddeq. Initially opposing Mosaddeq and the National Front, the Tudeh Party later took part in the coalitions formed by the National Front. Named Prime Minister of Iran by Parliament in 1951, Mosaddeq quickly moved to nationalise the country's oil industry. Up to that point, the British owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company dominated the industry and had been refusing requests for higher royalties. Mosaddeq's actions were popular among the masses, initially receiving a wider range of support from groups such as the Tudeh Party and religious leaders. He had the power of the public behind him, "Every time the opposition reared its head, whether in parliament or in the court, he would make a direct appeal to the public, and would rely on demonstrations to bring his opponents 'under his influence'" (Ervand Abrahamian, 1968, p. 190, the portion in inverted commas inside quote was cited from Ettelaat-i

Haftegi, 20 June 1951). It is relevant to note Mosaddeq's well-regarded status as an individual. The British Charge d'Affaires stated in 1951, "The Premier [Mosaddeq] is able to control parliamentary and public opinion mainly because of his personal popularity" (Foreign Office document in Ervand Abrahamian, 2001, p. 187). However, Mosaddeq and his pursuit of nationalism came under attack from many angles. The foreign entities that had thus far benefited substantially from their agreement with the Pahlavi regime over the country's oil wealth were at the forefront of this attack. The Pahlavi regime (1941-1979) itself was displeased with the independent authority Mosaddeq was exerting as Prime Minister and its implications for the monarchy's authority in the future. Moreover, the prominent position of Communists in the situation alarmed other supporters. Disagreements over sensitive issues, such as interpretation of religious laws, taxes on the bazaar and appointments to the ministries of justice and education caused rifts in the National Front, with the religious wing breaking away from Mossadeq (Ervand Abrahamian, 2001, p. 200).

In 1953, Mossadeq was overthrown with support from British and American intelligence agencies (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 54):

> Although popular perceptions in later years would deny this, in the summer of 1953, the monarchy and the military's realism resonated with many Iranians, whose personal interests and perceptions of national interest had diverged from Mossadeq's platform. Although many Iranians would later idolise Mosaddeq as a 'secular saint' and lament the consolidation of power in state institutions, the threat that they perceived to Iranian sovereignty and social stability in 1953 had nudged them to acquiesce to accelerating the pace of state-building and to vesting greater powers in those institutions that could provide order and protect Iran's territorial integrity.

While the idea of Mossadeq's mission was applauded by many, the risks that accompanied it were not accepted. Parallels can be drawn from the above assessment with current events, in which stability, individual freedoms and less overt threats to territorial integrity are endured when faced with full scale conflict (i.e. compliance with the Islamic regime in the face of unpredictable regime change instigated from the outside). Overall, Mossadeq's actions and his eventual overthrow in 1953 represent a landmark moment in contemporary Iranian history. Idealism was suppressed in exchange for an unfair yet stable state. Moreover (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 54):

> ...it is from this point forward that the demand for democracy became largely reduced to intellectual debates; it increasingly was separated from the reality of Iranian domestic and foreign policies. It is also from this point forward that any moves on the part of the state to become more autocratic were met with oppositional politics targeting state institutions. This development left Iranians with a conflicted vision of their relations with the state: they needed what the state provided, but they were deeply suspicious of its authority.

For some decades, ideological debates surrounding issues such as the relationship between the state, market and society were largely contained within intellectual circles. However, these debates did not remain out of sight for long and global and domestic events eventually pushed intellectuals back into the public spotlight, itself an indication of civil society's existence. The National Front was a bastion for intellectuals who had travelled to or studied in the West and were keen to explore ideas such as democracy and liberty within a nationalist framework. Moreover, the National Front was, in practice, a coalition that included support from factions of the bazaar, representing the private sector, a collaboration that demonstrates civil society in practice. While the National Front for all intents and purposes was made obsolete in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution, its ideas are still referred to three decades after the revolution and is an important historical element of modern Iran. In fact, "Mosaddeq's fall was to have widespread consequences for Iranian political development in the rest of the twentieth century and arguably led directly to the revolution of 1979" (Ansari, 2000, p. 34).

The White Revolution

Largely stemming from the events and groups discussed above in what can be considered an attempt to prevent public discourse from gathering pace, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi launched the White Revolution in 1963. What was termed the White Revolution was in fact a series of reforms aimed at modernisation of Iran through social and economic reform, including but not limited to land reform, privatisation, women's suffrage and welfare reforms. However, in brief, the outcome of the White Revolution did not yield the results promised by the ruling monarchy. Moreover, "When the land reform bill and other measures were introduced by the Shah in the early 1960's, the autocratic manner in which he did this so outraged the opposition that the substance of the reforms,…, was lost in the dust created by charges of

dictatorship, corruption, and subservience towards the United States" (Heisey & Trebing, 1983, p. 159). Clearly, the goals and outcomes of the White Revolution are more complex than the outline provided above and its nuances are beyond the scope of this work. What is of relevance is, first, the reality of large scale social and political change that was taking place in the country in the decade preceding the Islamic Revolution. Second, the events instigated by the state are just one indication of how social reform does not necessarily start and finish with state sponsored institutional change, as it bears out in the years leading up to the 1979 revolution.

3.4 Intellectuals on the Eve of the Revolution

Following the White Revolution, the intellectual elite were progressively findings themselves at odds with the monarchy (Ansari, 2000, p. 37). The intellectual discourse preceding 1979 can be broadly categorized as having 'leftist' and Islamic ideologies, either separately or, at times, combined. The common trait among these groups, which overlapped in certain cases, was the emphasis on creating an egalitarian society; as such, the individual was secondary to the needs of the group. These intellectual groups used frames and the process of framing to shape their discourse and engage with the public. Ali Gheissari writes "Before the revolution, the intelligentsia and the radical political opposition more generally had adopted a utopian perspective with an overlay either of Marxist Leninism or militant Shi'ism, which regarded the individual merely as an inseparable part of a supreme whole whose worth was to be measured in terms of his or her place in such a totality" (Gheissari, 1998, p. 2). Broadly speaking, the goal of the revolutionaries was to rectify the social schisms the monarchical system had embedded within Iranian society by, in the first instance, eliminating the monarchy. The second step, that of establishing a new political order, was less clear and took on a different shape based on the ideology accepted by each of the numerous political groupings.

The following section presents two key concepts that shaped or, in some way, affected these groups along with the public intellectuals who played an integral role in the concepts' dissemination. Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati are considered two of the principal intellectuals of contemporary Iran and were able to "…construct a 'local' image of Iranian culture in opposition to the 'universal' West, but do so

from within modernity, not from a 'resurgence of ancient impulses' or 'religious fanaticism'" (Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 13). While additional factors and influential figures existed, the following are leading examples of the role a concept paired with the voice of a public intellectual play in political and social discourse. The following two sections will expand on these two key frames, namely Westoxication and Political Islam, which shaped pre-revolutionary discourse and were instrumental in guiding action that ultimately resulted in the revolution. These frames were also what originally formed the public intellectuals of the reform movement, who later revisited, revised and countered them in their own work.

'Gharbzadegi' (Westoxication)

The issue of *gharbzadegi*, also known as 'westoxication' and occidentosis, played a significant role in shaping anti-monarchy sentiment in the decades before the Revolution, starting in approximately the 1960s. Though not coined by him, Jalal Al-e Ahmad brought the theory of *Gharbzadegi*, also referred to as 'Westoxication' and 'Occidentosis', into the mainstream among scholars and the general public in Iran through the 1962 underground publication of his book which references the term in its title, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*. The term represents the over-reaching effect of Western thought and culture on Iran, and non-Western societies as a whole. The issue of culture, 'native' thought and the 'other' gained momentum and the question emerged of "…how to eliminate foreign culture and introduce a new authentic culture" (Nabavi, 2003, p. 99). The result was a renewed discourse among intellectuals of how to tackle issues of domestic development while fighting colonial influence. It is important to note here that while Iran was never officially colonised, different countries, particularly the British government, and later the US, exerted a significant amount of control on the reigning monarchy. There is also a relationship between the notion of development (*tawse-e*) and westernisation according to Saeed Hajjarian, a leading intellectual of the reform movement, whereby development had become tantamount to westernisation; as a result of this, no link was constructed between the idea of development and Iranian intellectual tradition (Hajjarian, 1996, p. 57).

Considered a negative, ‘westoxication’ denotes the loss of indigenous culture and values to what some intellectuals of this time considered the superficial and commercial lifestyle of the West. According to Al-e Ahmad, the occident consists of Europe, the former Soviet Russia and North America that have developed the industrial capacity to take raw material from non-industrial nations, or the ‘East’, and turn them into marketable goods. These goods, in their new shape, are then sold to consumers created out of the proprietors of the raw material (Al Ahmad, Campbell, & Algar, 1984, p. 27). The raw materials he references are not limited to material goods but also include ideas and practices. For example, he cites the taking of anthropology from Oceania and sociology from Africa and Latin America (*Ibid*). He designates Iran as one of the consuming and ‘backward’ nations. Though the term and its sentiment existed before Al-e Ahmad, his work played a significant role in disseminating it with far reaching implications among the intellectual discourse of the time.

According to Negin Nabavi, the criticism of westernization was two-fold, “It was contemptuous of the unsophisticated nature of the people who found the popular culture of the West appealing, but perhaps more importantly it was an indirect attack on the government that, in their view, encouraged such ‘useless’ enterprises because they did not challenge the government or raise any questions” (2003, p. 35). Moreover, this attack fuelled resentment against those who were able to take advantage of Western imports, both tangible and intangible, by those who were unable to benefit as a result of economic or social pressure.

Political Islam

Gradually, other voices emerged, most notably that of Ali Shariati, a public intellectual who inspired a leading contingent of revolutionary forces. In the early to mid-20th century, the mainstream intellectual community disconnected itself from religion and was adamant about promoting rationality over tradition. Religion was the domain of clerics and the merchant class. However, in the decades leading up to revolution, radical perspectives on Islam emerged that divorced themselves from the clerical control. One of the leading thinkers on the Islamic perspective was Ali Shariati, a sociologist educated in both Iran and France and widely perceived to be

the leading intellectual of the Islamic Revolution. During his years in Paris, "...he was influenced by various intellectual trends, most notably existentialism and Third Worldist trends that criticised Western imperialism and consumer culture and advocated return to nativist identity" (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, pp. 69-70). Combining this with his expertise in religious doctrine, Shariati was able to "...interpret leftist dissent in Shia terms, which provided the revolutionary movement [of 1979] with ideological bridges between the various strands of the opposition to the Pahlavi monarchy" (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 70). Finding a strong support base among students and the lower middle class, Shariati was able to bring socio-religious principles and the leftist ideology that had captured the world's attention into a coherent and straightforward package. Shariati's work played a major role in bringing together different groups that defeated the Pahlavi regime.

Of course, even though he clearly influenced revolutionary activism, he continues to be criticised by both religious and secular activists. He was in sharp opposition to the control of clerics within Shiite Islam. Upon his return to Iran from Paris, he was briefly imprisoned. However, after his release, he began to both teach and give widely attended public lectures:

> In his main book, *Eslamshenasi*, published in 1969, he argued that Islam in its original form was a prescription for an egalitarian and democratic society, that historically monarchs on the one hand and the clergy of institutionalised Shi'ism on the other had created a false version of the religion that obstructed people's right to know and to pursue the perfect society it prescribed, and that it was the duty of the true Muslim to oppose both these authorities. (Moin, 1999, p. 173)

Incorporating ideas he studied in the West into his understanding of Iranian society, he promoted a novel approach that was well-received by a society already disenchanted with the status-quo. Through his written work and, more importantly, his compelling lectures, Shariati was in all senses of the term, a public intellectual. Though with much revision, Khomeini used Shariati's rhetoric after observing its popularity among the country's youth (Takeyh, 2006, pp. 14-15).

Fall of the Monarchy: '*Esteghlal, Azadi, Jomhuri Eslami*'

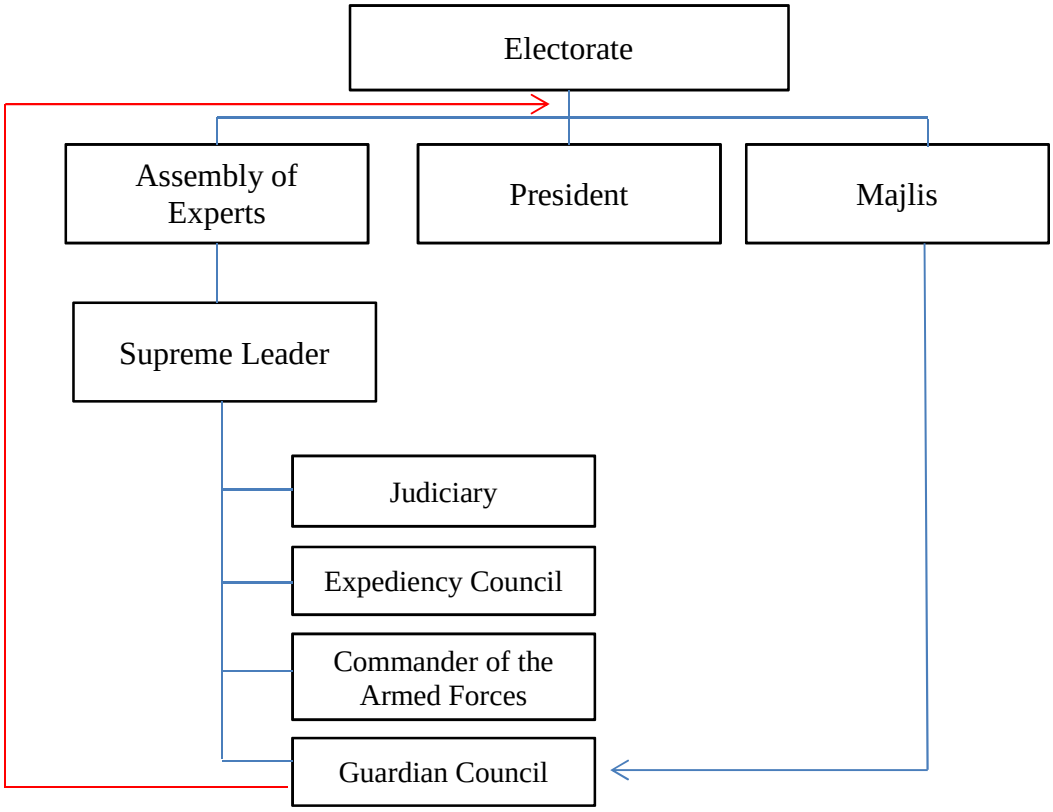
The discontent and discourse among intellectuals, the merchant class, *ulama* and across the socio-economic spectrum in the 1960s and 1970s culminated in a

revolution in 1978-1979. The refrain of '*Esteghlal, Azadi, Jomhuri Eslami*', translated as Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic, was a slogan used during the revolution and gradually turned into the motto of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The slogan represented the core values of the revolution, at least at its origin, containing terms appealing to a diverse audience. The alliance that opposed the monarchy, and came to support the Revolution, was able to mobilise around these ideas (though not everyone agreed with each one of the sentiments presented). Independence represented the idea of Westoxication discussed above, and the desire to fight external interference and influence. Freedom is founded on the call to reduce state power over citizens, bringing with it autonomy and space for civil society to grow. The final component of the slogan, 'Islamic Republic', is the most controversial and contested one. From the onset of the revolution, the formation of a republic based on the concept of Islam was debated and its implementation remains disputed. The specific model that emerged in the revolution's aftermath, centred on the figure of the Supreme Leader, will be further discussed in Chapter Six. Of relevance to this chapter is showing how key concepts can be traced across the decades, including the ideas of liberty and democracy which are entrenched in contemporary civil society discourse.

3.5 The New Political System

In the aftermath of the 1979 revolution that saw the overthrow of the monarchy, Iran moved towards the establishment of a republic with its first interim government. Early in the process, it became clear that Islamist factions, that were part of a larger and more diverse group of actors involved in the protests against the Pahlavi regime, were taking on dominant role. Despite power struggles from opposing forces, a referendum was put forward in March 1979 asking for a vote on one issue: Islamic Republic: Yes or No. The result was a definitive 'yes', establishing a theocratic state that combined traits of a republic, such as universal voting rights, with a unique Shia Islamic system of government. It is important to note from the onset that any accurate understanding of the Iranian state cannot assume that the regime implies a dichotomy between the religious and secular. As one scholar states, 'One of the many paradoxes of the Islamic Republic is that theocracy has been far more effective at persecuting the religious class than all of its monarchical predecessors. A special

court for the clergy was established, and hundreds of Iran's most learned and distinguished clerics were defrocked and imprisoned' (Takeyh, 2006, p. 27). This was the case before, during and after the height of the reform movement. It shows the complexity and internal struggle within the clerical elite that exists even amongst the conservative faction. It is this contention amongst conservative values that can lead to the potential breakdown or reform of the entire system.



Blue lines appoint or elect
Red line indicates approval of candidates

Figure 1: Organisational chart representing the post-revolution political structure

Since 2007, all citizens over the age of 18 have been able to vote in national elections; previous to this, the voting age was set at 15 years of age[15]. As shown in Figure 1, the electorate, in theory, elects all three branches of government. However,

[15] While there was a case that this change was to align the voting age with the minimum age for driving and serving in the military, it also represents the state's fears of a powerful young voting population.

in reality, the system is set up in a way that limits the options and final say of citizens. While the electorate appears to have a say in the election of state entities, either directly or indirectly, the complex nomination and approval system has gradually withered the candidate pool available to citizens, entrenching a conservative power base. This system and its entities, described in further detail below, are significant to the thesis as they outline the institutional challenges facing reformists and attempts at liberalisation of the state. Moreover, the prominent effect individuals with positions of power have supports the idea that agency (accompanied by political opportunity as entrenched in positions of power) can play a significant role in creating change. The following sections tackle the key components of the Islamic Republic and the role of conservatives within them.

What is 'Islamic' in the Islamic Republic of Iran?

First, the term Islamic refers to the dominance of Sharia law, Islamic religious jurisprudence, in the country's legal framework, as laid out in the Constitution. Moreover, the notion of *marja'iyyat-e taqlid*, meaning source of emulation or religious reference, is unique to the Shia branch of Islam, and was used to validate a ruling structure that placed a senior cleric at its centre, namely the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader's role is based on the political notion of *valeyat-e faqih*, meaning rule of the supreme jurist. This component of the Islamic political infrastructure can be considered even more significant as it allows for a religious dimension of authority to be continuously reassessed and reaffirmed based on individual religious interpretations. The Supreme Leader is a high level cleric, appointed by the Assembly of Experts, and controls key institutions of the judiciary, international and domestic security and economy. After the 1979 revolution, "The constitution recognised Khomeini's position as that of a the Supreme Leader of the revolution and the Islamic Republic—a 'Caesar' and a 'pope' who would remain leader for life, would not be accountable to any authority, and would have total veto power over the decisions of the state's branches and institutions" (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 91). Moreover, the Supreme Leader appoints half the members composing the Guardian Council, the body that must authorise all political candidates and legislation, described below. The position of the Supreme Leader is life-long and two individuals have held this post to date. The first was its co-architect, Khomeini,

who died of natural causes in 1989. Though formally approved by the Assembly of Experts, Khomeini himself designated his successor and second Supreme Leader, Ali Khamanei, who remains in the post at the time of writing.

From the beginning of the Islamic Republic, signs emerged indicating the political nature of the Supreme Leader's role, most importantly when time came for Khomeini to nominate his successor. Khomeini's original choice was Hossein Montazeri, but he reversed this decision as Montazeri increasingly came to criticise the new state for its authoritarian reaction towards citizens. To allow for his new choice to be approved, Khomeini requested a reversal of the Constitutional prerequisite stipulating that the person filling the post of Supreme Leader be recognised as a Grand Ayatollah before entering office. Only Grand Ayatollah's have the authority to serve as a source of religious emulation (*marja-e taqlid*). Khomeini's choice, Ali Khamenei did not receive his title of Grand Ayatollah until after beginning his tenure as Supreme Leader. To date, Khamenei's title is still not officially recognised by all religious leaders. Khomeini's controversial choice for successor continues to serve as a point of contention for the Supreme Leader's adversaries, including conservatives and reformists.

The other significant body of power within the Iranian political system that adds to the Islamic component is the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council must approve all candidates running for office as well as any legislation passed by parliament to be in accordance with the Constitution. In theory, approval is based on the individual or legislation meeting 'Islamic' standards which are not necessarily found in religious doctrines. In practice, individual members of the Council base their decisions on their own interpretations of religious law. These interpretations are coloured by the members' circumstances and personal beliefs. The Guardian Council is composed of 12 members, six of whom are clerics appointed by the Supreme Leader. The remaining six members are lay experts of religion appointed by Parliament. Appointments made by Parliament are based on recommendations from the head of the Judiciary who is himself appointed by the Supreme Leader.

What does the republican yet Islamic system imply?

It is the complex and circular system of elections, appointments and vetting that makes analysis and institutional reform of the Iranian power structure difficult. The government structure established in the aftermath of the Revolution is innately contradictory (Azimi, 2008, p. 362). As a republic with what can be considered a democratic system of elections, the state does not openly fall into the category of authoritarian rule. "The constitution envisioned the Islamic Republic to be a modern state with all the institutional and organisational features of such a state. It provided for a parliament, a judiciary, and an executive. It delineated the powers of each through a system of checks and balances" (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 91). However, the existence of a rigorous and often times subjective system of approval by the Guardian Council and the appointment of key posts by the Supreme Leader makes success by opposition forces a challenging and, at times, near impossible task. The institutions of oversight are the stronghold of conservative figures that strive to maintain control through the preservation of religious rule, which is what guarantees their institutional stronghold. In other words, the posts of Supreme Leader and Guardian Council are rationalised through a particular religious interpretation. In order to maintain the status quo, decisions that reverse or revise religiously based institutions and laws place the survival of the entire system at risk. Therefore, it is not surprising that actors with a political stake in the current system belong to the conservative camp and in opposition to the reform movement.

3.6 Following the Establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran

In the aftermath of the revolution, the most striking feature of the Iranian state was its various sources of power that at times supported while at other times opposed one another. "Broadly speaking, the system is a composite of key personalities, their informal networks and relationships with other individuals and power centers (all of which converge over common interests in the form of political factions), and the institutions with which they are associated" (Thaler, 2010, p. 40). These informal networks and power structures are a historical legacy, predating the current regime (*Ibid*). It will be shown that the boundaries between civil society and the state are further blurred during this time as a result of the new government's take-over of key welfare and charitable activities. After the establishment of the new government,

organizations previously outside of direct state control, such as those serving traditional social roles or providing charitable welfare, began to be absorbed by the growing public sector. Therefore, the boundaries between civil society and the state became further blurred.

The situation was further complicated for the Iranian people with the onset of an eight-year war with neighbouring Iraq, from 1980 to 1988, that required swift action from the state and extensive social services to meet the needs of citizens facing the consequences of war. Chapter Six, which looks at conservative perspectives of civil society, will provide in-depth coverage of the state institutions formed in the aftermath of the revolution with the intention of effectively absorbing activity traditionally attributed to civil society. In other words, staunch supporters of the Islamic regime attempted to give the state power over social, conventionally non-political interactions, such as those falling under the auspices of religious institutions, for example, mosques, or those which facilitated charitable giving. The war played a role in unifying the country, in reaction to a foreign enemy, and allowed a core group of individuals to structure power with limited oversight or opposition from the general population. However, the war was also instrumental in transforming the state-society dynamic:

> …it was not long before Iranians themselves were questioning the aims and consequences of the war. Such questioning was itself a reflection of the deeper changes which had begun to thoroughly permeate Iranian society. If Iranians had entered the war as obedient subjects, they emerged from it with a keener sense of their own relationship to the state. (Ansari, 2007, p. 298)

In reality, the unity that had led to a 99.7 per cent majority vote in a 1979 referendum in favour of the Islamic Republic had begun to dissipate within a very short period. Fractions and tensions developed even amongst the central figures of authority. However, concern over the war and strategic power plays led by Khomeini and his allies managed to contain these dissenting voices to an extent.

From War to Reconstruction: Setting the stage for Khatami's election

With the end of the war and the death of Khomeini in 1989, the state's focus turned to rebuilding infrastructure and the economy, leading to Rafsanjani's presidency,

1989-1997, dubbed as the period of 'Reconstruction'. By this time, individuals who had originally backed a Khomeini-led Revolution but come to question Khomeni's tactics and the regime, albeit silently during the 1980s, began to slowly voice their concerns. This dialogue was taking place amongst individuals with reservations about the direction of the state but with strong revolutionary credentials, i.e. those who had shown their commitment to the establishment of an Islamic republic. Their ideological background was based on the ideas presented above, including a desire for social and economic equality and a fight against Western interference. However, they began to question the post-revolutionary regime's ability to achieve these goals and saw themselves losing their ability to voice these concerns. At the same time, households felt increasing economic pressure, caused by inflation and decline in real income and purchasing power as a result of reduced state control of the economy that had been in place during the War (for example, price controls and rationing of goods) (Kian-Thiebaut, 1999, p. 14). In this atmosphere, the seeds for the reform movement were planted and led to the victory of Khatami in 1997.

The purpose of the above sections was to provide a historical backdrop to the events that took place by the time the reform movement came to dominate discourse on Iran's social and political spheres in the late 1990s. The key points are: first, the actors and institutions of civil society were neither new nor restricted to reformists or contemporary Iran. Second, although the level of their power has varied, public intellectuals have played a role in the events that shaped modern Iranian history, with particular attention given to the twentieth century in the above analysis. Finally, organisations that shape the public sphere cannot always be distinctly identified as changing contexts lead to a blurring of boundaries between civil and political society. Chapter Four will focus on telling the story of Iranian civil society from the period after this historical outline along with theoretical analysis. However, before proceeding, the next section will provide a review of a group of literature that has also tackled the issue of civil society and the reform movement in Iran.

3.7 Emergence of Civil Society Language and the Reform Movement

The term 'civil society' entered Iran's broader political language with the 1997 election of Mohammad Khatami as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the

launch of the reform movement represented by Khatami. Civil society, rule of law and democracy were some of Khatami's top campaign slogans, in sharp contrast to his conservative opponent who had the backing of the country's unelected Supreme Leader, a man whose word supersedes that of any elected President. However, Khatami's drive to bring democratic change by empowering the people struck a chord with the electorate, particularly women and youth movements. Millions rallied around Khatami, leading him to a decisive victory with seventy per cent of the vote.

The concept of civil society began appearing in intellectual discussions, particularly in intellectual journals focusing on society, politics and literature, leading up to and particularly after Khatami's election. For example, in the decade before Khatami's election, no exclusive articles appear in the journal Adineh. However, in 1997, a number of pieces on the topic can be found. For example, in the October/November (Iranian month of *Aban*) issue of Adineh, a large section deals with civil society and other related aspects. They asked scholars and figures from Iran's literary and artistic scene what is meant by civil society. The responses were, as expected, ambiguous, abstract and, on the whole, optimistic. Emphasis was placed on citizen rights, whereby the relationship between citizens and citizens and the state is based on law; another individual writes that civil society is one in which individuals know to not impose their wants onto others; an actor states that he wishes in a civil society to be able to take his scripts onto stage regardless of individual taste but based on predefined laws; and, an artist states that it relates to the feeling of security ("Dar Jame'e-ye Madani, Donbal-e che Migardid? (In Civil Society, What Are You Looking for?)," 1997). In another article written for Adineh in the Summer of 1997, Kazem Alamdari argues that an independent civil society has not yet been established in Iran, similar to other developing countries (Alamdari, 1997, p. 119). Amongst the reasons provided are those that are reiterated by reformist intellectuals in the next chapter, namely: the absence of social forces that can confront/oppose total power seeking and the fact that the majority of organisations that are considered to be nongovernmental are in fact governmental (*Ibid*). The *Adineh* pieces are a clear reflection on how civil society can be used to represent basic social desires, particularly as they relate to freedom and rights.

The following sections take a critical look at both English and Persian language literature surrounding the concept of civil society as it emerged during Khatami's presidency in the Iranian context. The audience for this literature was mainly found outside Iran among individuals interested in the changes taking place in the country, although some of the work was read, either in the original English or translated into Persian, by intellectuals and academics inside Iran. In fact, as a result of increased international contact, some of the individuals travelled to Iran and participated in roundtables or wrote for an Iranian audience (Kamrava, 2001, p. 168). Scholars such as John Keane also visited Iran, giving lectures on subjects such as democracy and civil society (one of the reformist public intellectuals interviewed for this thesis specifically mentioned his discussions with John Keane). The issues dealt with in this section include theoretical approaches to and definitions of civil society, discourse within Iran, the role of intellectuals in the reform movement and empirical work undertaken on Iranian civil society.

The re-emergence of civil society as a panacea to underdeveloped political and social systems in the past two decades has ignited fierce debate. Common questions range from the seemingly basic including what civil society means to more complex questions of whether the bolstering of civil society, however one may define it, will lead to a better life for those living in economic, political or social hardship. Not only has the Islamic Republic of Iran not been immune to such debates, but politicians and intellectuals, both domestic and international, appear to attach prospects for the future of the state upon opportunities for and impediments facing Iranian civil society (Amirahmadi, 1996). While civil society is not a new aspect of Iranian society, it has become a mantra of youth, women and student movements since the latter half of the 1990s, primarily with the election of Mohammad Khatami as President in 1997 and 2001, as will be described in further detail below. However, the definition and nature of civil society advocated by individuals, whether they be voices from within Iran or individuals residing abroad, is highly dependent upon the overall political and social systems advocated by them, particularly with regard to their views on Iran's brand of Shia Islam and its role in the political and social order.

3.8 Critiquing Literature on Iranian Civil Society

An example of English language literature

The purpose of this section is to provide an example of literature written outside of Iran by looking at an Iranian philosopher, Ali Paya, who has close connections to the country. A look at his work allows readers to become familiar with a common type of descriptive and prescriptive literature regarding the current state of Iranian civil society and its implications for future development. As the literature dates coincide with the research timeframe, it provides important background information regarding the context in which public intellectuals to be studied were active and the type of work they encountered. Paya is a recognised Iranian writer, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the National Research Institute for Science Policy in Iran and a visiting academic in the UK who has written about civil society and intellectuals. In "Civil Society in Iran: Past, present and the future", Paya jumps quickly from the historic precursors of civil society to civil society in the era following the Islamic revolution. He notes that following the revolution, Iranian society initially witnessed freedom that had not been available for decades. Moreover, a shift from the prevalence of the values of the working class to that of the middle class also added to the momentum of civil society's recognition (Paya, 2004, p. 168). However, this open society was put to an end with the start of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 and the capture of total control by the clerics. Here, Paya notes that, as can be expected, the dual role of the clerics, as both leaders of religion as well as protectors of the nation's sovereignty, began to contradict one another and, "…the notion of utility took precedence over all other values" (Paya, 2004, p. 169). It was for this reason, Paya states, that modern institutions were introduced within Iranian society. Unfortunately, the curtailment of individual freedom was kept in place and, it was in this atmosphere that Khatami unexpectedly won the 1997 elections with a platform of re-empowering civil society.

Elected to the presidency under a banner which included civil society, Paya pays special attention to Khatami's role in civil society. With regard to Khatami's plans, Paya notes that in order to gain a wider range of support for his programme, Khatami introduced his ideas as that of an "Islamic civil society" (Paya, 2004). In the wake of his election, a relatively free press appeared, nongovernmental organizations were increasingly established and local elections for city councils were arranged.

However, by the end of Khatami's second term, many of the people's aspirations for rule of law, freedom of expression as well as other similar ideas were not realized. It is this failure that Paya does not explain in any detail. We are left wondering why exactly Khatami's reforms initially received such tremendous public support. One reason for his popularity can be the exact programme he presented to the people. However, a contrasting, and possibly more pessimistic, outlook is that it was not Khatami's plan itself for an Islamic civil society that won people over but the fact that he was less favoured by the ruling supreme religious leader. It is important to understand the reasons behind Khatami's success in order to better analyse the reasons for which his supporters began to lose faith in the reform movement upon reaching certain roadblocks, after less than a decade of attempts to improve the country's social and political condition.

With regard to the future of civil society in Iran, Paya himself has a relatively optimistic outlook. He provides several reasons for his forecast. First, he cites the Shia religion's encouragement of free enterprise in the economy and Iranian society's familiarity with modern ideas and institutions, encouraged by globalization and the fall of the Ba'athis regime in Iraq (Paya, 2004, pp. 171-172). This is in parallel to the intellectual trajectory in the West with regard to civil society. Enlightenment thinkers, such as Ferguson, and those who came after have linked the rise of civil society to the development of capitalism. According to Marx, cited in (Kumar, 1993, p. 377), civil society "…embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of the development of productive forces". However, Paya also notes several factors which impede the development of Iran's civil society. First, while religion may pave the way for a free society in certain respects, the Institution of Emulation in Shia Islam that controls the relationship between believers and their Grand Ayatollahs creates a situation where "…the emulators are more likely to listen to their Ayatollahs than their political leaders" (Paya, 2004, p. 171). This is one key barrier to the establishment of political parties. Secondly, Iran's diverse ethnic landscape requires a strong state to protect national sovereignty. While the Persian language, dominant religion of Shia and national history bond the country, geographic and ethnic diversities have proven to be sources of tension. The central government has played a strong role in either subduing tensions or creating a common platform that maintains the country's unity. Finally,

when faced with harsh conservative reaction, there are fewer individuals willing to take risks in order to develop the institutions of civil society.

With this basic analysis, Paya fails to provide enough evidence to support his claims from either an empirical or theoretical point of view. We are faced with numerous questions regarding how he weighs the negative and positive prospects for civil society in Iran. Moreover, he provides little background for the transition that took place between the traditional forms of civil society to that of contemporary society. One final detail that requires clarification by Paya is with regard to the use of the word `individual' in his definition of civil society. While he does mention the Shia religion's advocacy of individual freedom in economic spheres, he does not mention how the individual is treated in other realms. In this respect, Mehran Kamali's explanation (discussed earlier) of civil society provides a better starting point, given the significant role the Shia religion has and continues to play in Iranian society.

The civil society discourse within Iran

The discourse within Iran has been categorized by analysts of Iranian civil society in a number of ways. One of the main struggles is access to primary sources as most can only be found in the original Persian. Even in times when language is not an issue, access to the text itself is problematic. Often the books were printed in limited numbers before they were banned by the state, making it difficult to gain access to copies. Iran has a complicated and changing system of censorship. However, several works, such as Khatami's *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society* can be readily found. Throughout the thesis, relevant Persian language sources that were obtained have been cited. A bulk of the work on civil society is by intellectuals and political figures discussing their views of civil society, the role of civil society in the political sphere and the relationship between civil society and Islam. Some of this work, including books, journal articles and interviews, is addressed in Chapter Four, alongside analysis of how reformist public intellectuals viewed civil society. In addition, there exists literature in Persian that takes a more theoretical and abstract look at the concept of civil society. Some of the authors writing about civil society in the Persian language have also published in English. Moreover, it is clear that

English language material about civil society has been reviewed by intellectuals in Iran, particularly as they cite some of this work in their writings.

The civil society discourse within Iran: Persian language literature

Similar to the journal *Adineh*, discussed above, other journals took up the topic of civil society around the time of Khatami's election. One of these key journals is *Iran-e Farda, or Iran-i Farda,* (translated as, 'Tomorrow's Iran' or 'The Iran of Tomorrow'), a journal dominated by nationalist-religious figures. In fact, they dedicated a large section of their 39th issue, published in December/January of 1997/1998 (coinciding with the month and year of *Dey* 1376 in the Iranian calendar). One of the articles in this issue was entitled "*Jame'e-ye Madani be Zaban-e Sadeh*", or "Civil Society in Simple Language". In the article, two definitions of civil society are provided: one being that affiliated with proponents of civil society, political figures, students, social and political press, etc. and the other affiliated with academia. In the former, civil society is linked to the whole of society, where society is based on ideas such as the rule of law, transparency, division of power between political parties and councils, etc. (Alijani, 1997/1998, p. 10). The latter definition is one where civil society is the space between the family (the private or personal) and the state (power and government); this space consists of organisations councils, political unions, arts and intellectual associations, etc. and endures regardless of the state and its actions (*Ibid*). The writer goes on to state that some of these organisations are political, such as political parties which look toward gaining political power) while some are not. He expands on this fact in the endnotes of the article, clarifying that some thinkers separate civil society from 'political society' (Alijani, 1997/1998, p. 13). However, he does not delve further. On the whole, this piece sheds light on the desire by thinkers and journals to tackle the issue of civil society and maintains the existence of a far-reaching characterisation of civil society.
One key academic on civil society in the Persian language is Mousa Ghaninezhad, who, according to Mehran Kamrava (whose article is discussed in further detail below), is one of the few authors to "have written on civil society with some consistency" (Kamrava, 2001, p. 168). Ghaninezhad's 1998 book, entitled *Civil Society: Liberty, economics and politics* (Jame'e-ya Madani: Azadi, iqtesad va siyasat (Civil Society: Liberty, economics and politics)) provides an in-depth look at

civil society theory. In contrast to some other writers in civil society, Ghaninezhad has a strong economic focus, with the first section of the book focused on civil society and political economy[16]. Moreover, Ghaninezhad expressed the fear that the far reaching use of the term civil society in Iran will lead to its degradation as a concept, as intellectuals and speakers link civil society with their own views and political wants (Ghaninezhad, 1999, p. 13). The appropriation of civil society, especially by reformist intellectuals, is a significant argument that is validated in Chapter Four.

Also discussed by Kamrava is the independent researcher Majid Muhammadi, whom Kamrava describes as "…one of the most influential voices within the civil society discourse…" (Kamrava, 2001, p. 169). He has written an in-depth book on civil society, published in 1999. For Muhammadi, the organisations that lay the foundations for civil society are those that are the go-between/intermediary (*vaset*) between the state and the individual (Muhammadi, 1999, p. 347). What weakens civil society and strengthens mass society, according to Muhammadi, are social movements that attempt to eliminate a political regime; in a mass society, individual freedom and rights are denied (1999, p. 348). A mass society infers a society where diversity is not encouraged nor protected and the state, which can act as defender of order, is attacked. With reference to Iran, Muhammadi notes that the government attempts direct control, on areas from the economy to culture, rather than taking on a more supervisory or administrative role (1999, p. 353). He considers Iranian society to not be a civil society but rather one that vacillates between a traditional society and a 'mass' society (Muhammadi, 1999, p. 357). Ultimately, he claims that there exist structural, cultural, legal and theoretical barriers to the growth of civil society in Iran; in order to overcome these barriers, be believes there needs to be 1) a reassessment of concepts such as freedom, liberalism, capital, political participation, etc.; 2) a study of the everyday life of Iranians, as opposed to public culture; and 3) a study of legal, political, social and cultural barriers to the formation of civil society in Iran (Muhammadi, 1999, p. 364). Muhammadi's work provides a valuable, in-

[16] It should be noted that the notion of civil society being tied to a free, competitive economy, as espoused by Ghaninezhad, was also reiterated by a key thinker of the reform movement (INT7) during a fieldwork interview. Expansion of the private sector was addressed as a factor of civil society by other individuals interviewed, as well as in literature.

depth look at the basis of civil society in Iran, serving as a spring board for other more focused studies.

Another key thinker is Hossein Bashiriyeh. For Bashiriyeh, a democratic civil society discourse surfaced in Iran from the time of the Constitutional Revolution in response to dominant discourses (of which he asserts there are three: (1) traditional patrimonial discourse, (2) absolutist-modernist discourse and (3) ideological traditional discourse); the reason for its appearance in the late 20th century was due to "…deepening crises of political legitimisation and ideological domination…" and "…is the latest manifestation of the wider democratic discourse that was born around the time of the Constitutional Revolution, was retarded by the absolutist state, grew in the 1940s and made a short appearance after the Islamic Revolution. The Islamic Revolution raised further obstacles in the process of democratisation" (Bashiriyeh, 2001). Bashiriyeh explains that the current social base of the civil society movement is not limited to religious reformists but "…is a new, articulate, political majority of twenty million people who voted for democratic reform. It is opposed to religious absolutism, blind traditionalism, cultural control and a closed society" (Bashiriyeh, 2001). Two obstacles to democratisation include, one, the political culture of patrimonial and traditionalist discourses and, two, the merging of religion and politics; however, he believes that there is space for the emergence of democracy, with reasons including the reformation of Shia political theory and the surfacing of an intellectual trend that encourages dialogue and discourse (Bashiriyeh, 2001). This last notion can be linked to the limited dialogue amongst intellectuals referred to by Muhammadi.

In terms of defining civil society, Bashiriyeh believes that the term should be one that not only academics can discuss and understand but that can be put forth into common use; he defines civil society as a society in which citizens have the ultimate decision making power in how they wish to live their lives, including, most importantly, decisions regarding their personal lives ("*Goftegoo dar bareh jame-e madani dar parto rooydad dovom khordad*," 1997). In a book on civil society, he specifies that civil society is the arena for social power and the space for social relations outside of direct interference by the state and consists of public/popular

(*omoomi*) institutions and groups (Bashiriyeh, 1999, p. 121). Overall, he claims that civil society is a battle for democracy (Bashiriyeh, 1999, p. 61).

In the same issue of *Iran-e Farda* mentioned above, issue 39 published in 1997/1998, an entire article was dedicated to asking Iranian intellectuals about their thoughts on civil society. A few key points raised by a couple of the intellectuals addressed will be discussed here. Ezatollah Sahabi, a scholar and political figure who was leader of the Nationalist-Religious coalition, stated that the public organisations of civil society are independent of the ruling government and private individuals, rather they are composed of many people who have a common interest in an aspect of their life, such as the political, social or religious ("Jame'e-ye Madani - Democrasi Nokhbegan - Manafe'e Meli (Civil Society - Elite Democracy - National Interests)," 1997/1998, p. 14). In another vein, Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari provided a list of civil society's attributes, including: a society where votes and individual freedom is formally recognised; there exists a fair distribution of power; independence of citizens and society in relation to the state; the establishment of independent organisations, such as parties, syndicates, unions, etc. to preserve citizens' freedom and rights ("Jame'e-ye Madani - Democrasi Nokhbegan - Manafe'e Meli (Civil Society - Elite Democracy - National Interests)," 1997/1998, p. 17). Overall, this resonates with the image of a liberal democratic style of governance. Between Sahabi and Eshkevari, again the sweeping vision of civil society is shown, as well as the significance of the separation between citizens and the state. The latter point is significant given the desire for reformist intellectuals to use civil society as a way to access power, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

The civil society discourse within Iran: English language literature

The following section will examine two papers, written outside Iran, which look at the theoretical discourse that took place in Iran. The first paper is chosen because of the comprehensive overview it provides of the civil society discourse, while the second paper is selected due to its concise argument challenging the role of Islamism in modern day Iran. The purpose of this analysis is to consider how writers outside Iran perceive the domestic situation through sources available to them and, at a later

point, to consider the merits and shortcomings of such pieces. Overall, it is believed that these particular pieces provide sufficient information for this review.

Mehran Kamrava's paper, "The Civil Society Discourse in Iran" (2001) categorizes his findings through the common threads that appear in Iranian literature on civil society. According to Kamrava, there exist four main themes. The first is that civil society has undergone an indigenization process. More specifically, the definition of civil society has gone through a process of localization with the development of a political, cultural and, most popular, social understanding of civil society in Iran. The second characteristic of Iranian civil society is the significant role the state plays in civil society while a third stream deals with the role of Islam. Finally, Kamrava notes the particular attention Iranian thinkers pay to the " 'image' that non-Iranians have of the Iranian nation" (Kamrava, 2001, p. 165). Each of these four fields presents an open area that requires further data and analysis. In concluding his paper, Kamrava makes the claim that up to this point, "…the practical side of the civil society discourse has had far more of an impact on Iranian society and culture than its theoretical contributions" (Kamrava, 2001, p. 185). The reasons underpinning the weak theoretical foundations of civil society discourse in Iran is a key area for further analysis and should be properly addressed.

For many involved in Iranian studies, civil society is evaluated upon the extent to which it is used as a political tool, either by those who wish to discredit the state or those attempting to legitimize the Islamic nature of the state. One such writer, Ali Banuazizi, Professor of Social Psychology and Modern Iranian History at Boston College, analyses the civil society debate in this manner. He contended that after two decades in power, "Islamism" is "…a spent ideology, no longer capable of providing legitimation for the rule of the jurist (velayat-e faqih)" (Banuazizi, 1999, p. 2). Furthermore, it is this loss of legitimacy that has the political sphere looking towards reform, particularly through the development of a civil society, in order to preserve its own legitimacy and in this environment which Khatami seeks his reform programme.

Banuazizi identifies three positions in Iran's civil society debate. The first he identifies as the hard-line conservatives who find civil society to be 'antithetical to

the basic values and ideals of an Islamic society and state' and also control key positions in the political structure (Banuazizi, 1999, p. 7). The second group is composed of the individuals who wish to Islamicize civil society and differentiate it from the traditionally Western view. Finally, he notes a third group composed of individuals "….who view the concept as ideologically neutral in terms of the ultimate goals and values of society, but useful as a basis for structuring state-society relations, protecting the relative autonomy and freedom of citizens and their associations, and promoting a more tolerant, pluralistic and democratic order" (Banuazizi, 1999, p. 7). Overall, the struggle for a tolerant civil society is defined as a battle between hard-liners in the state apparatus, who also control means of violence and the judiciary, and the supporters of Khatami's reforms towards the development of civil society.

While the above classification does provide some clarity for analysing the civil society discourse in Iran, it can also be deemed too simplistic. For example, it leaves out the possibility that some advocates of civil society attach Islamic concepts to the ideas they advocate only as a means to gain legitimacy in the eyes of other political figures. Here, it is important to ask about the compatibility of combining the two concepts of civil society and Islam. While it may very well be possible, it is important to look at both historical and practical evidence for such scenarios. Even more problematic is the third, value-neutral, category Banuazizi mentions. Can a political or social ideology be completely value-neutral? This may be the most dangerous assumption to make, particularly at a time when many are advocating a strong civil society as the goal for improving quality of life for the Iranian people. Further explanation and analysis of this category is of great significance.

Intellectuals and the reform movement

While the above sections deal with the state of Iran's civil society development as a whole, this section will be a brief assessment of literature surrounding the particular role of intellectuals in the reform movement that brought civil society to the forefront of political and social debates. Intellectuals are generally addressed as a subset of literature on the reform movement with relatively few pieces dealing with their specific role in civil society development and advocacy. The key group of

intellectuals active during the reform movement have come to be known as religious intellectuals due to their attempts to reform the current Islamic state as opposed to a revolutionary change. However, even this group of religious intellectuals are not a unified group and their differences should be taken into account. Other groups present, which were not part of the reform movement, are secular intellectuals and conservative religious intellectuals who advocate strict interpretations of Islam as the basis of political and social institutions. This section will provide a brief outline of intellectual trends during the reform movement and highlight several works on such individuals and their role in political reform and advocacy for civil society.

The key instigators of the reformist movement are a group of individuals commonly referred to as 'religious intellectuals', referring to a diverse group of laymen, laywomen and clerics with a wide range of opinions on political and social issues. 'New Religious Thinking' emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which attempted to address a growing gap between the ideals on which the revolution was founded and the reality of the Islamic state that emerged (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, pp. 25-26). As a group, they represented both a political and cultural force, pushing forward the concept of modernity in a religious society (Jalaeipour, 2003, p. 139). "Representing various strands of modernist Shia thought that had remained dormant during the war with Iraq, they offered new interpretations of Islam and began to articulate a theoretical critique of the Islamic state from an Islamic perspective" (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. 26). It is their critical approach, which they came to express in the public sphere that grants them the status of public intellectual discussed in Chapter Three.

With Khatami's election in 1997, their platform became a newly liberalized press, which included daily local and national newspapers, through which they expressed their views in critical pieces that received an overwhelming response from public readership. The main feature of their writings was "…its attempt to create a balance between its native belonging and the broader modern world" and the logic of democracy (Alinejad, 2002). However, with political failures such as the loss of parliamentary control and then the presidency in 2005 to conservative hardliners, the entire vision religious reformists advocated in their writings appeared to have failed. This failure has been attributed to a weakness of critical tradition and democratic

practices in Iran's history (Alinejad, 2002). While the latter point has validity, the former can be criticized on the basis of Iran's long history of intellectual activity and historic attempts to bring about social and political change, particularly since the Constitutional Revolution in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the research will attempt to go beyond this to address both the reasons for failure as well as areas of success to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the role intellectuals play in social and political change.

In this light, a critical aspect of intellectuals in the reform movement has been the press, which is one of the main ways of transmitting their ideas to the public. Journalists who promote the idea of the reform movement make up a new category of intellectuals who Farhad Khosrokhavar calls "intermediary intellectuals" who are contrasted with the notion of "grand intellectuals". According to Khosrokhavar, "'Intermediary intellectuals' borrow some intellectual ideas from the 'grand intellectuals' but with considerable independence due to their involvement in Iran's current political and social affairs" (Khosrokhavar, 2004, p. 198). The group, composed of men and women between their late twenties and fifties, are composed of some one thousand journalists with their contributions having been "…essential to the diversification of thought in Iran" (*Ibid*). Khosrokhavar's categorization and subsequent definition of the intermediary intellectuals is interesting for its inclusion of a significant group of individuals who brought critical thought within the public sphere through the daily press, as opposed to specialized journals, where the work of grand intellectuals previously appeared. However, it is unclear the extent to which the intermediary intellectuals, in Khosrokhavar's paper contribute original thought or analysis and whether or not there exists a difference in the public value of the ideas expressed by grand intellectuals versus those of the intermediaries. Therefore, this classification must be further examined in light of the definition of public intellectual used in this research before it is applied.

On the topic of Iranian intellectuals, the key scholar is Ramin Jahanbegloo, a university professor in Canada[17], political philosopher and himself considered a

[17] Jahanbegloo has previously held teaching and research posts in Iran. For example, from 2003 to 2005, he was Professor of Political Philosophy at Azad University. He was arrested by Iranian authorities in 2006 and imprisoned for four months.

member of Iran's intellectual circle who deals with the role of the intellectual in civil society. In a brief article entitled "Is Iran Democratizing? The role of the intellectuals" written in 2000, Jahanbegloo refers to a young generation of intellectuals no longer wishing to mobilize political ideologies but rather wanting to express critical views of Iranian political and social traditions (Jahanbegloo, 2000, p. 136). Written only three years after Khatami's election, his work is a suitable reflection on the initial role of intellectuals in the reform movement as well as a comparison of how the role of intellectuals has changed since the time of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. While his work clearly touches upon many of the issues this research project will address, it falls short of examining the shifts within Khatami's presidency and how shifts within the intellectuals' discourse impact civil society in practice.

As a final, yet important, example in this section we can consider US-based Professor of Sociology Mohammad Chaichian's (2003) "Structural Impediments of the Civil Society Project in Iran: National and Global Dimensions", where he posits interpretations of civil society by Iranian intellectuals, activists and politicians into six categories and names the architect or advocate of each stance. The interpretations vary mainly in terms of positions towards the roles of religion and the state. One issue that diminishes his paper's relevance for a study of the domestic debate within Iran is his inclusion of expatriate Iranians whose familiarity with the current Iranian situation can be brought into question. However, as a descriptive document it provides a useful starting point in laying out points of differentiation within the Iranian debate. Detailed analysis of the six categories will be carried out at a later time.

Overall, literature on Iran's reform movement engages with the role of intellectuals, including those who served as a public face for the ideas attributed to various sub-groups (i.e. the religious reformist intellectuals). The main contribution of this literature is its description of who initiated and moved the reform movement forward through various interpretations of the relationship between Islam and the state as well as ideas of democracy and civil society. However, this descriptive approach does not adequately address how the intellectual rhetoric of reform that included the necessity of developing civil society lost support from both the public and political leaders in

an eight-year period, an issue that will be tackled in the research. Further details of how these intellectuals developed will be presented in Chapter Four. For purposes of this chapter, it is enough to say that existing literature on the complexity of reformist thinkers that examine their role as active agents who themselves evolved intellectually and ideologically is limited. This is based on the fact that the discourse by and among intellectuals is highly dependent on their context and a straightforward reading of their texts or transcripts of their talks are insufficient for understanding them (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, pp. 4-5). This thesis attempts to fill this gap by addressing not just the writings of these intellectuals but also providing insight through interviews and provision of analysis that addresses the nuances of the Iranian case.

3.9 Conclusion

The contentions that have been put forth in this chapter are as follows. Using the basic organisational approach to civil society, one favoured by donor agencies working in development, civil society has a long history in Iran. This has been the result of cultural norms based on Shia traditions of charity and the existence of traditional community based organisations. It can be further argued that the associations from traditional civil society result in the manufacture of social capital, associations among individuals that lead to cooperation for the general wellbeing of society. Therefore, the first assertion from the context presented above is to weaken claims that civil society and its related concepts inherently represent a distinctly modern and Western norm that should be injected into non-Western countries for their development. Conversely, taking a more critical perspective of civil society that characterises its activities as a the space where dominant discourses are created *and* countered, particularly *vis-à-vis* state power, modern Iranian history illustrates its presence. The second assertion is to argue that literature reveals the existence of civil society as a sphere of contestation for ideas among different groups and agents of change in Iran, albeit with varying intensity at different times and with the influence of Western thought.

However, it was not until Khatami's presidency that the concept of civil society gained wide prominence within and in relation to Iran. The literature that emerged

has been limited in scope and subject to particular ideological perspectives, as discussed in this Chapter. It is within this contextual reality that research for this thesis was undertaken. The aim of the following chapter is to reveal how and for what purpose a concept that in practice has existed was appropriated and modified by public intellectuals in the reform movement as agents of civil society. The findings from Chapter Four will then be compared with the take-up of civil society by social actors who used the political opportunities afforded to them by reformists in political power.

Chapter 4: Public Intellectuals of the Reform Movement

Starting in the 1990s, public intellectuals affiliated with the reform movement in Iran broadly disseminated the idea of civil society as an instrument for change while at the same time they themselves were a product of a nascent civil society. Civil society was a vaguely defined and universal concept that reformist intellectuals used to free them and other revolutionaries from Khomeini's strict interpretations of political Islam, to which they were no longer able or willing to concede. Reformist intellectuals began to question the very system which they had brought about through their participation in the 1979 Revolution. A reformist intellectual, Akbar Ganji, writing in a reformist daily newspaper, revealed that the 'chain murders' (*ghatlhaye zanjirei*) of dissident intellectuals were at the behest of the ruling conservative elite. This particular set of calculated murders of eminent political and intellectual figures dates back to the late 1980s and culminated in a number of brutal killings in 1998; a figure from the Ministry of Intelligence, who then committed suicide under suspicious circumstances, was identified as the perpetrator behind the attacks. Reformist writers brought the issue into public light, in particular by asserting that leading conservative figures, including clerics, were the ultimate culprits.

The reasons Ganji gave in an interview as to why the murders became a focus of his writings included: the fact that the life of every individual matters, his questioning of any ideology that allows the killing of those with opposing thoughts, how political power that is related to protecting people can become involved in a type of extermination and, finally, the notion of how to prevent such a thing from being repeated (Ganji, 2000, p. 210)[18]. The involvement of reformists in this revelation was just one indicator of their break from loyalty to the vision of an Islamic Republic led by a Supreme Leader. One of the main sources to reveal the reality behind the chain murders was a former deputy minister of intelligence, Saeed Hajjarian,[19] and Ganji was himself a former Revolutionary Guard (Ansari, 2000, p. 177). In an unpublished article, Hajjarian himself wrote that he made certain that while his newspaper *Sohbhe Emrooz* remained open, not an issue would go by in which he did

[18] Before being published in Ganji's book, his words (here and in the next reference to Gangi's 2000 book) first appeared in an interview in the daily newspaper *Sobh-e Emrooz* on 21 February 2000 (2/12/1378).
[19] Hajjarian became known as a key reformist public intellectual.

not refer to the murders (Hajjarian)[20]. Ganji himself has claimed that one reason the defendants in the chain murders were identified and arrested was because Khatami refused to ignore the issue and saw it as one of honour (Ganji, 2000, p. 211). In other words, the issue became politicised.

Once Khatami was elected President, his administration provided a relatively open social atmosphere, the extent of which is described in this chapter and Chapter Five, where the ideas of civil society, as promoted by public intellectuals and practised by Iranian citizens, were exercised. The image of the Islamic Republic was revitalised with Mohammad Khatami's first electoral victory as president on 23 May 1997, corresponding with 2 Khordad 1376 in the Iranian calendar[21]. In terms of appearance, Khatami's neatly trimmed beard, modern frameless glasses and signature smile were a strong departure from the previous public faces of the regime. Even more significant was the manner and content of Khatami's language to both domestic and foreign audiences. A scholar of philosophy, Khatami was among a larger group of religious intellectuals with ties to the Islamic revolution who had, in the decade before the 1997 elections, come to increasingly question the future direction of the Islamic Republic. Civil society was one of the issues that emanated from the group and another significant aspect of this period of reform was the heightened role intellectuals played in the political sphere. According to one newspaper, out of twenty-two individual cabinet members Khatami introduced to the *majles* (parliament), at least seven held doctorates and all three clerics had achieved higher theological degrees (Tazmini, 2009, p. 61). While higher education is not an absolute determinant of an intellectual, it is a relevant indicator of an individual's inclination towards critical thought.

The proceeding chapter will follow from Chapter Three's introduction to key intellectual movements in Iran's contemporary history, to examine the developments that took place in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution and eight-year war with neighbouring Iraq (1980-1988). Significant individuals, as representatives of a larger

[20] The paper was provided to the writer by Hajjarian's office without any information regarding its official publication. Copies of the article can be found on websites such as news.gooya.com (an Persian language news website based outside of Iran). The paper was published on that website in 2005.

[21] 2nd of Khordad became a common name for the coalition of political parties and groups who supported Khatami and a movement for reform.

group will be introduced while the intellectual circles that emerged during the period of reconstruction after the Iran-Iraq war will also be probed. The chapter addresses the influence of networks and relationships as they stimulate the rise of civil society discourse among reformist intellectuals. The role of public intellectuals in the construction and use of civil society discourse to enhance positions of power after Khatami's election will be examined. Interviews with high-level reformist intellectual figures conducted during fieldwork are presented and analysed in order to answer the research question: how did public intellectuals affiliated with Iran's reform movement [attempt to] impact the evolution of contemporary Iranian civil society and, potentially, encourage a turn away from a theocracy to a liberal democracy? The chapter will apply notions of framing and political opportunities from social movement theories as part of the analytic process.

While intellectuals cannot be deemed the sole voice of the reform movement, they have played a critical role inspiring plurality in Iran's social and political spheres. As cited by Iran expert Arshin Adib-Moghadam (2006, p. 668):

> One may say that the intellectual tradition carried forward by oppositional Iranian intellectuals on the one side, and the burgeoning infrastructure of NGOs, professional unions and grassroots advocacy organisations on the other, has fostered a de-monopolisation of the political process and thus, *ipso facto*, has led to a 'pluralistic momentum'. It is this pluralistic momentum, I think, that engenders the imperceptive driving force of contemporary Iranian reformism.

The plurality that Adib-Moghadam refers to is an integral part of what the reform movement came to represent. Rather than seeking to implement a specific ideology, reformist intellectuals have initiated a new vision of contemporary Iran where diversity in ideas is not only tolerated but also promoted. Reformist intellectuals, including clerics and non-clerics alike, have questioned and made attempts to reformulate the relationship between Shiism and politics (Kamrava, 2003, p. 105). As revealed in one-to-one interviews, the contradiction with pluralism is present in intellectuals who are also political players (i.e. involved in state politics as politicians). In these cases, they are shown to have promoted civil society both as a theoretical concept for creating a multi-faceted, pluralistic society as well as a way for reformist politicians to re-enter politics and be allowed to promote their own

ideology. Regardless of their motives, however, the reformist backing of civil society had the effect of entrenching critical opposition to the state in society as a whole.

This thesis distinguishes between two types of public intellectuals, 'primary' and 'secondary' intellectuals[22]. The 'primary' public intellectuals of the reform movement meet the definition of public intellectual as given in Chapter Two, namely an individual engaging with and contributing to knowledge through critical discourse, within reach of a broad public audience, in a way that influences change. They were at the forefront of introducing concepts that shaped the movement's general platform, such as civil society and rule of law. The 'secondary' public intellectuals, on the other hand, did not introduce the concepts but were instrumental in institutionalising them within the movement and presenting them to society at large. While there is no strict divide between the two categories, they each have distinct attributes and play specific roles in how the concept of civil society unfolded in contemporary Iran, as discussed in this chapter. Secondary public intellectuals were the most common type of intellectuals involved in the reform movement.

One cause of internal conflict for social movements aimed at redressing a problem is the failure to reach agreement on the responsible agent or source of blame (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). This was clearly the case with the Iranian reform movement. Overall, the reform movement's weakness as a political force is argued to be partly a result of their failure to make use of civil society as a concept to empower the citizen base both to support reformists as political actors as well as to mobilise a force in a strong enough manner against the conservative state[23]. Alternatively, the very failure to institutionalise the reform movement as a powerful political party resulted in its success to create a dialogue that continued outside the official political space and spilled over into an expanding arena of civil society. It is within this civil society space that contentious politics continue to flourish, as seen in reformist challenges to

[22] It bears pointing out that while there are similarities between the idea of 'primary' and 'secondary' intellectuals presented here and Farhad Khosrokhavar's (Khosrokhavar, 2004) "grand intellectuals" and "intermediary intellectuals", my views were formed independent of his work.

[23] The other strong force working against the reform movement is the state structure, which favours conservative forces, as will be discussed later in this thesis.

dominant forces of the state since the end of Khatami's presidency, including the events surrounding the 2009 presidential elections.

4.1 Pre-Reform: Revolution and war

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve too deeply into the factions and individuals involved with the Revolution itself. Experts have studied and written in detail on the subject matter, presenting numerous theories as to why and how the Revolution took place in 1978-1979, as mentioned in Chapter Three. Of importance to this study are several factors that will be addressed in brief.

The first is the diversity of groups who participated in the Revolution and made it possible. Groups involved included: a faction of clerics (it is important to note not all clerics participated in the political sphere and some made it a point to remain outside the political debates), students, urban middle class, communist parties, pro-democracy nationalists and leftist Islamist groups among others. What united these groups was the common goal of ousting the existing monarchy as embodied by the Shah rather than the aspiration for a specific replacement. According to some accounts (see Takeyh, 2006), Khomeini, who became the face of the Revolution and took the mantle of leadership afterward, was not considered for the role of head of state until after the Revolution and strategic manoeuvring by him and his supporters. He had a modest following inside the country based on some written work and speeches he recorded in exile and disseminated back in Iran through tape recordings.

Second, soon after the Revolution, Iran was forced into a war with neighbouring Iraq that, partly due to political tactics by the new regime, turned into a costly eight-year struggle. The emerging political forces, namely Khomeini and his adherents, were able to consolidate their power by redirecting citizen interests and resources towards the maintenance of national sovereignty against outside aggressors:

> If Iran's revolution and its claims helped to precipitate the conflict, its definition of the absolute stakes that the war represented helped fuel it long after it had stopped making any sense. Iran's expulsion of Iraqi forces from its territory had been effected by mid-1982, yet the momentum of war and the drive to extend the sway of the Islamic revolution throughout the region prevailed over a more sober assessment of Iran's military capabilities. (Chubin, 1989, p. 3)

As a result, little time or resources were available for countering the power of emerging state structures or even supporting social development by the state. It was only after the end of the war and the period of reconstruction, a time which coincided with Khomeini's death in 1989, when a new era of intellectual activity emerged, among those involved with the revolution and who supported Khomeini, with a more critical outlook by citizens no longer engaged in the day-to-day struggles of war.

4.2 Intellectuals Post-war and the Emergence of the Reform Movement

The Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent eight-year war played a leading role in shaping the nature of the reformist intellectuals that comprised the reform movement. The intellectual activity and figures that emerged were influenced by both individual experiences as well as the general socio-political context of the country. The costly war "…and the poor state of the Iranian economy, prepared the ground for disenchantment in the following decade. Thinkers, most of whom had been revolutionaries, started to come to the fore with their mainly Islamic thought" (Khosrokhavar, 2004, p. 194). The turbulent period that followed the end of the war was compounded by the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. Shortly before his death, Khomeini and his allies further complicated Iran's status quo by introducing several key changes to the country's constitution. The country was thus faced with three factors, namely the end of a costly war in financial terms and body count, an amended constitution and the death of the Islamic Republic's iconic leader. From within this reality emerged a new set of intellectuals with strong ties to the revolution that began to question its tenets and future. While this group was in no way homogenous or formally organised, they shared several common characteristics and loosely tied factions.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, self-reflection on state policy began to overshadow ideas such as Westoxication and a preoccupation with outside interference for a group of intellectuals. It was these intellectuals who laid the groundwork for the reform movement. Though these intellectuals, whose discourse is referred to in Chapter Three as 'new religious thought', were dedicated to the revolution at its onset, they came to question the practices and policies of the Islamic

Republic during and after the Iran-Iraq War. Their interest in political Islam was redirected to a focus on interpreting Islamic law in a way that regards time and place (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. 26). Mohsen Kadivar, Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri and Abdolkarim Sorouh are three of the more prominent figures who questioned Islamic practices and beliefs as they were promoted by the state. Detailed research and analysis of the theological discourse around the idea of religious reformation falls outside the scope of this thesis. Of relevance is to acknowledge critical discourse contending the fallibility of human interpretations of religion and encouraging separation of 'church and state', examples of which will be addressed below. These religious debates were both a representation of civil society as a space for contentious politics in action, and an influence on intellectuals to pursue civil society as a concept by promoting pluralism.

Moreover, when discussing leading intellectual figures of the reform movement, it is important to point out that, similar to past regimes, the main body of the Iranian political system since the 1979 revolution has been dominated by key personalities as opposed to entrenched political groupings or parties. As Thaler (2010, p. 40) suggests "These personalities draw upon multiple networks or various commonalities—interleaved family, experiential, clerical, political, financial, and other relationships and interests which themselves may constitute power centres—that serve as levers of patronage, mobilization, and dissent". Therefore, the networks and backgrounds of the public intellectuals are just as significant as the content of their discourse. The next section explores the intellectual discourse and the groups that emerged among individuals with close ties to the revolution in the period of reconstruction that followed the Iran-Iraq war, roughly coinciding with the presidency of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997).

4.3 The Emergence of Intellectual 'Circles'

As mentioned above, the period of reconstruction following the war granted a reprieve from daily battle and critical discourse gradually surfaced among particular groups of intellectuals. While the state still dominated almost all media outlets and maintained strict control over all spheres of life, including political, economic and social, some critical voices were gradually allowed to emerge. The actors

articulating these criticisms were not in blatant opposition to the regime. Most had shown loyalty to the Islamic republic either by supporting Khomeini's rise to power in the early days after the revolution or by proving devotion to the country on the battlefield during the Iran-Iraq War. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, public space for debate was limited as the state restricted liberty and freedom of speech. In fact, by the time of Khatami's first election, only one daily newspaper with critical views of the government, *Salam*, was in existence (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. 30). Outside such public forums accessible to the general public, discourse was restricted to a number of specialised journals and informal and formal circles of intellectuals. According to a published interview with one of the main reformist figures, the ideas emerging in the following three circles prepared the grounds for change amongst reformist intellectuals: The President's Strategic Research Centre between 1990 and 1995, the Kiyan journal and students and followers of Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri (Mirsepassi, 2010, p. 132). This claim was supported by data gathered in fieldwork and it is in these spaces, particularly *Kiyan* (preceded by the journal *Kayhan Farhangi*) and the President's Strategic Research Centre, where the idea of civil society emerged. The following sections will delve into the two forums in which intellectual debates critical of the Islamic regime took place and which gradually gave way to the establishment of the reform movement platform. Special attention will be paid to Abdolkarim Soroush, a primary intellectual whose ideas are credited as instigating the reform movement.

Another noteworthy issue related to these spaces is that the institutions themselves represent the blurred boundaries between civil and political society, challenging observers to label them or place them in distinct categories, such as political society, civil society or the state. Similar to many other aspects of Iranian society, they defy clear-cut classification. On the one hand, the journal and its publishing institution are outside the state structure, making it an independent sphere for civil society discourse. On the other hand, for a journal such as *Kiyan* or its predecessor *Kayhan Farhangi*, to function they require state subsidies and would not have permits or be free to operate without close government ties. Similarly, while the President's Centre for Strategic Research is clearly a component of the government, the members and the critical discourse they engage with hint at activities carried out in spaces generally characterised as civil society spaces.

Kiyan Journal

The journal *Kiyan* and the circle of individuals with direct and indirect roles in its publication represent a significant commonality in the background of religious intellectuals affiliated with the reform movement. The history of this journal is best provided by the individual whose name is most closely associated with it, Dr Abdolkarim Soroush, a non-clerical scholar and proponent of Islamic reformation. *Kiyan* was founded by a group of individuals who were running the quarterly journal *Kayhan Farhangi* (translated as Cultural Universe, or World of Culture) which began its work in 1984. *Kayhan Farhangi* was based on the work of the country's liberally inclined intellectuals, clerics and laymen, who had ties to the revolutionary establishment. According to an interview with Soroush, one unique and innovative feature of the publication was the inclusion of an interview with one of the country's intellectual-academic figures in each issue and the introduction of the latest cultural and literary works in the country; this was all done during the turbulent period following the revolution and amidst a war (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). While political leaders were focused on the practical, day-to-day running of the country in order to establish order in a post-revolutionary society, they were also dealing with the results of a major war. It is therefore significant that an elite group of individuals maintained their commitment to intellectual activity that examined social and political ideas from a critical perspective despite the challenging surroundings. As an example, in a 1997 *Kiyan* article, Alireza Alavitabar, a reformist intellectual, asks how contemporary Iranian intellectuals can gain a deeper understanding of the West and modernity by analysing different viewpoints and suggests that reaching significant understanding is beyond one individual and requires wide-ranging collaboration amongst experts (Alavitabar, 1997).

Even more critically, the journal represents a ground-breaking publication where taboo subjects such as the role of the Supreme Leader were questioned. In an issue published shortly after Khatami's first election, the editor wrote a piece in which he directly addresses the negative impact of an all-powerful Supreme Leader; specifically, the editor writes that the constitutional change handing complete power to the Supreme Leader was one of the traits of the period following Khomeini's death and the end of the war, what he terms the 'second republic' (Shamsolvaezin,

1997). He goes on to say that the 2nd of Khordad represents the threshold of a third republic, where excluded society (*jame-eye mahzoof*) can once more become a social participant (Shamsolvaezin, 1997, p. 5).

If the journal *Kiyan* and its creators, as a whole, are considered to represent leadership of the reform movement as a collective, Soroush represents one of its founding religious intellectuals. In fact, it was the publication of Soroush's controversial article series on his theory of 'Contraction and Expansion of Religious Knowledge' (*Qabd va Bast-e Teorike Shari'at*), explained below, in *Kiyan's* predecessor *Kayhan-e Farhangi* between 1988 and 1990 that led to the resignation of *Kayhan-e Farhangi's* editorial board, whose members then went on to publish *Kiyan (Jahanbakhsh, 2004).*

Soroush cites some of the controversial works published in *Kayhan Farhangi* such as articles on religious theory and arguments over Karl Popper (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). This work received fierce criticism from various actors within the state, including the future president, Khatami. Soroush states, "…the pressure didn't always come from enemies or opponents; I remember that Mr. Khatami was culture minister at the time or he was the head of the Kayhan Institute. He criticised some of *Kayhan Farhangi*'s methods; quite fierce criticism" (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). The issue of Khatami's criticism for *Kayhan Farhangi* affords several insights into the development of Iranian politics, the origins of reformist leaders and the state of intellectual life as a whole. First, the fact that the state allowed controversial works to be written in a time of political unrest provides a softer, less authoritative image of the state, albeit the criticism was coming from 'inside' forces and therefore not considered an outright threat. Nonetheless, the existence of controversy or critical thought is in itself telling of the situation. Second, the fact that an individual such as Khatami himself criticised the methods used by the publication dispels the assumption that the future base of the reform movement was a homogenous group of elites. The contestation by Khatami, who later became an advocate of an independent press, sheds light on the changes of opinion that can take place within individuals, at least in practice.

The theory of 'Contraction and Expansion of Religious Knowledge, which Soroush later turned into a book, argues that religious knowledge is:

> …like other forms of knowledge, subject to all the attributes of knowledge. It is human, fallible, evolving, and most important of all, it is constantly in the process of exchange with other forms of knowledge. As such, its inevitable transformations mirror the transformation of science and other domains of human knowledge. (Soroush, Sadri, & Sadri, 2000, p. 16)

Soroush's work became a source of conflict and controversy. The clerical establishment considered it a challenge to religious authority and forced the journal to shut down in 1990 (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. 27). One year later, a number of individuals involved with *Kayhan Farhangi* decided to break away from the institution that had published the journal and establish the monthly journal *Kiyan* (translated as Foundation). Soroush reiterated his theory in *Kiyan;* for example, in a 1997 article on pluralism, he manifestly expresses that our religious knowledge is varied/plural (*matnoo/motekaser*) and mobile (*sayal*) (Soroush, 1997). The most significant product of *Kiyan* is the discourse emerging among a group of individuals who have come to be called the 'Kiyan circle'.

It should be noted that the 'Kiyan circle' is a term that covers an ambiguous group of individuals. According to Soroush, the term 'Kiyan circle' was never used during the height of the journal's activity; it was coined and used only after the publication was banned (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). Furthermore, there is no straightforward classification of the circle or precise membership list. In fact, Soroush claims the term has been exploited by individuals who did not have direct or significant involvement with *Kiyan* but claimed affiliation (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). The attempt by individuals, particularly reformists, to seek affiliation with the publication and its writers provides an example of the journal's accreditation as an early platform for the upcoming reform movement. The journal, along with its sister publication, *Zanan* (Women), "…were prominent platforms for the Islamic dissent that began to be voiced among 'insiders' after over a decade of the experience of Islam in power, and became a magnet for intellectuals whose ideas and writings now formed the backbone of the New Religious Thinking" (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. 27).

Soroush provides two broad definition of the 'Kiyan circle' which affords insight into the direction and make-up of the journal. First, he offers a general understanding of the term that consists of the journal's readers and those who were interested in the ideas introduced in the publication (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). With regards to the numbers, he states that though the circulation figure of the journal was 20,000, the results of a questionnaire included in the journal's last issue indicated that an average of five people read each copy; therefore, the general 'Kiyan circle' consisted of approximately 100,000 individuals (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). The specific definition of the 'Kiyan circle' consists of people directly involved with the publication which included the editor-in-chief, editorial board, some of the writers and a group of individuals who met on a weekly basis at the journal for debates on a variety of subjects during which different points of view were expressed (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). Many of the individuals cited at these meetings later became known as prominent members of the reformist movement and affiliated intellectuals.

One of the most remarkable and arguable points made by Soroush in his interview on *Kiyan* is that the publication was harmed as a result of the political openness that took place after Khatami's election (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). He states that while *Kiyan* was being published and the circle was meeting, he had no political problems with anyone; however, on the eve of the elections and after, the opening-up of the political atmosphere aggravated and intensified disagreements and disputes. He cites this issue as a social ill that needs to be solved, stating "All of us, who do not favour the country's prevailing policies and sometimes write things to express our opposition – when we find ourselves faced with a period of political openness, instead of becoming more united, we start attacking each other. It's as if we think that our mission is to prove our superiority over the others" (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). While the conflicts between members were settled to an extent, their very occurrence provides an example of a wider problem within Iranian society: when it comes to a plurality of ideas, even intellectuals, whose duty is to engage with critical thought, are not immune from conflict and intolerance. In the end, the semi-formal association between cultural figures in the 'Kiyan circle' was terminated upon the banning of the journal (Khojasteh-Rahimi, 2007). The journal was ultimately banned

in 1991[24]. While another similar publication attempted to replace it, the discourse that took place within and as a result of *Kiyan* remained unique. The history of *Kiyan*, as expressed by the individual most closely affiliated with it, dispels the myth that the reform movement emerged from a unified group of individuals with a homogenous outlook.

Additional analysis of Abdolkarim Soroush

As presented above, a discussion of reformist intellectuals necessitates a more detailed look at Abdolkarim Soroush, who was featured on the *Time* 100 list of the world's most influential people in 2005. Born in 1945, Soroush began his higher education in pharmacology at the University of Tehran before pursuing his post-graduate education in England. In the aftermath of the revolution, he was a well-known figure affiliated with the cultural councils credited for purging universities of individuals and curricula that did not meet the state's standards of religion. However, by the late 1980s, he began to come into conflict with conservative elements in the state as a result of his challenging views on Islam and advocacy of pluralism. Soroush himself defines religious intellectuals as individuals who "…are really religious; that is to say, religion is not just a research topic for them, it is a matter of faith" ("Some of our religious intellectuals are still afraid of being called liberal or secular," 2006). He identifies civil society as "a society in which people supervise government" and the tools for this supervision depend on the times; he states that in our times the tools include newspapers, political parties, guilds and associations, etc. (Soroush, 2000, p. 64)[25]. He further expands on this by stating that pluralism is also a pillar of civil society as human beings hold different views (*Ibid*).

Soroush was a leader in Islamic scholarship and not only condoned but advocated the need to go beyond religious texts and to study works by other scholars both within and outside the Islamic world. He studied and addressed works by individuals such as Popper, Kant and Habermas. Though he believes that scholars of social science

[24] The exact year of *Kiyan*'s closure is unclear as literature refers to both 1999 and 2001; the journal may have been shut down by state officials and reopened several times as is commonly seen in Iran. Regardless of its final closure date, the journal's impact was in the pre-Khatami era of the early to mid-1990s when the journal provided a unique space for dialogue among religious intellectuals.

[25] Cited information in this paragraph is part of an edited and published speech (in Persian) by Soroush in Mashhad, Iran on 19 December 1997.

should not solely focus on political problems at the expense of others, Soroush has made significant contributions to the study of Iranian political thought. He criticised the direction taken by the Islamic Republic through his writings and lectures, criticism which became particularly visible in the period following the Iran-Iraq War. His ideas have made theoretical and practical contributions across fields, including theology, philosophy and politics. In effect, the ideas he expressed and his challenging of the status quo can be considered a precursor to the reform movement as a whole. Though some of his contributions are addressed in the section on the *Kiyan* journal, this section aims to present a more comprehensive overview of his ideas beyond the journal. It should be noted that a detailed examination of Soroush's work would require a much more space than is available here; the intention is to provide a glimpse into the ideas expressed by a man who instigated, or at the very least influenced, the circle of individuals who later came to represent the intellectual and political face of the reform movement. An added contribution of this section is to redress some assumptions about the nature of a religious intellectual who is often associated with the purging of academic institutions in the post-revolutionary period.

The following paragraphs will examine Soroush's views on a number of key concepts relevant to civil society discourse. One of these is 'justice', an issue that has historically played a significant role in political and social movements and has also been addressed by Soroush on numerous occasions. While he explains that he is devoted to the cause of justice, he finds the term problematic because it is open to conflicting interpretations; even defining a concept such as justice is difficult as it is a term that can be applied to any action without representing any specific activity (Seyyedabadi, 2006). Soroush's dealings with justice demonstrate his background in philosophy and desire to open up and challenge ideas rather than choosing to simplify concepts for the sake of political expediency.

With regard to democracy and Islam, Soroush asserts that Islamic civilizations' basis on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and law does not inherently make civilisations dominated by Islam incompatible with the notion of rule of law (with rule of law a key factor for democracy). For a model of religious democratic society, Soroush references de Tocqueville's study of America, "…where, even though religion and politics were separate, religion guided the American society and polity and where the

ethics of universality in religion had a bearing on the harmony between the freedom of subjectivity and democracy" (Vahdat, 2002, p. 211, based on a 1994 article written by Soroush for the journal Kiyan). However, what is amiss in Islamic civilizations is the notion of rights, as *fiqh* is based on duty rather than rights. Democracy based on the rule of law can be achieved once the concept of rights is introduced to *fiqh*, according to Soroush.

With regard to liberty, Soroush has stated in interviews, such as the one with John Keane, that "…liberty is a value and that even the opponents of this virtue need it in order to express their opposition to liberty" ("CSD interview: The beauty of justice," 2007, p. 10). His expression that liberty is required even in order to oppose it makes it an essential value of society, as seen by Soroush. Freedom, according to Soroush, is a component of justice; in contrast to justice, freedom as a concept is not abstract (Seyyedabadi, 2006). Freedom of expression is a key component of liberty. Soroush states that if the power of speech is taken away from human beings, his whole being is doomed; the freedom of expression brings with it freedom of thought, critique, writings, newspapers and public media (Soroush, 2003b, p. 74). He further elaborates that, since the constitution in Iran, freedom of expression has not solely meant that speech considered to be 'right' (*sokhanan-e haq)* should be spoken (in other words, it is not only about the speech that is deemed to be the 'Truth'); rather, any speech has the right to be spoken (Soroush, 2003a, p. 64).

Therefore, those who promote justice should also be proponents of freedom, and, considering that it is possible to define freedom, it should not be a difficult value to provide a society. Related to freedom, Soroush summarises democracy as the existence of three steps, each of which require freedom in order to be achieved: step 1-installing rulers, step 2-criticising rulers and step 3-dismissing rulers; justice is achieved once people are able to exercise all three steps (Seyyedabadi, 2006). He states: When man is not in power, he can breakdown right from wrong (*haq o batel*), but once in power he sees himself as right/in the right (*haq*) and considers all else based on his own standards; it is for this reason that he considers democracy and 'being democratic' (*democrasi va democratic boodan)* as necessary (Soroush, 2003b,

p. 79). Intellectuals in the West have addressed each of these interdependent concepts: democracy, freedom and justice, on countless occasions.

Civil society for Soroush begins when human beings entrust the right to referee (*davari*), rule (*hakemiyat*) and administer (*mojri*) freely to another person, and, he references John Locke's opinion that civil society is equal to a regulated (*ghanoonmand*) society (Soroush, 2000, pp. 61-62). Soroush goes further to state that the notion of the Supreme Leader is validated because it is included in the constitution, even if some might find it legitimate purely on religious grounds (Soroush, 2000, p. 62)[26]. A society cannot be based on individuals' selfish desires; it should be based on decisions that have been instituted collectively, such as in the constitution, rather than being based purely on the wants of a few without having a rational, legal basis. In a sense, it is freedom of choice that defines a civil society. On the whole, however, Soroush emphasises the need for freedom to be paired with justice, as he states that without justice freedom becomes an 'orphan' (*yatim*) (Soroush, 2000, prologue).

What makes Soroush's thoughts noteworthy is that he speaks as a practising Muslim who has, at present, a high standing amongst Muslim communities and a past in the Islamic Revolution. In order to accept the values of freedom and democracy, he does not disavow Islam, though he does contest the ways in which it is interpreted. "…Soroush distinguishes between a religious and a liberal democracy, a distinction grounded in freedom of faith and freedom of inclination, respectively" (Vahdat, 2002, p. 210). The bringing-together of the Islamic context with the terminology associated with Western liberal thought is just one of Soroush's contributions. His application of these ideas to the regime of the Islamic Republic is another. He states that it is necessary to strive for a moral society as a political and religious goal (Soroush, 2002, p. 68).

Soroush does not consider himself a politician or political leader. Rather, he falls in the category of scholar and philosopher. Nonetheless, he has consistently contributed criticism and suggestions on Iran's political affairs. He applies his

[26] Cited information in this paragraph is part of an edited and published speech (in Persian) by Soroush in Mashhad, Iran on 19 December 1997.

theoretical understandings to practical circumstances. For example, in discussing modernity and tradition, he notes the conflicts that arise when modern tools are used with traditionalist mentalities, or vice-versa. He cites the contradiction between Khatami's performance and slogan and between his physical tools and conceptual tools as one reason for his failure to succeed (Seyyedabadi, 2006). In a sense, he shows, in a very tangible way, the need to update the means used by those in power to achieve modern-day agendas. While this may implicate the entire system of the Islamic Republic, it is also applicable to the reformists themselves who have struggled between their allegiance to founding ideals of the state, primarily those espoused by Khomeini, and their desire to see change. Although Soroush expressed some of these ideas after the start of the reform movement, he was nonetheless a pioneer in post-Revolutionary Iran with his call for critical analysis to cover all areas of thought and the need for examination of history's role in how religion is understood.

The President's Centre for Strategic Research

In contrast to the *Kiyan* journal, less is known about the President's Centre for Strategic Research (CSR), or *Markaz Tahghighat Strategic Riyasat Jomhouri*, in relation to the intellectuals involved. The President's Centre for Strategic Research, called the Centre hereafter, was established in 1989. According to the Centre's current website[27], it was created to carry out research in fields such as politics, economics, legal, cultural and social studies. The Centre was part of the Office of the President until 1997, when it was reassigned as the research arm of the Expediency Council, an official body of the state that serves as an advisor to the Supreme Leader[28]. For purposes of this thesis, the reasons for the Centre's handover and activities after 1997 will not be discussed. Of relevance is the role the centre played up to 1997 as a hub for intellectual activity that resulted in the development of the reform movement, particularly as few other spaces were available for similar dialogue to take place among public figures.

[27] Website for the Centre for Strategic Research: http://www.csr.ir/
[28] Chapter Six provides more in-depth discussion and analysis of the complex state structure and the involvement of reformists and conservatives in the different branches.

The concepts that eventually framed the reform movement began to emerge during the period of reconstruction, after the Iran-Iraq War, a perception supported by one respondent, INT2, during his interview (as discussed in the introduction, respondents will be identified by individual codes. The prefix 'INT' refers to reformist intellectuals). The following information is based on INT2's interview and the views are supported by Ali Mirsepassi's *Democracy in Modern Iran (2010).*[29] According to INT2, President Hashemi Rafsanjani wanted to grant some credit to the leftist thinkers whose political influence was rejected and for this reason Rafsanjani created the President's Centre for Strategic Research during his term in office. The respondent was invited to move from Esfahan to join this centre in Tehran and, by his account, it was at this juncture that members of the group began a dialogue amongst themselves. He emphasises that the individuals involved had an interest in religion and were educated in various areas of the social sciences. According to a news article with a key member of the Centre, one of the conclusions members of the Centre reached was that focusing solely on economic development was not sufficient and there was a need to address cultural, political and social development ("*Az markaz tahghighat etrategik riyasat jomhouri ta halghe kiyan*," 2007). INT7, another intellectual, who was at the Centre for eight years working on the topic of political development, cites the time preceding Khatami's election as a period when ideas developed and "a synergy was created between them [members who participated in dialogue at the Centre]". Moreover, figures such as Khatami and Soroush, who attended sessions on the topic of religion, took part in some of the Centre's meetings. In addition to his research at this Centre, INT2 was also a member of *Kiyan*'s editorial council. Moreover, a group of clerics who were former students of the late Ayatollah Montazeri also worked with the group of individuals linked to the Centre and the journal *Kiyan*. These individuals were united over an interest in religion and were all educated in areas of the social sciences that allowed them to carry out an interdisciplinary dialogue among themselves. Up to the 1997 elections, they were trying to work on the needs of civil society, such as the issue of

[29] Interviews for Mirsepassi's book were conducted around the same time as fieldwork for this thesis was undertaken. Some overlaps in data can be found. The overlap is used to corroborate evidence and not considered a duplication of work as the central focus of each work is different: Mirseppasi concentrates on intellectual debates surrounding modernity and democracy whereas this thesis was motivated by a desire to understand why the idea of civil society was chosen as a framework for the reform movement.

privatization. INT2 concludes that by the time Khatami was first elected, he and his colleagues had already begun work on the topics central to the reform movement.

A number of inferences can be surmised from INT2's account of the Centre summarised above. First, his belief that Rafsanjani encouraged the Centre's establishment as a way to include leftist thinkers is an indication of reformist thought originating amongst a group that had been both disenfranchised by the mainstream political sphere yet also given some space for activity. In other words, this supports the argument that reformists were tolerated and granted a voice, albeit limited, in the greater state structure but their standing was fragile. Second, the dialogue that eventually led to the key concepts that framed the reformist movement emerged from formal spheres, namely the Centre as a space for dialogue in the period before 1995 in this case. The Centre, Rafsanjani's sponsorship of its creation and the type of environment it offered pre-1995 is an example of 'political opportunity', a building block of social movements. As the Centre was later reorganised and became intolerant of challenging views, the opportunity was not embodied in the institution as a structure, but by the particular space it provided, allowing dynamic dialogue and the participation of a diverse set of opinions. A third inference from INT2's account is that the individuals who came to represent the reform movement and whose dialogue formed the movement's basic principles emerged from a common and narrow base, as shown by the overlapping actors in key spaces such as *Kiyan* and the Centre.

4.4 Why Civil Society?

Building on INT2's assertion that the ideas behind the reform movement emerged in the six to eight years before Khatami's election, the following section provides in-depth coverage of the reasons why civil society emerged as a key concept, according to interviews with key public intellectuals affiliated with the reform movement. This section is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with members of the group identified as 'secondary' public intellectuals earlier in the chapter. The section will identify the personal accounts and experiences that shaped these individuals' relationships with the reform movement, the reasons reformists chose to support the notion of civil society and their definitions and findings of civil society.

The majority of data and analysis is grounded in interviews with eight individuals with the following profiles. INT1 is a former government spokesperson in the Khatami administration. At the time of the interview he was an academic at a leading university, was part of Khatami's inner circle of advisors. Prior to Khatami's presidency he held regional government posts. INT2 represents a well-known public intellectual who was a key behind-the-scenes strategist of the reform movement. He was an editor of a leading reformist newspaper during the Khatami administration and wrote extensively on the topic of civil society. INT3 is a female intellectual who held high level posts in the Ministry of Interior during Khatami's presidency and was a strong advocate for nongovernmental organisations. Her credentials as an intellectual are based on her work as a researcher and writer. INT4 is an academic, reformist newspaper editor and active member of the intellectual circles of the reform movement from the time of its inception. INT5 is a female academic and former member of the parliament during the Khatami presidency. INT6 refers to a key leader of the reform movement who has held posts in the government from the early days of the revolution but gained prominence in the Khatami administration. He is a principal figure in one of the main reformist political parties and has provided strategic guidance for the movement. The most prominent of the respondents, INT7, was an influential thinker, strategist and public figure, considered to be one of the founding fathers of the reform movement. He was also an elected official for a period during the Khatami's presidency. INT8 represents a female member of Khatami's cabinet, active in the field of women's rights for over twenty-five years.

1. Power: Challenging dictators and acquiring control

The idea of power was a recurrent theme in interviews with regard to why civil society as a language and concept was used by reformists. However, the basis of power as a reason to pursue the concept of civil society stemmed from two different, yet related, angles. First, civil society was seen as a way to weaken the hold of dictatorial power. This represents a more idealistic viewpoint. The second angle emphasises a more pragmatic perspective, whereby individuals who saw themselves side-lined politically wanted an alternative route back into power.

As expressed by Saeed Hajjarian, a public intellectual and key architect of the reform movement from its inception, civil society has the power to dissolve political power. He explains this in an article on police and military states by providing the example of what happened to the Shah's regime with the Islamic Revolution (Hajjarian, 2002, pp. 6-7). He describes the outcomes of a police state, whereby society becomes "atomised" and civil society done away with; individuals have no protection by way of family, civil organisations, NGOs, political parties, etc. which is how the state can seize those without refuge. However, at the same time, he claims the private sphere is partly secure and the public sphere is weak such that it is difficult for the state to control and organise the public sphere. It is at this point that with the organisation (*sazmandahi*) of civil society that the power seeking state (*dowlat-e eghtedargara*) will dissipate. He goes on to explain that the state can take steps to mitigate civilian power, but ultimately it cannot regain control. Hajjarian's view, though discussing the overthrow of the Shah, can be seen as parallel to the way in which reformists attempted to restrain the post-Revolutionary power of the state.

Civil society to restrain abuse of power

INT2 represented the first viewpoint and provided a direct answer to the question of why civil society was pursued. What attracted him and his 'friends', as he referred to the circle of individuals around him, to the idea of civil society was the issue of dictatorship. He said they saw that cycles of freedom in Iran were short-lived and they wanted to know how to stop the cycle of dictatorships that took over. The first thing that came to his mind was that the regime has too much power and, "we need a power source that is of an equal level with the government (*hokoomat*)". But there were also questions such as "how does our outlook differ from the liberal outlook?" His response to this question was that equality was important in addition to individual freedom. Civil society was the answer. At the time, he claims, "Khatami saw civil society as resistance to despotism (*moghavemat be estebdad*)". In an article entitled "*Chera Jame'e-ye Madani?"* (Why Civil Society?) appearing in the journal *Iran-e Farda*, the writer states that the most important function of civil society in democracy is to bring about a basis for limiting government, and this is done by oversight and limitations of actions by democratic states and democratising

of authoritarian states (Sardarabadi, 1998, p. 63)[30]. The intellectual Sadeq Zibakalam, in an article for the magazine Jame-eye Salem[31], wrote (as translated from the Persian), "In a civil society, the law is higher than the government (*hokoomat*), and in the interpretation of the "science of politics", the level of its power is greater than governance" (Zibakalam, 1999, p. 92). Similarly, according to INT3, the motivation for her to become involved in the issue of civil society was a need to prevent individual rule and a concentration of power. INT3's view and that of Khatami, according to her, was of organisations mediating between citizens and government.

A comparable view is expressed by INT7, one of the key public intellectuals, political advisors and strategists of the reform movement, who himself ran and briefly held political office. According to INT7, in the time period leading up to the 1997 elections, "Our argument was that the government in Iran is very big, there is a strong state and a weak society and this can't be. There should be a balance between state and society". According to him, the government is independent from society and benefits from relative autonomy since it has oil and does not take taxes from the people. At the same time, "the people of Iran are very dependent on the government" (INT7). He provides a number of statistics, including the fact that under the last census (carried out in 2006) 29 million people received some sort of welfare support from the government. INT7's description of the state-society relationship reflects on the condition of a rentier state, discussed in Chapter Three. He asserts that, "Our [he and his colleagues] thesis was that if we want a strong democracy in Iran, one of the ways is the enrichment of civil society organisations, organisations that are people based". He (INT7) and his colleagues felt that the revolution started with 'the people' and "if this potential is not institutionalised, we would return to the time of the Shah". The Shah, representing the monarchy, refers to an undemocratic system of government that the revolution was supposed to supplant by granting voice to the citizen base. INT7 claimed it was for this reason that one of the Khatami administration's goals became the enrichment of civil society.

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[30] The author provides an endnote reference to Larry Diamond's work here ("Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation", 1994).
[31] Jame'eye Salem, Volume 7, Number 34, August/September 1997 (Shahrivar 1376).

Reformist intellectual and academic, INT4, confirmed that the discussion of civil society began before Khatami's election as president. It should be noted that rather than using the singular, INT4 used a plural pronoun, which includes himself, when referencing to intellectual circles that publicly debated the issue of civil society. Use of the pronouns, 'us' and 'we' is common in the Persian language, providing a level of formality and establishing a degree of distance between an individual and the ideas they present. The assumption should be that references to 'they' in the following section are either to the individual interviewee or to the larger group of intellectuals affiliated with public political discussions, unless otherwise stated.

According to INT4, discussions of civil society were largely impacted by the Eastern European experience. However, "We did not accept the Eastern bloc experience because it led to revolution and totalitarianism". He asserted that in the post-war period, there existed no organizations independent from the government, leaving the 'middle' of society empty. According to him, there existed two options for Iranian society to pursue, one being that of 'Hegel' (i.e. the supremacy of individual autonomy) and the other being a society without hierarchy. The society that he and his colleagues chose was one where nongovernmental organizations existed. He did not provide much further detail about this envisioned society. The reason for choosing this path, he claimed, was the inordinate involvement of government they saw in everyday life. As an example, he stated, "In Iran the government is everywhere. When someone dies and you want to hold a funeral, the Government tells you which *akhound* (cleric) you can invite. We wanted to make government smaller". Upon seeing such an inordinate level of involvement, the goal of those promoting civil society was to decrease the size of government. A noteworthy point in this account is the reference to the funeral practices, which is, by all accounts, a personal matter rather than a broader political issue. Based on background information on this informant, it was known that he had recently lost a family member and had faced trouble making funeral arrangements. While this was a recent occurrence and may not have been an issue during the time debates around civil society were taking place preceding Khatami's election, it indicates a post-rationalisation of events. The inference from this example is that the understanding

of past decisions is a complex and imprecise practice, and there exists a constant process of transformation in how intellectuals understand and rationalise ideas.

In literature, similar references to the issue of restraining power can be seen (as addressed in the previous chapter). Rule of law and rational law making have been considered key points to civil society. For example, in an article on law making in civil society, the writer, a reformist cleric, discusses the importance of the law (*ghanoon*), respecting the law (*ghanoonmandi*), being law oriented (*ghanoongaraie*), etc. in civil society, regardless of the specific definition of it that is used (Mohaghegh Damad, 1998, p. 36). He then goes on to state that one of the problems in Iran is the disorganised state of law making (*vaze bi sar o samoon ghanoon gozari*) and the need for there to be an agreement of principles that can serve as a pre-set assumption based on which laws are enacted and interpreted (Mohaghegh Damad, 1998, p. 44).

Civil Society as a tool for access to power

In addition to considering civil society as a tool to prevent the abuse of power or counter dictatorial rule, the concept of civil society was also picked up by intellectuals in discussions before Khatami's election as a way to access power. In other words, civil society was pursued, as ascertained from interviews, with the desire to find a new source of power among the electorate that circumvents the conservative dominated state structure. This notion tackles a popular understanding of civil society that argues, "The political role of civil society in turn is not directly related to the control or conquest of power but to the generation of influence through the life of democratic associations and unconstrained discussion in the cultural public sphere" (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. x). There is contradiction among some reformist interpretations that see a much more direct link between civil society and political power. The intellectuals involved in this endeavour were by and large revolutionaries who were at one point amongst the inner circle of the regime. Upon losing their standing within this circle and their questioning of practices within the state, they began looking for other sources of power. While spaces such as the President's Centre for Strategic Research and a limited number of publications such as *Kiyan* offered them a partial outlet to impart their views, the idea of civil society provided them with the potential for direct access to power. Overall, political parties

have a weak representation in Iranian politics. Individuals such as Hajjarian, believed that political parties could establish connections with entities such as NGOs, associations and movements to generate cooperation (Khosravi, 2001)[32].

The following data is based on an interview with INT6, a prominent intellectual and leader in one of the principal reformist political parties. According to him, "The government is the leviathan in Iran. Structural wise, the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic regimes are the same and '76 [1376 of the Iranian calendar, 1997 Gregorian Calendar] was an opposition to this". '76 refers to the emergence of the reformists and their stance, which had emerged in the post-war period. "We felt like we had created a beast (*ghool*) and understood that a few things had to happen, the most important was that the government has to be responsive". However, he also stated that in a short period, the regime could not become liberal or the government smaller because of people's high expectations of the government. He gave the example that society in general opposed privatisation and surveys have shown that over two-thirds of people wanted to keep radio and television under public ownership[33]. His observations counter the idea of reformists wanting to limit government. At the same time, he asserted that Iran needs a strong military and security because of its geopolitical position. Instead, he provided another role for civil society, and a reason for reformists opting to use the concept. He stated, "We went to civil society to rein in the beast (*ghool-e bi shakh o dom*). We didn't see it from the viewpoint of freedom and rights but it was mostly to stop the beast". He further elaborated on this metaphor and the role of civil society by stating, "We saw that in opposition to this beast we can create smaller beasts". The 'smaller beasts' he clarified are in reference to civil society.

INT6 further explained that in the period before Khatami entered power, but after Khomeini's death (1989), pro-reform individuals were slowly being disqualified from running for office (*rad-e salahiyat*) by the state structure and they, pro-reform actors, realized that as individuals they needed freedom to continue. They felt civil society was their way. "During the war, everything was done to maintain the government but after we realised that the beast (*ghool*) would knock us down

[32] A copy of this interview was received from Mr Hajjarian's office.
[33] He referred to a survey from 2004.

(INT6). Moreover, he claimed he and his reformist colleagues wanted to create a local civil society based on their society's needs, not simply as a way of modelling the West. He asserted, "Certain things happened early in the revolution that led us to this. Free elections, even during the war, allowed us to realise that voting doesn't mean we are moving away from the revolution". The last statement is an indication of the strong relationship he, as a leading intellectual figure of the reform movement, sees between civil society and democracy. This is significant because although he claimed the movement wanted to create a localised civil society, he still relied on a link between the Western idea of democracy and civil society. Overall, however, the key finding from INT6's statements in this regard is that civil society, as he and his colleagues saw it, was a tactic to achieve political power. At the same time, the contrasting explanations for why civil society was chosen are themselves an indication of the conflicting meaning and responsibility reformists assigned to the concept of civil society.

Related to this point is the attempt to attract segments of the population who had lost confidence in the regime to a reinvented image of the Islamic Republic through the principles of civil society. INT3 directly addressed this issue. She stated that reformists wanted to change the view of people towards the regime so that it "…belongs to them (*taalogh khater*) and not something to fear". Her definition of civil society, provided later in this chapter, explains how she believed that through nongovernmental organisations, citizens could voice their desires. This view can be attributed to the reformist aspirations of maintaining the Islamic Republic and using the concept of civil society as a way to attain power.

2. Challenging violence

Another less prominent, but important theme, that resonated most with INT2 was that of violence. While a direct reference to the idea of violence was not made in other interviews with public intellectuals, its general premise can be seen in references to the promotion of dialogue by respondents. INT2 stated, "I thought to myself, how can we lower the levels of unrest (*shooresh*) and still have people express their wishes? We went towards civil society because of violence (*khoshoonat*). Instead of slogans (*shoar*), people within civil society talk about their

ideas. Our goal was to find a non-violent way". INT2 referred to the violence he witnessed during the (Iran-Iraq) war, in which he had voluntarily participated. Even when the war was over, he "saw riots and unrest (*shooresh*) in several cities like Qazvin, Shiraz and Eslamshahr near Tehran". When speaking about the dialogue that took place at the Centre, discussed above, he stated, "We had all seen the violence of the revolution, war and domestic terrors. They [referring to domestic terrorists] were assassinating and the others were executing (*oonha terror mikardan va inha edam mikardan*). We saw lots of people being killed". Overall, this characterisation of civil society can be linked with the liberal origins of civil society and Ferguson, who wrote about civil society as the elimination of violence from human affairs. Civil society offers a peaceful means of interaction and is similar to those who identified civil society as not just organisations, as will be described below, but rather as a space or forum for debate. While this outlook on civil society presents a more nuanced and less restrictive view than one focused on organisations, it also poses a challenge in its ambiguity. It was in this atmosphere of ideas about restricting excessive power and engaging in open dialogue that the 1997 presidential elections took place between Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, a hard-line cleric and speaker of parliament, backed by the Supreme Leader, and Mohammad Khatami, a moderate cleric and former Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance who pursued liberal policies during his past political tenure.

4.5 Reformist Entry to Power: Khatami's election

According to INT4, in the time period immediately preceding Khatami's first election as president in May 1997, the intellectuals previously involved in the revolution of 1979 began to drift away and the revolutionary ideology lost its intellectuals. Though these debates began before Khatami's election, it was Khatami, a cleric, who was able to take them to the public in ways the intellectuals had failed to do. When Khatami became a candidate for the presidency, the reformist intellectuals referenced above began to actively support him. For example, INT3 stated, "At one point, I would be giving three lectures a day in defence of Khatami". It was during this election and afterwards that civil society entered the public sphere in Iran. As recounted by INT6, while those in his circle were familiar

with the issue of civil society, it was not until Khatami's entrance on the national stage that it became a public concept.

Khatami as representative

As an individual, Khatami played a significant role in bringing a new style of intellectual discourse into the public spotlight. According to Abdolkarim Soroush, Khatami was himself an intellectual with a 'deep' (*amiq*) understanding of concepts such as civil society; this is in contrast to other politicians whom Soroush claims have only a superficial understanding (*sathi*) of new issues about which they speak (Soroush, 2000, p. 421)[34]. During his election campaign and after his election victory, the issues that were thus far confined to limited circles of intellectuals entered the mainstream media. For Khatami, "The role of civil society is better living (*behtar zistan*) or welfare (*behzisti*). What shows the civil aspect of society is the conscious/aware (*agahaneh*), selected (*entekhab garaneh*) and voluntary (*davtalabaneh*) existence of individuals. Humans have to be free in order to be able to have a voluntary presence in different fields of society, particularly the political, social and cultural" (Khatami, 2000b, p. 38). Khatami takes on a broader approach to civil society. He states that in 'a' civil society, thinking is free and must be expressed; the final referees are the people and they get to decide, (Khatami, 2001b, p. 68)[35]. Khatami states that while civil society is a concept emerging from the West, it does not mean that it must then be renounced. In fact, he points to other Western concepts, such as constitutionality (*mashrootiat)* and republicanism (*jomhouri*), which have become embedded in Iranian society. The main facets of civil society, he states, include: people being present in all arenas of society (he states that in an uncivil society people have no rights and this is against Islam); government has limits and must work within a particular framework (he points out that even the Supreme Leader is selected by the opinion of the Assembly of Experts (which is elected by people); there exist organizations that serve as intermediary between people and government (this includes political parties, syndicates, etc.) (Khatami, 2001b)[36].

[34] Based on interview with Soroush in weekly *Aban* on 1/3/1378 (22 May 1999)
[35] Based on the President's speech and Q&A with students, 7 December 1998 (16 Azar 1377).
[36] Based on the President's speech and Q&A with students, 7 December 1998.

On the issue of civil society and freedom of the press, a translated work of Khatami's words states:

> In this part of the world, and especially in Iran, religion has called people to establish and consolidate civil society, a responsible society, a society in which people are participants, a society where the government belongs to the people and is the servant of the people, not their master, and is consequently responsible to the people. Civil society needs to be based on order and the cornerstone of that order, is the Constitution. (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 90)

With regard to intellectuals, Khatami made the claim that Iranian society had been afflicted by two challenges in the past century, one being 'unenlightened religious dogma' and the other being secular intellectualism (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 23). A key feature of his thought was his reproach of dogmatic "Khomeinism"[37] (Shakibi, 2010, p. 162). In a collection of essays published in 1993, Khatami asserted:

> Unfortunately, what has been called intellectualism in our society has been a movement that has been superficial and cut off from the people. Never has the voice of self-appointed intellectuals travelled beyond the cafeterias and coffee houses where they have posed as a political opposition. Even if people have heard their voice, they have found it incomprehensible. Thus, there has never been any mutual understanding. And if public-minded intellectualism came to the fore and gained respect, it was through people who cast their claims in authentic, traditional, and religious terms. This was the reason for the vast popularity of figures such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati. These two were real intellectuals, and our society felt that they were a part of the people and spoke to the people's pains and concerns. (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 25).

Here we witness the paradox of a religious intellectual's claim that the reason the work of secular intellectuals was unable to take root in Iranian society was due to their inability to integrate and engage with the wider public, a critique that later came to be lodged against religious intellectuals including Khatami himself. This is reminiscent of Gramsci's call for "…intellectuals to develop a relational knowledge of and with the masses in order to help them become self-reflective" (Borg, Buttigieg, & Mayo, 2002, p. 164). The idea also resonates with neo (or post)-Gramscians, who discuss the importance of ideas and ideology relating to particular

[37] Khomeinism (as well as Leninism) refers to "…the construction of a universalist utopian modernity superior in morality, politics, social justice, and…economics, to that offered by the West" (Shakibi, 2010, p. 80).

groups (for example, Stuart Hall's work on the problem of ideology and Marxism (Hall, 1996)). Khatami goes on to state that a lack or weakness of religious intellectualism is a major flaw that must be addressed (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 28).

From the same collection of essays first published in 1993, we see that Khatami describes an intellectual as one who '…lives in her own time, taking on a social responsibility, her mind constantly curious and restive about reality and human destiny. An intellectual is one who respects rationality and thinking and also knows the value of freedom' (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 28). He then adds to this interpretation to describe a religious intellectual as:

> ...one who loves humanity, understands its problems, and feels a responsibility towards its destiny and respects human freedom, She feels that humans have a divine mission and wants freedom for them. Whatever blocks the path to human growth and evolution, she deems as being against freedom. (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 29)

Religious intellectuals, he believes, can emerge by linking religious seminaries and universities.

Khatami's stance on censorship is interesting in that he does not believe in a system based on a singular dominant idea that isolates itself from critics. He writes, "An active, evolving society must be in contact and communication with different, sometimes opposing views, to be able to equip itself with a more powerful, attractive and effective thought than that of the opponent" (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 47). An additional testimony is a statement he made during his inaugural speech, "It is only through the growth of thinking and intellectual forces in society, and the free exchange of ideas, that the government can choose the best views and ways and arrive at the proper criteria for justice in the sophisticated world of today…" (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 80). These statements form a basis for the notion, expressed by respondents below, that civil society is a forum for the exchange of ideas. Therefore, it is in line with this belief that reformists encouraged and participated in expanding newspapers during Khatami's presidency. Khatami's choice of Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ata'ollah Mohajerani, upheld this belief by granting an extraordinary number of permits for reformist publications while at the same time authorising a previously suppressed sphere of arts and culture.

According to one calculation, in the first year of Khatami's first term, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance "…issued more than 779 new press licences, bringing the total to 930 (Tarock, 2001, p. 590). Looking at just the number of daily newspapers, while the numbers were gradually rising in the 1990s, there was a dramatic growth after Khatami's elections. According one estimate, in Iran, there existed 7 newspapers between 1979 and 1983, 34 in 1993 and 62 in 1996; this number increased to 112 in the period following Khatami's election (Zoeram & Fee, 2010, p. 224)[38].

At the same time, Khatami leaves room for interpretation of the law as it pertains to censorship. When asked by a student if in a civil society the press should need a license to operate, he states that it is something that the laws of each society need to decide and Iranian society should not compare itself with Western society. He says that Iranian society faces concerns such as political and security powers and espionage and counter-espionage and cannot just leave society to just 'be' on its own (*be aman-e khoda raha konim*). However, he offsets his stance by stating that the current law requiring these licenses should not contradict people's basic rights (Khatami, 2001b, p. 82).

In his inaugural speech given on 4 August 1997, Khatami further called for an increase in public participation while asserting that "…the government is obligated to provide a safe environment for the exchange of ideas and views within the framework of the criteria set by Islam and the Constitution" (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 76). Though Khatami's words are tempered by his inclusion of Islam and the Constitution as boundaries, his interpretive understanding of Islam and the general tone of his speech are more telling of his message. He goes on in the same speech to say:

> …as indicated by the late Imam Khomeini, we should always consider the elements of time and place in the question of Islamic *Ijtihad* [independent interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence] and understand Islam in such a manner that it can respond to and meet emerging issues and needs of all times. (Khatami & Mafinezam, 1997, p. 79)

[38] The closure of many newspapers during Khatami's presidency is another matter and points to the conservative challenge facing reformists. The reason for using these statistics here is to show the attempts made by Khatami and his colleagues, such as his choice for Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, to open up the public sphere.

While Khatami had his own conception of civil society and increased participation of citizens, the understanding of civil society by intellectuals directed the way government policies were enacted, particularly as a number of the intellectuals were active in the political sphere, principally as advisors to the president or members of reformist political groups. Given his lack of institutional power:

> The overall strategy, as conceived by many of Khatami's closest advisors, was to use popular pressure from below in factional struggles behind the scenes at the top levels of the republican and revolutionary institutions in order to advance the politics of change. This active use of popular pressure from below was needed since Khatami was attempting to re-define the power and prerogatives of revolutionary institutions whose real power was greater than that of the republican presidency. (Shakibi, 2010, p. 293)

This idea of popular pressure from below is fitting with the notion of civil society, particularly as it was envisioned by reformist intellectuals when it came to its use for gaining political power. Further discussion of specific policies and laws addressed during Khatami's presidency are beyond the scope of this thesis, however they can add value to legal research. The next section outlines how the respondent intellectuals interviewed defined civil society as well as their perspectives on how civil society should be developed in society. The findings can be contrasted with the perspectives of civil society activists who considered themselves as constituting the sector.

4.6 Defining and 'Generating' Civil Society

The following section presents the definitions of civil society provided by leading public intellectuals affiliated with the reform movement who were interviewed. These definitions are broadly grouped into two categories. The first emphasises organisations and formal structures while the second is more concerned with civil society as a space. The respondents expressed the view that civil society represents a space that is not under the direct control of the state or, more specifically, under the control of the conservative government. However, regardless of emphasis on civil society as a space or organisation, the common thread was the role of civil society as an intermediary between the wants of society, namely citizens, and the state, as an institution and collective of political leaders. On the whole, regardless of the exact

definition, there was emphasis on civil society as a facet of modernity ("Miz Gerd-e Kian dar Barehye Jame'e-ye Madani (Kiyan's Round Table on Civil Society)," 1996). This point is stressed in discussions on the relationship between religion and civil society (examined below). The divergence between interview data and literature on civil society by intellectuals is that, in general, the literature placed less emphasis on organisations and gave prominence to more abstract ideas. It stands to point out that other writers and intellectuals have underscored the lack of a unified meaning for civil society by reformists. For example, Ezzatollah Fooladvand notes that even before Khatami's election, responses to the question of 'what is civil society'? remained ambiguous; and when an explanation was given it was limited to either an example of an advanced society or a conversation on the existence of never-ending corruption (Fouladvand, 2000, p. 25).

Organisational perspectives

The first category emphasises the organisational aspect of civil society. This interpretation can be linked back to organisational definitions of civil society popularised in the late 20th century in the field of development, particularly by international agencies involved in capacity building programmes, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Khatami himself emphasised that civil society organisations have to be people-based (*mardomi*) and not, as he says has been the case in countries like Iran, created from the top; in this criticism he includes political parties (Khatami, 2001a, p. 37). According to a former Khatami government spokesperson and reformist intellectual, INT1, the idea of civil society is the existence of organisations that are not under direct command from the government, and which are separate from private for-profit enterprises. This characterisation is in accord with the basic Western, liberal definition of civil society and was broadly shared by respondents. It emphasises the affiliation of civil society with a type of organisation or collective action.

Different individuals expressed additional nuances that attach particular values or elaborate on this definition. For example, INT3 separated civil society into two factions, that of nongovernmental organizations and local city councils. According to her, the idea was to create organizations independent of the state with the

collaborations of governments such that the citizens can communicate their needs and views. She asserted that the government has an obligation to create the groundwork for political parties and NGOs. These organizations should be tools that are able to force changes in the views and structure of the government. What she and her colleagues attempted to do was give certificates to organizations and to organize them within the structure of the Islamic Republic:

> The idea was to create organisations independent of the state with collaboration of the government such that citizens can communicate their needs and views. These organisations were to be tools that can force changes in the views and structures of the government. (INT3)

The purpose of these organisations, she stated, was to play the role of an intermediary between citizens and the government. However, it is unclear how this relationship would operate in practice.

Of particular significance here is the distinction she makes between traditional citizen activity and what she deems modern civil society. The former focuses on charity while the latter is a check on state power. Again, we see the emphasis on civil society as a mediator between citizens and the state. An interesting point is her inclusion of city councils in civil society. As elected offices mandated by the constitution, it is unclear why city councils would be considered part of civil society. While she explained that these assemblies have the power to support civil society organizations, she did not clarify why they would in themselves be considered a part of civil society. According to her, in Iran, citizen-based organizations have a history, but not with what she considers today's description of civil society. While she did not elaborate on the distinction between traditional and modern definitions of civil society, her example of traditional charities as conventional citizen-based organisation versus a civil society organisation provides an indication of her conceptualisation. That is to say, the difference between what she considers modern representatives of civil society and previous models is that modern civil society is involved in the political process by being a vehicle that connects citizens with the state. Organisations such as charities, on the other hand, do not play such a role. Of course, it is interesting to examine the difference between this perception of organisations such as charities and the role of traditional organisations absorbed by the state, as will be explained in Chapter Six.

Local Councils as civil society

Local councils were a mandate of the new Constitution enacted after the 1979 Revolution:

> In order to expedite social, economic, development, public health, cultural, and educational programmes and facilitate other affairs relating to public welfare with the cooperation of the people according to local needs, the administration of each village, division, city, municipality, and province will be supervised by a council to be named the Village, Division, City, Municipality, or Provincial Council. Members of each of these councils will be elected by the people of the locality in question. Qualifications for the eligibility of electors and candidates for these councils, as well as their functions and powers, the mode of election, the jurisdiction of these councils, the hierarchy of their authority, will be determined by law, in such a way as to preserve national unity, territorial integrity, the system of the Islamic Republic, and the sovereignty of the central government. (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

According to the Constitution, the councils, along with the *majlis*, form the legislative branch of the state. However, in practice, the councils were never put into place until Khatami came to power. In fact, according to a leading reformist figure, Mostafa Tajzadeh, the reformist push to enact the mandate on city councils was denounced by conservatives who saw it as an expensive project without any real value. Conservatives continued to make moves against it; for example, Tajzadeh notes how the conservative figure Ali Larijani, then head of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, contacted him after the date of the first council elections were announced encouraging him to take back the announcement and postpone the election, with the excuse (an excuse that Tajzadeh did not take as valid) that the date was too close to that of elections for the Assembly of experts (the body that elects and oversees the actions of the supreme leader) (Tajzadeh, 2004)[39]. Nonetheless, the first elections for city, village and provincial councils took place in 1999. The role of these newly established entities was to elect mayors and oversee economic, social and cultural affairs at the local level, including the provision of welfare services. They are unique in the history of Iran's political system in that they represent a shift away from centralised administration to local oversight.

[39] Tajzadeh's article referenced here was first published in Yas-e No newspaper, 26 February 2003 (7/12/1381).

However, the reality of Iran's current political structure limits their power. On the one hand the overdue establishment of these councils is indicative of the reform movement's attempts to rectify the missteps that altered the original vision of the revolution. On the other hand, however, reformist figures, as indicated in interviews (for example INT6, R1), considered the councils to be vehicles for the promotion of civil society or even, in some cases, a component of it (INT3, INT7).

The characterisation of an elected body of the state as civil society reveals two important points regarding the reform movement's leaders. First, it indicates the ambiguous nature of civil society they envisioned for Iran. Second, it indicates the reformist inclination towards using state institutions for their own purposes by changing perceptions of them, for example, affiliating city councils with civil society instead of the state. Alternatively, they were aiming to capture power at the local level and reform the state through decentralisation, reducing the power of the central government. The perception of using city councils as a way to capture power is exemplified by an interview with Saeed Hajjarian in the bi-monthly *Cheshm Andaz Iran* magazine, where he states that in other contexts, such as Turkey and Egypt, certain political parties were able to begin their activities through their work in city councils (Ghani, 2006, p. 66). However, the ultimate aim of regaining power from conservatives is not feasible given the governing structure where the power of the Supreme Leader supersedes all other authority. This issue is also addressed by INT6 who claimed that due to Iran's structure, "…the way to enrich civil society is through government. If reformists aren't in power civil society cannot breathe". This statement was made following explanations of how 33,000 council organisations were established in one day by the Khatami administration as a way to hand power to the 'people'.

However, according to INT6, decentralisation on its own is insufficient as it is ultimately through the presence of those who support the ideals of reform in government that civil society can take shape. This observation supports an understanding of civil society that is not about the organisational aspects of civil society but the internal values through which they operate. In line with this understanding, Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari wrote in an article, printed around the time that the councils were to be launched, that the city councils should be looked at as a

step towards civil society and democracy; he states that this is the case despite the fact that there are conditions on elections for the councils, such as stipulations placed on candidates, that are not in line with freedom, democracy and civil society, as there is a need to start from somewhere (1998, p. 19). The significance of the councils is in its ability to take power structures closer to the hands of citizens. Eshkevari's mentioning of the restrictions placed on candidates is an illustration of his unease with the continued influence of state power.

Intermediary and space for dialogue

Ultimately, as asserted by INT6, reformists developed their vision of civil society through experience rather than theory. The idea of civil society as an intermediary between 'society' (presumably the voting population) and the state featured regularly in interviews, and is supported by literature. For example, Majid Mohammadi, a key writer on civil society, notes in a 1997 article in Kiyan magazine that civil society comes after the establishment of institutions and organisations that rest between the government and family and includes notions such as social consensus (1997, p. 38). This perception also fits the second definition of civil society mentioned at the start of this section that characterises civil society as a space for debate and discussion rather than focusing on official or even informal organisation. However, the practical explanation for this outlook was unclear. For example, in the case of INT3, she pointed to nongovernmental organisations as the entity serving as the intermediary. Similar views can be found in literature. For example, in an article on the impact of civil society on the Islamic Republic's international relations policy, civil society is designed as organisations that serve as the intermediary between the individual and government (Dehshiri, 1999, p. 12). However, most other intellectuals interviewed did not clarify their definition of civil society that they envisioned for the country. For INT2, civil society is the space where individuals can pursue their demands "without throwing stones". This explanation is in line with his views of non-violence explored above. The vague explanations offered are in line with the multi-faceted quality of civil society explored in Chapter Two. In this sense, civil society is an undefined arena for the contestation of power (Howell & Pearce, 2001).

4.7 Civil society and its Affiliation with Islam According to Reformist Intellectuals

One area where almost all reformist intellectuals interviewed were in agreement was the relationship between civil society and Islam; they either directly opposed or questioned the connection between civil society and Islam that was presented by Khatami. In a statement made by Khatami less than one year after taking office, he argued, "While Western civil society, historically as well as theoretically, is derived from the Greek city-state and the later Roman political system, the civil society we have in mind has its origin, from a historical and theoretical point of view, in *Madinat ul-Nabi" (Khatami, 2000a, p. 16). Madinat ul-Nabi* (or *Madinat al Nabi*) means the 'City of the Prophet'. As Khatami explained, "…it is only after such a return to the common identity that we can live in peace and tranquillity with other peoples and nations…. Seeking abode in the common Islamic home – *Madinat ul-Nabi* – is tantamount to the assumption by Muslims of their true position; that is, securing their true connection with Islamic identity" (Khatami, 2000a, p. 17). With regard to the relationship of democracy and Islam, Khatami does not believe there to be a conflict between the two; he claims that "If Islam belongs to all times, in different times and with consideration of different needs it has to respond to those needs" (Khatami, 2001a, p. 35).

However, Khatami does not provide sufficient clarification as to what his Islamic interpretation of civil society means in the practical sense for a modern nation-state. Moreover, the intellectuals of the reform movement reject Khatami's interpretation of civil society and deny any relationship between the definitions of civil society they discuss and the notion of *Madinat al Nabi* as espoused by Khatami. In fact, the general consensus amongst respondents was that Khatami only made this connection as a way to gain political favour with sceptics as the idea of a distinct 'Islamic' civil society was not part of the discourse amongst reformist intellectuals. This view is espoused by Saeed Hajjarian, who in a published paper stated that while Mohammad, the Islamic prophet, created the first Islamic civil complex (*mojtameh madani eslami*), this is not to be mistaken for civil society; civil society encompasses the appearance of citizenship as a concept and the individual's ability to make

independent decisions and have the free will to join organisations voluntarily and adjust rules and regulations (Hajjarian, 1998, pp. 317-318)[40].

According to INT1, Khatami's linking of civil society with *Madinat al Nabi*, referred to as *Madinat* from here forward, was a mistake from the viewpoint of intellectuals. He stated that this conflation was in reality a play on words as there is no relationship between the old idea of *Madinat* and today's modern world. The problems with the development of civil society during the reform period were multifaceted. With regard to Islam, INT6 stated that in Iran, any serious discussion needs to consider Islam or else it will not fit society, however this does not mean that everything needs to be "Islamicized". The main finding with regard to the role of Islam in the reformist discourse on civil society is that while Islam is a major factor in Iran's social and political culture, it was not an underpinning of the reformist civil society discourse. INT4 supports the above argument in his statement on the relationship between the civil society promoted by reformists and Islam. He stated that for civil society to exist, rule of law and independent, private life is required. However, this idea was translated by traditional factions of society as '*bi-namoosi'* (one without honour, a term often used to express a lack of personal morality). In other words, traditional, or conservative, leaders considered the call for independence in individuals' private lives as a free pass to surrender to immoral, unregulated existence. It was due to this belief that Khatami presented his 'Madinat al Nabi' argument to lessen the pressure on him. In essence, Khatami made claims about civil society's religious connection as a political tool.

Alternatively, INT5 argued that Khatami's discussion of *Madinat* was in order to explain civil society to the general public and prevent them from believing it is a foreign or Western concept. According to her, those who criticised Khatami for talking about *Madinat* did not understand Iranian society. Similar to other respondents, she agrees that this was done to localize the issue of civil society and distance it from its Western roots, and arguably, accusations of Westoxification. However, her statement implies that it was successful in making it more acceptable to the general population and is an example of how religion is used to validate an

[40] The book chapter from which this Hajjarian reference comes from was originally published as an article in the journal Etela'at Siyasi-Eghtesadi in 1997 (Vol 11, Nos. 9-10).

issue, regardless of its actual accuracy. However, in almost all the other interviews with reformists and even conservative intellectuals found in Chapter Six, the point was made that there is in fact no relationship between the idea of civil society discussed by reformists and that of the religious society implied by *Madinat al Nabi*. Moreover, as will be seen in Chapter Five, civil society actors, such as members of student groups, women's rights activists and nongovernmental organisation representatives, rarely if ever, connected the idea of civil society with Islam, further evidence of the irrelevance of Khatami's association between the two concepts.

The issue of *Madinat* exemplifies a larger concern with the use of civil society as a concept. Though the concept and its theories originate in the West, it has been adopted and adapted in other contexts by different actors with various intentions. In Iran, reformists adopted the concept in an attempt to break free from the increasing power of the state in the post-revolution era. While the definitions and characteristics they attributed to civil society were diverse and at times ambiguous, people like Soroush tried to make Islam more amenable to the space for dialogue created by civil society rather than redefining civil society to match Islam. Khatami's introduction of *Madinat* into the discourse was ultimately inconsequential.

4.8 Conclusion: The blurring of boundaries and meanings

Ultimately, civil society came to signify a wealth of liberal ideas countering authoritarianism and conflict, while employing a less straightforward term. Reformists used the language of civil society to craft their vision of the good life, although as a group, or even individuals, they did not have a cohesive strategy or end game. This is represented by INT10, an intellectual and close advisor to Khatami, who said, "When I went somewhere to give a talk, I barely understood what I was saying let alone the people I was speaking with. Khatami told me that you have been my advisor for eight years and I am just understanding what you are saying." INT10 points out that reformist discourse was not only unclear to outsiders, but was met with uncertainty even among the inner circles of the reformist movement.

The following findings emerge from the investigation presented in this chapter. According to interviews, taking up the concept of civil society as the reform

movement's mantra did not occur as an informed choice. Rather, these significant agents of the reform movement gave the impression that the concept of civil society was gradually accepted by them because of their affinity for the adaption of Western theories. CS6, a well-known academic working in the field of development, explained in an interview that while intellectuals became familiar with current concepts and theories, they were unable to see them in the framework of Iran's own history and did not consider the question of whether or not civil society as a concept made sense in the given society. However, he went on explain that Iranian society has been conditioned to model itself after Western experiences and there exists no clear understanding of civil society's meaning in Iran. With reference to religion, he stated that a reductionist approach is taken towards religion, in other words, intellectuals tried to reduce civil society and other concepts to fit with the principles of religion. According to S6, "Civil society is the same as the elephant in Molavi's [Jalal-e-Din Mohammad Molavi Rumi] story, where everyone said my idea is correct". In essence, one of the problems of the reform movement's approach to civil society was the insistence by various individuals that their definition or vision of civil society was the correct one.

This chapter addressed the question of how and why reformist public intellectuals came to represent and promote civil society by the time their group had captured the presidency, and the imagination of the country at large. Their downfall can be attributed to their overly ambitious reliance on civil society as a solution. However, one of the greatest gains was the ability of these individuals to introduce the ideas of democracy, pluralism and individual rights into the public domain from within the heart of the regime. Reformists accomplished this goal by clarifying that their main goal was to end the monopolisation of power by a select group within the regime, using the mantra of civil society. Political society and civil society became intertwined in this interpretation. Chapter Five examines how the reformist audience, specifically those affiliated with a sector that considered itself to be representative of civil society, reacted to and even benefited from the reformist platform.

Chapter 5: The 'Practitioners' of Modern Iranian Civil Society

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings of an empirical study on the agents, or practitioners, of modern Iranian civil society with the emergence of the reform movement in the political spectrum. These findings are based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with non-state, civil society actors. The underpinning rationale is to understand why and how social actors used the concept of civil society to enhance their positions of power vis-à-vis the state and society at large. By the time of the second Khatami administration in 2001 and up to its end, activists and observers were largely disappointed with the outcome of reformist efforts, namely the failure to create sustainable and effective organisations and policies that gave security to the modern civil society sphere. However, civil society practitioners gained experiences and exposure at both the domestic and international level alongside the establishment of more vocal public spheres during Khatami's eight-year presidency, none of which were simply reversed with a change in government. This chapter looks at how the civil society frame promoted by reformist intellectuals, examined in Chapter Four, and the political opportunities afforded to the public once reformists entered power, was taken up by individuals who considered themselves members of a modern civil society sector. The term 'modern' implies association with liberal ideals of individual autonomy and accountability of the governing state.

The arguments made are: first, the results of the reformist promotion of civil society from the time of Khatami's election should not be judged solely based on the establishment and collapse of nongovernmental organizations or civil society-related institutional reforms. Rather, analysis of Iranian civil society should take into account ways in which the new era, instigated by the 1997 presidential elections, inspired actors from different segments of society to engage with public affairs at large and created an opening for civil society actors who would not have otherwise had an opportunity to voice their opinions. Second, as discussed in Chapter Four, civil society was used as a tool to gain support for reformists amongst the public and to prevent centralisation of power by conservative forces in the state by boosting the political power of reformists. In this regard, the boundaries between civil society and political society were blurred as actors in certain segments of civil society appeared

to act as political agents. Political society here consists of institutions such as political parties, electoral mechanisms and political leaders, essentially the "… arena in which political actors compete for the legitimate right to exercise control over public power and the state apparatus" (Linz & Stepan, 1998, pp. 51-52)[41]. In contrast to political society, civil society actors are not in direct competition for political roles. A third, and final, argument is that although some civil society activity was part of a brief trend that gained and lost popularity during the reform movement, some actors survived the reformists' political losses and continued their work despite hostile conditions. Therefore, greater insight can be gained by examining the legacy of the reformist movement through individual actors rather than the organisational structures that were left in place.

In this thesis, civil society is identified not by the ambiguous classifications of reformist public intellectuals, as discussed in Chapter Four, but by an understanding guided by critical interpretations. Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato's definition is most helpful, as it understands civil society to be "…a sphere of social interactions between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication" (1992, p. ix). The last point, regarding public communication, refers to a key issue addressed in this thesis, namely the idea of civil society as dialogue or discourse. Rather than looking at the organisations of civil society that can take on different forms and characteristics based on context, this chapter emphasises the agents of civil society. During Iran's reformist movement, these agents worked in different capacities and in varying areas of civil society. Their commonalities included: self-identification as members of civil society and work within formal and informal organisations and movements, not directly involved in competition for power at the state level.

[41] The notion of political society existing as a category separate from civil society is a contested one. Following from this, some thinkers include political parties in their definition of civil society while others do not. For example, Keane considers the concept of political society, a sphere falling between, the state and economic sector, on one hand, and civil society on the other, as an out-dated one (1998, p. 182). In some cases, where thinkers place political parties outside the domain of civil society, the impetus is based on assumptions regarding the characteristic of each. For example, in post-communist countries, political parties were associated with corrupt oligarchs while civil society was associated with ideals such as high principles and transparency (Gershman, 2004, p. 28).

Moving beyond the specific case of Iran, the findings presented in this chapter are intended to show that civil society activity should not be solely measured from a quantitative or organisational perspective based on the numbers and powers of organisations. Rather, it should be evaluated from a qualitative outlook that takes into account the types and ranges of activities taking place in the public sphere in general. This includes looking at instances where citizens take initiatives and are critical in their approach to political as well as social activity. Here the social movement aspect of civil society needs to be taken into account as a greater indicator of civil society activity rather than what is reflected in formal civil society organisations in the public sphere. Social movements have a more diverse composition, consisting of loose coalitions of individuals and formal and informal organisations and networks, with the women's movement serving as a valuable example.

From an organisational outlook, civil society, as voluntary establishments outside the realm of the state and economy, has a long established history in Iran. The difference between modern and traditional civil society organisations (often referred to as Community Based Organisations, or CBOs) is explained in a report by Sohrab Razzaghi, one of the key players in civil society capacity-building efforts. He describes traditional civil society as lacking "…respect for democratic values, human rights, and gender rights…" (Razzaghi, 2010, p. 18). Alternatively, the rise of civil society as a symbol of freedom and democracy, as touted by reformists and taken up by the middle class, students and women's rights activists, among others, became conflated with a modern organizational approach that emulated the West and was advocated in the field of development. As such, civil society activists and observers of Iranian civil society considered the failure to institutionalize civil society through legislation and the inconsistent growth of civil society organisations, such as NGOs, as a failure by the reformists. However, as was observed in interviews, civil society activists dedicated to their cause shifted strategies to accomplish their goals via other channels when their original path was hindered by conservative state powers. Therefore, the question remains, what was the contribution of the reformist period, when countless NGOs were given the green light for activity and in certain cases funding before opposing political factions shut them down? On the whole, while certain aspects of civil society activity would have taken place regardless of the

reformists' position in the political sphere, the success of reformists, particularly by the public intellectuals who pushed the slogan of civil society, was in their ability to open up the possibilities of civil society to a much larger faction and spectrum of the population, expanding the types of activity taking place and fostering discourse based on pluralism.

Varying accounts of the successes and failures of modern Iranian civil society and the affinity towards an organisational vision of civil society can partially be explained by different understandings of civil society between practitioners and the public intellectuals who attempted to provide a theoretical grounding. Analysis of the entire spectrum of Iranian civil society, based on different definitions, is beyond the scope, resources and intentions of this thesis. Rather, this chapter focuses on a small group of actors involved in what has been dubbed the 'civil society community' during the Khatami era. These actors engaged in public discourse through print media, participated in special forums and meetings designated for 'civil society' (i.e. taking part in events organised by civil society capacity building organisations) and designated themselves members of civil society. To establish a manageable and representative sample of key players from this 'community', given the resources available, interviews and research emphasised three categories; namely actors in the women's rights movement, student activists involved in the Islamic Association of Students (*Anjoman-e Eslami-ye Daneshjouyan*) and journalists. To provide context to the often politically charged civil society activities of the groups mentioned above, interviews were also conducted with actors involved in more conventional development-oriented NGO activity (for example, environment, poverty alleviation and education). The following paragraph introduces the women's rights movement.

It should be noted that although the general goal of the women's movement has been to give voice to the needs of women in society, the vision and plan of action among proponents is far from homogenous. A shallow separation of women's groups yields categories such as feminist, religious/Islamic and Islamic feminist perspectives. However, an in-depth look reveals a more multi-dimensional set of groups that often overlap in terms of both values and programmes. Detailed analysis of Iranian women's groups and the various women's movements that have existed in Iran is

beyond the scope of this research. What is relevant is the impact of civil society language from the reform movement on women's groups and individual women's rights activists, particularly those who supported or sought to benefit from the open atmosphere touted by reformists, starting with Khatami's election campaign. The following section will briefly introduce the Iranian women's movement that began to emerge in force in the mid-1990s. Next, an outline of various developments that took place in that movement during the Khatami administration will be presented. The information and analysis includes data gathered during fieldwork, using semi-structured interviews with women's rights activists from varying backgrounds. The focus is on how a specific number of women's rights campaigners, activists and researchers observed and were swayed by the civil society slogan of the reform movement. Analysis is focused on the connection between the notion of civil society as envisioned by reformist intellectuals and by individuals working on the issue of women's rights. In particular, the research looks at the ways the emerging language of civil society was used to enhance the position of power amongst women's rights activists.

In order to accomplish the above, the chapter sets out the context in which modern civil society actors found themselves by the time Khatami entered the political arena. Next, personal interviews with individuals from the categories named above are used to illustrate varying perspectives on the concept of civil society as they emerged during the reform movement. The ultimate objective will be to examine how the language of civil society was interpreted on the ground and to observe the bolstering of Iranian civil society as a result of political opportunities. The findings show that, overall, while the basic ideas motivating civil society actors were not new, the Khatami presidency provided the political opportunity for these actors to carry out their work. This was done both formally and informally. Formally, the Khatami administration supported civil society actors by granting resources such as permits and funding. More importantly, however, the reform movement gave informal support by making the sphere for civil society more receptive to new ideas. As stated by Tarrow:

> …by communicating information about what they do, once formed, movements *create* opportunities – for their own supporters, for others, for parties and elites. They do this by diffusing collective action and displaying the possibility of coalitions, by creating political space for kindred

> movements and countermovement, and by producing incentives for elites and third parties to respond to. (1998, p. 72)

5.1 Historical Existence of Civil Society Organisations in Iran

An informed consideration of Iranian society must recognise that the existence of civil society space and corresponding practices are not new phenomena. This is true both in terms of an organisation-oriented definition and a broader outlook that emphasises a public sphere separate from the state and market. Acknowledging the existence of civil society and its institutions is significant as it allows for a more realistic understanding of Iranian society that does not automatically reject the important contributions made by the sector before the introduction of Western notions and practices. In terms of traditional civil society organisations, Iran has a long history of voluntary sector activity, particularly organised around local communities and Shia religious practices.

Masoud Kamali asserts that Iran's civil society, '…is a civil society of communities and institutions rather than individual citizens and their associations' (1998, p. 11). This approach to civil society places less emphasis on a liberal understanding of citizens as independent, rational actors and stresses communal action outside the scope of the state and market. Up to the early days of the twentieth century and the push for modernisation of society, civil society was of a traditional kind that contained two influential groups, namely the *ulama*, Muslim clerics, and the *bazaaris*, merchants, who had roles in both the Constitutional Revolution and 1979 Revolution, with modern civil society also playing a role in the latter revolution (Kamali, 1998, pp. 11-12). Arguably less politically influential, though still falling within a general definition of civil society, are the local Shia community organisations such as women's social groups and charitable associations, which have existed as part of traditional civil society in Iran for centuries. According to one estimate, there are approximately 3,000 to 5,000 charity organisations and 10,000[42] *Sandoqh-e Qarz-ol-Hassaneh* or Interest Free Funds[43] (Motee & Namazi, 2000, p. 7). This traditional aspect of civil society remains in existence today but is accompanied

[42] It should be noted that the figure of 10,000 registered funds is questioned as data on NGOs and CBOs is unreliable (Motee & Namazi, 2000).
[43] Explained further in Chapter Six

by a growing modern civil society sector, consisting of a public sphere, actors and organisations that were at the centre of the civil society discourse led by reformists.

This chapter focuses on modern Iranian civil society, as this modern interpretation with its liberal associations informed the reform movement's actions from the mid-1990s onward. Moreover, emphasis is placed on actors who engaged with this sector and how they viewed and utilised civil society rather than the organisations and structures themselves. However, acknowledging the traditional sector is also important for the following two reasons. First, traditional civil society organisations continue to fulfil important roles in Iranian society, including but not limited to charitable and local community engagement. Second, programmes geared towards enhancing citizen participation, a component of civil society promotion programmes, need to engage with or at least recognise traditional organisations as they have direct access to a significant segment of the population. Moreover, as addressed in Chapter Three (and further elaborated in Chapter Six), the post-Revolution state has incorporated various sectors of traditional civil society, either directly as part of the state structure (for example, Foundations) or through special dispensations (for example, associations affiliated with mosques).

5.2 Civil Society and the Legal Structure

The following sections outline the relevant features of the constitution, which can appear contradictory to the general practices of conservative powers. This sets the complex and contradictory context that political and social actors have faced since the 1979 Revolution. The main paradox in the Constitution results from the inclusion of clauses that demand all laws be consistent with Islamic values. As the Islamic values being referenced are based on interpretations that differ amongst even the highest-ranking clerics, discrepancies are inevitable. This is the principle addressed by intellectuals like Abdolkarim Soroush, who claims that religious knowledge is not sacred but fluid (Azimi, 1993, p. 419; Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 173), and Mohsen Kadivar who questions interpretations of religion by criticising the position of the Supreme Leader whose role is supposed to be mandated by God (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006, p. 109).

The Constitution, ratified by a referendum in 1979 after the revolution and amended in 1989, contains a number of articles that are pertinent to civil society activity. One of the most striking features of the Iranian political system is the contradiction between legislation ratified over the past three decades, policy enactment and the written word of the Constitution. In reference to civil society, including activity in the public sphere, there are clear provisions that emphasise individual liberty. However, reality on the ground has shown clear discord between the legal framework and practice as a result of context and political leadership.

In fact, the demands of reformist political and intellectual figures and their supporters were largely in accord with provisions already stipulated in the Constitution. This understanding of the reform movement's platform as a return to the Constitution, rather than representatives of a purely new ideological faction, emphasises the nuanced trajectory of the post-Revolutionary state. In other words, the proposed role of state authority that emerged after the Revolution of 1979 was not based on a strictly conservative doctrine that stipulated a narrow view of the public sphere from which the reform movement distanced itself. Moreover, there is strong evidence against the argument by opponents of the Islamic Republic that reformists represented the same base ideology of militant revolutionaries who took over the state in 1979 and the same mentality as conservatives who have structured the state thus far. Despite the inherent push by reformists to enact key features of a Constitution already in place, they were not looking to necessarily, or solely, realign a broken path that had been started by the Revolution. While some intellectuals of the reform movement may have initially focused on returning to the original ideals of the Revolution, there was a clear evolution of ideas, as presented in Chapter Four, when the ideas of pluralism and dialogue prevailed over loyalty to the Islamic state. A look at the Constitution is important to understand the extent to which notions of civic participation and individual liberty not only held a place in Iran's history, but also became incorporated in the statutory framework of the Islamic Republic. The following section will provide evidence of this by addressing relevant passages of the Constitution.

Protection of individual rights

The following articles provide evidence of how the Constitution attempts to safeguard individual autonomy and freedom of thought.

> *Article 23: The investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.*

However, this is in direct contrast with:

> *Article 13: Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education.*

The contradictory passages in the Constitution are the result of inherent conflicts of creating laws that are both liberal, as they pertain to individual freedom and rights, and religious, as they pertain to a particular interpretation of Shia Islam.

Contradictions in the defence and promotion of a dynamic public sphere

The constitution provides evidence that the state is meant to not only tolerate but also defend and promote an active public space, including a free press.

The Press

> *Article 24: Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public. The details of this exception will be specified by law.*

Again, the inclusion of Islamic principles acts as a control on the freedom of expression that is seemingly granted by the Constitution. While official broadcasting, namely the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), has been controlled by conservatives since the Revolution and remained so with Khatami's election, an independent press was promoted during the Khatami administration (Khiabany & Sreberny, 2001, p. 206). Khatami appointed an ally, Ataollah Mohajerani to the post of Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance, who was responsible for regulation of the press and who, prior to his removal by pressure from conservatives, made it possible for the birth of a thriving press through the granting

of licenses for newspapers and journals (Khiabany & Sreberny, 2001, p. 207). However, this burgeoning press was openly attacked and restricted by opponents of reform, through the Guardian Council (responsible for interpreting the Constitution) and a complex court system (under the control of the Supreme Leader) (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006, p. 138). Conservative attacks against the pro-reform press are best summarised in a statement made by Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, former president and later member of the Expediency Discernment Council and Assembly of Experts, two key bodies related to the Supreme Leader. In a Friday sermon, Hashemi Rafsanjani claimed, "Today enemies are trying to undermine the sovereignty of Islam by using some sections of the press… to strip the Islamic Revolution of its Islamic content" (Khiabany & Sreberny, 2001, p. 217). Similar arguments have been made to prevent collective action, as seen in the next section.

Political and Social Organising

> *Article 26: 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.*

According to the constitution, the organisations necessary for an active and dynamic civil society are permissible. However, the vagueness of principles, with regard to Islam and the preservation of the Islamic Republic, to which these organisations must adhere, have restricted the public sphere in practice. Particularly with regard to preserving the foundation of the regime, social and political organising is severely restricted. This has a profound effect on the formation of political parties and civil society organisations, especially those that question the regime's practices. With regard to non-political, nongovernmental organisations, there is no straightforward categorisation or mechanism to obtain legal status. Voluntary community-based organisations working in areas of welfare and service delivery are either informal or under the auspices of government programmes such as the *basij* and Foundations (*bonyads*), discussed further in Chapter Six. For other forms of nongovernmental organisations, no comprehensive and cohesive piece of legislation existed until 2005.

On the one hand, there were few pieces of legislation limiting the work of NGOs, on the other hand, there was little legal protection for these entities.[44] NGOs have registered with various government entities including: the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, *Owqaf* and Charity Affairs, Ministry of co-operatives, Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Namazi, 2000). Registration with each entity is dependent upon the types of activities with which the NGO engages.

NGOs, in the sense of organisations working on issues of development or advocacy for rights, were more recently introduced in the Iranian public sphere[45]. However, traditional and communal organisations aimed at welfare and charitable giving had been familiar for a much longer period. An example of common social entities are the credit organisations (*sandogh-e qarz-ol-hasaneh*), or funds that offer short-term interest-free or low-interest loans based on Islamic values to help deprived members of the community (Namazi, 2000). These funds derive from formal and informal networks, with some connected to local mosques and others affiliated with the *bazaar* (markets) and business owners, while other members of the community such as religious leaders and political figures have also been known to play key roles in their administration (Namazi, 2000). The mixed formal and informal characteristic of these credit unions typifies such communal organisations. The fact that the *bazaar* and religious and political figures contribute to their administration is also indicative of why they have been allowed to operate. Charitable organisations providing services to vulnerable groups, which have a long history in Iran as indicated above, usually operate as informal social groups and have never been registered with any government body; although, charity organisations have been able to register with the Ministry of Interior and *Owqaf* (religious endowments) (Namazi, 2000). However, the issue of registration is complex and dynamic. For example, as

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[44] The 2005 legislation attempted to streamline the registration and legal process for NGO activity. Later, in 2011, a draft law was introduced in parliament that would in effect include representatives from bodies such as the Intelligence Ministry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and *Basij* in regulating NGO affairs ("Iran: Independent civil society organisations facing obliteration," 2011). However, these legal statutes were not in effect during the Khatami administration.

[45] In the Persian language, NGOs are officially referred to as "*sazman mardom nahad*" which in translation places the word person at its centre. NGOs are also referred to as "*sazman-e gheir-e dolati*" which is a direct translation of "nongovernmental organisation.

of 2008, a law passed in 2001 was brought into effect proclaiming that only the State Welfare Organisation of Iran (*Sazman-e Behzisti Keshvar*) has authority to provide a license to charity organisations[46]. The status of organisations already registered with other bodies is unclear. Ultimately, while these organisations are not officially involved in political activity, their work continues to be monitored by the state. As with any activity that takes place in the public sphere, those groups that collaborate with religious entities such as mosques are, in the end, connected with the state. In any case, their work is different from the types of development-oriented or advocacy organisations promoted by reformists and civil society actors during the reform movement.

Until Khatami's election, mass political participation had been encouraged through religious institutions, in particular mosques that were turned into polling stations during elections and were at the heart of political activity for traditional powers (Razavi, 2010, p. 86). After Khatami's election, reformists made a concerted effort to increase participation and increase the numbers and power of political parties, which, as discussed in Chapter Four, some reformists considered to be an aspect of civil society. Structurally, the new parties that came into existence had the characteristics of political factions instead of parties. In other words these groups lacked organisation, making it challenging, "…to create a coherent political programme, which is the most recognisable function of a political party. Instead of producing policies, organizing the public and keeping in touch directly, the new parties tried to communicate with the public through the press" (Razavi, 2010, p. 90). The issue of an absent political programme and the use of a press that was easily blocked by opposing forces from expressing their viewpoints, as mentioned above, are critiques that can be made against reform as a movement at large. With regard to legal obstacles, in addition to the Constitutional article, a law was enacted in 1981 that established a commission responsible for monitoring the activities of political parties, "The work of the new commission did not produce an attitude conducive to the creation of political parties, one reason being that the commission could stick an anti-Islamic Republic or anti-Islam label on political organizations and refuse permits" (Razavi, 2010, p. 90). In effect, a subjective account of political activities'

[46] Website of the State Welfare Organisation of Iran, http://www.behzisti.ir/Documents/Show.aspx?id=175

compliance with and stance in relation to Islam and a hard-line interpretation of the regime challenged the establishment of a free political space. It was this space that reformists attempted to revitalise through the notion of civil society.

Maintenance of a multi-layered system of governance

> *Article 100: In order to expedite social, economic, development, public health, cultural, and educational programmes and facilitate other affairs relating to public welfare with the cooperation of the people according to local needs, the administration of each village, division, city, municipality, and province will be supervised by a council to be named the Village, Division, City, Municipality, or Provincial Council. Members of each of these councils will be elected by the people of the locality in question. Qualifications for the eligibility of electors and candidates for these councils, as well as their functions and powers, the mode of election, the jurisdiction of these councils, the hierarchy of their authority, will be determined by law, in such a way as to preserve national unity, territorial integrity, the system of the Islamic Republic, and the sovereignty of the central government.*

Article 100 provides provisions for a multi-layered system of government that distributes power amongst various entities while maintaining a cohesive central government. Enacting the constitutional mandate by the establishment of local councils was one of the most significant contributions by Khatami's reformist government. In fact, members of the Khatami administration considered these councils as a component of civil society. As discussed in Chapter Four, this understanding of civil society points to the blurring of boundaries between civil society and political society. Local elections became a central battle ground for reformist political figures and civil society actors who chose to run for office in order to have their voices heard[47]. However, similar to other political offices, conservatives in opposition to the reform movement eventually came to dominate the local city councils. Although these actions were taken under the banner of civil society promotion, they were, in actuality, reformist attempts to decentralise political power.

5.3 Civil Society: The introduction of a new concept

While the reformist intellectuals involved in creating the political platform of the movement had their vision and plan of action for the development of civil society,

[47] Based on personal discussions with civil society actors and reformists in 2004 and 2008.

what happened on the ground had its own unique trajectory. It is not possible to determine exactly what determined civil society activists' actions on the ground, but it is feasible to uncover major patterns and corroborate some assumptions from direct interviews with the actors. The following section presents findings in two areas: key characteristics of the modern civil society activity that emerged during the Khatami administration and, significant influences on civil society activists during the Khatami administration, as they relate to their actions in the public sphere. The results are based predominantly on interviews with student activists, women's rights activists and NGO leaders. Representatives from these groups were chosen due to the prominent role they played from the start of the reform movement.

A study of the type and nature of civil society activity that emerged during the Khatami administration displayed several striking features. These findings are not necessarily discrete or representative of civil society actors and organisations across the board. However, they provide a macro-level understanding of the arena where many had pinned their hopes for the democratisation of Iran. The following three features will be outlined below. First, much of the emerging civil society activities, particularly as they related to NGOs, lacked structure and capacity. Second, the activities were often focused on political effect rather than focusing on the internal needs of the group or organisation itself. Finally, success, in terms of a group's viability, was in part determined by its ability to be flexible with regard to outside forces, such as state regulations and donors.

In this section, some of the general perceptions of civil society as a theoretical and practical concept by civil society actors will be outlined. Similar to the definitions provided by reformist public intellectuals in Chapter Four, civil society actors also held different understandings of the concept and its role. Some had worked in the field of civil society long before Khatami's election, particularly those involved in apolitical organisations and causes, such as those dealing with the environment, education, and women's rights. However, the term 'civil society' was new for many of them. As described by the editor of a reformist newspaper, J8, Khatami's slogans, such as civil society and rule of law, were a 'remedy' (*darman*) for the problems of censure he faced in his personal and political life. Whether following a trend or seeking a solution, the concept of civil society was picked up by individual actors

who wanted to take advantage of the political and social opportunities afforded by the Khatami administration.

For some, such as a young reporter for a reformist newspaper, who was interviewed for this thesis and identified as J6, the meaning of civil society was never clear. The informant "…Did not have a real definition of civil society and only slowly realised what an NGO is". With this statement, we first observe the elusiveness of civil society for individuals can be observed, even by some who worked in the field of journalism, which served as a platform for the reform movement and its ideals. Second, in the absence of a clear definition, we see that in looking for a meaning, this individual reached an organisation-based understanding of civil society. J6 went on to explain, "The real responsibility of an NGO is to inform citizens". With this explanation, it becomes increasingly evident that the ideas of civil society and NGOs are being conflated. Although what the interviewee meant by 'inform' remained vague, the implication was that NGOs, which he equated with civil society, were responsible for enhancing awareness and openness in society. It is interesting to note here that when discussing his background, J6 mentioned his brother, a prominent NGO activist who has been arrested on numerous occasions due to the sensitive nature of his work. Without a clear definition of civil society provided from other sources (i.e. reformists who touted the concept), J6 reached his own conclusions, most likely based on his personal experiences with the subject. It should be noted that it was the political openings (i.e. relaxation of political restrictions) provided by the Khatami administration that allowed his brother to pursue and establish his NGO. Overall, the example is evidence of how the meaning of civil society was fostered and the reciprocal relationship between the meaning of a concept (i.e. civil society) and how that concept is enacted (for example, establishment of NGOs).

Another case is that of R2, a journalist, NGO activist, PhD candidate, former electoral supervisor for the state (*ostan*) of Tehran and expert at a government research centre at the time of the interview. Her husband is a physician and member of the Revolutionary Guards, or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. She considers herself a child of the Revolution who had come to believe in the need for reform. As a religious woman, R2 wore her scarf in a markedly conservative manner and explained how she took on the *hijab* by choice in her early teens. Her background is

a myriad of complexity that typifies the crossover between the politics of the reform movement and the growth of civil society. For example, her role as a journalist and NGO activist is in contrast to her many political positions. She exemplifies the actors who had once been ardent revolutionaries but then broke away from traditionalists in the state by seeking reform. The contrast between her activities and her announcement of having a '*sepahi*' husband (husband belonging to the ICRG), is also telling, particularly as there exists the assumption that the ICRG are supporters of the Supreme Leader (i.e. a conservative). A stereotypical male member of the ICRG would not be expected to have a blatantly pro-reform wife. Nonetheless, R2 was a distinct representative of the reformist movement, someone who straddled the line between political and civil society.

Though she was a social science student, R2 claimed she had not come across the topic of civil society, even in her academic work, until Khatami's presidency. Without having a definition of civil society to work with, she said she had created a meaning of civil society for herself, where civil society "…was freedom, freedom of the press, rights, etc. It was the intangible element of democracy (*badan-e malmoos democracy*)". She stated, "Civil society was not internally understood (*darooni*) for everyone, even myself". She believed that even the people who introduced these concepts within Iranian society did not fully understand their meaning. Women she worked with would say 'I have an NGO', something she too would say. This, she found, reflects on the misconception of civil society that fails to take in the cooperative nature of NGO activity. A similar sentiment was expressed by J7, another young reporter, who said of Khatami's administration time and after, "There are civil society organisations but no civil society space". In other words, J7 implied that organisations with the structural features of civil society exist but the spirit of civil society as an independent space, the definition of which remained vague for him, was not created.

Overall, civil society is an elusive concept that was introduced to society but left for individuals to define. This view was supported in other interviews. For example, S8, a member of the reformist student movement and leader of a political group's youth branch, stated, "At the time [when reformists first came to power] Khatami's words were important. People didn't know exactly what civil society meant but

would talk about it in the streets. The rule of law was also important. People would try to cross the street at crosswalks and stop at red lights. The view of civil society then was of a free and open society". Again, the definition provided is abstract and the idea of civil society is used to frame a vision of the good life, linking it to notions such as rule of law. In Iran, where rules and regulations, such as traffic laws, are often ignored or rejected, the reform movement's language was used as an inspiring force. However, this was an informal and tenuous change in perspective addressing people's attitudes rather than a formal change in policy. In a way, it represented how civil society was used to create change by reformists. What can be extrapolated from other statements in S8's interview though is that once people noticed that their expectations of Khatami, in terms of changing society, were not realised, they began to retract their support for the reform movement.

For others, civil society represented a more active and politically charged sphere. According to a student activist and leading figure of the Islamic Association of Students, S2, civil society is "the intermediary (*vaset*) between people and the government". In this sense, civil society makes it possible for citizens to have a say in how the state governs its people. While he did not explain how the role of civil society as an intermediary works, similar accounts were given by other interviewees, such as R4, the head of the youth branch of a major reformist political party and former student activist. R4 stated, "Civil society is a society where people actually play a role in constructing and managing government". In other words, civil society refers to the inclusion of citizens who are not selected or elected as agents of the state in how the state governs.

According to S6, a student activist, a robust selection of books on the subject of civil society from a theoretical stance did not exist and instead the term was employed politically by individuals such as Khatami and Hajjarian. He felt that political activists were too focused on using civil society as a political tool and were void of a theoretical understanding of civil society as a concept. Ten years ago, he claims to have had a different view of civil society. At the time when reformists entered the stage, he stated that his view and that of other student activists was that civil society is the space or activity that leads to democracy, and democracy means putting whomever you want in power without the existence of an all-powerful leader.

However, he now considers this to be a raw or inexperienced understanding; what resulted from his original view was that the student movement as part of civil society became attached to the state in a system where the state had more power. In return, the state trounced civil society due to the student movement's misunderstanding of civil society. In his view, civil society is the space where individuals try to create a counter-hegemony using soft tactics against power so that the state is not obliged to use force against you. This can be linked back to Gramsci's notion of civil society as the sphere where dominant groups can construct hegemony and subordinated social groups can construct a counter hegemony (Simon, 1982, p. 30). Overall, they had a wrong impression of the meaning of the state or government. For them, the state was synonymous with government leadership. In reality, he stated, they should have seen the role of power in schools, universities, streets and even in the family. He believes that in addition to organizing political activities such as rallies, the student movement should have also debated broader issues such as why Islam is taught the way that it is; he said challenging issues such as this would have been a great accomplishment, but students preferred to discuss about what they considered to be more pressing issues, such as the Supreme Leader.

The reform movement's promotion of civil society provided an outlet for individuals and groups, such as student activists who represented a generation brought up on the propaganda of a post-Revolutionary regime but had come to feel critical of its actions. These individuals saw an opportunity to voice their opinions in the public space that opened during the Khatami administration. However, they came to realise that they were not able to channel their voice in a coordinated or effectual manner. According to S2, who continued his studies in the UK, the topic of civil society was a fad. S2 entered the University of Tehran in the year 2001 and was a leader within the Islamic Student Association. According to him, civil society as a theory or idea had an impact on a minimal amount of people. Regardless of the terminology or debates on the issue of civil society, people would have carried on the same activities because the social setting was conducive to such behaviour. For example, he argued that even if individuals in the political spotlight, such as Hajarian, were not talking about civil society, other people would have acted upon the same ideals. In other words, the field was open for these activities. However, if Khatami had not been elected, this space may not have been used. Society, according to the interviewee, is

more developed than government. He stated that Islamic student associations had a history of activity, though it was after Khatami's election that their activity turned towards reform; up to that point, their work was based on the regime's current ideology.

The interviewee credits Khatami with increasing the speed with which civil society activity was able to move forward in Iran and for creating the space in which to carry out this activity. With regard to the use of the civil society platform, the former student leader considered the topic to have been chosen 'accidently' rather than the result of a well thought out plan. This statement is another indication of the haphazard way in which civil society came to the forefront of Iran's political and social scene in the twentieth century. However, once civil society was established as a key component of Khatami's campaign and the reform movement, the interviewee explained that Khatami's speeches were integral to the spread of the slogan. In practice, significant strides were made in the areas of political parties, the media, associations, NGOs and the cultural sphere, which included theatre, cinema and the publication of numerous books by new publishers. Overall, there existed a diverse and unsystematic understanding of civil society as a concept amongst those who worked in its space. The following section will examine how this space grew with the onset of Khatami's presidency.

5.4 Opening Up of Space for Civil Society and its Actors

Making it easier for NGOs to operate

Activities in the field of development, such as poverty reduction, environmental protection and education, already existed in the civil society sector. However, they did not necessarily operate in the form of modern NGOs. While they were active, the entrance of the Khatami government provided them a much more open field in which to operate. For those who had an idea, but not the necessary paperwork, the administration began quickly issuing permits. At the same time, both state and non-state organisations began providing capacity-building programmes to help this new sector that blossomed during the Khatami administration. The results of the following interview provide further insight.

CS2 is a university professor interested in expanding innovative educational programmes in primary and secondary schools throughout the country. His work in the field began before Khatami's election, but it was not until after the election that he was able to undertake his most substantial activities. He believes that Khatami impacted the political state in which civil organizations could develop and provided the following example. CS2 had applied for a license to develop a youth magazine in the field of mathematics several years before Khatami entered power. For three to four years he did not receive an answer from the authorities. In the beginning, he sought information on the status of his permit every day until his enthusiasm wavered. When Khatami came to power, he was immediately notified that his license had been granted. The news came without any attempts by him to pursue the issue. This example shows how the political structure of the state can directly impact civil society regardless of actual legislative changes. In this example, the infrastructure was already in place for the interviewee to seek a license in this field and he was not even in a position where the state had rejected his application. Rather, the state was not concerned with empowering the sector, regardless of a specific case's political nature (in the case of the mathematics magazine, there were no blatant political implications).

CS2 was also a key player in another NGO that was registered in the late 1990s, after Khatami came to power. He stated that if Khatami were not there, this registered NGO would not have existed. This particular NGO's objective was to introduce information and communication technologies to schools and was of a more sensitive nature than the magazine indicated above. As such, it required direct access to school administrators, teachers and students. In this case, the presence of reformists played a key role in allowing the NGO's work to proceed. The organisation still exists, despite the following presidential administration's sensitivities towards it. The difference is that they are now more cautious. CS2 states that Khatami's time in office helped by getting the NGO into schools by allowing them to directly contact school principals. Now, school principals do not have the courage to directly work with them and refer them to authorities in higher positions of power. During Khatami's time NGO administrators did not have to ask permission for every activity or action, while the Ministry of Intelligence under the new President questions them at every step. CS2 claims the new administration wants the NGO to work, but under

the control of the government, as evidenced by the sending of government observers with the NGO when they go abroad to conferences.

The above cases show how the attitude of different governments towards civil society impacts the sector. In the case of Khatami, actors who were already engaged, albeit in a limited way in some cases, were able expand their scope of work due to the supportive nature of the state. On the other hand, when a new government took power that did not have civil society promotion on its agenda, and in some cases impeded such work, the administration was unable to completely undermine the sector.

5.5 The Women's Movement

This section is based on interviews with women's rights activists, including women who worked on the issue of increasing women's rights from within the reformist government. Support for the public sphere occupied by women's rights actors was a significant contribution of the reform movement. While not all achievements made during the period from 1997-2005 were sustainable, the breakthroughs made during Khatami's administration created an important legacy.

Women have historically played an intrinsic role in the development of Iranian society. In fact, scholars such as Janet Afary consider the Constitutional Revolution of the early 20th century to mark the beginning of the modern Iranian women's movement. Women fought alongside men in battle and established societies in support of the constitution (Namazi, 2000; Poulson, 2005, p. 272). Afterward, women continued to be active participants in economic, political and social life up to and continuing through the Revolution of 1979. While not high compared to Western standards, the overall percentage of female labour force participation, 30 per cent in 2000[48], is competitive at the regional level. Moreover, women have played significant roles in social and political development (for a more detailed account of women's roles in Iranian society, see for example Afary, 2009; Halper, 2005; Moghadam, 1988; Osanloo, 2009). In terms of traditional civil society, referring to the more informal groups, charities and local CBOs, women have always played a

[48] Data from the World Bank, Genderstats

key role. This role was particularly prominent among women who, as a result of cultural restrictions preserved by the family or the economic environment in general, were not in full time or formal paid employment outside the home.

Women's rights advocates have long questioned and tried to bring about change with regard to the Islamic government's 'equal but different' vision of the law as enshrined in law and practice. It was the Islamic women's movement that raised the issue of discrimination against women with regard to child custody, leading to a ruling that allowed the courts to give physical custody (though not legal) of a child to her mother, in contrast to S*haria* law which gives all custodial rights to the paternal family. Later, women's groups were among the first to bring the concept of modern civil society organizations, including nongovernmental organizations, into Iran starting in the mid-1990s.

There was an increase in the number of women's NGOs by the early 2000s as a result of "the women's movement in the 1990s, when women's issues became an integral part of the politics of the Islamic state and society" (Povey, 2004, pp. 257-258). The opening of space and resources provided by Khatami's administration were key factors in the massive growth of the scope and extent of their activity. A well-known women's rights activist, W1, explained how the women's rights movement began before it was addressed by the reformist movement and continued to fight, even after losing political power. According to W1, what was important was 'how' the activists operate. She began by explaining that the first NGOs to be recognised in Iran were those working on the issue of women's rights and came about in the lead up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, which was held in Beijing. At the time, there was no government body available in which NGOs could be registered. Therefore, a special government office was created that would recognise NGOs that wanted to send representatives to the Beijing conference. R3 and W3 also pointed to the Beijing conference as a key moment in the recognition of NGOs by the state and the promotion of government backing for some women's groups. However, it was the Khatami administration that made dramatic changes in this space.

The following information is based on a female faculty member from the University of Tehran, W2, who has also been a leading figure in the field of women's studies both in practice and in research. As an exact description of her activities would reveal her identity, comments and references to her specific activities have been withheld. However, her general views and experiences are described. She states that although she and her colleagues had been working on expanding the field of women's studies in Iran, particularly during the Rafsanjani administration, it was during Khatami's presidency that they were able to implement these programmes and projects. She gives credit to Rafsanjani for having the courage to work on women's issues along with his daughters. However, while they were able to achieve some preliminary work and certain agreements on proposals during that period, it was when requests were made from within Khatami's cabinet that W2 and her colleagues were able to make progress. She states, that while her efforts from below did not get anywhere, requests from above worked. In fact, they received some funding from the President's office and received projects from the government as well. As part of their work in the field of women's studies, they had what she calls an 'academic' relationship with NGOs. However, there was no sense of security in the work they carried out, meaning that they felt their work could be shut down at any time. During discussions with the interviewee, the significance of personal relationships was highlighted. For example, she cited how her relationship with the wife of a key minister helped turn her ideas into reality.

What comes across in the interview is that it was not policy changes that significantly altered the landscape of the women's studies field. Rather, it was personal relationships and general support from the President's office that were significant to advancing work for women's rights. W2 goes on to state that with the end of Khatami's presidency, the ability of women's rights actors to carry out the same work was substantially hindered. One area that was particularly subject to attack was the work she and her university colleagues were carrying out in collaboration with NGOs. She states that she had tried to overcome the criticism that had existed regarding the limited relationship between academia and civil society by establishing an 'academic relationship with civil society'. However, the new government chastised her and her colleagues for this work and they were told there is no reason for a connection between NGOs and the university. The government also

took control and made changes to a number of the programmes in women's studies she and her colleagues had initiated. Furthermore, they were forced to abandon most of their foreign contacts with development, women's rights and academic organisations and institutions. She states that the new government also wanted to eliminate the entire field of women's studies as being 'too Western' but this was not accepted within the ranks of the university. She compares what happened with her work in the field of women's studies to what happened within society at large. Namely, the new government took on a negative view of civil society and nongovernmental entities, particularly those that developed international connections and collaborations.

With regard to what happened during the Khatami administration itself, W2 provides the following criticism. She states that the individuals and organisations that suddenly faced a more open and tolerant arena began their activities in earnest without planning or preparation. For example, when international travel became feasible for academics and civil society activists, everyone started to attend international events; some people would work with several NGOs and attend every event to which they were invited. Ahmadinejad took office at a time (summer of 2005) when the civil society sphere had no real order and NGOs were asked to re-register with the Ministry of Interior. On the one hand, she states that it makes sense for the new government to try and make sense of these new organisations by giving them some order and structure, but the organisations were also scrutinised by the state. Some organisations were given permission to continue their activity by the Ministry, some were shut down and to some, the Ministry simply failed to respond. She compares civil society in Iran during the Khatami period to 'a balloon that kept on getting air'. W2's account of civil society and the rise of women's groups links to the notion of political opportunities opening the way for civil society that was countered to a degree by structural impediments and interference from opposing state factions.

5.6 Blurring the Boundaries between Civil Society, Political Society and the State

Tying civil society to the state: The women's movement and funding

Reformist intellectuals in the state used their positions to provide resources for civil society activists so as to support the concept of civil society they were pushing for in their political discourse. This was made particularly clear in the women's movement. Women within Khatami's cabinet (such as Masoumeh Ebtekar, first female vice-president, and Zahra Shojaei) and in the sixth Parliament played a large role in bringing women's issues to the forefront of social activism in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Not only did Khatami have the first women cabinet members, his choice of advisors on the issue of women's rights made a significant impression on the work that took place by the government and outside the government.

I9 is a women's rights activist and a member of Khatami's cabinet. A devout Muslim woman, dressed in a traditional black cloak, I9 has been working in the field of women's right for twenty-five years. She was a key player in the Centre for Women's Participation, *markaz omoor mosharekat zanan,* which was created early in Khatami's presidency (the organization was renamed the Centre for Women and Family Affairs, *markaz omoor zanan va khanevadeh,* by Ahmadinejad). She believed that the view on women's issues during the reform movement was '*shoari*', meaning it was based on slogans rather than actions. In the first year of Khatami's presidency, her work included support for various publications related to women and active participation in the creation of the first library dedicated to women. She states that work on the establishment of such a library began in the previous government, namely that of Rafsanjani, however the vision was not realized until after Khatami's election. Other interviewees also pointed out the pattern of ideas forming but not turning into reality until the reformist period. I9 and her colleagues also established a centre for women's studies at Tehran University. The idea for this was formed during a trip she took to the United States.

One of the issues she discussed was the distinction between including women in the workforce versus the social participation of women. What she and her colleagues planned for was creating the groundwork for using women's social capabilities in

civil society, seeing work, or participation in the economy, as separate entities. For her, "Reform is the inner desire of part of society and a logical government looks at reform as a way to prevent a revolution". Khatami, she states was a '*mohebat elahi'* or 'divine gift'. He had asked them, his advisors on women's affairs, to resolve the paradox between high levels of social development and the family responsibilities assigned to women in Eastern societies. Their solution was to develop and enrich NGOs. According to I9, she and her colleagues felt that if they could develop a foundation for NGOs, they would have helped with the social development of women, the growth of civil society and tackled the issue of unemployment. In other words, they attempted to bring women into the public sphere, reconciling the public and private without engaging with the economic sector and therefore the potential for financial independence of women.

She and her colleagues felt there was a need to use the productivity and energy of an active female workforce in nongovernmental organizations. She states that logically, in order to reach the goals of development, all sources of power must be used, half of which belong to women in any given society. The issue was that while some women contributed to the country's development by joining the work force, she and her colleagues were concerned with the 'social participation' of women. They sought to create a foundation for the use of women's social capabilities in civil society, which is separate from the regular workforce. In 1997, she cites the existence of approximately 55 NGOs for women. By 2004, that number had multiplied nine times and reached some 450 NGOs, with numbers continuing to grow to a current (at the time of this interview in 2008) 530 NGOs related to women's issues. The work they carried out during her time in President Khatami's government was the development of training packages that detailed how to establish and run NGOs. Their goal was to create the foundation for these NGOs rather than establish the NGOs themselves. The work included regional meetings and public forums in which they encouraged women to create NGOs. As budget is usually a key concern, they secured financial support from the government for these NGOs by granting funds on a project by project basis. After some time had passed and a number of NGOs were operational, they held specialized meetings for NGOs in various fields, such as associations or unions, social/cultural groups as well as political groups (which she admits are not actually NGOs). She states that she and her government colleagues

had a ‘motherly’ role towards these NGOs; they knew they did not belong to them and were in reality there to overlook government activity, but in those first years, they wanted to help them. This last sentence is critical and corresponds to the argument that reformists saw civil society as a project to cultivate rather than an organic sphere that needed to develop on its own.

With regard to the inclusion of women in the financial sector, I9 and her colleagues also made some strides. She referenced the issue of ‘*ta’avoni’* or manufacturing and consumer cooperatives formed by groups of individuals working in particular economic areas. In order to form these cooperatives, an initial amount of investment is needed. Women’s rights activists encouraged the participation of women in these cooperatives by establishing a decree that if a cooperative is formed by at least 70 per cent women, it can be exempt from the initial investment amount. The two outcomes of this decision were the increase of men inviting women to join their cooperatives and the ability of women who had the initial idea but lacked the necessary seed money, to independently form cooperatives. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the merits and results of this decision. However, it is presented as a case of different ways in which the government encouraged women to participate in Iranian society.

When asked about the criticism extended to reformists and women’s rights activists, that only certain wealthy women participated in these newly established NGOs, the interviewee responded with the following statements. As an indication to counter this argument, she cited statistics on NGOs in economically disadvantaged cities and provinces that showed a high level of activity in those areas. She stated that the activity taking place across the country showed the responsibility that people felt towards their communities and that without government support, these individuals would not have been able to “stand on their own feet”. To conclude, the reformist faction of the state was actively trying to cultivate civil society, though it was unable to fully realise its goals.

The politicization of student activists

Above, we see how the state attempted to intervene in the development of civil society. In the following section, the reverse will be examined, where the civil society sphere became intertwined with the political sphere. The 'politicisation' of civil society was a major issue, particularly with regards to students. Civil society, as a component of any community, is political in nature, if politics is meant to refer to a system of power. However, a distinction can be made between those activities that attempt to influence power as it impacts a particular arena versus those that want to alter the entire system itself, without focus on a particular issue. In other words, civil society activity should be differentiated between its two possible forms. The first is that which creates a channel between a group and the state, such that the state meets the demands or needs of that group. The second is that which uses the forum of civil society as a source of power that will change the state itself. These two types of actions are not mutually exclusive and do overlap in some cases. Over-politicisation in this instance refers to the actions of civil society organisations or forums that initially take shape based on a common platform of needs for that particular group but soon shift their stance and demands for a more universal change in the state. By doing so, the boundary between civil and political society becomes further blurred and, more importantly, the original demands that directly impact the particular audience of the civil society forum are lost. This blurring of boundaries between civil society and political society was a dominant feature of what took place in Iran from the onset of reform. It is not surprising, as it was in fact some reformist intellectuals themselves who stated that civil society was used as a tool to bring reformists back into state power, as seen in Chapter Four.

The best way to illustrate how this happened is by looking at the student movement. Students, and youth in general, comprised one of the largest factions of supporters for reform as visible in their campaign efforts for Khatami, particularly in 1997, and activism in civil protests. While students, like members of the women's rights movement, have traditionally played an important role in contemporary Iranian history (for examples, see (Mahdi, 1999; Mashayekhi, 2001), the level of consistency in their activism, though it has dropped and peaked, gained momentum after the 1997 election campaign.

> From 1977 to 1979, university students actively participated in making the revolution happen. After the revolution, apart from a short period between 1979 and 1981, during which universities became the centre of the political activities of all political organizations, there was little independent political activity from the university students until 1997. (Razavi, 2009, p. 1)

The following section includes data and analysis of interviews with a number of student leaders and activists as well as interviews with leaders of the youth faction of two key reformist political parties. Again, it is beyond the scope of this research to provide a detailed and comprehensive account of varied student activities in Iran. Rather, what is provided is a snapshot of the university activists and youth involved in political and social organizations during the height of reform up to the present, which show the over-politicisation of student activism that stemmed from the reform movement. This argument is not meant to diminish the actions of the numerous groups and individuals who worked diligently and successfully on issues directly relevant to students, from housing to academics. However, the argument is meant to show how civil society promotion can transform into a space for political contention, becoming another arm of the power struggle for state control.

In terms of opening space and creating opportunity, students, who comprised a substantial level of the activism witnessed during the Khatami presidency, witnessed similar trends to that witnessed by NGOs and women's rights activists (Mashayekhi, 2001; Poulson, 2005). The interview with S4 provides first-hand evidence on how this space emerged. S4 provides the example of the *'sotoon-e azad'*, translated as the free or open pillar, in universities, which was a focal point for all students. This was a space in the university where individuals were able to post messages and articles on all topics. She states that even if you were not 'political' or active in social and political activism, you would still take notice of this space; there were twenty or thirty people around the pillar reading the items posted at any given time. This example provides evidence of how an opening for such activity (i.e. allowing greater freedom of expression) paved the way for a more active public sphere, though not all of that developed into organised civil society action. According to S4, translations of social science books and articles were much more readily available during Khatami's presidency. She specifically mentions the 'Kiyan Circle'[49] as well as public

[49] Journal under the leadership of reformist figures described in detail in Chapter Four

meetings of the Islamic Student Association that served as platforms for the exchange of ideas. For example, she states that if you attended a public meeting of the Association in the early years of Khatami's presidency, you would have felt out of place had you not read Abdolkarim Soroush's latest work. Moreover, in the years between 1997 and 2001, newspapers publishing articles on topics from current events to philosophy were abundantly available and in high demand. Further details about student activism will be provided in later sections of this chapter

How students moved towards political activism

S6 was unique amongst the interviewed student activists in that he was not officially a member of the Islamic Student Organisation but had established an independent publication at the faculty in which he studied. Approximately 800 to 1,000 issues were sold per week. When he headed this publication, the main topics covered were issues related to student life, i.e. instructors, situation of higher education, the meaning of a democratic university as well as topics such as cafeterias and dormitories. He found that students responded positively to these topics and he was of the opinion that this vantage point attracted more students than direct discussions of politics. His method was to approach the issues of the reform movement indirectly, showing the role of ideas like democracy and civil action as they played out in everyday life. Despite this indirect approach, in 2003, he was arrested for his activities and spent 90 days in solitary confinement, after which time he passed-on the responsibility of the publication to another student. From then on, the publication focused directly on politics (though it is no longer published). The shift in focus that took place at the publication is reminiscent of how the concept of civil society was treated on a larger scale. The publication went from addressing and attempting to implement the ideals of civil society at the university as a microcosm, to leaving behind the problems of the university as an institution in need of change and directly addressing and attempting to influence the political sphere.

In terms of student activism during the reform era, the former student leader, S2, claims the idea of a student 'movement' is an exaggeration of the level of activism in this arena. Rather, while students played an active role in the social and political spheres, the collective strength and influence of their activity did not indicate a

unified or organized movement. He states that though students backed Khatami, they cannot claim to have created him, "Khatami was the one who helped them [students]; even though I shouldn't say this, the student movement was taken too seriously. They expected the President to be a student and saw themselves as President." According to S2, two significant events that not only generated student activism but also embellished the notion of a student movement as part of a larger reform movement were the '*Kooye Daneshgah*'[50] dormitory confrontation and the death sentence handed to Hashem Aghajari[51]. He explains that the '*Kooye Daneshgah'* incident was initially the result of a controversy over dormitory catering. It was after this issue was raised that someone mentioned the closure of *Salaam* newspaper, adding fuel to an already tense atmosphere. S2 went on to say that the case shows how the conservatives, referring to those opposed to reform and in support of the Supreme Leader, used the conflict to inflict revenge on reformists as a whole. The case of the 1999 student protests actually having been instigated over dormitory catering reveals how political allegiance and disputes became so easily intertwined with everyday welfare concerns. With regard to the protests that followed the announcement of Aghajari's death sentence, he states that it was in fact a handful of students who organized and consciously sought a platform to voice their dissent. The protest gathered force as people walking by stopped and joined the crowds for reasons including basic curiosity. Overall, he stated that these were 'enjoyable' experiences as students were given an opportunity to mingle amongst one another while classes were cancelled. With the start of Khatami's second term, these types of protests and activism died down, particularly as a result of punishments for the more confrontational and committed student activists. In other words, student activism was a reflection of the political developments taking place amongst reformists in the political sphere rather than students representing an independent voice as part of an autonomous civil society.

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[50] *Kooye Daneshgah* is the name of a set of University of Tehran dormitories. In this context, it refers to a bloody July 1999 attack on students at their dormitory in the middle of the night by plainclothes police, most likely linked with the *basij*, following a day of peaceful protests by students. The catalyst for the protest is generally reported as frustration with the shutting down of reformist newspapers, capped by the closure of the popular *Salaam* daily.

[51] Iranian university professor sentenced to death in 2002 for questioning the role of religious leaders. His death sentence was ultimately overturned.

5.7 Changing Trends

It was, in the end, the ability of new and emerging civil society organisations and actors to be flexible in reaction to their surrounding context that determined how they fared. The reformist agenda helped open the sphere for collaboration and make it possible for controversial ideas to be put forward. However, the groups that survived the end of Khatami's regime were the ones that had already existed in some form before his presidency. The reform movement helped them make some progress, empowered them and made them bolder to a degree. However, as they had existed before, they were able to continue their work according to their willingness to take risks and, at times, change their mode of operation.

The women's movement: From associations to organisations to networks

As the crackdown on NGO activity and the limitations placed on women's rights activists increased, a shift took place within women's rights activity from NGOs to a network framework with a less visible basis. These networks maintained an online presence but were dependent on localized activity in smaller groups working on the ground, albeit maintaining some contact with the larger network. On the one hand, this type of activity is reminiscent of the community based activism that took place before the emergence of the NGO concept. However, there are several distinctions. First, the activity is based on meeting what these particular women's rights actors consider 'universal' values of women's rights rather than focusing on material well-being, though contributions to material-wellbeing are included. Second, religion is not a driving factor within the network, though it may be a driving force on a personal level. Finally, the networks maintain and sometimes benefit from certain organizational aspects of NGO activity.

Although the number of NGOs multiplied several fold between 1997 and 2005, the onset of the Ahmadinejad administration and increased pressure on civil society actors resulted in activists turning to new and less formal types of activity. In the case of one women's rights actor, W1, she and her colleagues established informal networks that she described as being less bureaucratic, more self-sustainable, value-based volunteer actions in which participants really believed in feminism and

democracy. For example, the network they established has no office but meets in people's homes and has a website. Their work is mostly on changing the laws related to women.

Student view: Shifting away from politics

The following section reveals how the reformists' loss pushed some students away from the political activities that prevailed when Khatami was in power. In 2003, S5 became a leader of the Islamic Student Association and during his time at university was active in all divisions of the association. Before he entered university, around 1995, the Islamic Associations at universities became places for critical thought under the influence of Abdolkarim Soroush. This tendency gained further momentum after the 2nd of Khordad elections and after students began participating in university elections in greater numbers. His political thoughts were instigated with *Salaam* newspaper. Other influences included the *Jame-e* newspaper after the 2nd of Khordad and the *Kiyan* and *Rah-e No* journals. Mohsen Kadivar and Abdolkarim Soroush were influential intellectuals and Hajjarian and Ganji helped shape his political thoughts.

S5 believes two issues were influential in eliminating the power of the reform movement. The first is the political position of the United States with respect to Iran and the second is society's move towards individualism. Moreover, Khatami's inability to achieve his stated goals led to a lack of trust by society in politics, regardless of political stance. Several years after Khatami's electoral loss, other individuals such as actors and sports figures gained the fame previously held by political figures. With regard to the Islamic Association of universities, they lost their budgets with the election of Ahmadinejad. Furthermore, since 2005, these student associations have been told to shut down their elections. Before 2005, anyone could become a candidate and up to 2007, the associations held their own elections even though the universities did not officially recognize them. However, now they have decided to abide by the new rules and hold closed elections. On the whole, the same types of associations existed during the presidencies of Rafsanjani, Khatami and Ahmadinejad, however, the difference is the strength of the Association during Khatami's time. With regard to numbers of active members, or members who

consider themselves to be *'Anjomani'* (referring to a person who is part of *Anjoman*, the main student association), there were under 100 members during the 1990s. During Khatami's presidency, there were approximately 100-200 members. By 2008, the numbers had decreased to 70-100 individuals. The split within the Islamic Student Association was not strong until the university administration became involved. Previous to this, the Association had members with ideologies ranging from liberal to Marxist and only a limited number of people would be against the group simply because the name included the word Islamic. However, with Ahmadinejad's election, two significant sources created friction. The first was that some members of the Association said they should be more 'Islamic' to avoid the pressure of elimination from the government, which made the existence of secular students more difficult. The second issue was direct pressure from the government, monitoring and regulating their actions to thwart opposition activity.

S6 states that at the height of the reform movement, he felt that student activism around him was a movement, but now he believes it may not have been an actual movement. Regardless, he does not think such labels are relevant or important; at least he claims, at the time a call would have gathered hundreds of people but now it is difficult to even attract the attention of ten individuals. This change in space is due to the downturn of the reform movement. The student movement could only exist so long as there was a larger movement within society; the student movement became important when a reform movement began with Khatami. He believes that what separates him from his friends is a belief that organizations such as *Tahkim Vahdat* were important because of Khatami. In other words, the student movement was a subsidiary of the main reformist movement rather than an independent movement on its own. This can be contrasted with the women's rights movement that was helped but not directly born out of the reform movement. Since Ahmadinejad's victory, however, issues such as political reform have taken a back seat to economic well-being. In one sense, the women's movement was more successful than the student movement because they focused less on higher order, general political issues than the student movement and therefore managed to sustain themselves even today.

Similar to the rest of society, S5 claims there is an anti-political or apolitical feel in the university. He describes his own experiences of interrogation by various groups,

including the legal courts, the intelligence services and a university disciplinary body that he claims is intended to scare students. Other students face similar experiences, which serve as a strong deterrent against future political activities that could cause them further trouble. In effect, the punitive reaction of conservatives is a strong contrast to the opportunities and encouragement of participation by reformists. Last year [2007], he stated, a seminar was held on 'modern government'. However, the people and issues covered by the seminar "…were not important for students anymore and not many participated. They welcome Namjoo[52] and students are more interested in cultural and social activities". The students' base of interest has become less overtly political, with interest in figures such as Namjoo, whose work is socially and politically provocative but lacks any direct involvement in the struggle for political power. In a sense, the reformists' civil society frame that was based on the interests of the reform movement has been rejected and redefined.

It was during this time of high hopes and interest, namely Khatami's administration, when students realized that their expectations were not being met. S4 considered the events that followed the '*Kooye Daneshgah'* incident as a turning point that changed her outlook on the regime and led to a loss of hope with regard to the possibilities of creating change. A general shift in intellectual pursuits by students began to occur by the middle of Khatami's presidency. The focus on social issues moved to an interest in '*erfan*', or spirituality, in the early 2000s. This interest, that included ideas like meditation and yoga, was also later abandoned in favour of fiction. Based on a research study which she helped conduct close to the time of the interview [in 2008], the book most borrowed from the student library was a love story. At the same time, the number of students in universities increased and the status of being a student, particularly at a prestigious institution such as the University of Tehran, no longer carried the same cache. Moreover, future generations of social and political leaders did not emerge, nor were cultivated, from among student activists. She states that political parties should have taken this opportunity to engage students as future leaders.

[52] Mohsen Namjoo is a singer and song-writer who was criticised by the Iranian government for his use of religious phrases and references in music. He has a large following amongst Iranian youth and students.

Students, who represented a considerable section of the reformist audience, have changed as a result of the brief openings that took place during the Khatami administration. According to S5, "One of the best things that came out of those eight years [Khatami's presidency, 1997-2005] is that we now understand repression (*sarkoob*). For example, *gozinesh* [a selection process based on a person's religious beliefs and practices that one has to take for many public sector jobs, university placements or other activities that require a government permit] was eliminated in some cases during Khatami's time, though it was prevalent before Khatami and accepted. Now that it's back [it was reinstated in many cases] it is not as easily accepted… Now people argue." S5 laments that many of the students who received their bachelor's degrees during the Khatami administration and were socially or politically active now have trouble being accepted for Master's programmes. Many of them say they hope that if they stay quiet and resist getting involved in activism, their problems will be solved. However, according to the interviewee, people will soon realize that going home and sitting out of politics will not help. "The students who jeered Khatami in 2004 returned two years later to clap for him. The people who called Khatami incompetent (*bi*-orzeh) now see that he is better than a competent individual who does bad things [an implied reference to the current president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad]. The mood will change and people will return to politics" (S6). The student movement reflects a broader political trend with a dynamic interplay between those in, or seeking, political power and the citizen base. The different sectors of civil society, whether structured as a group or movement, are not static entities. Rather, they change and develop as a result of context and encounters with the different forces of the state. In the case of students, their level of activity transformed as a result of these experiences. To examine their relationship with the reform movement, a complete look must be given to both the time period in question and to the fluctuations in their activities over a longer period of time.

5.8 Conclusion

As revealed above, a consideration of civil society during the Khatami administration cannot be completed in a vacuum. To understand Iranian civil society, particularly during a time when the language of civil society was framing an entire movement, it is critical to look at the actors occupying that space and how they utilised the

concept. The student movement displayed how the boundary between political and civil society can be blurred in practice. Activity in the voluntary sector, student-based groups and fields such as women's rights, poverty reduction and social equality, have a long established history preceding the emergence of the reform movement. Moreover, the activity did not come to a standstill after reformists lost their authority in the state. However, during the period that reformists were in power, the civil society sector became much more receptive and conducive to activities that had previously faced more challenging hurdles. As the public space in which they operated was opened, they were afforded political opportunities that were not available in the period before or after the reform movement.

While reformist intellectuals were using the language of civil society to craft their vision of social and political life, civil society actors were using the resulting openings to achieve their own goals. The public image of civil society that emerged was often a magnification of the larger, political reform movement, exemplified by the student movement. The result was a gradual weakening of the energy and capability of student activists, who soon changed the course of their activism, focusing on less overtly political issues and to a large extent carrying out their activities independent of organised groups. The women's movement, on the other hand, represents the endurance of movements containing their own socio-political frame (i.e. having an independent cause not directly tied to a political movement). The opening of space afforded to the women's movement allowed them to increase the scope and volume of activity that predated the reform movement; once this space was restricted by the opposing conservative factions of the state, the women's movement modified their *modus operandi*, shifting to formal and informal networks, some virtually based, to continue pursuing their goals. Civil society organisations with apolitical agendas (i.e. organisations without direct political agendas or affiliation with the reform movement) were given an opportunity with the favourable environment provided by the Khatami administration (for example, issuing of permits and funding), which they used to sustain themselves in the post-reform era. The experiences gained by civil society actors during the period of reform generated an assertive group of individuals more willing to engage with and defy limitations imposed by the state. What is more, conservative factions of the state adopted

pertinent facets of civil society touted by reformists to promote their own agendas, as will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Adopting and Adapting a Liberal Concept – Conservatives and Civil Society

In October 2010, the Deputy Interior Minister for Cultural and Social Affairs of Iran stated that “People-based organisations should not engage in political activities. They can criticise the administration organisations in their private sessions, but they should not undermine the administration in their media outlets” ("NGOs should shun politics: Deputy minister," 2010). His statement was made during a meeting for ‘people-based organisations’ at which time he also proclaimed that the country’s voluntary militia force, the *Basij*, is the country’s largest NGO.

This final substantive chapter provides a glimpse into the workings of the dominant conservative faction, which controls Iran’s main socio-political and economic institutions, and the capitalisation of ‘civil society’ language and structures by the faction’s leading figures. The aim is to show how the use of civil society language and structures can be adopted and adapted by opposition forces. Specifically, how the collective referred to as the conservative faction in Iran has come to use the tools and structures of a civil society that emerged since the late 1980s while simultaneously challenging the ideas associated with the Reformist vision of civil society as a Western model that is detrimental to the Islamic Republic. The ultimate argument is that individuals and groups opposed to the notion of reform have managed to modify the language and structures of civil society based on their own values, in order to enhance their positions of power and realise their agenda of preserving conservative dominance in the Islamic Republic. The civil society concept that reformist intellectuals spoke of and actors pursued, discussed in Chapters Four and Five, respectively, was based on a different set of values, and therefore detached from the social sphere in which conservatives operated. In other words, rather than creating a dialogue within a single domain, reformists and conservatives attempted to influence parallel, non-intersecting spaces.

In this chapter, the Iranian system of government will be introduced, as it is necessary to appreciate the intricacies of this system to locate the role of the conservative, against whom reformists stand as opposition. The conservative

coalition, as it emerged following the split of reformists, will be introduced. Second, it will be shown how a benign, organisation-based definition of civil society has had a long-standing history in Iran, including the existence of traditional community based organisations (CBOs). More importantly, however, the post-Revolution state, during the 1980s, consolidated such institutions under its own control, effectively blurring the boundaries between their rendering of civil society and the state. This chapter illustrates how conservative factions use the tools of civil society, in particular the notion of social capital discussed in Chapter Two, to develop a loyal base while at the same time dismissing reformists whose language of civil society they associate with an agenda of Western imperialism. It is for this reason that an organisational approach to civil society does not provide a complete view of Iranian society and exemplifies the importance of taking a broader approach to the concept, which looks at the values underpinning the concept of civil society and acknowledges its interdependence with the pursuit of political power. From a theoretical viewpoint, the chapter shows how concepts associated with liberalism and democracy can be appropriated and used to reach illiberal objectives.

In the final section, the view of conservative intellectuals, based on in-depth interviews with two of these individuals, will be presented and analysed. The purpose is to show how pragmatic conservative intellectuals can grapple with liberal values, countering the perception that the country's conservative ideology is based purely on dogmatic, illiberal views. The contentious conclusion drawn from these interviews hints at the possibility of reform stemming from within a pragmatic core of individuals who have come to engage with and adapt the notions previously taken up by reformists or other individuals opposing the regime.

6.1 Deconstructing the Conservative Camp

First, it should be recognised that the conservative faction of the Iranian political system, similar to the reformist camp, is not a cohesive unit with a uniform set of political, social and religious ideals. Rather, it is a loose coalition of individual actors and political groupings adhering to a general set of principles, including firm backing of the post-Revolution political system. From the time of the reformist rise in political power from the mid to late 1990s, political rivalry has largely been

between two poles, one representing the reformists and the other conservatives, though this is not to deny complex internal dynamics. Both political camps were dedicated to maintaining the fundamental structure of the state, including the role of the Supreme Leader.[53] However, conservatives had a strong standing with the Supreme Leader with whom reformists had a more contentious relationship.[54] When the reformist camp began to emerge, individuals within the state-endorsed political sphere could be separated into groups: those who voiced dissatisfaction with the current regime's *modus operandi*, reformists, and those who maintained their loyalty to the status quo, conservatives. However, as the reformists gained momentum, long-standing divisions within the conservative camp became sharper and more visible from the outside. Although they were able to establish practical coalitions by the end of the Khatami administration for electoral gains, by the end of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's first term as President and the 2009 elections, infighting amongst conservatives has gained renewed momentum, most likely due to political rather than ideological reasons. This current stream of fragmentation will not be pursued any further as it does not have significant bearing on the overall arguments made here.

Broadly speaking, conservatives can be divided into three camps, the traditionalists, the pragmatists (who have been known to overlap with reformists) and principlists (Thaler, 2010). Traditionalist conservatives strongly back a clerically dominated system that adheres to the values set out by Islamists in the early days of the Revolution; they control the Guardian Council, giving them the most political clout within the system. The pragmatists are associated with individuals such as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ali Larijani, the current Speaker of Parliament. Defining features of pragmatic conservatives include limited concessions towards social liberties for the sake of political cohesion, economic growth through privatisation and a more cordial relationship with the West. Affiliates of this branch of conservatives are more likely to express discontent with the regime. During one interview, a conservative intellectual, C1, stated, "I can do more. Some regimes use

[53] Within the reformist camp debates emerged regarding the authority of the Supreme Leader, however there was no direct attack or call for eradication of the role from reformists. The stance of reformists towards the Supreme Leader after the Khatami left office is more complicated and not discussed in this thesis.

[54] The conflict that arose between the Supreme Leader and President Ahmadinejad in 2011 is representative of increasing divisions among conservatives but is not of direct relevance to an explanation of the initial stages of the reformist rise in prominence.

people to their best potential but some regimes don't". Despite his connection with and support of the conservative political faction, he still expressed dissatisfaction with the ways in which control was exercised at the expense of capacity building.

In contrast, principlists are regarded as ultra-conservative, right wing politicians with a populist approach. Their political ideology is closely aligned with that of Khomeini, and their ambition is to run the country based on the values set out during the early days of the Revolution. While the traditional conservatives advocate clerical rule and primarily consist of clerical figures, the principlist faction is largely composed of devout laypeople who "…have challenged (through, for example, their use of messianic imagery and their denunciations of corruption and the enrichment of some clerics) the dominance of the clerical elite among the traditional conservatives" (Thaler, 2010, pp. 70-71). With the rise of Ahmadinejad to power, principlists have gradually pulled away from the traditionalist clergy. Despite the differences among conservatives, political figures bearing the conservative label are commonly united in their traditional interpretations of Shia Islam and their views of the governing role of religion.

Conservative partisanship

Party politics is not a defining feature of the conservative faction and was not an issue until well after the reformist emergence on the political scene and gained further momentum with the election of Ahmadinejad. Conservatives, as has been the case in Iran's political history, are driven more by loyalties to personalities than to specific ideological differences. In the early years of the Revolution, Khomeini's position as the founding father of the regime limited internal infighting. Upon Khomeini's passing in the late 1980s, followed by the opening-up of political space with the entrance of reformists nearly a decade later, an increasing level of partisan politics emerged within conservative ranks. What is also important to note is that these organisations are not unified and formal political parties as seen in the West. Rather, they are associations with cross-cutting interests. Often, leading members of these associations or parties serve in high-level institutions of the state through appointments by the Supreme Leader. Membership does not limit or necessarily ensure support from the political association. For example, Ahmadinejad is a member of the Islamic Society of Engineers, which was formed in the late 1980s, but

provided backing for Ali Larijani, Speaker of Parliament, in the 2005 presidential elections. The fact that Larijani, also a principlist conservative, took part in that election shows how individual identity takes precedence over parties and factions. Currently, the most significant association among conservatives is the *'e'telaf-e abadgaran-e Iran-e eslami'*, or the Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran, which was formed in 2003. The most prominent figure is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. It is an umbrella organisation with membership of different conservative political organisations.

Analysis for this chapter will consider the whole of the conservative faction, while noting instances when a particular subdivision is addressed. The decision to look at conservatives as a whole stems from the fact that this entirety has stood collectively against the reform movement and, while there are internal divisions amongst conservatives, they are united in their opposition to major changes in the structure of the Islamic Republic. In terms of the role of public intellectuals vis-à-vis the conservative political realm, there are several sources of power. Key political figures have their own ideology, rather than the party having an ideology and politicians being civil servants. This structure stems from the dominance of personalities in Iranian politics. Moreover, clerics play a dominant role in conservative politics and are themselves scholars of religion. There are conservative or, more aptly labelled traditionalist clerics, who are not directly involved in politics, but they are not of relevance here. Although the entire political system is based on religion, only religious scholarship that is sanctioned by the state has an opportunity to play a role in politics.

6.2 Conservative Theory on Civil Society

The following section provides a succinct look at the theoretical foundations of the conservative faction. As with the reformists, there are variations and nuances within theoretical beliefs of different actors, such as political figures and intellectuals. Political figures refer to those who have political posts, either elected or appointed; intellectual refers to those who advise or provide the philosophical foundations for the political actors. At times, an individual's official government role may overlap with her role in the political faction's ideological strategy.

The goal of conservative ideology is the preservation of the Islamic Republic, or the political system that emerged under the leadership of Khomeini in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution. The central component of this regime is the notion of *velayat-e faqih*, or Rule of the Supreme Jurist, which is embodied by the *vali-e faqih*, the Supreme Leader. As described earlier, this post is based on Shia doctrine that requires clerical authority to serve as guardians of Islam during the occultation of the 12th Imam. Conservative can be identified as such based on their strong support for the position of the Supreme leader and a particular interpretation of Shi'ism that is not receptive to pluralist constructions of religion.

A compelling argument for the ideological incompatibility of Islam and civil society is found in a short book written by Dr Ahmad Vaezi, a cleric and scholar active in Iranian seminaries and universities. Vaezi's philosophy has been influenced by clerics such as Mesbah Yazdi and Hassanzadeh Amoli.[55] Mesbah Yazdi is a hard-line cleric who opposes any Western influences in the country and follows a strict interpretation of Islamic guidelines; he has been considered one of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's mentors. Hassanzadeh Amoli is another influential hard-line scholar with close ties to the office of the Supreme Leader. In his book, Civil Society, Religious Society (2001), Vaezi identifies the features of civil society, and religious civil society in particular, and explains the paradox with Islam. The main incompatibility is based on civil society's assertion that final authority rests with the individual (citizen) whereas in Islam this authority is based on the will of God. He states scholars who claim compatibility between religion and civil society are failing to take account of civil society's features in their entirety. Some individuals are able to connect civil society with the civil associations established by the Prophet Mohammad. However, thinkers, like Vaezi (2001, p. 152), point out that this suggestion is not convincing as it has no relevance to what Vaezi calls the 'common' definition of civil society. Presumably by the 'common' definition, he means to imply liberal classifications of civil society. Therefore, in the case of Iran, the role of

[55] In his biographical description on the website for Hawzah Elmieh Masjid Soleiman, where he has taught, Vaezi indicates the main sources of his philosophical learning: http://hawzah-almahdi.org/portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=NEWS&ID=60fb1195-2332-4684-8ab3-6d89aae68bb5&WebPartID=76bd32df-ff4c-4b7f-ba8d-acd30d39f352&CategoryID=356d00e5-83fe-4b17-9203-918b878a71fc

the Supreme Leader as guardian of religion cannot be over-ruled by citizens whose opinions may be based purely on personal desires. What conservatives appear to do is use the organisational frameworks attributed to benign perceptions of civil society (for example, religious and volunteer organisations). However, they do not embrace the ideological principles attached to liberal perceptions of civil society (for example, individual liberty). The following sections will outline a number of key organisations that blur the boundaries between the civil and political as well as provide evidence and analysis of how intellectuals deal with civil society on a practical level.

6.3 Conservative Civil Society Organisations: Blurring the boundaries

Though civil society was a mantra invoked by reformists starting in the 1990s, civil society institutions as volunteer entities not under the direct control of the state or private sector already existed in Iranian society, as discussed in Chapter Two. Of particular interest to this section is the introduction and analysis of traditional and modern civil society organisations with ties to the conservative political faction. While these organisations may not refer to themselves as civil society organisations, their characteristics fit CSO definitions that focus on organisations, as is common in the field of development. Definitions associated with the third sector that emphasise the benign service delivery approach of volunteer organisations, which are not a direct part of political institutions or the market, can be applied to volunteer charitable and social organisations that were in operation before the Revolution and formed close ties to conservative political factions after the Revolution. There are also several organisations formed under the direct order of the state in the aftermath of the Revolution. As they have some characteristics of civil society groups, these organisations will be referred to as quasi-state organisations, similar to government organised NGOs (GONGOS). The most recognisable of these is the social service branches of the *basij* paramilitary organisation, which will be discussed below. These organisations take on roles traditionally ascribed to civil society groups through both official and unofficial channels, made more complex as a result of the state's position of religious authority. Through both law and the bodies of these quasi-civil society institutions, conservatives restrict the political opportunities

reformists attempted to extend. Overall, their role in welfare provision sustains conservative power while providing them with additional legitimacy.

Religious charities

Based on its strong Shia Muslim identity, the role of charity has historically played a large role in Iran. Charities are often based on the religious principles of believers and focus on serving the underprivileged. They are generally tied to local communities and based on informal networks of both men and women. Local mosques and clerics have traditionally had links with these charity groups. Over three decades after the 1979 Revolution, local religious charities continue to provide services and goods to disadvantaged individuals and communities without any political affiliation or agenda. However, there are two instances when conservative politics are linked with these charities. First, there are charities that have been absorbed by the state under the patronage of the Supreme Leader, some of which will be described below. Second, and less obvious, are individuals involved in religiously based charities who may not receive direct financial or organisational backing from the state but who support conservative politics due to the populist language used by conservative actors, including traditionalist and principlist conservatives.

One prime example of the religiously-motivated charitable endeavour is the *Sandogh-e Qarz-ol-Hassaneh*, which are interest-free loan funds (similar to microcredit organisations) based on Islamic beliefs. Before the Revolution, these funds "were established, initially, as a safety net for opponents of the Shah who were dismissed from their work. These grew from the first in 1970 to 3,000 in 1988 and 10,000 in 2005[56]. Often run from the mosque, the *sandogh* loans are guaranteed by businessmen in the bazaar" (AKDN & INTRAC, 2007, p. 33). The number and power of the funds grew soon after the Revolution with support from the government; however, many were closed, "As the so called Islamic financial institutions began to wield political clout and disregarded Government's fiscal and monetary policies…" (Motee & Namazi, 2000, p. 9). On the whole, the larger funds emerged from inside the bazaar, independent of the government and mosques (Motee & Namazi, 2000, p. 9). The case of these funds exemplifies the functional

[56] As mentioned in Chapter Five, the exact number of these organisations is difficult to establish.

relationship between the mosque, *bazaar* and post-Revolutionary state. Though there are fissures in the relationship between the state, *bazaar* and religious institutions, the conservative camp has historically been based upon a '*bazaar*-mosque alliance' (Ashraf, 1994).

Why is the link between traditional charities and conservatives important?

As discussed in earlier chapters, the civil society advocated by reformists was not merely a call for an increase in civic action or community participation (along the lines of Putman) but a promotion of broader liberal democratic ideals. Therefore, the link between traditional charities and conservatives can be significant in a discussion of civil society. If civil society is supposed to play a link between the populace and the government, as described in literature and expressed by reformist figures, conservatives have been successful in establishing a link with these charities.

The most basic criticism of this link is that it does not necessarily represent an interactive and reciprocal relationship whereby members of the charity organisations are able to voice their opinions and make demands on the state institution. Though valid on some level, namely that conservatives will maintain their stance on key issues regardless of voices from below, conservatives do provide benefits for their supporters and make concessions within certain boundaries. In particular, this can be seen in economic reforms made to address the dispossessed. It is through local charities and mosques that conservatives reach out to their base and the charities in turn gain access to political figures. Friday prayers represent one example of interaction between local charities and conservative political figures. The appointment of Friday prayer leaders is under the command of the Supreme Leader. In fact, the Islamic state controls and has complete oversight over all mosques. Many of the local *Basij* organisations, expanded upon below, operate from within mosques.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Basij

The *Basij* forces, translated as mobilisation forces, are a paramilitary volunteer militia established in 1979 and are under the command of the Islamic Revolutionary

Guard Corps (IRGC) also known as the Revolutionary Guards or *Pasdaran* (meaning Guard). The IRGC was itself established after the Revolution by a decree from Khomeini. The IRGC has managed to influence almost all aspects of the country's socio-political framework based on a populist and authoritarian understanding of the Revolution's principles (Wehrey, 2009, p. xi). It was conceived as a counterpart to the regular military and consolidated its power with service during the Iran-Iraq War. Since 1997, the IRGC has expanded its reach in the economy and its "…commanders are ubiquitous in decision-making circles, control the police, the national radio and television, and Ministries of Defence and Intelligence, and are responsible for the security of the clerical leadership". Former Guard members constitute one-third of the conservative parliament that was elected in early 2004…" (Gheissari & Nasr, 2005, pp. 180-181). In other words, the IRGC represents the economic and political powerhouse of the conservative base and the quasi-militarisation of the economy and society.

During the Khatami administration, the IRGC mobilised its members in an attempt to curtail the impact of the reform movement. Their fear was that reform, even if not intentional, could potentially destroy the political system. As a result, the chief of the IRGC at the time, took on a directly interventionist approach (Alfoneh, 2008). In addition to mobilising their paramilitary forces, the IRGC also used the courts to attack reformist intellectuals and publications (Alfoneh, 2008). In essence, the IRGC had and continues to hold the economic and political means to control any attempts to change the Islamic Republic.

The *Basij* forces, short for *sazman- basij-e mostazafan,* or Organisation for the Mobilisation of the Oppressed, are a paramilitary volunteer militia established by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 and a component of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. The *Basij* were created in the aftermath of the Revolution as a security force that was first responsible for neutralising domestic insurgency. With the start of the Iran-Iraq War, they came to play a key role in national defence. The *Basij* have branches responsible for domestic security but also an extensive programme of social service delivery made up of locally organised volunteer forces. According to one estimate, in 2010 there were approximately 4 million members of the *Basij* (Golkar,

2010a). A majority of its members consist of men, though there are dedicated women's and girls' groups as well.

Organisationally, the *Basij* are a network of local organizations largely based in mosques with additional branches in institutions such as universities. During the war with Iraq, members of the *Basij* fought on the front lines, with young members even accepting to martyr themselves by clearing minefields with their bodies. As a result, members of the *Basij* are, to this day, considered loyal to the Revolution and given special privileges, such as university places. From the end of the war until the writing of this thesis, they continue to provide national security roles and serve as a type of 'morality' police that ensures 'Islamic' behaviour among citizens. In the public domain they have taken initiatives to monitor women's clothing (to ensure they meet their standards of modest clothing), established check points on the street to detain drivers with illegal substances in their cars (including alcohol or restricted music) or prevent unmarried couples from riding in cars together and other such measures. They are also routinely mobilized in times of political unrest on behalf of the Revolutionary Guard and the office of the Supreme Leader. Membership is also a means of obtaining civil servant positions and other roles within the government.

However, it is interesting to note that the ideological base of the *Basij* is permeable. For example, in 1997, 73 per cent of *Basijis* voted for Khatami in the Presidential election (Golkar, 2010a), an act that appears to directly defy Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, who supported Khatami's opponent. As a result, '…the Basij intensified its ideological training for its members. A new series of IPT [Ideological-Political Training] courses was added to the Basij program: *velayat* (guardianship) in 1997, *basirat* (insight) in 1998, and *marefat* (awareness) in 2001' (Golkar, 2010a)[57]. These training courses are an indication of how the conservative faction of the state reacts in a systematic manner to potential deviance from within using the authority of the Supreme Leader over this organization. The fact that 73 per cent were willing to vote in defiance towards the Supreme Leader shows that the ideology of the Islamic Republic is less rigid than often presumed.

[57] According to Golkar, further adjustments have been made in the *Basij* and IRGC IPT programmes.

Though the official organization of the *Basij* brands it an entity of the state, certain factors, including its role in the community, make it a quasi-civil society organization. In addition to security roles, members of the *Basij* also provide services to the community and the organisation serves as a basis for community cohesion. Members participate in social activities such as sports, extracurricular academic classes for students and regular outings and travels. Common in low-income neighbourhoods, the mosque-based *Basij* organisation provides a safe and acceptable space for socialising, which would not have otherwise been possible. Participation in these activities is voluntary and does not necessarily have a political dimension. Community building, therefore, becomes a strong focus as a result of the relationships formed, which fall outside the realm of the family. The *Basij* have been a prominent fixture in disaster relief efforts acting in conjunction with official state aid as opposed to acting as the state's official representatives. It is this aspect of the *Basij* that blurs the boundary between the state and civil society.

Of particular importance to this thesis is the Student *Basij* Organisation, or SBO. Established in 1990, with its first bureau at University of Tehran, the SBO was not focused on political activism until after Khatami's election, when individuals including the Supreme Leaders encouraged members to counteract reformist students. "This call to action was backed up on the legislative side by a new law to strengthen the SBO, which was passed with an absolute majority on December 13, 1998, by the fifth Majlis" (Golkar, 2010b, p. 23)[58]. Though the SBO was a student run organisation similar to the Islamic Student Association that came to support reform, referred to in Chapter Five, its financial and ideological ties to are to the office of the Supreme Leader. In an interview with a reformist student, S4, she explained how in her view, the *Basij* in universities had tried to transform their image, particularly as an entity connected with the IRGC, by holding cultural events. Cultural and artistic events were activities generally associated with reformist students and groups. The *Basij*'s attempts to use forums similar to reformists, is an indicator of how they attempted to reframe their position from a paramilitary organ into a civil one. The contrast in political outlook of the two student groups is a mirror of the broader battle between reformists and conservatives during Khatami's

[58] The Fifth Majlis was dominated by the conservative faction.

presidency. On the whole, the IRGC and *Basij* represent how similar organisations and actors can be labelled as civil society or the state based on their underlying power base.

Para-statal Foundations (*Bonyads*)

One of the key aspects of Khomeini's appeal during the Revolution was his advocacy on behalf of the 'downtrodden' or 'dispossessed' and calls for egalitarian rule. With rapid urbanisation taking place, overcrowding and poverty in city centres became an issue by the 1970s. Though the concept of charity and community-led support for the poor was part of the population's cultural fabric, the state also played a role both before and after the Revolution. Mohammad Reza Shah originally established the Foundations, commonly referred to as *Bonyads*, as royal foundations characterized as charitable organisations. In reality, they served as profit-making entities with commercial interests that benefited patrons loyal to the monarchy. In the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, the Foundations were nationalised and reformatted with the objective of redistributing income to the poor. With the onset of the war, the Foundations were assigned the task of supporting the families of war veterans. However, it did not take long for the Foundations to transform back into the commercial conglomerates that existed prior to the Revolution. "Under Rafsanjani, the *bonyads* controlled and disbursed billions of dollars and greatly enriched those associated with them, using their own wealth to gain patronage, invest in a wide array of business interests, and generally advance their power and influence" (Thaler, 2010, p. 57). Their vast commercial interests range in diverse fields that include agriculture, textiles and automobiles and are a major employer. According to a 2009 report, they controlled an estimated 10-20 per cent of Iran's gross domestic product (Thaler, 2010, p. 58).

> The foundations consist of large religious endowments such as the Endowment of the Shrine of Imam Reza (with approximately $25 billion in net assets), or several umbrella corporations, such as the Foundation of the Downtrodden ($15bn in assets) or the Martyr's Foundation ($20bn in assets), that manage vast and diverse financial holdings, and own real estate, construction, manufacturing, retail and infrastructure development companies in both the public and private sectors. The foundations exercise extensive monopoly powers in the economy, employ large numbers, and serve as source of revenue for the ruling regime and many of its leaders.
> (Gheissari & Nasr, 2005, p. 181)

In addition to the growing role of the IRGC, the foundations are a significant source of the conservative base's economic power.

Despite a generally centralised structure under the control of the Supreme Leader, the Foundations also have local and thematic branches. They are tax-exempt entities that receive large contributions from the public, particularly religious donations and are also subsidized by the government. In return, they provide welfare services to the community. In addition to providing for families of war veterans, they also provide services for economically disadvantaged families and the disabled. The workings of each individual Foundation are independent and in many cases there is no government oversight.

> Oftentimes, they operate parallel to the formal institutions of the government, but very infrequently do they coordinate their activities with the executive. For example, although there is a Housing Ministry, the Housing Foundation (Bonyad-e Maskan) remains both active and influential in providing housing to needy families. The Literacy Movement (Nehzat-e Savad-amoozi) operates side-by-side with the Ministry of Education. The Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (Shoura-ye Aali-ye Enqelab-e Farhangi), which sets overall cultural policy on behalf of the Leader, competes with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.
> (Kamrava & Hassan-Yari, 2004, p. 509)

The welfare services provided by the Foundations are an indirect component of the state's welfare system since the state has a separate entity that deals with social security and welfare. Therefore, the work of braches of the foundations is somewhat autonomous and, similar to the *basij*, can be considered quasi-civil society organisations. In fact, the Foundations are even more multifaceted as their activities blur the boundaries between the roles of the state, market and civil society.

The resulting 'conservative' civil society

The conservative political faction in Iranian politics is not homogenous, with considerable discord emerging each day. However, there are several distinct features that set this group apart from reformists. While reformists did not explicitly or even implicitly attack the role of the Supreme Leader, conservatives have had a close relationship with Khamenei since he took the post after Khomeini's death. When it comes to civil society, conservatives have a close link with traditional civil society,

such as local religiously-based charities and the bazar. In addition, due to their connection with the office of the Supreme Leader, conservatives have generally controlled quasi-state institutions, such as the *basij* and *bonyads*. Although they are state sponsored, these organisations run social service provisions that are often the domain of civil society, as described below.

The following statement by the head of the judiciary and member of a prominent conservative political family summarises the general ideological stance of the conservatives:

> In a nutshell, civil society and liberalism are twin brothers, and one of the main theses of liberalism, and therefore of the [sic] civil society, is the neutrality of the state. This is not consistent with pure Islamic doctrines, unless one is so infatuated with liberalism, that one does not care about such an inconsistency, and that is another matter.
>
> Contrary to the views of a number of myopic intellectuals, liberalism is not only incompatible with the fundamentals of religious belief in general, and with Islamic thought in particular, but also poses grave philosophical problems for the individual. A necessary consequence of the liberal doctrine is that every immoral law, provided that it is endorsed by all and sundry, is then enactable and it is the duty of the state to pave the way for its implementation. This is because the state has no criterion for distinguishing wrong and right. Its only obligation is to safeguard the liberties. If people decided that abortion or homosexual life style should be allowed, then the state must follow suit and modify its laws to accommodate these demands. …
>
> Such ideas are not only untenable from an Islamic point of view, because among other things, Islam does not endorse moral pluralism, but are also faced with irresolvable philosophical difficulties.
> S. Larijani[59] (quoted in Paya, 2011, pp. 298-299)

The main ideas encapsulated by the above statement are that of the incompatibility of what he considers a religious or 'moral' society with ideological pluralism. Based on this belief, the notion of an unfettered democratic system is unacceptable. It is for this reason that even the 'civil society', organisations and spheres of interaction outside the state and market, instituted by the conservative state, is strictly controlled. Here, 'civil society' is used so far as it denotes an organisational concept, namely an organisation that falls outside the state structure and the marketplace, and not an ideological one. In general, for conservatives, the state (presumably one overseen by

[59] Sadeq Larijani is a lecturer in Qom seminary, former member of the Council of Guardians and current head of the judiciary. This quote was written in a paper entitled 'Religion and Civil Society'.

the Supreme Leader) is sufficiently capable of guiding citizens. However, despite this seemingly stringent idea of what is right and wrong, there are in fact clear differences amongst conservatives. Particularly amongst pragmatic and principlist conservatives, there are signs of weakened support for, and submission to, the Supreme Leader. This has to do with political as well as religious disagreements. What connects them is the fact that religious ideals (which are not necessarily defined) should guide society rather than a democratic process stemming from negotiations amongst members of civil society. There are also members of this faction who not only accede to, but even demand the precursors to pluralism, namely discourse and the questioning of norms. This last notion is part of a growing contradiction in the ideological base of pragmatic and principlist conservatives that grants final authority to the will of God as opposed to the individual. The following section is based on interviews with two key conservative thinkers who appeal for a greater space for dialogue. They find that the closed, top down decision-making at all levels of society has impeded the country's development.

6.4 'Reformist' Conservatives? Interviews with two intellectuals

Due to the political situation of the country and my position as a researcher from a Western institution, arranging interviews with intellectuals and political figures affiliated with conservative factions was more challenging than those with reformists. In fact, such interviews were largely discouraged by contacts that I consulted on this topic. Moreover, conservative members of the state or individuals affiliated with it, often attempt to present a different public image, particularly to the West, as exemplified in the softened tone of interviews provided by individuals like President Ahmadinejad. The focus is on individuals who fit the definition of a public intellectual, as a critical thinker who contributes to public debate. On the whole, the interviewees can be identified as 'secondary' intellectuals who interpreted conservative political stances based on their own individual views. It leaves out individuals in the conservative faction who seek to return to their understanding of Khomeini's goals for the Islamic Republic at its inception without concessions to the changes resulting over time. They are faithful to the office of the Supreme Leader in their political stance and therefore ideologically favour a state and society that

adheres to their particular interpretation of Islam, even if it must be enforced from above.

I was able to secure a limited number of interviews with conservatives, and the following section stems from those discussions. As critical thinkers, the individuals who were interviewed fall into a distinct category of moderate conservatives, irrespective of affiliation to the political factions outlined above, as they are willing to question the theoretical underpinning of the state, albeit judiciously, and take the impact of modernisation into account. Nonetheless, they can be most closely identified with the traditionalist or principlist conservative factions. C1 is a leading conservative intellectual who serves as a strategist for a faction of the conservative camp. He is a university lecturer and political editor of a conservative daily newspaper. He has been credited by others, and confirmed by him during the interview, for being the first person to challenge Khatami in a scholarly manner. Within conservative politics, he stands in opposition to Ahmadinejad. During his interview, an individual whose affiliation was not provided sat in the room from beginning to end. His mannerisms and lines of questioning addressed to me after the interview indicated his affiliation with an intelligence unit of the state, often directly affiliated with the office of the Supreme Leader. C2 is a prominent academic and public intellectual affiliated with conservative thought. He holds advanced degrees, including a PhD in Philosophy from an Iranian university. In addition to university posts, he is the president of a government institution, which is officially headed by the Iranian president, dedicated to research and development in the field of science. A philosopher by training, he has held this post since the late 1990s. In political and intellectual circles, he is known as a staunch supporter of the Iranian political system and the Supreme Leader. One of the most noteworthy discoveries from this interview is the commonality between these moderate conservative intellectuals and reformist intellectuals. In addition, their critiques of the reform movement are not overtly rooted in its conceptual basis but focus instead on the method of delivery and the reformist understanding of Iranian society.

Shedding the hard-line image

An unexpected element of the interview with C2 was his open criticism of both political and social development in modern Iran. His words were in stark contrast to the dogmatic views one might expect of someone so closely affiliated with conservative politics. On the one hand, this can partly be attributed to the difference between what is said, particularly as it may be part of a larger propaganda agenda, and what is actually supported through action. On the other hand, the very fact that these statements were made, particularly ones criticising how the state operates, indicate at least some willingness to engage in dialogue and pluralism. The interviewee has published his views on the topic of science and Islam himself. However, these are not included in analysis as it is not the nature of his academic and philosophical theories per se that are of relevance to the thesis. Rather, it is about how an intellectual and political figure from the conservative spectrum speaks about the contemporary discourse around civil society that took shape during the reformist period and his engagement with these ideas at the practical level.

Based on the content of the interview, it would not be immediately obvious that C2 belongs to the conservative camp. Early on in the interview, he clarified that he was not speaking with me as a journalist but as an academic, a statement that can be construed to indicate the interview was not being used as a public forum for political statements. In addition to this declaration, the content of the interview is the strongest evidence that he was not interested in defending or promoting the conservative agenda. In a similar manner, C1 was openly critical of particular features of how the Islamic Republic has developed, particularly with regard to the education system. Each section depicts key findings from the interviews that contribute to analysis earlier in the chapter.

Questioning the basis of reformist civil society language

One of C1's key criticisms was against the theoretical basis of the reform movement. C1 stated, "Every social movement needs a theoretical basis. The 2nd of Khordad

movement[60] had the *Kiyan* journal where they discussed civil society. What they discussed was the rights of citizens and that the government is not holy (*moghaddas*)…But where are the roots of the civil society you [reformists] talk about? Is it Hobbes and fear or Locke and benefit?" He further commented that he realised Khatami himself did not have a specific understanding of the concept. The crux of C1's argument was to emphasize the reformists' ambiguity on the complex issues they presented and question their roots at a theoretical level. Drawing on this line of argument, it can be asserted that conservative opposition to the reform movement was not a shallow condemnation based on any concepts with Western or liberal connotations, but rather a questioning of the theoretical underpinning of a vague reformist agenda. Based on this evidence and other issues revealed in the interview, it can be reasoned that at least this conservative figure saw reformists as a group that challenged the conservative base but without a clear conceptual agenda. C1 mentioned that at one point Khatami discusses *madinat-al nabi* (City of the Prophet) but C1 believes it was only said for political reasons. This last statement shows how Khatami's linking of civil society with religion not only failed to attract his own followers but was similarly disregarded as a political ploy by conservative figures.

C2 made a similar argument with regard to the reform movement's weak conceptual foundations. He stated, "Khatami mentioned civil society but this had not reached the ears of journalists. Even now if you ask them what it is they will say isn't every society civil?" Here, C2 raises the issue of Khatami's language being out of sync with that of the people and the ambiguous connotations of civil society. This schism between reformist language and the understanding by agents of civil society was also addressed in Chapter Five. Its acknowledgment by a conservative figure is an indication of a material weakness in the reformist civil society frame and the conservative ability to use this as a political opportunity to attack their opponents.

C2 explained in the interview that there are no civil institutions (*nahad-haye madani*) in Iranian society and if they exist, it is a formality (*tashrifati*). By formality he

[60] The 2nd of Khordad refers to the date of Khatami's first election as President in the Iranian calendar, 23 May 1997. From that point forward, the reformist faction was commonly referred to as the 2nd of Khordad movement.

refers to an organisation that may carry the name or superficial structure of a civil society organisation, but not the substance (the substance or underlying values of such an organisation was as yet unclear). The claim sheds light on a contradiction with his statement that the institution that he leads can be considered a civil society organisation. Again, the issue is raised of the many ways civil society can be defined and its uncertain place in Iranian society. He claims that civil society became a political issue and moved away from social and economic concerns. His statements indicated a development-oriented interpretation of civil society and appeared to disregard or even challenge the ideological implications of civil society. In other words, in this instance it appears that the meaning of civil society for him (before being politicised) is the seemingly benign one emphasising basic social and economic development (for example, poverty reduction and access to education and health care). C2's observation in one sense does not identify whether civil society as a space for dialogue and critical debate can or should have a place in Iranian society. For him, civil society appears to refer to uncontentious academic organisations rather than a sphere for controversial debate. This point shows an inner conflict within conservative thought as one of the country's needs is to train its citizens as critical beings, as discussed below. He stated that reformists used Western models of civil society because it was the easiest way, "They did not have time to localise civil society as its translation was easier and most of their support came from the West; the language of intellectuals was different from that of the people".

Blurring the boundaries between civil society and the state

However, in spite of the interviewees' criticisms of reformists and their use of the civil society concept, they also acknowledged the potential of a more 'localised' civil society. In other words, they, in particular C2, acknowledged the necessity of civil society organisations as well as space for critical dialogue. The issue of civil society organisations will be addressed in this section, with the argument that even more than reformists, the interviewed conservative figures attempted to mould existing state-dominated institutions into a civil society frame, with clear contradictions resulting. Much of the interview with C2 was focused on cultural and structural problems that prevent academic and development projects from succeeding rather than arguing for or against the theoretical underpinning of civil society. He

understood civil society organisations in Iran to lack any organic foundation in Iranian society while at the same time considering a broad spectrum of organisations in the country as belonging to the civil society category. In fact, he considered the institution that he led, and where the interview took place, to be part of civil society, even though it was in reality a government entity. This perception of civil society is interesting given that the official head of the institution is the country's president.

One of the first insights into C2's viewpoint on politics was his remark that the most powerful scene in the book *Le Petit Prince* is one where the Little Prince meets the King[61]. Here, we can interpret C2's reflection on the extent to which a ruler can impose his own will on those around him. Translated into the Iranian context, he is in fact implying that a conservative domination can only be effective to a certain extent; beyond that, it is an illusion of authority without a real basis. Analogies were spread throughout C2's interview. In one instance, he stated the civil society organisations have good members but are without roots, "…similar to a beautiful flower that is held in a vase rather than planted in the ground". On the one hand, the state can control society just so far. On the other, the power of non-state actors and institutions are imports that have not become imbedded into the local social order. He noted that it is in security regimes[62] where these organisations do not exist. However, he also stated, "if we don't want civil society then we don't want development". His comments are further validated by his statement that in Iran there has been a failure to solve problems with home-grown solutions. Within the education system, he states that structures and methods were imported without insight into how the concept would be localised. He offers examples such as educational plans that were taken from abroad and translated and the start of academic research. He refers to the Sorbonne, Cambridge and Oxford, which began as schools of religion but gradually transformed into independent universities. Comparing this to Iran, "We created a university next to a 'hawze' (seminary); they each took their own separate place. But we have to consider the relationship between

[61] This particular chapter in *The Little Prince* refers to a scene where the Little Prince meets a King who claims to have authority over everyone and everything around him; the reality is that he sets his parameters of expectation to what he knows will take place regardless of his wish (for example, he claims that he is able to command the sun to set at a certain time but does so based on his knowledge of natural cycles of the earth).

[62] C1 does not provide a definition of security regimes. However, based on the context, the following understanding of security regime can be inferred: states focused on preventing outside interference while controlling all domestic activity.

the two". The idea is that Iran has been dependent on foreign exports rather than allowing its own indigenous social structures to emerge.

De-politicising the civil society concept

Following from the discussion above of conservatives blurring the boundaries between the state and civil society, is the notion of de-politicising civil society to fit their perception of the state under the Islamic Republic. According to C1, Shias have historically organised independent civil society organisations, as they considered the state to be the oppressor. "After the Islamic revolution, the state is no longer the oppressor, but does this mean an end of civil organisations? Post-revolution Iran shows that this does not occur. The Islamic republic tried to keep traditional Shi'a organisations under its wing though most of the funding comes from the people (*tudeh mardom*)". For C1, civil society has traditionally existed in Iran as a necessity to offset a repressive state. The Islamic Republic, it can be assumed from his commentary, rectified this situation by liberating the country and absorbed this vague notion of civil society that had protected citizens against the state. However, he believes the Islamic Republic is faced with a paradox since from an economic perspective, the government must become smaller, while in the social sphere the government wants to maintain absolute control. He places greater emphasis on the economic structure than the public sphere of civil society. It was evident from the interview that C1 opposes both the Western import of civil society by reformists as well as the populist system of governance implemented by Ahmadinejad. Most important, he placed civil society as a component of traditional Shi'a life only necessary to serve as a space for organised opposition when facing an oppressive state, resonating with the Western liberal conception of civil society as an overseer of the state. However, he sees civil society as a source of opposition, as advocated by reformists, having little relevance to contemporary Iranian society, which he believes to have defeated and replaced the 'oppressive' state. This vision of civil society is a relativist one that manipulates the role of civil society contingent upon how society 'should' look. Here, we have another example of the way in which the concept of civil society can be adapted to fit a particular vision of the good life. However, despite the criticisms of reformists and manipulation of civil society to fit the system of the Islamic Republic, the interviewee made a surprising appeal for more critical

thought in Iranian society. He exemplifies the inherent contradiction in the conservative intellectual: simultaneously appealing for critical thought while politically supporting a government that demands its citizens conform to particular political, social and religious interpretations that leave little room for pluralism.

A call for critical analysis: An unexpected perspective

During the interviews, there was an unexpected call for an increase in critical thought amongst members of Iranian society. In this regard, both interviewees emphasised the need for advancing the education system as a way to promote critical analysis, as opposed to rote learning mechanisms. According to C1, "We haven't had logical, philosophical questions and the answers do not fit the question…the education system does not fit our society because it is not our own system. It doesn't allow creativity; individuality is what gets the high grades (*fardgarahi nomreh miyare*). In this system you have to accept what you're told… You don't have permission to question your teacher here. We should have continued with the old system of education". The result of what has just been mentioned, he states, was Ahmadinejad's election. He continues, "The youth who had not been involved in the activities of reformists were no longer teenagers and were ready for life and marriage; their need became economic. The NGOs dealing with the economy had not matured and the dominant discourse was no longer about freedom but equality and economics". He goes on to criticise the Ahmadinejad administration in turn, saying that "The government is paying people rather than the people working and paying the government, a move that would have made the government responsive to them [referring to the monetary hand-outs Ahmadinejad has been popular for since before his election]. Ahmadinejad's method though is a shot rather than a cure. Ahmadinejad led to an expansion of government instead of the economy as the money he gave to people did not circulate financial system but was directly injected".

Moreover, C1 claims that reformists failed, where individuals such as Khomeini did not, in reaching out to society. He described Khomeini as a high-ranking cleric, a source of religious emulation, who not only had a strong understanding of philosophy but could also speak with the people. The problem was the "laziness" of

reformist intellectuals and the simplicity of translation. "What Iran needs is philosophers; we have 'falsafekhan' (people who study philosophy) but no philosophers and this has been a result of the power of religion". The last statement implies a shortcoming of religion, or at least its influence, in society, which is a curious statement coming from a conservative figure. First, this serves as a common point with reformist intellectuals, who based much of their thought on reformulating or questioning religious doctrine. Second, the interviewee serves as an example of an intellectual commenting on how critical thought has failed to take a stronghold in the country, charging such criticism against reformists themselves and ascribing the problem to power and religion.

It should be noted that during the interview with C1, as can be expected, his tone was tempered. However, his statements do not stand in sharp contrast to his overall views expressed through his public sources of literature. The general views that emerge from his interview can be taken as representative of his moderate conservative stance on the topic of civil society and the country's social development. Most importantly, he emphasises a need for educational reform. While he does not provide detail, the issue of allowing freedom of thought, through questioning of material, and promotion of creativity are highlighted. This is striking as conservatives are often considered to discourage freedom of expression. However, taking into account his emphasis of the role religion plays in the life of the ordinary Iranian citizen, it appears that the expectation is that people's wants will not step far from the traditional views of conservatives. Moreover, his advocacy for a return to a home-grown system of education is vague and the idea of going 'back' to the system of education in place before the import of Western education systems does not give hope for a modern and progressive system of education.

C2 states that we have to think of what we need and what we can do and then look at how we can cooperate with the outside. According to him "We [in Iran] always just look at others and emulate. We shouldn't just repeat what the teacher says. We take our education system from other countries because we have no other choice. We don't look at what a university can do. We created universities so we could have white collars and ties". He further elucidates "There is a need to look at the question of "why"! We don't THINK (emphasis in speech)!" He recalls a scene from *101*

Dalmatians and states that sometimes a sentence by one person can have more meaning than what a person can say in a book. In the story, "one of the thieves says: 'I think' but the other says 'I had warned you about thinking!'". C2 states that "they have warned us about thinking", though he does not elaborate to whom 'they' refers. He states that when science (*elm*) and thought is not present, everything disappears. "We need to try and listen to others. Today politics has taken over everything and is interpreting philosophy, arts, religion and is turning society 'uni-dimensional'". It is also interesting to note C2's penchant for using Western literary and cultural references, two of which are mentioned here (i.e. *Le Petit Prince* and *101 Dalmations*). In essence, he is showing a 'modern' image of the conservative, one who has not relegated himself only to traditional folklore and religious studies.

During the interview, C2 focused on the lack of planning for projects in Iran. He described a plan as having two parts: the first is making the decision of what money to give and then how to spend that money. In Iran, he claims, there is no planning. For example, the members of his research institution are the best scientists in the world but their work has not reached such high levels. He believes he can do more but is unable to do so. He states that some regimes use people to their best potential but some regimes do not. It can be presumed that he is speaking about his own situation. One example he provides is with a technical malfunction in a popular car model assembled in Iran. Even though the biggest group in his institution is engineering, no one asked for their support. This assertion reflects on the lack of cooperation between different sectors of society, whether academic, government or private, which is also one of the obstacles civil society institutions face.

According to C2, "We are disabling the abled (*darim tavanmandha ra na-tavan mikonim*)". He states, engineers are the best when you ask them about schoolwork, but then they cannot work beyond that. Iran has engineers who go to become leaders and heads of organizations but have no training for this. Electrical engineers start talking about history rather than a historian, instead of working in their own industry. In a sarcastic tone, C2 states that the most important role today is 'engineer'. "The head of Culture and Art of Qom is an engineer! You might as well close down other departments! This is the problem of an underdeveloped society". Ultimately, the two individuals criticise the import of foreign concepts, including civil society, but

simultaneously call for an increase in independent critical thought and localised, independent institutions. They are, in a sense, calling for the same objectives reformists had demanded through the language of civil society.

6.5 Conclusion

On the whole, in order to counteract the rise of the reformist power base, conservative leaders used the same social tools as pro-reform factions to mobilise a sympathetic base to show their support. However, the underlying values for the civil society they aimed to mobilise are far from those of reformists. A look at the more pragmatic or moderate conservative voices, as done through interviews with conservative intellectuals for this thesis, reveals a call for change, comparable to reformist demands. Even conservatives, particularly pragmatists, seek to find ways in which the country can develop and compete globally. However, the interviews also revealed an inconsistency between the desires to inspire a populace capable of critical thought with the reality of maintaining the current inflexible political structure. Given the current struggles within the conservative faction, the time may come when pragmatists find the opportunity to gain influence. However, the strong economic and political authority entrenched in institutions such as the Foundations and, in particular, the IRGC, make it difficult for balanced, multi-polar power struggles to take place. A stalemate amongst conservatives is the most likely condition for the time being.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Iran and the Wider Global Context

The Iranian reform movement can provide a valuable theoretical and practical case study relevant to the events unfolding in the wider Middle East and North Africa. While each instance has its own particular circumstances and nuances, parallels can be drawn. In particular, the language and concept of civil society is a common denominator, whereby analysts and strategists from domestic and international government and nongovernmental organisations place a heavy burden on the power of civil society. In these cases, the power of civil society is considered a vital component in the fight against oppressive regimes. There is an assumption that civil society, in contrast to the state, is a just representative of the 'people's voice'. However, this assumption does not take into account the existence of power politics in all spheres of human interaction. Moreover, civil society is not a homogenous entity with a singular goal. Rather, it is an amalgamation of different ideas, people and organisations with different viewpoints and agendas.

The research concludes that while civil society promotion can contribute to social and political change in non-liberal contexts, it is not a clear-cut case of increasing the number of civil society organisations and expanding capacity building programmes. The case of Iran shows that the language of civil society was able to inspire a movement that questioned the conservative control of the Islamic regime. Moreover, the research findings emphasise the significance of agency in social movements, as found in the role of public intellectuals in Iran and their power to extend the language and concept of civil society into public discourse. The next section of this conclusion will summarise the research findings as empirical and theoretical contributions, overall and by chapter; the third and fourth sections discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the research, respectively. The final section offers areas for further research.

7.2 Empirical and Theoretical Contributions

> Reform may be weak, but it will not be destroyed. Political literature in Iran has always belonged to reformists. People mistake elections with social movements. If this error is resolved, it is not accurate to say that reform is dead. (INT6)

This statement was made by a reformist intellectual during an interview in reference to the electoral loss of reformists in the 2005 presidential elections and was largely vindicated by the seminal events surrounding the summer 2009 elections. When I first began research for this thesis in the autumn of 2006, popular opinion considered reform a failed endeavour by former revolutionaries. Reformists' abstract discussions about civil society, rule of law and freedom of expression were deemed bankrupt in the face of a conservative powerbase entrenched in the state (i.e. the Supreme Leader and his office's subsidiary entities), reformists' inability to address popular needs of the citizens (for example, income inequality and autonomy from state control) and the incompetence of the reform movement to organise as a unified socio-political force. However, the issue I was concerned with was that the results of the reform movement were more complex and far-reaching. In large part, this issue played out in the 2009 elections where reformists mobilised large sections of the population with an organised and powerful platform, reminiscent of Khatami's elections. Once the contested election results declared Ahmadinejad the victor over two strong reformist challengers, Mir-Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karrubi, masses of people supporting the latter two candidates took to the streets in peaceful protest. Led by Moussavi and Karrubi, young and old supporters voiced their objections to conservative domination of the state and the way the election process was carried out. As these events post-dated fieldwork and the main research period, they are addressed in a separate epilogue following this chapter.

Research for this thesis began by asking: Does civil society promotion (i.e. discourse and action endorsing the language and concept of civil society as a public good) by public intellectuals (i.e. elite voices) contribute to social and political change in non-liberal states? In other words, does it make sense from a practical point of view, and from the viewpoint of external agencies or governments, to prioritise civil society capacity building and development programmes as a way to create changes in states

where liberal democratic values are not the norm? Specifically, the question asked was: In the context of Iran, why and how was the language and concept of civil society used to enhance positions of power during the period of reform, circa 1997-2005, by political and social actors? Public intellectuals take centre stage in this thesis as they were significant actors of the reform movement, while so far little is known about their explicit role in the characterisation and implementation of civil society. What this thesis concludes is that even when civil society is used for narrow political purposes, the discourse and practices it engenders leave a legacy that endures beyond immediate power struggles. The objective has been to gain a better understanding of how civil society language and structures can be used to achieve a particular vision of society.

Three months of in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out in Tehran with high level reformist intellectuals, civil society activists and other individuals deemed relevant to the thesis. In the autumn of 2008, when I carried out fieldwork, the reform movement was largely deemed to have run its course. Individuals, who had once held high level government posts, been proactive writers and public speakers and looked upon as sources of inspiration for dramatic reform of the Iranian state and society, were now sitting on the side-lines. Those who had not fled the country or been barred from writing or engaging in politics held academic or research posts in universities and research centres where they were still strictly monitored. The political parties and organisations that were still operating saw little activity in their offices. When prompted about the upcoming presidential elections in a year's time, those who had once been the minds behind the reform movement expressed major doubts as to whether reformists would or could play a significant role. When I asked specifically whether they saw a case for the return of Mohammad Khatami, the former president who represented the movement for eight years, more than once I heard the expression '*boz del*', meaning 'coward' or 'weak-hearted', used. Those who used this term felt Khatami had not maintained his ground in promoting the reformist vision, a concept that was itself not well defined.

However, it is too crude and unrealistic to blame one person for the failure of the reform movement to maintain political power. Looking back at the viewpoints of the actors who played key roles during the eight years that comprised the height of

reform, it becomes apparent that the ideas that formed the reformist vision itself were ambiguous and under constant transition. A look at how the concept of civil society entered the political arena and was enacted provides an example of this. The data captured during this research was then analysed based on its bearing to the research questions. As raised in the introduction, politically loaded terms such as civil society do not only motivate but also have the potential to hinder the realisation of objectives aimed at liberalisation and democratic transition. If civil society is defined as associations and organisations outside the direct control of the state or market, then it has traditionally existed in non-Western contexts such as Iran. To use this definition, one would have to include traditional and conservative factions of society as well. However, this does not imply that all of these organizations meet the historical characterisation of civil society emerging in the West that associates it with ideas such as individualism, autonomy and liberal democracy. Civil society has broader implications, as it is more useful to think of as a space for challenging dominant ideas and practices, similar to Gramsci's notion of civil society as a space for hegemony and counter-hegemony to challenge one another. However, it is still unclear how to transform this notion of civil society into practice. The politics of civil society are much more complex than implied by organisational interpretations. In fact, non-liberal actors have come to use the tools of civil society (for example, organizational capacity building) while at the same time dismissing the liberal ideas of democracy and human rights associated with civil society language. This is in direct contrast to international and local actors and agencies that attempt to use civil society development as a means for fostering transition from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy.

During the 1990s, Iranian reformists targeted a particular segment of the population, namely the secular middle class and proponents of a pluralistic Islam, a segment of the population that had felt alienated by the ruling elite once power was consolidated in the hands of a conservative force after the 1979 Revolution. The height of reformist political control was during the Presidency of Mohammad Khatami from 1997-2005. Reformists used the concept of civil society, the language of which did not have a history in the country's discourse. However, the discourse and activity that took place during this time were not sufficient to change the country's power structure, which continues to be dominated by the Supreme Leader and his

conservative allies. Moreover, conservative factions of the state continue to have well-established links with a majority of the population as they have absorbed sectors that are generally the domain of civil society in non-theocratic systems of governance. Individuals from these sectors of society joined organisations such as the *Basij*, or became their patrons, such as those who were beneficiaries of payments made by Foundations. As a result, these semi-governmental organisations formed arms of the state which were able to counter actions by the emerging reformist civil society actors, in effect forming an alternative, illiberal civil society.

Chapter Two explored the theoretical concepts addressed in this thesis. The case was made that a majority of civil society literature focuses on an organisational perspective of civil society and fails to capture its other significant aspects, in particular those associated with social movements. Tarrow's theory of contentious politics and collective actions is introduced in this chapter, highlighting the significance of political opportunities. Chapter Three set the empirical stage of the thesis, explaining key elements of Iran's 20th century history as they relate to the role of public intellectuals and highlighted gaps in literature on the development of civil society during the period of reform. The main gap recognised is with regard to literature that takes a comprehensive approach to civil society, going beyond an organisational definition, and looks at how the concept and practices were adopted and adapted by different groups of individuals, highlighting the role of agency, during the period of reform.

Chapter Four, one of three substantive chapters, explored the reasoning behind reformist public intellectuals' use of civil society language as part of a broader reformist political vision. Facets of social movement theories, in particular the concept of framing, were used to better understand how reformist public intellectuals incorporated 'civil society' as part of the reform movement. Agency and the role of positioned individuals in affecting change takes centre stage in this chapter. The main finding was that figures of the reform movement, specifically the intellectuals who developed the movement's platform, chose the concept of civil society as a way to disable the monopolisation of power by a select group within the Islamic regime. Ultimately, it was the opening up of the public sphere that took place with Khatami's election that emboldened the reform movement and made the call for civil society to

gather momentum. From the perspective of intellectuals, civil society and political society became intertwined, an issue that permeated groups such as students. However, the ideas they associated with civil society were too abstract to operationalize effectively and communicate with a wider section of the population. Moreover, alongside the political opportunities afforded reformists there coincided a set of political constraints entrenched in the conservative basis of the Islamic regime. These constraints were also instrumental in thwarting reformist efforts for political dominance. A point of significance is that the idea of 'Islam' was of little consequence in interviews with public intellectuals. In fact, what was regularly cited is that the idea of civil society these intellectuals were discussing had little relevance to Islam or the "city of the prophet", as used in Khatami's rhetoric.

Chapter Five studied another set of actors entitled 'practitioners' of civil society, who were in effect the consumers of the civil society language touted by reformist intellectuals[63]. To facilitate data collection and analysis within the confines of this research, focus was placed on student activists and women's rights actors in addition to several leading figures in the NGO community and beyond. Individuals from these groups represented those who were most associated with the reform movement. The impact of reformist intellectuals' ideas on Khatami's presidency was the creation of political opportunities, which civil society actors discussed in this research, used to their advantage. The idea of civil society mobilised individuals and groups en masse. The experiences gained by civil society actors during the period of reform generated an assertive group of individuals more willing to engage with and defy limitations imposed by the state. However, civil society, as presented by reformists, remained an elusive concept. Moreover, when it came to practice, in addition to political opportunities afforded by the Khatami administration, the conservative factions of the state created almost as many structural constraints. Civil society actors had to navigate in this fluctuating intersection of political opportunities and constraints.

[63] Of course, reformist intellectuals can also be considered civil society actors. However, what separates them from the actors discussed in Chapter Five is that these agents are engaged in activities that support a particular collective (for example, women or students) rather than seeking general political change or power.

Finally, Chapter Six examined the conservative take on civil society, to show the way in which a concept with liberal, or at the very least seemingly benign, connotations can be appropriated and used by forces couched in different values. Two main issues emerged in this chapter: first, conservatives have appropriated the organisational components of civil society and embedded them within the state through direct control and funding. An interesting observation here is that when reformists supported civil society, they too provided funding for organisations, an act that could have, in effect, reduced the new organisations into semi-state agencies akin to those under conservative control. The second case made in Chapter Six is that conservatives are far from homogenous as a group. Though pragmatic conservatives may disapprove of reformist actions or their use of the term civil society, they are more amenable to other changes related to liberal thought, for example supporting critical analysis by intellectuals and restructuring the education system.

7.3 Implications for Theory

The value of civil society is in providing a framework for analysing and building broad-based social movements that emphasize pluralism and liberty at their core. The efforts in the 1990s and 2000s to strengthen civil society can still prove useful if they are preserved in the long term. Furthermore, language and theory are a necessary part of any society. Though turning theory into practice is difficult, efforts to do so are a significant starting point. The language of civil society introduced by Iranian reformist public intellectuals who had close ties to the 1979 Revolution and the state played a significant role in initiating a movement for change in Iran. This movement has had a lasting impact as witnessed in the activity that surrounded the 2009 elections.

The thesis case-study sheds light on the importance of studying agency and the particular role of public intellectuals in socio-political development. Current literature on this issue is inadequate in addressing the versatile and cross-boundary roles of actors. More research is needed on the role of agency. For example, David Lewis's recent work analysing life histories of public and nongovernmental sector workers in Bangladesh shows how the boundary between governmental and

nongovernmental activity is ambiguous, constructed and maintained (2011, p. 2). The boundaries between positions in different sectors are ambiguous, with individuals holding multiple identities and crossing over roles. Looking at individuals as agents of social change, rather than occupants of particular roles within a given structure, adds weight to the influence of individual actors. In the case of Iran, we see how public intellectuals, who held different roles inside and outside of government, were influential in shaping the political and civil society sectors. On the whole, there exists the need for an approach to civil society that focuses on public intellectuals and how their ideas frame the way civil society is located in politics and wider society. This approach would allow for a better understanding of the political dynamics of civil society.

7.4 Implications for Practice

In the past two decades, civil society as a social concept has lost some of its value as an analytic and policy making tool or even as an emancipatory idea. The bureaucracy of funding and interaction between donor agencies and recipients has led to practices that favour certain structures and projects. As a result, many organic movements have been lost in the fray. There is a clear need to move beyond standard views of civil society and recognise the power of ideas by donors, civil society actors and political figures. In the case of Iran, where international donor agencies were not a significant factor, reformist intellectuals used the concept for the sake of political reform. Here we see the role of public intellectuals introducing a theoretical concept to the public domain. Political stakeholders, whether domestic or international, should re-examine their perspective on civil society, particularly in newly established Arab regimes. Simplified assumptions about the power of support for civil society bringing about pluralistic, secular societies need to be re-evaluated.

With regard to Iran, advocates of civil society need to be much more vigilant in the types of activities they support and realise that general support for standard community NGOs does not necessarily lead to democratization or liberalization of societies. This is particularly important as international actors are increasingly cognisant of the domestic situation in Iran and consider ways to circumvent state powers. Civil society actors themselves need to be more aware of how their

activities and organisations can be framed and used as part of a political agenda, calling for greater self-reflection on their part. This is similar to the inadequately contextualised "…use of blueprints for strengthening civil society…" referred to by Howell and Lind in the case of Afghanistan, whereby the international aid giving programmes have provided large sums of money to promote a liberal vision of civil society (2009b, pp. 727-728). In turn, the use of this funding by local civil society actors and organisations has "…undermined the legitimacy of civil society…" by having them appear as agents of the state or donor body (Howell & Lind, 2009b, p. 732). Whether by international or domestic actors, the language and concept of civil society can be used to manoeuvre activity in social and political spaces. Civil society actors need to realise that they are stakeholders in a political space, of which civil society is a part. On the whole, more emphasis must be placed on the diverse and dynamic nature of the language and concept of civil society.

7.5 Future Work

As mentioned in Chapter One, one of the limitations of this research has been its focus on individuals living in the capital city of Tehran, leaving out voices of those based in other major cities and regions. There is space for future work to examine the role of individuals (reformist political figures, public intellectuals, students, women's rights activists, journalists, conservatives, etc.) living and working outside of Tehran. A comparative view can be taken between the centre (Tehran) and periphery (other cities) as well as between regions, which are the bases for a variety of ethnicities, cultures and economies.

Another area of future research is the topic of 'elite bias'. On the whole, this thesis focused on the role and beliefs of elites in Iranian society, namely public intellectuals and leading figures of civil society. Individuals not included in this research are, for example, less well-known civil society actors (for example, NGO practitioners from smaller organisations) or intellectual figures and politicians who were not part of Khatami's inner circle, both inside and outside of Tehran. Looking to non-elite actors will contribute to a deeper understanding of the frame construction process. "In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of various frame construction, frame alignment, and frame resonance processes discussed above, we

need to design more studies which include the interactions, understandings, talk and the like of non-elites as well as of elites" (Benford, 1997, p. 421). The new data can then be compared with the analysis done for this thesis in order to better understand the interaction between the two. In particular, further research can help determine if there are differences in the impact of reformists on leaders in the civil society sector versus those who do not have as far-reaching a voice.

The role of new media, including the effect of modern information and communication technologies, is another area that can be explored. The number of internet users rose exponentially during Khatami's presidency, with figures estimated at: 2,000 in 1996, 22,000 in 1998, 130,000 in 2000 and 1.3 million in 2002 (Ehteshami & Zweiri, 2007, p. 12). The internet became the home of bloggers and websites of underground organisations, potentially providing a platform to balance the reach of non-elites versus the elite. However, the Internet can also be, and indeed has been, used as a tool for conservative voices. Moreover, the state has ultimate control over the physical infrastructure of the technology, although it is much easier to circumvent these controls than previously possible with traditional media. A constant battle is in place between the state's forces placing restrictions on the internet through bandwidth limitations and filters to block websites and users employing a variety of methods to overcome those restrictions, for example by employing proxy servers and VPNs (Virtual Private Networks). Thus far, some work has been carried out on the content of Iran's online spaces (for example Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010). There is an opening for in-depth research on the use of new technologies by reformist intellectuals and the role of changing communication platforms in affecting public opinion.

Another area that can be further developed is that of civil society's role in Iran's social and political development since the controversial 2009 elections. The empirical evidence for this thesis was obtained before the disputed elections. Since the elections, reformists have come under increasing pressure by conservative factions who accuse them of plotting a velvet revolution. Future research can focus on how the language and practice of civil society has been employed by reformists since that time in order to determine if any dramatic changes or developments have occurred.

Finally, there is room for a comparative study between case of Iran and both Islamic and non-Islamic countries undergoing political transition, including regime change. Although some thought on this topic was given throughout research for this thesis, it is beyond its scope to conduct in-depth analysis. While Iran is unique in certain respects, the findings from this research show that it offers a valuable perspective from which to examine the role of public intellectuals and civil society in other nations; a comparative study can confirm and expand on this angle. With regard to the role of Islam, it was observed in this thesis that the particularities of religion were less significant than the role of agency and power. This point was substantiated in Chapters Four and Six, where Islam was a tangential issue for both reformist and conservative public intellectuals. Religion was brought in by political actors to make justifications for their ideas at certain times, but power politics, on the whole, remained dominant in discourse. This point can be verified by a study of other countries where Islam is a central component of politics, for example, contemporary Iraq. These studies can counter arguments of Islamic exceptionalism[64], which maintain that Muslim societies, due to the inherent nature of Islam, need to be viewed based on different standards than their non-Muslim counterparts.

Subsequently, a comparison with countries undergoing economic, social and political development in other parts of the world can provide additional evidence of how the language and concept of civil society can be appropriated by different sectors of society to enhance positions of power, regardless of religious or political basis. As a closed system of government, referring to restrictions by the state and limited formal intervention by the outside (such as foreign aid), Iran's case can be compared with the growth of civil society and the role of public intellectuals in countries such as Cuba or China. This can then be contrasted with cases in which direct foreign aid for civil society has been a critical element, such as in Eastern Europe. These studies will show how civil society is translated and transformed at the local level and the role played by different stakeholders.

[64] Claims of Islamic exceptionalism can be linked back to thinkers such as Ernest Gellner, discussed earlier in this thesis.

Epilogue

In autumn 2008, when I conducted fieldwork, the response to questions about the role of reformists in the next presidential elections, to be held in June 2009, were dominated by scepticism or resigned failure. Khatami was widely seen as a spent force. However, by late 2008, reformists gained a surprising momentum. There was in fact an entire campaign run by young reformists entitled *Mowj-e Sevom* (Third Wave) aimed at inviting Khatami to run for a third term as president in late Autumn and Winter 2008. Initially, this momentum was marred by tentative and shifting stances by reformists, such as Khatami's vacillation over running. Khatami had originally said he would not stand for election if Mir Hossein Mousavi, a former Prime Minister, was to run, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty in the reformist camp. In February 2009, Khatami announced that he would run. However, a little over a month later, Khatami withdrew his candidacy in favour of Mousavi who had declared his candidacy earlier in March 2009. Many of the young individuals involved in campaigning for reformists were student activists during the reform movement or children of reformist actors. While reformists might not have used the slogan of civil society, the spirit of the campaign was clearly one of reform. Karrubi ran under a banner of "change", while Mousavi's campaign slogan was for "a progressive Iran with law, justice and freedom". Despite the drama that unfolded in the upper echelons of the political sphere (e.g. the disorder over who would represent reformists), what is of relevance to this thesis is the action at the lower levels, including those by social and political campaigners and the wider public, because that is what shows the development and resilience of civil society. The final race was between four candidates: conservatives Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mohsen Rezai and reformists Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karrubi.

A comprehensive study of the 2009 elections was beyond the scope of this thesis. However, an overview and analysis is provided as it supports the finding of Iranian civil society's strength and fervour following the reform movement. In order to provide meaningful consideration concisely, several key issues have been selected for their relevance and significance to the development of Iranian civil society.

Between Mousavi and Karrubi, the latter's position was the more liberal amongst reformists as he held a tougher stance for change in Iranian society, such as greater rights for women. Karrubi was also the only candidate affiliated with a political party, namely the National Trust Party, that included its own newspaper and membership list (Ansari, 2010, p. 32). However, Mousavi was the figure who emerged as the stronger contender. Although attempting to originally appeal to both Reformists and Principlists, Mousavi ultimately went toward a reformist agenda; "Seasoned observers recognized that his political managers were drawn almost entirely from the Islamic Iran Participation Front (the main Reformist Party) and from the Servants of Construction, the centrist group of technocrats who were supportive of Rafsanjani" (Ansari, 2010, p. 33). One of his key strengths was his wife, Zahra Rahnavard, a former university chancellor, who campaigned alongside him; images of him with his wife by his side were commonplace. It was rare to see a woman so directly involved in her husband's campaign. She also made bold claims regarding the benefits for women if her husband were to be elected (for example of her comments at a press conference, see Fletcher, 2009). She represented a more modern approach to marriage – that of partnership. This is a prime example of how the role of women, as social agents, has risen to the forefront of politics. The colour green, representative of Islam alongside other possible connotations, was adopted as Mousavi's campaign colour. Green wristbands and women wearing green headscarves began appearing everywhere. In the month leading up to the election, Mousavi's campaign gained momentum, with large crowds, consisting of young and old, religious and secular, wealthy and poor, gathering for rallies across the country, especially Tehran. These actions by people from across the social, economic and religious spectrum was reminiscent of Khatami's presidential campaign. People's actions may have even been emboldened by experiences of the reform movement. Mousavi's campaign was also pushed along with publications, such as the newspaper *Kalameh Sabz (The Green Word*), and websites, including *Kalameh.* As in the past, publications continued to play an important role in promoting the reformist viewpoint.

Television debates

One of the key elements of the election campaign was the televised debased between the presidential candidates. These were one-on-one debates, each lasting 90 minutes, between the four rivals and aired on national television. The establishment of such live debates marks an opening for civil society, which had an opportunity to witness candidates in a new light. Though moderated and not open for meaningful public participation, the debates allowed candidates the opportunity to present their views and challenge one another, in a manner more becoming of a fully democratic regime. In the debate between Mousavi and Ahmadinejad, Mousavi "…accused [Ahmadinejad] of undermining the nation's interests by constantly questioning the Holocaust and by engaging in an adventurist foreign policy" and went so far as so accuse him of moving toward turning the country into a dictatorship (Fathi, 2009). Mousavi's bold claims are notable given the public backing Ahmadinejad received from the Supreme Leader. Khamenei criticised Mousavi's claims against Ahmadinejad's foreign policy but also, surprisingly, admonished Ahmadinejad for asserting corruption charges against his critics during the debate with Mousavi; Khamenei stated, "One doesn't like to see a nominee, for the sake of proving himself, seeking to negate somebody else" (Tait, 2009). The national broadcaster also stated that those whom Ahmadinejad accused of fraud will have an opportunity to defend themselves ("Iran's national broadcaster to grant airtime to accused officials," 2009). Although it is doubtful that such action actually took place given the election outcome, the fact that it was suggested represents a seemingly inclusive public media.

The debates were not limited to pitting reformists against conservatives. In the debate between Ahmadinejad and Rezai, Rezai criticised Ahmadinejad's record on the economy and his failure to engage with the expert opinions of the elite[65]. While the debate between these two candidates was less volatile, it still reflected a sense of competition. This sense of competition of opposing views can be considered a manifestation of the discourse espoused by reformists as part of a civil society. According to the head of the election desk of Iran's national broadcaster, Voice and

[65] Information obtained from transcript provided by Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Network 3, 8 June 2009 (as supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring).

Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran, approximately 50 million people watched the debate between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi[66]. If accurate, this represents a majority of the country and, if sustained across the different debates, shows a wide interest amongst the population. On the whole, the debates represent an opening up of dialogue, albeit not fully free.

Public participation

In addition to the debates, public rallies were a crucial feature of the campaigns. One potential concern in the months preceding the elections was that of low voter turnout. For those who had witnessed the rise and fall of the reform movement, culminating in Ahmadinejad's victory in the 2005 elections, the idea of bringing about change through the electoral process held little appeal. However, as campaigning gained momentum so did the spectre of wide citizen participation. It was here that we begin to see a public revival of civil society. Individuals and groups began participating in pre-election events and, finally, went out to vote on Election Day. Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari, a reformist intellectual, outlined why it would be a mistake to boycott elections with an article in the newspaper Etemad Melli, a paper affiliated with Mehdi Karrubi's political party. In the article, Eshkevari noted that while it was possible to be a reformist outside of the government, it was only once you were in government that you could be considered a reformer who could bring about change (Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari, 2009).[67] There was once more resurgence in the belief that reform has the potential to create change.

It is important to note here that campaigns for Mousavi (and to a lesser degree Karrubi) were both in support of these candidates themselves and to a possibly even larger degree a campaign against Ahmadinejad and conservative forces in the government. At the same time, this remained a vote for reform and not an overhaul of the Islamic Republic. As one editorial in the newspaper E'temad noted, individuals were encouraged to vote for the sake of the Revolution as it was

[66] *Jaam-e Jam Newspaper*, Tehran, 6 June 2009 (BBC Worldwide Monitoring).

[67] It should be noted that Eshkevari escaped from Iran in the aftermath of the elections in fear of persecution. He continues to speak for reform and democratisation, albeit from exile. The crackdown on intellectuals such as Eshkevari represents the current government's continued resistance to dialogue within civil society. However, this pressure does not mean that individuals have fully succumbed, as acts of defiance and opposition mentioned below indicate.

indicated the revolution belongs to the people (Golabi, 2009). This is similar to the support for Khatami in the early days of the reform movement—this belief, however, was challenged given the events that followed the election.

In the weeks and days leading up to the election, popular interest and support for Mousavi became clear. Public displays and rallies organised by Mousavi's supporters gained momentum. One of the most visually striking stories was that of the human chain formed by Mousavi supporters that purportedly covered the 15-mile length of a major Tehran street (Black, 2009). These organic, non-violent movements can also be attributed to the growth of civil society as intended by reformists. In contrast, Ahmadinejad's rallies depended on the bussing in of supporters whom they gave goods such as bottled water (Black, 2009). According to researchers and the media, one significant component of the pre-election period (and post-election protests) was the use of the internet, namely social media, and mobiles. In fact, SMS (Short Message Service), or mobile phone text messaging, played an essential role. Text message campaigns were used by both pro and anti Ahmadinehjad campaigns. Examples include: "If you plan not to vote, just think about June 13 when you hear Ahmadinejad has been re-elected" and, conversely, "Vote for our brave President Ahmadinejad to help build a stronger Iran" (Hafezi, 2009). Another reformist text campaign conveyed the message that four years earlier many reformists boycotted and allowed Ahmadinejad to win, therefore this time by voting he can be defeated (Dareini & Murphy, 2009). Mobile phone communication, and text messaging in particular, has played a more substantial role than the internet in the coordination of the opposition (Ansari, 2010, p. 9).

Women played a key role during and after the 2009 presidential elections (see for example: Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010; Tohidi, 2009). As mentioned before, Mousavi's wife was a key player in her husband's campaign, as were countless others, both religious and secular. Dr Rahnavard, an artist and academic, was vital to pro-Mousavi rallies, where she would challenge the status-quo, asking questions such as, "Why are there no women presidential candidates or cabinet ministers?" and "Why are students jailed for speaking their minds?" (Sengupta, 2009). The strong role played by women is also both reminiscent and a continuation of what was seen during the reform period, as explained in the thesis.

Therefore, it was a shock to many that within hours of polls closing, Ahmadinejad was declared victor by a wide margin of the vote. While some maintain that the vote results are valid, analysis suggests otherwise. Irregularities in the final vote tally include provinces showing a higher than 100% voter turnout, which cannot be accounted for by the claim that some individuals vote outside their home district and a new loss of regional variation (Ansari, Berman, & Rintoul, 2009). Moreover, while it may have been "…conceivable for Ahmadinejad to have won the election outright, the subsequent mishandling of the election and the desperate attempts by the authorities to explain what had happened only added to the perception that the election was fraudulent" (Abootalebi, 2009, p. 8). One particular form of control by the state was the banning of public gatherings. For example, a ban was placed on the gathering of political groups and candidate supporters until after the announcement of the election results and the need for a government authorisation for gatherings after that time ("Political gatherings banned before Iran election results are announced ", 2009). The Green Movement (*jonbesh-e sabz*), also called the Green Wave (*mowj-e sabz*), emerged as a social and political movement that denounced the election results. The movement consists "…of a number of different civil society movements, including the women's movements, the largely but not entirely repressed labor movement, student movements, insistent journalism and blogging and Internet activism" (Fischer, 2010, p. 513). Mousavi and Karroubi serve as its public faces. As indicated in analysis, the crisis following the June 2009 election, "…was not principally about the election, but rather that the election was part of a far deeper malaise in the structure and ideology of the Islamic Republic" (Ansari, 2010, p. x).

Of course, there are writers, from the pro-regime, conservative camp, who deny the existence of vote rigging and claim the post-election crisis has occurred as a result of factors such as political obstinacy by Mousavi, who failed to accept defeat, and Western support (Ismaili, 2010). One such thinker claims that change in Iranian society requires the leadership of clerics over that of lay intellectuals; rather than working with clerics to eliminate despotism, intellectuals use incorrect teachings from abroad to pursue their goals (Ismaili, 2010, pp. 245-246). It is from this stream of thought that claims emerged of the post-election crisis representing a velvet revolution instigated by the West. Based on these claims, individuals affiliated with

the reform movement and those who participated in protests were detained, arrested and put on trial.

Post-election crisis protests

In the aftermath of the elections, individuals from across the political and socio-economic spectrum participated in various forms of protests. Ultimately, the protests and protesters were silenced by state power, either through mass arrests or through displays of force. The following section will describe several forms of protest by citizens, originally in objection to the outcome of the elections but ultimately as a broader criticism against the government. Although these protests were eventually crushed by the state, their existence and intent are representative of the strength and continuity of civil society's power. They represent the creativity of civil society actors in showing their views as well as their ability to organise. Ultimately, however, civil society action results in gradual change and chipping away of power as it does not have use of state resources and access to (or desire for) the means of violence.

Members of the Mousavi and Karrubi campaigns continued to voice criticism against the outcome of the elections through their writings, whether in print or online. Protests were called for in which thousands of people participated despite the fact that government permits were not granted for these rallies, even though they should have been constitutionally guaranteed. Green continued to be used as the colour of the protestors and pro-reformists, "A key strategy of the reform and protest movement in 2009 was to deny the state the control of Islamic terms and symbols, and to reappropriate them for Muslims of all ideologies" (Fischer, 2010, p. 519). Protest action led to the arrest of both protest participants and organisers. The most public arrests were of the intellectuals and leaders of the Mousavi and Karrubi camps. Many of these individuals appeared in court together, gaunt and dressed in prison uniforms. The arrests and mass public trials allude to the role of intellectuals in creating and promoting ideas of civil society, as discussed in the thesis, and as a cause of fear for the ruling elite. Some of the intellectuals and activists arrested confessed on television to accusations of having taken part in a reformist conspiracy; many received harsh sentences. Although Mousavi declared that he would challenge

the election results through the legal system, potential legal avenues were closed by the government and resulted in further public demonstrations (Abootalebi, 2009, p. 10).

Other tactics of defiance against the state were also used by the general population, including the shouting of slogans from rooftops at night. One of the main slogans was *Allahu Akbar* (God is great), which was a slogan used during the 1979 revolution, and now used against the government; these protests faded away after state forces, including the Basij, began marking buildings from which chants were coming from at night in order to make arrests the following day ("How Iran's opposition inverts old slogans ", 2009). Other less blatant measures were taken. For example, anti-regime slogans were written onto currency (Fischer, 2010, p. 520) and impromptu shouts in support of Mousavi could (and can still) be heard in certain gatherings. In a sense, although civil society still attempts to promote different views, its power can be limited by a state that resists an opposition.

Conclusion

While Ahmadinejad carried on as president and the public protests gradually subsided, what can be deduced from the elections and its aftermath is the strength and vitality of the public sphere. A strong public sphere may not necessarily have the ability to take down or manifestly transform a political system, which is not ultimately the aim of the protests. The reason for civil society's limitation is mainly due to the state's control over the means of violence, modes of communication and financial institutions; these were the same limitations targeted by reformist intellectuals who touted the concept of civil society. However, despite the stifling situation, the public sphere can gradually peel away at the state's legitimacy and provide reason to doubt its durability. The aftermath of the 2009 elections was evidence of this, further supporting the notion of civil society as a dynamic construct with blurred boundaries between civil society, political society and the state. The diversity of the individuals involved in the 2009 elections supports the thesis's assertion that civil society should not be looked at as simply a static group of organisations.

Mousavi and Karrubi are still confined by the state and may no longer represent the injustices of the Islamic Republic on a daily basis. Nonetheless, they have not been completely forgotten. More importantly, the ideas of reform, many of which emerged in the 1990s, have become embedded in such a way that they may be able to spread through civil society without the need for a dominant leader, with less prominent individuals serving as agents of change. It will be significant to watch how the 2013 presidential elections unfold, with noteworthy factors including: the candidates, i.e. who chooses to run and who is allowed, and the public's reaction, i.e. the numbers who turn out to vote. Ultimately, this will be another test of the Islamic Republic's legitimacy in the public eye. According to Mehran Kamrava, the growing rift between society and the state is an outcome of the 2009 elections, and, though, it may not destabilise the state's ability to govern it is also not helpful (Kamrava, 2010, p. 401). While legitimacy may not be the final deciding factor in the immediate survival of a non-democratic regime, it remains influential in deciding its duration and future action. The 2009 elections are a manifestation of civil society as a process that is in a continuous state of development, fitting with the assertion that a more inclusive and integrated approach is needed regarding civil society study and practice. The question, however, remains as to how the ideological trajectory of reform will develop and what role civil society's various parts will play in bringing change to Iran. Moreover, it will be significant to see if and how public intellectuals influence this process, particularly as many key figures are now in exile.

Appendix 1: Interview List

Reformist Public Intellectuals

Code	Occupation/Affiliation	Gender
INT1	Government spokesperson for Khatami administration; academic (social science)	M
INT2	Khatami advisor, leading thinker of the reform movement, researcher and academic (social science)	M
INT3	Female intellectual who held posts in the Ministry of Interior during Khatami's presidency and was a strong advocate for nongovernmental organisations	M
INT4	Reformist public intellectual; academic (sociology); holds strong revolutionary credentials	M
INT5	Female academic (international relations) and former member of the parliament during the Khatami presidency	F
INT6	Key leader of the reform movement who has held posts in the government from the early days of the revolution but gained prominence in the Khatami administration; principal figure in one of the main reformist political parties and has provided strategic guidance for the movement	M
INT7	One of the most prominent of the interviewees, he has been considered one of the founding fathers of the reform movement; an influential thinker, strategist and public figure of the reform movement who was also an elected local official for a period during Khatami's presidency	M
INT8	Female member of Khatami's cabinet, active in the field of women's rights for over twenty-five years	F
INT9	Prominent cleric who has publicly challenged the direction of the Islamic Republic; imprisoned for his work	M
INT10	Leading reformist intellectual and Khatami advisor; academic (social science)	M
INT11	Academic: Professor (social science); strong ties to leading reformist figures; pragmatist	M

Other Reformist Figures

R1	Ministry of Interior employee for department of social welfare, civil society activity and city councils; Former deputy to minister in Khatami cabinet and leading figure in planning of World Bank projects and implementation of city councils	M
R2	Government employee and NGO activist in women's rights; trained NGO leaders	F
R3	Khatami advisor/head of women's section of reformist political party/NGO activist for women's rights	F
R4	Head of youth section of reformist political party; student activist	M

Students

S1	NGO activist working for a women's rights campaign; also a student activist during the reform period	M
S2	Student activist and key leader in Islamic Student Association	M
S3	Student activist (later years of Khatami administration and after)	M
S4	Leading activist from Tehran University's Islamic Student Association; currently a PhD candidate in the social sciences	F
S5	Student activist	M
S6	Student activist	M
S8	Head of youth section of political faction that broke away from state ideology before reform movement came to prominence; faction came to be affiliated with reform movement; student activist	M
S9	Student: an undergraduate student in the social sciences during the reform period, studying international relations	F

Women's Rights Activists

W1	Leading women's rights activist; imprisoned on numerous occasions	F
W2	Civil society activist in the field of women's rights; academic (sociologist)	F
W3	Civil society activist in women's rights; academic (sociologist); leading figure in sociology association	F

Civil Society/Civil Society Organisation Actors

CS1	NGO activist: has worked with a number of NGOs since the 1980s to present day in the field of poverty alleviation and environmental protection; his work has extended across the country; he has been an active member of several associations and organizations promoting collaboration and advocacy for NGO activity	M
CS2	Head of a large NGO working on issues related to education; academic (physical sciences)	M
CS3	Civil society activist with special focus on development of the private sector; active in social development through civil society activities	M
CS4	Civil society activist; film director; developed films about NGOs	F
CS5	Civil Society activist (participated in development projects with international organisations and local entities); journalist	M
CS6	Academic (social science); expert on and active in the field of development	M
CS7	UN staff member involved in civil society/NGO programmes	M

Journalists affiliated with the reform movement

J1	Journalist for a major Tehran-based newspaper run by the mayor's office	M
J2	Journalist for a major Tehran-based newspaper run by the mayor's office; conservative leanings	M
J5	Journalist for a major Tehran-based newspaper run by the mayor's office; during the period of reform he also hosted a television programme, interviewing citizens on the street regarding their opinions on various social topics	M
J6	Journalist at reformist newspaper	M
J7	Journalist at reformist newspaper	M
J8	Editor of reformist newspaper	M
J9	Board member of Association of Newspapers	F

Conservative Public Intellectuals

C1	Academic; government post as head of a public research institute for the social sciences	M
C2	Academic; editor of leading conservative daily newspaper	M
C3	Academic; Strong ties to the revolution	M

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