State-University Power Struggle at Times of Revolution and War in Iran

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Universities in Iran are part of the state structure. They are founded, financed, and governed by the state, although state-controlled private institutions have emerged in recent years. At the same time, the university has been a major center of opposition and revolt against the state. Students are a main force challenging the state. More than half a century of unceasing student struggles for democracy and freedom in Iran has been to some extent documented. Throughout this bloody struggle, the objectives and scope of the student opposition to the state have changed. While the student movement was reformist (demanding the constitutionalization of the monarchy) until the mid-1960s, beginning in the early 1970s, and especially during the revolutionary crisis of 1977–1979, students campaigned for the overthrow of the monarchy.

Today, 25 years later, students are calling for a referendum to separate state and religion and, thus, to bring an end to the reign of Islamic theocracy. This power struggle has taken place in the context of two wars: first, an internal ideological and political battle over the rule of Islam versus the rule of secularism and democracy. This struggle was, in the realm of education, known as the "Islamic Cultural Revolution" (1980–1987), which aimed at fusing religion and education by Islamizing all aspects of education from teacher-student relations to textbooks, curricular and administration. Second, there was an external war—the invasion of the country by Iraq, which had been supported by the United States (1980–1988).

Iranian students, both in Iran and abroad, played a prominent role in the overthrow of the monarchy. However, while Khomeini emerged as the leader of this revolution and became the architect of the Islamic theocracy, the campuses remained in the control of radical and leftist students and faculty. They closed down the headquarters of the secret police from the campuses and abolished the surveillance system the shah had installed at all universities. Leftist students and faculty, most of them secular, by then were in control of the campuses. Radical students and faculty claimed both legitimacy and the right to run the institutions. This legitimacy had been won through decades of unceasing struggle under the most difficult conditions; the universities are known in Iran as *sangar-e azadi* (bastion of freedom).

The Khomeini Era

Khomeini, despite his popular base and a history of opposition to the shah, was far from being a historical match for the students. The universities, rather than the seminaries, were seen as the 'bastion of freedom.' As a result, the new regime was initially very cautious in its attempt to control the campuses. While the government was increasingly using its administrative power to rule over the campuses, students continued to resist. As a result, a situation of *dual power* emerged. Students were in control of the classroom, the physical space, and campus politics. The state was the owner and administrator at the top. The Islamic regime did not tolerate this state of dual power, although it was not yet in a position to use violence in order to conquer the campuses. One tactic was to subdue the most important institution, Tehran University, by conducting Friday prayers on its campus. In order to conduct this nationally televised event every week, students, faculty, and staff were forced off campus and security forces controlled the entire space on Thursdays and Fridays. However, even this abuse of state power could not bring the campus under full state control.

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By the end of 1979, Khomeini was growing impatient with the universities. In his New Year's message on March 21, 1980, he ordered an attack on the universities. On April 18, Khamene'i, in his Friday Prayer sermon, ordered a holy war (jihad) against the students. He accused the students of turning the campuses into "war rooms" against the Islamic state. After the prayers, armed gangs attacked three campuses. Within the next few days, the gangs wounded hundreds of students and killed at least 24. Students were driven off the campuses, and the government took over all the premises.

The assault on the universities was soon called the Islamic Cultural Revolution. Khomeini appointed a Cultural Revolution Council to lead the project of integrating the universities into the Islamic state. Campuses were closed down for two years, and all the students, faculty, and staff considered disloyal to the Islamic state were purged.

Islamization

The process of "Islamization" of higher education coincided with Iraq's invasion of Iran. What is unique, and peculiar, about higher education in Iran is the presence of two overlapping forces causing chaos, unrest, confusion, and turmoil. First, the process of Islamization under the rubric of Islamic Cultural Revolution (1980–1987) seized the public policy space. Second, the country was entering into a war for which neither country was prepared or had a reason to wage (1980–1988). In order to concentrate on the war, the Islamic state tightened its political grip internally. This included, among other things, unprecedented control over universities, the suppression of national minorities demanding autonomy, and more aggressive Islamization of gender relations. It should be emphasized that the changes that transformed the universities in Iran would have taken place even without the Iran-Iraq war; the war only speeded up the process, silenced opposition groups, and further legitimized state control. Therefore, in this context, the war and the Islamic Cultural Revolution should be considered as two sides of the same coin—both diverging sharply from the democratic path that universities and the society dreamed of following.

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One mechanism for controlling the campus was to readmit students after conducting a full check on their political loyalties. Government agents would go to the addresses where students had lived to find out whether they and their family members had attended the local mosque before the revolution. New students were admitted only if a "local investigation" could prove that they were loyal to Islam and the Islamic regime. While nonloyal students and faculty were purged, those who had defended the regime and volunteered for fighting in the war against Iraq were admitted through a system of quotas—including members of the armed forces, families of martyrs, and war veterans. This quota policy pursued two objectives: using the admission of applicants devoted to the Islamic regime to create a safe social base for the state within the unruly student body; and providing a very important material incentive to those who participated in a war that had become extremely unpopular.

The Islamic Cultural Revolution led to the silencing of the campuses. Students not affiliated with the government were no longer allowed to form any organizations, write slogans, post any writing anywhere, or distribute literature. Muslim student associations were given the mandate to spy on students and faculty. Academic freedom, which had been won through the struggle against the shah's regime, came to an abrupt end. Repression was so extensive that the student body for the first time since 1941 turned apolitical. By the end of the decade, however, the era of postwar "reconstruction" began with immense consequences for universities. In response to the growing social unrest, a devastated economy, and a ruined society, the state pursued a policy of "relaxation" and "reversal." In practice, on campuses this meant easing gender segregation and reopening most of the disciplines to women. Lack of financial and human resources forced the state to halt the gender segregation of university classrooms by using dividers or simply separating female/male students by a curtain. Some faculty members were invited back to resume their teaching, even if the state was in doubt concerning their loyalties to Islamic doctrine. Many purged students were also invited to apply so as to be considered for admission.

The policy of relaxation of the iron fist of the state did not extend to the governance of universities. The institutions had to be loyal to the state and its ideological and political line. The ideal Islamic university, as designed during the Islamic Cultural Revolution, should not aim at achieving autonomy from the state. Since the Islamic theocracy aims at the unity of state and religion, the education system should also combine knowledge and religion. This is expected in both state-run and the expanding private institutions of higher education. These tenets continue to shape the policy of the state, although there are differences between the two major factions—conservatives and reformists—that are contending for power on the campuses.

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A situation of relaxation prevails everywhere from the enforcement of women's dress codes, to censorship of the media, to limitations on foreign trade. In the case of the universities, state control is challenged by various forces, especially the faculty and the students, the latter being the main force in turning the campuses into the site of struggle against the state. It is also important to note that the conservatives have lost credibility and support everywhere. The population has been on the

offensive since the late 1990s. This offensive mood manifests itself in everyday resistance in public spaces, where people openly challenge the values, symbols, language, and repressive organs of the theocratic state. Thus, much like the situation in the monarchical regime, while the state is still in charge of the administration of public universities and while private institutions are administratively and politically loyal, the student body has seriously challenged the state, and some have called for the overthrow of the regime through a nationwide referendum. Under these conditions, while the political atmosphere of the campus has changed, faculty and students enjoy no academic freedom and there is a noticeable absence of university autonomy.

Student Reactions

Ironically, soon after the end of eight years of war with Iraq (1988), Islamist students began protesting the policies and practices of the government, its corruption and repression, and its inability to improve the economic conditions of the country. A decade later, these "unruly subjects" (i.e., students) began a major uprising, in July 1999, in response to a brutal midnight attack on a dormitory by security forces. The six-day protest shook the Islamic state, but was violently suppressed. On the fourth anniversary of this uprising (July 2003), the student movement was even more radical. Some of the slogans called for the overthrow of the Islamic theocracy. Now, 25 years after the revolution, the student movement is calling for separation of the state and religion. It aims to achieve this goal through a national referendum, which is expected to put an end to a quarter century of Islamic theocracy. ■

The Privatization of Kenyan Public Universities

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Research on private higher education, from studies by Daniel Levy onward, has analyzed private-sector challenges to public dominance in higher education. As the contemporary Kenyan case shows, however, we now also see public-sector challenges to recent private growth. Worldwide, one challenge lies in the public rules or regulations, such as accreditation. Another, the subject of this article, lies in the (partial) privatization of public universities.

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Kenyan private higher education has a longer history, compared to most of Africa, and antedates the public privatization movement. The private sector's accelerated expansion, rising status, and official recognition from the late 1980s led to concern and reaction from the public sector. Private universities in Kenya grew in number, going from 3 to 17 in just two decades. In comparison, there have been only 6 public universities during the four decades since independence. As elsewhere in Africa, private expansion sprang forth largely due to the public system's failure to meet the demand for higher education. Private higher education has registered steady increases in enrollment. Some universities—such as the United States International University (USIU), the largest of the privates—have waiting lists of applicants. Public universities responded to this development by mounting privately sponsored Module II programs. Such programs are increasingly common not only in Africa but also in Eastern Europe and other regions that have seen rapid emergence and growth of private higher education and now see public-sector reaction.

For one thing, tuition is as high in Kenya's Module II programs as in similar programs at Kenya's private universities (sometimes even higher because the publics have the advantage of more qualified staff, better facilities, and, crucially, name recognition). The public Module II programs include some fields only peripheral to the curriculum at private universities in Kenya (medicine, engineering) but that privates in some countries have been able to build up over time. The Module II programs include some that have been "safe havens" for privates (e.g., business). For instance, while total enrollments at the USIU (popular for its business courses) was 2,931 in 2002–2003, Module II business programs at the largest public institution, the University of Nairobi (UoN), alone enrolled 2,683 students. Overall, just over half of UoN's 27,839 students were enrolled in Module II programs. All its (1,220) nondegree (diploma) students were in Module II, and at the postgraduate level there were twice as many as in regular programs. Thus, in 2002–2003, the university raised U.S.$15,914,639 from these programs. This is