

Dodging Bullets: The Iranian Women Journalists Circumvent Censorship

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Abstract

Censorship as a single concept is a multifaceted phenomenon that has a multi-layered impact. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance became the official institution responsible for operationalizing the state's censorship policies. This thesis intends to study how the censorship policies of this Ministry during three consecutive government administrations (1989-2013) have impacted Iranian women journalists on both professional and personal levels. To answer the research question, this thesis applies Bourdieu's theory of practice which focuses on the field, habitus, and capital. To extract the censorship policies which were implemented by each administration, the researcher explored the Persian and English archival sources. Also, to elicit authentic narrations of the actual experiences of Iranian women journalists and their struggle against censorship, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven women who have been involved (in/directly) in journalism during the stated timeframe. The findings of this investigation highlight that regardless of the divergent political affiliations of each government, Iranian women journalists accommodated certain approaches to navigate safely within Iran's constrained press field and dodge the censorship. Although their practice of these methods has contributed to their agency and resiliency, the hegemonic presence of coercive forces from government bodies like the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has persuaded them to internalize self-censorship as a defense mechanism.

Key words: Censorship, Iranian women journalists, self-censorship, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance

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Notes on Persian Transliteration and Translations

I used the guideline of Encyclopedia *Iranica* for transliteration of the Persian terms and names.

For the names and expressions that are formally scripted, I have used the formal versions that are more common and/or used by the people themselves. For example, for *Kayhan* newspaper, I have used the same transliteration they use on their own website. Also, for proper names, I have used the same dictation that is used by the individuals themselves via their social media or on their official pages. For instance, instead of writing ‘Azra, I have used her own dictation of Azra.

All translations from Persian to English are my own.

List of Abbreviation and Acronyms

IJA	<i>Anjoman-e Şenfi-e Rūznāmeħ Negaran-e Iran</i>	Association of Iranian Journalists
DPA	<i>Mo'avenat-e Omore Maṭbo'ati,</i>	Deputy of the Press Affairs
EDC	<i>Majma'-e Taşkhīs-e Maslahat-e Nezām</i>	[The] Expediency Discernment Council
GC	<i>Şoray-e Negahban</i>	[The] Guardian Council
IRGC	<i>Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab- e Eslami</i>	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
MCIG	<i>Vezerat-e Farhang va Erşad- e Eslami</i>	Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance
MP	<i>Namayand-e Majles-e Şoray- e Eslami</i>	Member of Parliament
NSC	<i>Şoray-e 'Ali-e Amniat-e Meli</i>	National Security Council
PSB	<i>Heyat-e Nezārat bar Maṭboa't</i>	Press Supervisory Board
SCCR	<i>Shoraye A'ali-e Enghelab-e Farhangi</i>	Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution

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Introduction

“The Mouse Has a Right to Live.”

“How long do you intend to continue the game of cat and mouse?” asked Saeed Mortazavi, Tehran’s public prosecutor. “Until the cat recognizes the mouse’s right to live,” replied the journalist Māšaāllah Šamsova’eżin.¹ The game of cat and mouse is an apt metaphor to illustrate the complex interaction between Iranian journalists and Iran’s state authorities. This power struggle between two unequal forces includes the press and journalists on one side and the state and their censorship-wielding officials on the other. Although the field of journalism, ideally speaking, is synonymous with reporting the truth, being “people’s eyes and ears in their absence,”² disclosing secrets, and taking risks, the profession has additional challenges for Iranian women journalists. In the Iranian patriarchal context, gender inequality, sexual harassments,³ severe censorship, and constant self-censorship are examples of the daily challenges of Iranian women journalists. Yet, they still seem to create a balance between securing their jobs, reporting the truth, and protecting themselves within a country that is described as the world’s “biggest jail for women journalists.”⁴

Accordingly, this study is interested in two main points of inquiry: the first relates to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s (IRI) regulatory measures particularly throughout the *Vezarat-e Farhang va Eršad-e Eslami* (Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance or MCIG, hereafter)⁵ and the second pertains to how they have shaped and modified Iranian women journalists’ professional attitudes. In particular, I seek to understand the evolving context and status of Iranian women’s journalism after the revolution of 1979 and during three consecutive administrations from 1989-2013, asking the following question: “How have the censorship policies of Iran’s Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance from 1989 to 2013 impacted Iranian women journalists’ professional attitudes?” It is worth noting that “professional

¹ Gholam Khiabany, *Iranian Media: The Paradox of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 92.

² Maryam Kazemzadeh states “Journalist is the eyes and ears of people in their absence.” For more please see Appendix A.

³ One of the most recent examples happened in the case of Sepideh Qulian who was arrested in November 2018. She revealed that the ministry of intelligence’s interrogators accused her of being a disgrace to her family. They threatened her to use this accusation to aggravate her brother and convince him to behead her.

⁴ “*Iran Bozorgtrayn Zendan-e Zanan-e Rūznameh Negar Šod* [Iran Became The Biggest Prison Of Women Journalist],” Radiofarda, accessed August 27, 2019, <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/30131222.html>.

⁵ After the 1979 revolution, the Ministry of Information and Tourism was changed to the Ministry of National Guidance, two years later it became the Ministry of Islamic Guidance, and divisions of the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education were merged into the Ministry of Guidance. The title of the ministry was changed to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in 1987.

attitudes” is used as an umbrella term referring to a wide range of journalistic responsibilities such as “providing the public with verifiable information,” “covering sensitive issues,”⁶ and in short, passing on information to the public. Also, this study investigates which techniques have been utilized by women journalists to protect their profession and continue working in such a tense and precarious political climate. To answer these questions, I have studied the amalgamation of government regulatory measures extending from the offices of the MCIG during three consecutive administrations that include the governments of moderate Rafsanjani (1989-1997), reformist Khatami (1997-2004), and of fundamentalist Ahmadinejad (2004-2013).

It is remarkable that in countries like Iran where Islam forms the basis of their national constitution, the notion of guidance is embodied in the precepts of *al-amr be'l-ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-monkar* (ordering good and forbidding evil); consequently, all the governing tools such as rules and regulations, state agencies and the judiciary are established and act within this framework. Furthermore, to maintain their hegemony over the flow of information, the authorities regulate what Iranians read, view, and listen to online, in newspapers and journals, on the stage, at the cinema, and on their televisions.⁷ In this regard, the mission of certain state agencies such as MCIG is so significant that its minister needs to be approved by the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.⁸ It is also notable that such institutions are established to assess the compatibility of some materials under Islamic values; it is also their responsibility to produce certain censorship policies to formalize these understandings.⁹ Within such a framework, the MCIG enforces executive regulations to operationalize certain laws, such as the press law, which has been passed by Iran's Parliament (*Majles*).¹⁰

⁶ Magdalena Wojcieszak, Amy Brouillette, and Briar Smith, "Facing Boundaries, Finding Freedom: An In-Depth Report on Iranian Journalists Working in Iran," Center for Global Communication Studies (2013): 13, http://repository.upenn.edu/iranmediaprogram/8?utm_source=repository.upenn.edu%2Firanmediaprogram%2F8&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.

⁷ Some other responsibilities of the MCIG in the press field are planning, supporting, and determining the criteria for the establishment, dissolution, and development of the activities of non-governmental news agencies (papers based or electronically), regulating and monitoring them and also educating those who are active in journalistic context.

⁸ "Aya Entekāb-e Vazir-e Kešar Bedon-e Šalahdid-e Rahbar Šorat Migirad?[Is Interior Minister Selected Without Consultation With Leader?]," updated January 29, 2017, accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-features-40765016>.

⁹ Ahmad Karimi Hakak, "Censorship," in *Iranica* (December 15 1990). <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/censorship-sansur-in-persia>.

¹⁰ "Ayeen Nameh-e Ejray-e Ghanon-e Maṭbo'at [Bylaw to Enforce the Press law]," accessed May 26, 2019, <http://qavanin.ir/Law/TreeText/185528>.

In addition, MCIG is not only an executor of the laws and regulations, but it is also responsible for promoting specific “moral virtues,”¹¹ extracting Islamic and revolutionary values from a variety of sources. The Qur’an, the Holy Prophet’s *sunnah* (manners and behavior), and the political and intellectual thought of the Islamic Revolution’s founder are examples of such sources. The other duty of the MCIG is to promote and lead Iranian society towards cultural independence, “immunizing society against the influence of foreign culture.”¹² To operationalize these duties, the MCIG established some intra-ministerial organizations such as the Deputy of Press Affairs, which is responsible for supervising the press and distributing government financial aids to them. The main task of these organizations is to control the press and journalists, and their actions have led to the securitization of the press field, turning journalism into a dicey profession and field.

Significance of Study

Censorship is a ubiquitous phenomenon around the globe and is commonly practiced by organizations and powers that intend to obstruct the flow of information.¹³ Irrespective of their locations, censorship bodies have one thing in common: they apply political, economic, ideological, and social apparatuses to preserve their control over the flow of information. With this in mind, studying the complex and restrictive pressures that MCIG places on the press are useful in understanding the various techniques and methods that many Iranian women journalists have employed to improve and secure their agency in the press field.

This thesis hopes to contribute to the study of censorship policies in Iran and scholarship on Iranian women’s journalism. Due to the lack of information on censorship policies during Rafsanjani’s presidency, this study has used governmental sources, such as reports of the Office of Strategic Studies¹⁴, and secondary archive sources such as books and journal articles. Also, to compensate for the lack of academic research on Iranian women

¹¹ Jihad that is most frequently associated with war and armed struggle between Muslims and non-believers is an Arabic term that refers to almost any effort to make personal and social life conform to God’s guidance, such as the struggle against one’s evil inclinations, proselytizing, or efforts toward the moral betterment of the Muslim nation.

¹² "Duties and Policies," Ministry of Cultrue and Islamic Guidance, 2021, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.farhang.gov.ir/fa/intro/duty>.

¹³ For more on Censorship in other countries, see “Press Censorship in Turkey,” by Bilge Yesil, “China’s Unruly Journalist: How Committed Professionals are Changing the People’s Republic,” by Jonathan Hassid and “Self-Censorship among New Journalists in the Ethiopian State Media,” by Terje Skjerdal.

¹⁴ *Daftar-e Mojtale’at Va Barnamerizi Rahbordi-e Vezarat-e Farhang va Eršad-e Eslami* also known as *Daftar-e Mojtale’at e Rahbordi*, is a department in Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which consists of two sub-departments of "Deputy of planning" and "Deputy of Strategic Studies." This department is responsible for making policies regarding cultural affairs such as policies related to the press, books, cinema, theatre, and music. For more information please see" <https://motaleaat.farhang.gov.ir/fa/barnamerizi/sakhtar>."

journalists' professional attitudes or, to use Pierre Bourdieu's term "habitus,"¹⁵ I employed a comparative method to evaluate the differences and similarities between the habitus of Iranian women journalists and that of other reporters working in similarly restrained contexts around the globe, for instance in Tajikistan, China, Russia, Hong Kong, Turkey, and Kenya.¹⁶

Sources of this Study

To answer the question of how MCIG's censorship policies influence Iranian women journalists, I implemented two strategies. First, to investigate the coercive policies of MCIG, I chose a historical strategy that looked for background information on the history of censorship and of women journalists in the Iranian context. For example, to thoroughly study Rafsanjani's presidency and the press policies that his MCIG instigated, I employed a historical approach and cross-examined Persian-language and English-language sources on Iran's press law, governmental reports (such as official statistics from the Deputy of Strategic Studies),¹⁷ MCIG's bylaws, academic sources, and press articles. Secondly, I conducted semi-structured interviews from September 2019 to December 2020 to elicit authentic data regarding the circumvention strategies that are employed by certain well-known women journalists in Iran.

Limitation and Delimitation of the Study

Apart from the common challenges of snowball sampling found in any qualitative research and the existing risks of conducting academic research on such controversial topics within the Iranian context, this study was mainly challenged by an ongoing global pandemic that began in 2020. Intending to conduct fieldwork, I traveled to Iran. However, COVID-19 restrictions delayed nearly all my interviews and meetings. Some of the interviews for this project were thus completed using Skype on the advice of the Norwegian Center for Research Data (also known as NSD). I contend that regardless of the limitations and challenges, I was able to gain access to archive sources in Persian and to conduct interviews with my informants.

Additionally, as any other ethnographic study is a case study; the findings of this thesis project cannot be generalized for similar topics.

¹⁵ For an explanation on habitus, see "Theoretical Framework," of this study.

¹⁶ Banafsheh Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices" (Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, 2019), 84-88.

¹⁷ Behrooz Fathi, *Dastavardhay-e Farhangi-e Si Sal-e Jomhuri-e Eslami-e Iran* [The Cultural Achievements of Islamic Republic of Iran in Past Thirty Years (1979 – 2009)], 71-72 (Tehran: The Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The omnipresence of censorship made it the subject of many scholars' investigations. Michel Foucault's theory of "governmentality,"¹⁸ Louis Althusser's study of "Repressive and Ideological States Apparatuses,"¹⁹ Helen Freshwater's emphasis on the experience of "censored,"²⁰ and Pierre Bourdieu's "theory of practice"²¹ are effective and highly useful theoretical interventions that helped me to better examine censorship, its manifestations, tools, and effects in the contemporary Iranian context. For instance, Foucauldian governmentality that consists of sovereignty power, disciplinary power, and orchestrating the conduct of people to govern themselves are applicable in explaining the central or main political actors in IRI, where the *Velayat-e-Faqih* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists)²² and his alliance dictate regulations in Iranian politics and society.²³ Moreover, although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact associations that constitute the links to Iran's central powerbrokers, some of the ministers of MCIG are connected to this elite circle. Additionally, institutions such as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Press Supervisory Board (PSB) are considered to be disciplinary powers responsible for enforcing regulatory measures upon the press and journalists.

Based on Foucault's theory of governmentality, MCIG and the PSB are the central powers that use different tools to impose certain frameworks on the press that are particularly impactful for women journalists. Given that governmentality is the art of controlling oneself in the absence of central power;²⁴ it may explain the reason why women journalists restrain themselves in their profession and practice self-censorship.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault et al., *Security, territory, population : lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, Sécurité, territoire, population, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁹ Mathew Bunn, "Reimagining Repression: New Censorship theory and After," *History and Theory*, no. 54 (February 2015): 35.

²⁰ Helen Freshwater, "Toward Redefinition of Censorship," *Critical Studies* 22 (2003): 225.

²¹ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices " 45.

²² *Velayat-e-Faqih* or Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists was one of the theories in Shia faith which was developed by Ayatollah Khomeini. In this theory, all the political power is transferred to the Shia clergy that makes him the only decision-maker of the country and the most powerful person in the Iranian political context. This idea has been the foundation of the Iranian political system since 1979 Islamic revolution.

²³ In the Iranian socio political context the term "power brokers" refers to Ayatollah Khamenei and organizations such as military and security bodies like IRGC and/or Ministry of Intelligence, Judiciary, The Islamic Republic of Iran's Broadcasting (IRIB) and some other organizations that are working under his direct supervision. There is no clear evidence to specify the identity of the members of this group yet some experts such as Mehdi Khalaji believe that this group determines the macro and micro policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security, territory, population : lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, ed. Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, Sécurité, territoire, population, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

The question of how regulatory measures formed and shaped their resiliency and restructured their professional attitude can be best answered using Bourdieu's theory of practice that includes "habitus," "capital," and "field." It is noteworthy that although I am using some terms and concepts from other theorists, Bourdieu's theory of practice is the primary theory that I use to analyze the data of this study. In this regard, Bourdieu's conceptualization of the pre-constrained field²⁵ aptly describes the Iranian press context that has been already limited by the press law. I also integrate his theoretical concepts of "dominant" and "dominated" to configure and make sense of the interwoven dynamics of the main government and social actors in the Iranian press field.

Theoretical Concepts

According to Bourdieu, "Dominants are the social actors that try to make field function for their advantage, yet they must always cope with resistance, claims, and contentions of the dominated."²⁶ He adds that dominant and dominated are positioned in the field according to their capital, which Bourdieu equates with power.²⁷ He elucidates that "" Capital takes on different forms such as social, cultural, economic, symbolic, and editorial. Social capital, for instance, functions as a form of power that gives its possessors strength and chance to succeed in their practice."²⁸ It is noteworthy that the focus of this research will be mostly on studying and analyzing the political and economic capital of both dominant and dominated actors and forces in relation to the MCIG as the dominant player versus women journalists as the dominated group.

In this respect, I employed the concept of "structural position" to determine the "heteronomy" and "autonomy" of the press and journalists. Heteronomy is understood as the degree of in/dependency of the journalism field to the logic of a different field (e.g. political situation or economic resources).²⁹ The findings of this study show that nearly all Iranian papers are politically and economically heteronomous. Thus, the question remains as to how women journalists as "censored" actors have maintained their independence and survived within this heteronomous press field.

The People of the Pen

²⁵ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 42.

²⁶ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 42.

²⁷ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 56.

²⁸ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 56.

²⁹ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 55.

For many Iranian women journalists, being exposed to suppressive forces and being engaged in a constant struggle to bypass restrictive press policies has resulted in a certain “habitus,” which Bourdieu has defined as a “mental structure and system of perceptions that orient [actors’] actions and shapes series of attitudes that are known as practical anticipation or practical evaluation.” He adds that “habitus can be changed through new experiences or learning from the previous practices which enable them [actors] to read the future that fits them by looking at their past experiences.”³⁰ Similar to their Chinese or Russian counterparts, Iranian women journalists have employed certain survival strategies to withstand the external pressures that suppress them. Fieldwork data, historical sources, official statistics and data, and academic research help shed light into the context of their employment and more so, their changing habitus over different government administrations given the fact that from 1989 to 2013, the Iranian socio-political context witnessed the rise and fall of different political parties. Each of these parties had different cultural agendas that re-shaped Iranian women’s journalistic behavior.

Fieldwork Methodology

To answer the main question of this research I conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven women that worked in the press field during 1989-2013. In particular, my interviews centered on their experiences as journalists and attempted to understand how they responded to the state’s suppressive policies and what technique(s) they used to stay in this game of cat-and-mouse.

Conducting fieldwork is a challenging task, and, at first, finding suitable candidates for this research seemed to be a mission impossible. As mentioned earlier, this thesis focuses on the experiences of women journalists who worked between 1989- 2013. However, most of the candidates with whom I intended to interview had retired, been imprisoned, were banned from journalism, or had fled the country. Moreover, regarding their traumatic experiences due to being summoned by state security bodies or being imprisoned, the topic of this research – an investigation of MCIG censorship policies—made many interview candidates hesitant to participate in this study.

³⁰ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices ", 62.

Fortunately, the presence of legitimate gatekeepers³¹ made this research feasible. After I conducted the first interview with Jila Baniyaqoob, she as a key informant, introduced me to her other colleagues. Her personal connections and my affiliation with the University of Oslo helped me to build a stronger and in-depth connection with other participants. For instance, while I was in Tehran, I attended the book signing³² ceremony of Baniyaqoob where I met Faezeh Hashemi, Baniyaqoob's cellmate in Evin prison. My other key legitimate gatekeeper was my supervisor and professor Dr. Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi who introduced me to another journalist, Masoumeh Naseri. She also introduced me to her other colleagues and advised me to contact them on social media. As skeptical I was, I followed her instructions, and the snowball of interviewees expanded successfully.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shutdown of regular life in Tehran, my research was affected by "fuzzy events that impacted the process of the research."³³ I had to postpone other interviews and conduct them using Skype. I did the semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions which facilitated natural interactions between interviewees and the interviewer; and helped us to stay on topic while also enabling informants to talk freely about their experiences. In this way, the interviewees easily elaborated on the different types of censorship, the strategies they used to dodge censorship, and the way that this struggle transformed their carrier.

As a woman researcher, interviewing other women, I was aware of what Irving Seidman has described as a "false assumption of shared perspective,"³⁴ by shared perspective, he means identical features such as gender and occupation, among other factors. Although, in this study, being a woman interviewer who grew up in Iran made the interviewees feel more comfortable sharing their experiences. Moreover, living, studying, and working in Iran empowered me with being aware of cultural sensitivities (such as respecting elders or existing public assumptions about topics such as sexual abuse) of the Iranian context. In conducting this research, I focused on staying neutral, which means keeping my personal, political, and social views away from the undergoing research. Additionally, I was aware of my position as

³¹ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing As Qualitative Research : A Guide For Researchers In Education and The Social Sciences*, 4 ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 104.47.

³² For more information about Jila Baniyaqoob please see Appendix A.

³³ Rhoda Ann Kannaneh, "Introduction " in *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women In Israel Public Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 8.

³⁴ Seidman, *Interviewing As Qualitative Research : A Guide For Researchers In Education and The Social Sciences*, 104.

a Master's student at the University of Oslo, and how my social position and gender contributed to establishing a firm connection and grounding to this project.

Interview Limitations and Ethical Consideration

Since censorship and journalism are highly risky themes in the Iranian context, my biggest challenge was the safety of both participants and me as a researcher. Adding to this, in some cases the background and the current situation of the interlocutors were important in a way that interviewing them could create problems for both me and them. Therefore, to avoid jeopardizing my security, I was mindful of even minor details, such as the wording of my interview questions. For instance, when I conducted the interview session with Faezeh Hashemi, I went to her office alone, carrying a voice recorder, a simple mobile phone (not my smartphone), and a notebook consisting of interview questions. I asked indirect questions about her experience with MCIG instructions while her paper *Zan (Woman)*³⁵ was being published. The additional factor of security during the COVID-19 pandemic made the meetings and face-to-face interviews impossible, and I had to use some Internet applications to interview the participants. Also, the geographical distance between the researcher and some of the interviewees who live in other parts of Europe and the USA added technical challenges to the already existing difficulties. For example, some online applications such as Zoom were filtered in Iran, so the participants had to use Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to circumvent the filtering. Moreover, due to the poor quality of the Internet in Iran, the calls were often disconnected, and so keeping a consistent flow of conversation was another challenge of the online interviews. However, despite all these obstacles, the participants were enthusiastic to continue talking about their experiences and rebuilding their memories, which made the interviews go smoothly.

Before I conducted the interviews, I sought approval from the NSD to perform the fieldwork. I informed them of the participants' willingness to be identified by their real names and biographies. I also followed NSD instructions on how to get face-to-face and online consent, how to acquire suitable digital applications to conduct the online interviews, and how to save the recordings and transcriptions. This was enormously helpful in updating me

³⁵*Zan (woman)* was established in August 1998 and was closed down in 1999. Faezeh Hashemi the daughter of President Hashemi Rafsanjani, obtained her long-awaited license to publish a daily newspaper after President Khatami and his reformist administration came to power. According to Shahidi in *Journalism in Iran : From Mission to Profession*, *Zan*'s tabloid size, relatively elegant layout, lively approach and wide range of subjects including women's rights made it one the most popular papers during its short life. Although Ms. Hashemis' advisor and senior staff were men, women made up eighty percent of paper's staff. Some of them were experienced women journalists that were forced to resign after 1979 revolution.

about the process of academic interviews. I also asked the participants' permission to record conversations and let them know that they were free to remain anonymous and/or to refuse to answer some questions. I also assured them that they could retrieve their answers at any point. As of this writing, I have not yet received any comments or inquiries from the interviewees to change any parts of their statements.

The Interviews

This phenomenological³⁶ research, which is subjective and bound by time and context, uses the reconstruction of “lived experiences of the informants.”³⁷ This research is designed to elicit comments from the women journalists themselves about their circumvention techniques and the impact of censorship policies on their work and life experiences. Of the 11 women journalists I interviewed, three of them live outside Iran and still work as journalists; two have been legally banned from practicing journalism in Iran. Two left their jobs due to suppressive measures of the security forces, and four of them have retired. Asieh Amini, Masoumeh Naseri, and Nooshabeh Amiri are active journalists living abroad. Jila Baniyaqoob and Badrolsadat Mofidi have been banned from journalism. Zahra Ebrahimi, Maryam Kazemzadeh, Azra Farahani, and Minoos Badiie are retired. Lily Farhadpour and Faezeh Hashemi quit being journalists. Their biographies are found in Appendix A.

The informants were asked about their experiences gained in the press field, how they reflected upon the state's censorship policies, and how they reconstructed their practical knowledge as journalists. The interviews were conducted in Persian, and nearly ten or more questions were asked. The interviewees were not asked about their political tendencies or backgrounds and level of education, for I viewed this as irrelevant information for this thesis. All interviewees have been active in various fields of journalism, such as being a press license holder and/or photojournalist, and the questions were asked accordingly. For instance, Faezeh Hashemi was asked about her own role in censoring the content of the news or controlling the journalists who worked for her newspaper, while Maryam Kazemzadeh,

³⁶Seidman sets four themes to explain the phenomenological approach in interviews, the first feature of the phenomenological research is being bound by time and fleeting nature of experience, which according to Seidman can be problematic. The second theme is the subjective view of the participants and how do they make sense of that experience in the present time which is authentic if the interviewer would use proper techniques. The third one is the reconstruction of the lived-experience, which Seidman explains as reconstruction of experience. He also believes that we study the textual evidence as a way of getting at the essence of the experiences that are central to our study. And the fourth one is the context which he highlights as crucial to understanding the meaning of the participants' experience.

³⁷ Seidman, *Interviewing As Qualitative Research : A Guide For Researchers In Education and The Social Sciences*, 17-19.

Masoumeh Naseri, and Nooshabeh Amiri were asked about their experiences on avoiding being censored.

Main Argument and Structure of the Study

In a constrained environment, women journalists made the most of the opportunities that became available to them, due to the political shifts taking place between 1989 and 2013. In the securitized context, that information could be considered as a security issue, journalists were in danger of being labeled as “spies,” simply because they collected information to report it to the public. Therefore, it is important to know about the methods that they employed to preserve their resiliency and stay active in the press field. This thesis argues that the censorship measures of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance during the period of 1989 to 2013 persuaded Iranian women journalists to develop and practice circumvention methods that contributed to their resiliency and enabled them to survive in the press field.

The subsequent chapters of this thesis are ordered as follows: in chapter two, I present the historical background and refer to the academic research about censorship in the Iranian press and the history of women’s journalism in Iran. Readers are provided with a more comprehensive and vivid picture of the Iranian press field from 1989-2013. Chapter three explores the censorship policies of MCIG that were imposed on the press, particularly impacting women journalists during Rafsanjani’s tenure from 1989-1997. Chapter four investigates MCIG’s policy measures on the press and women journalists during Khatami’s tenure from 1997-2005, exploring the political challenges between cabinet officials and fundamentalist authorities aligned with Khamenei. In chapter five, I study MCIG’s regulations during Ahmadinejad’s administrations from 2005-2013, focusing on the restrictive measures of two fundamentalist ministers who encouraged the press and journalists to self-govern. This chapter culminates in a comparison of the censorship politics of the three government administrations and also provides an opening to chapter six, where I discuss the by-pass strategies and methods that scaffold women journalist’s resiliency. The thesis concludes in chapter seven where I will present the findings of this study and offer some remarks on future areas of inquiry for the pressing issue of censorship in the contemporary Iranian context.

Literature Review

This chapter discusses the history of journalism in contemporary Iran, including the history of women's journalism, and dwells in the chronological process of the establishment of certain legal censorship tools, such as the press law and Press Supervisory Board, and their functions. The majority of the existing literature on journalism, specific to the history of restrictions of speech, has a descriptive nature. To investigate the resiliency of women journalists, I utilized the scarce number of studies that examine journalistic behaviors conducted within constrained frameworks around the globe. These academic investigations are significant since they compensate for the lack of similar academic studies about the post-revolutionary Iranian context. To provide a more comprehensive illustration of the history and current situation of the press and women journalists, I consulted Persian and English archival sources. This chapter thus provides complementary information on the background of post-revolutionary monitoring measures that enabled the MCIG to implement external restrictive measures on the press and women journalists.

External Forces: A Fence or a Border?

In addition to the political context, “macro-level influences”³⁸ or external forces, according to Shoemaker and Reese, are pervasive elements that manipulate the press and journalists. Their “hierarchy of influence” consists of a long list of external forces such as governmental policies, financial institutions, and religion.³⁹ Although the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is a political institution that is officially responsible for enforcing regulatory measures concerning the content of the press such as printed pictures and news, the first legal tool to control and restrain the press in the Iranian context is the press law.

The Press Law

Iran's first press law was passed in February 1908, and it was revised in 1909, 1931, 1951, and 1956. The first post-revolutionary amendment took place in August 1979. The new press law was drafted by the MCIG without consulting with any experts.⁴⁰ The new decree intended to

³⁸ Shoemaker and Reese in *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century: A Media Sociology Perspective* proposed three types of forces that impact the press field the press and journalists: Micro (individual), Macro (external), and Meso (organizational) forces.

³⁹ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices " 83.

⁴⁰ Hossein Shahidi, "Iranian Journalism and the Law in the Twentieth Century " *International Society of Iranian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2008): 42.

take the right of publication away from the associates of the former regime of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi. According to this new regulation, the papers that insulted the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, were suspended for six months; according to Shahidi, the suspension was equal to being banned forever.⁴¹ The law was criticized for introducing general and imprecise concepts that would be open to abuse. Although many journalists protested the new law, *Šoray-e 'Ali-e Enqelab-e Farhangi* (The High Council of Cultural Revolution) used this law to close down 175 newspapers and magazines.⁴²

The second amendment took place in 1986 amid the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), when the MCIG was authorized to establish the Press Supervisory Board (PSB). The PSB, which functions as Louis Althusser's "Repressive State Apparatuses,"⁴³ was established to restrict the press and journalists.⁴⁴ Of this amendment, Articles 10 and 11 describe the members of the Press Supervisory Board and its responsibilities.⁴⁵ PSB is responsible for issuing press licenses, deciding on the eligibility of applicants and executive managers of the papers. Shahidi believes that the composition of the board and the extensive power of the PSB to revoke papers' licenses without a court hearing imposed extra pressure on the press and journalists.⁴⁶ Moreover, the amendment of 1986 intended to impose more constraints on the press and journalists by criminalizing any critics of the political and religious authorities. According to this amendment, questioning political features such as the leader, the president, and the clergy as religious characters was equal to defamation.⁴⁷ Although these amendments restricted the freedom of speech, in April 2000 the press law was amended for a third time, concurrently with the last days of the fundamentalist-dominated fifth *Majles*.⁴⁸ This amendment empowered PSB with

⁴¹ Hossein Shahidi, "Iranian Journalism and the Law in the Twentieth Century " *International Society of Iranian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2008): 43.

⁴² Hossein Shahidi, "Iranian Journalism and the Law in the Twentieth Century " *International Society of Iranian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2008): 43.

⁴³ Louis Althusser introduces Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) to describe institutions such as police and criminal justice that can enforce behavior directly. Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) is the second mechanism that he investigates which refers to the institutions such as schools, religions, the family, legal systems, politics, arts, and sports organizations that generate systems of ideas and values.

⁴⁴ Mathew Bunn, "Reimagining Repression: New Censorship theory and After," *History and Theory* 54, no. February 2015 (2015): 35.

⁴⁵ According to article 10 of the Press Law, the Press Supervisory Board is consist of a judge that is appointed by the head of the judiciary; Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance or his authorized representative; a member of parliament that is introduced by the *Majles*; A university professors selected by the Minister of Culture and Higher Education; A representative of press managers that is elected by them; A clergy professor that is selected by the Supreme Council of the Seminary of Qom [*Šoray-e 'Aali-e Howzeh*] and A member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution that is selected by that council.

⁴⁶ Shahidi, "Iranian Journalism and the Law in the Twentieth Century " 747.

⁴⁷ According to Article 12 of the press law that was passed in 1986, the press is forbidden from the publication of heresy, [...], revealing confidential documents, insulting Islam or the Leader and the religious authorities. Also drawing the cartoons of the state officials or religious authorities are considered as libeling.

⁴⁸ The fifth *Majles* (1 June 1996- 26 May 2000) hosted the large majority of conservative /fundamentalist politicians that suppressed Khatami's reformist government with unprecedented pressures such as the impeachment of two ministers. Mohajerani (Minister of MCIG) and Abdullah Nouri (Interior minister), the first

more supervisory and executive apparatuses, easing the way for the judiciary and other security departments into the press affairs and tightening the restrictive measures against journalists.

Ministerial Establishment

In the early days after the 1979 revolution, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance implemented two ways to operationalize the press law. As a first step, MCIG used the executive regulations that were passed by the government.⁴⁹ For its next step, it established the Deputy of Press Affairs to supervise the press and distribute governmental subsidies to support them.⁵⁰ Governmental subsidies were provided in different forms, such as allocating the governmental advertisement to papers, distributing the press [in the country], allocating paper quotas and cash subsidies, granting facilities (such as house loans for the journalists), buying returned publications [by the government], supporting professional training, helping the press studies, funding and assisting in [press] research and publications, supporting guild unions, news agencies, and information bases, and holding press conferences, festivals, and press exhibitions.⁵¹ The Deputy of Press Affairs controls the press and journalists by manipulating governmental subsidies and the financial resources of the papers to restrict the freedom of expression and autonomy of the journalists.

Other Censorship Agents

Another method of controlling the press is through the Press Supervisory Board. The procedure in which the PSB issues the paper license has transformed certain professions and positions within journalism (such as license holder, executive manager, or senior editor), turning them into political posts.⁵² It is noteworthy that political and ideological connections add to the “editorial capital” of those who are “having a high post in the internal organizational structure of a publication.”⁵³ Scholars Lee and Chan have studied the interwoven political and ideological connections between the position of the senior editors and license holders. In Hong Kong, for instance, the closeness of editors to the owners of the

one survived the impeachment, but the latter failed to gain enough trust vote and was dismissed from the post. The conservative majority altered the press law and imposed more restrictions on the press.

⁴⁹ "Ayeen Nameh-e Ejray-e Ghanon-e Maṭbo'at [Bylaw to Enforce the Press law]."

⁵⁰ " Šarḥ-e Vazayef va Mamoryat hay-e Edarey-e Kol-e Maṭboa't Va Kābar Gozary haye Daḳely [Job description and Duties of the Internal New Agencies and Press Administration]," Vezārate Farhang Va Ershād-e Eslāmi, Mo'avenat-e Omore Matbo'ati, 2020, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://press.farhang.gov.ir/fa/duty/press1>.

⁵¹ Hamidreza Šešjavani, *Arzyabi va Baznegari-e Nežām-e Yaran-e Dehi-e Maṭboa't va Ketab* [Evaluation of Governmental Aid to the Press and Books], 1735-0727 (Tehran Moaseseh Pouyehmehr Ešraq, 2017).

⁵² Mino Badiie, interview with author, Oslo, 15 June 2020.

⁵³ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices " 61.

news outlet pushes the press to “avoid offending power holders such as the governments, advertisers, and major business corporations.” They also realized that the editors are altering the reports by “omission, dilution, distortion, and change of journalists’ rhetoric.”⁵⁴ Other researchers have explored the result of this type of external pressure on journalists in different contexts, such as Olivia Allison in Tajikistan,⁵⁵ Terje Skjerdal in Ethiopia,⁵⁶ Simon and Strovsky in Russia,⁵⁷ and Yesil in Turkey.⁵⁸ Nearly all of them conclude that the outcome of such external forces, regardless of type and degree, is that journalists practice self-censorship.

The Burgeoning of Women’s Journalism in Iran

How did Iranian women enter the journalistic field? The *Enqelāb-e mašrūta* (Constitutional Revolution)⁵⁹ transformed women’s social and political perception, facilitating their presence in many fields, including journalism. Although the number of literate women was scarce at that time, those who could read and write⁶⁰ used the press to publicize their opinion about topics such as women’s rights, equality, and any other theme that mattered to them. Women found the right to education some years after the Constitutional Revolution, but they had to wait for their first paper *Dāneš* (Knowledge) until 1911.⁶¹ According to Omid Maso’udi, Mrs. Kahal was the first woman who printed a newspaper for women. It was published in eight pages and focused on women’s issues such as taking care of children and their households. After that, some other educated and wealthy women, inspired by Mrs. Kahal, published some journals and papers for women. Gradually, the number of papers that were published by and

⁵⁴ Chin-Chuan Lee, "Press Self-Censorship and Political Transition in Hong Kong," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 3, no. 2 (1998): 57, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1081180X98003002005>.

⁵⁵ Olivia Allison, "Loyalty in the New Authoritarian Model: Journalistic Rights and Duties in Central Asian Media Law," in *After the Czars and Commissars: Journalism in Authoritarian Post-Soviet Central Asia*, ed. Eric Freedman and Richard Shafer (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 150.

⁵⁶ Terje Skjerdal, "Self-censorship among New Journalists in the Ethiopian State Media," *African Communication Research* 1, no. 2 (2008): 198.

⁵⁷ Dimitry Strovsky Greg Simons, "Censorship in Contemporary Russian Journalism in the Age of the War Against Terrorism: A Historical Perspective," *European Journal of Communication* 21, no. 2 (2006): 191, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0267323105064045>.

⁵⁸ Bilge Yesil, "Press Censorship in Turkey: Networks of State Power, Commercial Pressures, and Self-Censorship," *Communication, Culture and Critique* 7, no. 2 (2014): 112, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12049>.

⁵⁹ During the Qajar dynasty, movements that aimed to end the authoritarian system led to Constitutional Revolution (1323-29/1905-11) in which a parliament and constitutional monarchy were established in Iran. The Constitutional Revolution is a social, economic, and political milestone that facilitated foreign investments, the emergence of the Press, and expanded the interactions between Iran and Western countries.

⁶⁰ At that time the literate women were those who could read Quran, on the other hand, the families with good welfare hired (male) tutors to teach reading and writing to their female relatives (e.g. sisters or daughters). Since there were few families with such conditions so the number of female literates remained scarce as well.

⁶¹ Omid Maso'udi, "*Morori Bar Naḡostin Tajrobehay-e Rūznāmeḡ Negari-e Zanān dar Iran* [Reviewing the First Experiences of Women Journalism in Iran]," *Resaneh* 9, no. 1 (1998).

for women increased—for example, *Šhokūfeh* (Blossom)⁶² and *Zabān-e Zanān* (Voice of women),⁶³ *Nāme-ye Bānovān*⁶⁴ (The Ladies letter), *Ā'lame Nesvān*⁶⁵ (The Female's World), *Jahān-e Zanān*⁶⁶ (The Women's World), *Nesvān-e Vaṭankāh*⁶⁷ (The Patriot Female), and *Nesvān-e Šarq*⁶⁸ (The Eastern's Female).

Sociopolitical changes in the 1940s led to the flourishing of the Iranian women's press, but this process was stopped before the 1953 coup d'état when a nationalist prime minister was overthrown by American and British intelligence.⁶⁹ After 1953, until the 1979 Islamic Revolution, some government-run magazines such as *Eṭela't-e Bānovān* (Ladies' Information) and *Zān-e Rūz* (Woman of Today) were printed.⁷⁰

[Iranian Women Journalism in the Post-revolutionary Era](#)

In the days when the papers were categorized as “enemies of Islam” and journalists were described as the ones with “poisonous pens,”⁷¹ women obtained a small chance to publish papers in which they sought to discuss women's issues. In the first years after the revolution, Iranian women journalists who were affiliated with different political or religious movements published nearly 30 newspapers and magazines. In these publications, they all campaigned for women's rights according to their own political and ideological affiliations. *Eteḥād-e Melli Zanān* (National Union of Women) and *Nehzat-e Zanān -e Mosalmān* (Muslim Women's Movement) are examples of the political parties that criticized misogynist laws and regulations and proposed their modification. Also, some organizations with leftist affiliations

⁶² *Šhokūfeh* (Blossom) was a bi-weekly paper that was published by Maryam Mozayan Al-Saltaneh in 1913 in Tehran and was dedicated to women's issues.

⁶³ *Zabān-e Zanān* (Voice of women) was a bi-weekly paper that was published by Sadigheh Dowlatbadi in 1919 in Isfahan and published articles about the European languages, history, and culture. The content of the newspaper was mostly advising women on how to stay healthy, taking care of children and their household.

⁶⁴ In 1920, *Nāme-ye Bānovān* (The Ladies letter) a bi-weekly paper was published by Shahnāz Āzad in Tehran.

⁶⁵ *Ā'lame Nesvān* (The Female's World) this bi-weekly paper was published by Navabeh Safavi in 1920 in Tehran. This western-oriented newspaper was printed by the women that were graduated from the American School of Tehran.

⁶⁶ *Jahān-e Zanān* (The Women's World), this bi-weekly paper was published by Farkhr Āfaqpārsā in 1921 in Mashhad.

⁶⁷ *Nesvān-e Vaṭankāh* (The Patriot Female), this newspaper was published irregularly by Mohtaram Eskandari in 1923 in Tehran. Eskandari was an educated woman who was interested in literature. Social affairs were her main concern, and in her newspaper, she demanded equality between men and women.

⁶⁸ Marzieh Khanomzarābi, published a bi-weekly paper called *Nesvān-e Šarq* (The Eastern's Female) in 1925 in Bandar Anzali.

⁶⁹ In 1951, Mohammad Mosaddeq was appointed as prime minister by Mohammad Reza Shah. He led the movements that resulted in nationalization of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (AIOC) that initiated a period of tense confrontation between Iran and Great Britain. Mosaddeq was overthrown in the coup d'état of 28 *Mordād* 1332Š (19 August 1953) which was conceived by MI6 (the British Intelligence Service) and delivered by CIA.

⁷⁰ Maso'udi, "Morori Bar Naḳostin Tajrobehay-e Rūznāmeḥ Negari-e Zanān dar Iran [Reviewing the First Experiences of Women Journalism in Iran]."

⁷¹ Shahidi, "Iranian Journalism and the Law in the Twentieth Century " 44.

used this opportunity to publish their views on their papers. For instance, women with Maoist or Communist affiliation published papers such as *Anjoman-e Rahaie Zan* (Emancipation of Women Society), *Jam'iat-e Bidāri-e Zan* (the Society for Awakening Women), *Jam'iate Zanān-e Mobārez* (Militant Women Society), *Eteḥād-e Enqelabi-e Zanān-e Mobārez* and discussed the situation of Iranian women according to their ideological and political discourse.⁷² While many of these papers were closed or went bankrupt due to financial problems,⁷³ those such as *Payam-e Hajar* (Hajar's message)⁷⁴ promoted the connection between Iranian women with other Muslim women and survived these challenges. The events after the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war led to the closing down of many papers and thus many women journalists lost their jobs. The proceeding chapters focus on the changes and challenges that emerged in the postrevolutionary Iranian political context during the administrations of three different presidents, focusing on government press policies and their impact on Iranian women more than a decade after the Islamic Republic of Iran's birth.

⁷² Lily Farhadpour, "Women, Gender Roles, Media and Journalism," in *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, ed. Tara Povey (London: Routledge, 2012), 95.

⁷³ Hossein Shahidi, *Journalism in Iran : From Mission to Profession*, Iranian studies, (London: Routledge, 2007), 83.

⁷⁴ This paper was named after Hajar the Prophet Abraham's wife. It was published by A'zam Taleghani, the daughter of the late Ayatollah Seyed Mahmoud Taleqani (5 March 1911 – 9 September 1979) who was one of the theorists and founders of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the first Friday-Prayer Imam of Tehran who was appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini. According to Shahidi in *Journalism in Iran, From Mission to Profession*, A'zam Taleghani (1943-2019) challenged the Iranian authorities and refused their interpretation of Article 115 of the constitution, stating that the president should be elected from "the Iranian political men (*rejal*)." She believed that the word *rejal* referred to personalities and /or personality and not gender, also believed that such interpretations are made to degrade women's political contribution. The magazine that was established in the early days of the 1979 revolution was closed in 2000.

The Press under the Presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997)

This chapter investigates the censorship policies issued by subsequent ministers from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) during Rafsanjani's administration. This chapter inquires specifically about the identity and contexts in which certain press policies under Rafsanjani's leadership were made and implemented. It also investigates the ideological backgrounds and political tools that Rafsanjani's MCIG ministers used to enforce their policies. And in one particularly controversial case, the chapter looks at the circumstances behind the forced resignation of a minister while others enjoyed the full political and ideological support from members of Iran's political and religious elite. Much of the necessary data for this chapter was obtained from Persian archival sources, such as official reports of the MCIG, newspapers, media outlets such as BBC Persian, and reports from the Deputy of Strategic Studies (*Daftar-e Moṭale'at-e Rahbordi*)⁷⁵. Further contextual information was taken from the interviews I conducted with women journalists who worked during this period.

A Man Famous for Moderation, though Not That Moderate

Akbar Hashemi Bahremāni, known as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997), was elected as the fourth president of Iran. Rafsanjani's moderate⁷⁶ administration was unique in two ways: first, it was the first post-Iran-Iraq war cabinet and also was the first administration to govern after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the political and ideological founder of Iran's Islamic Revolution. Rafsanjani was known as a technocratic president, who prioritized

⁷⁵ *Daftar-e Moṭale'at Va Barnamerizi Rahbordi-e Vezarat-e Farhang va Eršad-e Eslami* also known as *Daftar-e Moṭale'at e Rahbordi*, is a department in Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which consists of two sub-departments of "Deputy of planning" and "Deputy of Strategic Studies." This department is responsible for making policies regarding cultural affairs such as policies related to the press, books, cinema, theatre, and music. For more information please see" <https://motaleaat.farhang.gov.ir/fa/barnamerizi/sakhtar>."

⁷⁶ The Moderate Party (*E'tdalgarayan*) refers to the social-political party that tries to avoid extremism based on collective wisdom (*kerad-e jam'i*). Ahmad Pournajati a member of this party describes moderation as "keeping your feet on reality and keeping your eyes on the horizons" that refers to being a realist as well as a futurist. Although the Moderate party has been one of the oldest social-political parties in Iran, moderators were not successful in influencing any political wave or change in the Iranian political context. Rasool Muntajabnia, another member of this party has defined moderation as a socio-political tendency that tried to bridge the gap between the Iranian fundamentalists and reformists; Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Hassan Rouhani are the most significant portraits of this political faction.

rebuilding the economy and progress over cultural issues.⁷⁷ He re-appointed Seyed Mohammad Khatami as the minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance who was the minister of Islamic Guidance from 1982 to 1986 while Ali Khamenei⁷⁸ was president

Khatami obtained his bachelor's degree in Western philosophy from Isfahan University. While he was studying for a master's degree in educational sciences at Tehran University, he went to Qom to complete his previous studies in Islamic sciences. After seven years, he received his *Ijtihad* qualification and became an expert in Islamic law. From 1978 to 1980, he briefly settled in Germany to chair the Islamic Centre in Hamburg. Two years later, he became the supervisor of the *Kayhan* Institute and was known as a moderate intellectual in the Iranian political context.

Khatami has been described as a culturally liberal politician who supported freedom of speech and consequently with him in the office, journalists and the press corps hoped for liberal policies to be enacted. He believed in norms that, according to fundamentalists⁷⁹, were labeled as "western norms."⁸⁰ In 1989, criticisms against him arose once the issue of a "Western Cultural Onslaught" was being raised in public sermons by the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. A special commission was soon established to review and study this phenomenon and its manifestations within the Iranian cultural context. The meetings of this commission were held in the Centre for Strategic Research (*Markaz-e Taḥqiqat-e Esteratežik*)⁸¹ of the Expediency Discernment Council (*Šoray-e Tašķis-e Mašleḥat-e Nežam*)⁸² and the reports of those meetings were to be revised by Khamenei and Rafsanjani. Khatami as the minister of MCIG and some other government officials such as Ahmad Masjedjame'ei (later Minister of MCIG in the second cabinet of Khatami), Ali Larijani (later Minister of MCIG in the first cabinet of Rafsanjani), Hassan Rouhani (then the Secretary of

⁷⁷ "Roasay-e Jomhūrī-e Iran Ba Će Šo 'arḥayee Be Meydan Āmadand? [What Were The Slogan's of Presidential Candidates?]," BBCPersian, updated April 20, 2017, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-features-39616020>.

⁷⁸ Now the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Khamenei served as president from 1981-1989.

⁷⁹ Fundamentalists (*Ušulgarayan*), are also known as the conservatives that focus on loyalty to Islam, the Islamic Revolution, and the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They believe, support, and try to protect the ideological principles of the early days of the Islamic Revolution. They strongly believe in the principle of *Velayat-e-Faqih* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists) and recognize it as the most appropriate form of a state. This principle contradicts the reformists' belief in people's will to choose their leaders and is the source of these two political groups dispute.

⁸⁰ Hasan Shayanfar, "Introduction", *Motaham-e Radif-e Aval [The Prime Suspect]* (Tehran Kayhan, 2014), <http://yazdrasa.ir/article/3728432>.

⁸¹ *Markaz-e Taḥqiqat-e Esteratežik* [The Center for Strategic Research] was a leading Iranian think-tank and functioned as the research arm of the Expediency Discernment Council. It was established in 1989 and dissolved in 2017. It aimed to formulate a strategy for the Islamic Republic of Iran in various dimensions, such as conducting strategic studies in various international, political, economic, legal, cultural, and social fields.

⁸² *Šoray-e Tašķis-e Mašleḥat-e Nežam* [Expediency Discernment Council] was established in 1988 by the Iranian Supreme leader to resolve the differences between the *Majles* and Gurdian Council.

the Supreme National Security Council), and Hossein Shariatmadari (then the official representative of the Leader) were taking part in these meetings. According to Hassan Shayanfar, Shariatmadari expressed his serious concern over the presence of the (Western) enemy in Iran's cultural centers, such as movies, books, visual arts, and newspapers."⁸³

Although Shariatmadari claimed that he and those who accompanied him were neither confronting Khatami nor that the atmosphere of the meetings was hostile, the aftermath of these meetings showed otherwise. Following heated discussions and also after having imposed external pressure from extra-legal forces known as *hezbollahis*,⁸⁴ Khatami resigned from his post, complaining that "these gentlemen [Shariatmadari and his companions] see me as the embodiment of a 'western cultural onslaught.'" In his resignation letter, Khatami complained about the actions of those who were willing to crush "all legal, religious, ethical and customary boundaries" to eliminate him.⁸⁵ Mousavi Lari⁸⁶ explained that Rafsanjani did not agree with Khatami's decision, yet he was afraid that Khatami's unconventional presence would create more complications and challenges toward his administration. He thus accepted Khatami's resignation, on June 23, 1992.⁸⁷

Khatami left the MCIG post while papers received 70 million US dollars subsidies in 1991-92, but in 1992-93, this amount fell to 48 million. This gap can be explained as the Iranian government's oil revenue which was the main source of the press subsidies, decreased in this period⁸⁸ although, in the upcoming years, the Iranian economic situation improved, the press did not benefit from the oil income. Moreover, regarding the representation and participation of women in the field of journalism, the number of women's press is self-

⁸³ Hasan Shayanfar, "Introduction," *Motaham-e Radif-e Aval [The Prime Suspect]* (Tehran Kayhan, 2014), <http://yazdrasa.ir/article/3728432>.

⁸⁴ *Hezbollahis* (Partisans of God) is a militia group that was formed in the 1970s. Ervand Abrahamian in *Radical Islam* writes that *Hezb-e Jomhūrī-e Eslāmi* (Islamic Republic Party or IRP) was formed by Rafsanjani, and Khamenei created *Hezbollahis* to disrupt the activities of anti-IRP groups. The *Hezbollahi* group played a major role in the conflicts that took place in the early days after the 1979 revolution. According to Ahmad Karimi Hakak *Hezbollahis* were known for their frequent attacks bookshops and beat suspected violators of Islamic codes that were never clearly defined. *Hezbollahis* targeted offices, printing presses, and election rallies in many cities around Iran and labeled their enemies as anti-Islam and anti-revolution. Armed, they reportedly blocked the streets and arrested and killed many civilians. Although IRP was disbanded in 1987 due to internal conflicts, *Hezbollahis* never left the Iranian political context.

⁸⁵ "Este'fa Haya Tariqi Dar Jomhūrī –e Eslami [Historical Resigns in the Islamic Republic]," BBCPersian, updated 3 May, 2016, accessed 3 January, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2016/05/160511_000.

⁸⁶ Abdolvahed Mousavi Lari was the deputy of Khatami in MCIG and later replaced Abdollah Nouri (Interior minister), that was impeached by the fifth *Majles*, from 1998 to the end of Khatami's presidency in 2004.

⁸⁷ Mansouri, "Este'fa Haya Tariqi Dar Jomhūrī –e Eslami [Historical Resignations in the Islamic Republic]."

⁸⁸ "Karnam-e Naft Dar Se Dowlat-e Gozašte[Oil Report Of Last Three Administrations]," Donya-e Eqtesad, updated March 3, 2014, accessed March 8, 2019, <https://www.donya-e-eqtesad.com/fa/tiny/news-789021>.

explanatory. In 1992-93 there were only 2 women-targeted papers, a number which represents just 0.6% of all government-approved published titles (See Graph and Table 1).

Khatami was replaced by the fundamentalist politician and former military officer of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Ali Larijani.⁸⁹ According to Shariatmadari, Larijani was also advised to study the reports on the “western cultural onslaught” and to familiarize himself with its manifestations and thus find ways to confront and defeat it.⁹⁰ As a member of the Special Commission to combat this issue, Larijani intended to relieve the concerns of the fundamentalist officials by suppressing the press and coerce journalists into censoring their works. Although he did not announce any specific type of cultural and press agenda, official statistics on government-approved press publications illuminate what happened during his tenure. For example, in 1993-94, the number of titles was reduced to 304, and the amount of government-paid subsidies fell to 20 million US dollars. Moreover, there were only 5 papers published for women and families that constitute 1.6% of the total papers (See Graph and Table1).

Mostafa Mirsalim: “Murderer of Red Roses”

For the second administration, Rafsanjani appointed another fundamentalist politician, Mostafa Mirsalim, who was a member of the Islamic Coalition Party⁹¹ and a supporter of a liberal economy, but not cultural liberalism.⁹² Mirsalim received his Master’s degree in mechanics from the University of *Poitiers* in France in 1969. After the 1979 revolution, he held one of the high-ranking government positions as an advisor to Khamenei.⁹³ During the *Majles* session to gain their vote of confidence, Rafsanjani introduced him as a candidate who was fully supportive of and supported by the Supreme Leader.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ "The Brothers Larijani: A Sphere of Power," Aljazeera, 2013, accessed January 4, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/6/9/the-brothers-larijani-a-sphere-of-power>.

⁹⁰ "*Naqš-e Šebh-e Rošanfekran Dar Tariḳ-e Mo'ašer-e Iran* [The Role of Semi-Intellectuals in Iran's Contemporary History]," (August 26, Tehran: Magiran, September 12 2019). <https://www.magiran.com/article/4084311>.

⁹¹ *Hezb-e Mo'talefe-ye Eslāmi* [The Islamic Coalition Party, also known as ICP] is a conservative political party in Iran that favors economic liberalism and is not in favor cultural freedom.

⁹² "*Miraṭ-e Mirsalim Dar Eršād; Sansor-e Ešq va Rafiq* [Mirsalim's Legacy in Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Censoring Love and Friend]," *Tarikh-e Irani*, 2017, accessed May 6, 2020, <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/5836>.

⁹³ Peter Feuilherade, "Iran: Media and the Message," *The Middle East* (16 April 1994), <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Iran%3a+media+and+the+message.-a015353089>.

⁹⁴ "*Miraṭ-e Mirsalim Dar Eršād; Sansor-e Ešq va Rafiq* [Mirsalim's Legacy in Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Censoring Love and Friend]," *Tarikh-e Irani*, 2017, accessed May 6, 2020, <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/5836>.

Mirsalim was successful in achieving the Parliament's support, for his leadership agenda was characterized as heading in a strong fundamentalist, Islamist direction—one aimed at staving off the cultural incursion of western norms by promoting a pious Islamic culture. To fulfill his promise in uprooting the western cultural codes he employed all the necessary legal, social, political, economic, and ideological tools to restrict the freedom of speech. One example of his extreme attitude was censoring the medical and nursing books. His emphasis on censorship made the journalists and writers name him as “Minister Scissor hands (*Vazir-e Qeyči be Dast*)” and “Murderer of words, kisses, beds and all the red roses.”⁹⁵

According to a report from the Deputy of Strategic Studies, from 1993-94 to 1996-97 when Mirsalim was MCIG director, 304 papers and 649 million copies were published. Specifically, in 1994-95, there were 367 papers and 686.8 million copies; in 1995-96 424 titles and 703.3 million copies also 661 papers and 630 million copies were printed in 1996-97. There were only 13 women's papers, constituting 1.9% of the total papers that were published in Iran. Although the number of titles increased by 1.80%, the number of printed copies reduced from 703.3 million copies in 1995-96 to 630 million copies in 1996-97. At the same time, the amount of paid subsidies fell to 18 million US dollars in 1994-95, but it later increased, reaching 37 to 40 million US dollars in 1996-97(See Graph and Table 1).

Analysis

This chapter discusses how the political affiliations and ideological stances of ministers of MCIG have determined certain policies that targeted the press field, including news outlets and journalists. In reviewing the events that led to Khatami's resignation, what becomes apparent is that Iranian cultural policies were designed by authorities who generally acted above the law and have the support of Iran's Supreme Leader. After Ayatollah Khomeini's death, the Iranian political atmosphere shifted in a way that resulted in Khatami and his supporters' isolation. Essentially, he lost power, or, to use Bourdieu's term, he lost his political “capital.” Bourdieu states that capital manifests itself in economic, political, social, and cultural forms, and it determines the position of the dominated or the dominant.⁹⁶ In other words, concurrent with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and with fundamentalists in power, Khatami and his alliance lost their political capital to make any kind of long-lasting policy

⁹⁵"Miraṭ-e Mirsalim Dar Eršād; Sansor-e Ešq va Rafiq [Mirsalim's Legacy in Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Censoring Love and Friend]," *Tarikh-e Irani*, 2017, accessed May 6, 2020, <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/5836>.

⁹⁶Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices " 56.

change or cultural reform. Moreover, Khatami's philosophy of "tolerance," was opposing the ideology of the dominant fundamentalists, who believed that "one of the duties of the Islamic government was to control how people think."⁹⁷ In many ways, fundamentalists as the dominant political players eradicated Khatami and his policies from the MCIG to impose their desired suppressive measures on Iran's cultural affairs including the press and journalists.

But how did fundamentalist politicians increase their capital in government and thus maintain unchecked authority at MCIG? The answer is by being close to the main sources of power, which explains the legitimacy and efficacy of Iran's dominant actors. For instance, Shariatmadari was neither politically compatible with Khatami nor had the highest government position. Yet, by him being ideologically and politically close to the main source of power and being Khamenei's representative in Kayhan as well as being his unofficial speaker, this placed him higher than other government administrators such as Khatami.

Political capital not only influences a government minister's fate but also determines the heteronomy and autonomy of a paper and journalists. As mentioned previously in the introduction, Iranian papers are neither politically nor economically autonomous. So how did the press heteronomy (political and/or economic) facilitate the execution of the censorship policies by Rafsanjani's administration? One of the ways was through keeping the number of published papers limited by using the Press Supervisory Board's power; after all, they were legally empowered with disqualifying applicants without providing any reason. For example, during Rafsanjani's administration, some applicants such as journalist Nooshabeh Amiri and the politician Faezeh Hashemi were not permitted to print a paper. And the other one was through paper's financial heteronomy that was manipulated via government subsidies.

Also, after Khatami's removal from the MCIG, fundamentalists took power, using economic, political, and "editorial capital" to intensify their dominance on the papers and journalists. This kind of capital authorized editors to use their administrative power to manage papers and journalists. In Larijani and Mirsalim's administrations, the editors who were ideologically and politically close to the dominant players of the press manipulated the content of the news according to their political or ideological agendas.

⁹⁷ "*Roasay-e Jomhūrī-e Iran Ba Āe Šo 'arhayee Be Meydan Āmadand?*[What Were The Slogan's of Presidential Candidates?]," BBCPersian, updated April 20, 2017, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-features-39616020>.

Moreover, concurrent to the presence of fundamentalists working in the MCIIG, censors were relocated from security institutions and were replaced or re-appointed in press offices. In this way, the censor could stop a report before it was completed or printed. Nearly all of my informants remembered many cases in which editors⁹⁸ stopped them in the middle of writing a report; they also recalled so-called colleagues warning them about the consequences of printing a review during a “friendly chit-chat.” Those who remember working as journalists have described Mirsalim’s tenure as “the darkest time in post-revolutionary Iranian press history.”⁹⁹

In such a constrained environment, it was women journalists who experienced more challenges to their upward mobility and employment than men. Since the Iranian press field was a largely male-dominated arena, women had to make double (or more) efforts to work as journalists in the first place. As discussed in the literature review of this thesis, many women journalists lost their jobs in the early days after the 1979 revolution.¹⁰⁰ The few who survived the purification period—taking place in the first two years after 1979—were expelled from the news fields, such as the war zone, and were forced back behind the tables and into their offices during the Iran-Iraq war. Even those who wore “chador,” the hardline authorities’ preferred Islamic outfit,¹⁰¹ were not well-received as journalists because of their gender.¹⁰² The scarcity of papers meant fewer job opportunities for women journalists in the Iranian male-dominated press field where official statistics and the interviewees’ stories also verify the invisibility of women journalists during that period.

Better days were however ahead for women journalists and the Iranian press. In the next chapter, I delve into the political environment during Khatami’s tenure as President of Iran, discussing how it opened up Iranian women’s journalism to more work opportunities, expression, and self-publishing.

⁹⁸ Editor is an umbrella term to refer to editor in chief, senior editors, service editors, deputy editors and anyone that was in the position to impose censorship on the journalist and /or a reporter.

⁹⁹ Masoumeh Naseri, interview with author, Oslo-Washington D.C., 25 July, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Nooshabeh Amiri, interview with author, Paris-Oslo, 8 August, 2020.

¹⁰¹ *Chador* is an outer garment and is an open down the front, black cloak that is a full-body-length and a semicircle of fabric. This cloth is worn over the head and it does not have any buttons or clasps, it is held closed by a woman’s hands or tucked under the wearer’s arms. Before the 1979 revolution, Iranian women wore black *chadors* in funerals and during periods of mourning; after the revolution, it was /is being worn outdoors as an outfit for some official offices such as *Majles*.

¹⁰² Zahra Ebrahimi, interview with author, Tehran-Oslo, 15 July, 2020.

President Seyed Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) and the Press: A Painting of Spring

This chapter surveys the censorship policies that were imposed on the press and women journalists by the MCIG during the two terms of Khatami's administration (1997-2005). During the reformist¹⁰³ administration, the press, and women journalists experienced an exceptional situation. On one hand, MCIG's measures facilitated women journalists' agency, and on the other hand, an iron fist of the authorities came down on the press and women journalists.

Seyed Mohammad Khatami was elected as Iran's fifth president in 1997, after securing a landslide victory, primarily from an Iranian middle class that had gained relative economic welfare under Rafsanjani's presidency. He promised "meritocracy" and securing "freedom of speech," which was hailed by Iranian youth, intellectuals, and women.¹⁰⁴ Khatami appointed a reformist politician Ata'ollah Mohajerani as his first Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Mohajerani had studied history and Iranian culture received his Ph.D. in history. Mohajerani's political career began in 1980 after the Iranian Revolution, when he won the first round of the parliamentary elections to become a representative of Shiraz and became the youngest member of *Majles*.¹⁰⁵ However, he was impeached by the majority fundamentalist fifth *Majles*. Although he survived impeachment, his determination to promote and practice liberal cultural policies drove Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei to directly criticize him;¹⁰⁶ and shortly afterward he resigned from his post. Thereafter, he was

¹⁰³ Reformist (*Eshlahṭalab*) refers to the left-Islamists (*Čap-e Eslami*) that believed in democratic Islam which is compatible with universal principles of democracy. One of the principles of democratic Islam is *Mardomsalari*, which refers to people's power and freedom to choose their leaders. The members of this group were originally very close to Ayatollah Khomeini and were among his companion that made the revolution and then built the Islamic state in Iran. After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini (1989) they were purged and disempowered by fundamentalists. Khatami is known as the most prominent feature of this political group.

¹⁰⁴ "Roasay-e Jomhūrī-e Iran Ba Če Šo 'arhayee Be Meydan Āmadand? [What Were The Slogan's of Presidential Candidates?]," BBCPersian, updated April 20, 2017, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-features-39616020>.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher de Bellaigue, *The Struggle for Iran* (New York: New York Review Books, May 22, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ In meeting with the members of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei stated: "I have some expectations from the Ministry of Guidance. Of course, he is not here [Mr. Mohajerani] - apparently - and he excused himself from participating and listening to us [me]! However, it does not matter; whether he is here or not, I protest that during his two years presence in this post; the Ministry of [Culture and

replaced by another reformist politician, Ahmad Masjedjame'ei, who sought to continue the reformists' agenda in the Ministry.

A Breeze of Change

As Khatami's presidential campaign insisted on preserving freedom of speech, his administration issued numerous licenses for newspapers. They also eased restrictions on the press, revived, supported, and assisted to establish the Association of Iranian Journalists¹⁰⁷ and the Association of the Iranian Women Journalists (ROSA).¹⁰⁸ During what is known as the "Second Spring of Freedom,"¹⁰⁹ and unlike previous administrations, the reformist-led MCIG's Deputy of Press Affairs did not instruct the press on how to practice censorship in papers and welcomed political polyphony and pluralism in the Iranian press.

According to the women journalists whom I interviewed for this project, most believed that Khatami's administration facilitated an opening for journalists, in general, and women journalists in particular, to be active players in the field irrespective of their gender and the subject they covered. For example, Jila Baniyaqoob wrote a comprehensive report on the "*Qatlhay-e Zanjirei*" (Chain Murders) in Iran"¹¹⁰ in which she explained the role of the high-ranking Ministry of Intelligence's officers. These officers were involved in the killings of well-known dissident intellectuals who were critical of the Islamic Republic in 1998-99. She recalled, "When I finished my report, I asked myself what has changed that not only I can

Islamic]Guidance has not presented any Islamic work [that can be called] Islamic! ... This is my protest. I am not satisfied with the policies of the Ministry of Guidance.

¹⁰⁷ Iranian Journalist Association (IJA) is a member of the International Federation of Journalists and was founded to protect and safeguard the legal and professional rights of Iranian journalists. Concurrent with Ahmadinejad's presidency, the IJA faced systematic harassment from government authorities and was shut down in August 2009. According to Badrolsadat Mofidi the secretary of this association), before the presidency of Ahmadinejad (2008) it had 4000 members; after 2009 and its closure; these statistics have not been updated.

¹⁰⁸ ROSA or Association of Iranian Women Journalists was established in the early days after Khatami's presidency. According to its website, this association is a political party that is defined within the Islamic Republic's constitution and practices loyalty to the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*, accordingly ROSA and Association of Iranian Journalists (IJA) had different political approaches and different destination.

¹⁰⁹ Shahidi, *Journalism in Iran : From Mission to Profession*, 56.

¹¹⁰ *Qatlhay-e Zanjirei* (Chain Murder) in Iran became a serious issue after the killing of Dariush Forouhar and his wife Parvaneh Eskandari, Mohammad Mokhtari, and Mohammadjafar Pouyandeh. These killings happened in autumn and winter 1998. President Khatami appointed a team outside the Ministry of Intelligence to investigate the case without the presence of then minister (Dori Najafabadi). After a month of investigation, the team confirmed the involvement of high-ranking Ministry of Intelligence's officials in the killings that happened in and out of Iran and arrested the perpetrators. Among the arrested was Saeed Emami (Eslami), known as the team leader. Later he committed suicide in prison. It is believed that this team was responsible for the killing of at least 80 writers, translators, poets, political activists, their children, and ordinary citizens using various methods such as a car accident, stabbing, shooting, fake armed robberies, and potassium injections to simulate a heart attack. After the report of a special delegation of Khatami on the Chain murders case, Dori Najafabadi, then Minister of Intelligence was immediately dismissed by Khatami. Khatami wanted to replace him with one of his candidates, but all were rejected by Ayatollah Khamenei. In his memoir, Rafsanjani stated that Ali Younesi, who replaced Dori Najafabadi, was one of the candidates that were introduced to Khatami by the leader.

think of such topic, but I can write about it. If two years ago, somebody would have told me that soon, I would be able to write such a report, I would have him/her tested for drugs.”¹¹¹

While these changes were celebrated by journalists, some critics did not approve of MCIG’s new policies. On May 2, 1999, some members of the conservative fifth *Majles* decided to impeach Mohajerani. Although his impeachment was unsuccessful, his critics were not finished tarnishing his reputation. A power struggle continued, leading to a unique event in the post-revolutionary press’s history. Mohajerani became the first and, until now, the last Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance to be openly criticized by the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei. In November 1999, during a meeting with members from the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, Khamenei expressed his disapproval toward the policies of the MCIG.¹¹² He stated that “[Mohajerani’s] liberal policies ease the situation for the cultural enemies to camouflage as journalists.”¹¹³

To pile more pressure onto the press, the fifth *Majles* changed the press law and imposed more restrictions on reporters.¹¹⁴ In the new press law, journalistic transgression was criminalized and other coercive bodies such as the judiciary were allowed to directly confront the press and journalists. Similarly, the independence of the jury press was manipulated by altering its composition and tampering with its financial independence (Article 36, Note 1 and Article 38, Note 30). Also, questioning the Islamic Republic’s Constitution was criminalized based on Article 6 of the new press law. Moreover, ignoring the National Security Council’s (NSC) commands resulted in losing the paper’s license (Article 5, Note 2). After this amendment, any NSC’s statement was treated as law, and thus disobeying their commands was punishable by law. Correspondingly, according to Article 9, Notes 6 and 8 that prohibited papers to hire the journalists that used to work during the previous regime’s era (the Shah),¹¹⁵ many experienced women journalists such as Nooshabeh Amiri were hired by the reformist papers lost their jobs. But the article that targeted journalists and their autonomy was Article 9, Note 7 of the Press law. According to this article, the judiciary was allowed to hold the journalists accountable for the content they produce (such as writing a report or drawing a

¹¹¹ Jila Baniyaqoob, interview with author, Tehran-Oslo, 18 October, 2019.

¹¹² “*Bayanat Dar Didar-e A’azaye Shoraye ‘Aali-e Enghelab-e Farhangi* [The Meeting with the Member of Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution],” 1999, accessed 14 January 2019, <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=9617>

¹¹³ “*Bayanat Dar Didar-e A’azaye Shoraye ‘Aali-e Enghelab-e Farhangi* [The Meeting with the Member of Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution],” 1999, accessed 14 January 2019, <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=9617>

¹¹⁴ “Press Law,” *Majles Publication* 2000, accessed 17 January 2020, <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ir/ir013en.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Shahidi, “Iranian Journalism and the Law in the Twentieth Century ” 748.

caricature, and so on); according to many journalists such as Jila Baniyaqoob, this article encouraged journalists to practice self-censorship.¹¹⁶

A month after these pressures and Ayatollah Khamenei's speech in which he criticized members of the press, the judiciary closed nearly 100 newspapers and magazines.¹¹⁷ Many journalists were detained, interrogated, imprisoned, and banned from the field. These particularly strict and punitive measures that were completed by Mohajerani's resignation marked a milestone in the history of post-revolutionary censorship.¹¹⁸ Mohajerani was replaced by Ahmad Masjedjame'ei, another reformist politician.

Reviewing statistics shows that 903 titles and 886 million copies were printed in 1998-99. In 1999-2000, of 933 papers, there were 911 million copies; and finally, in 2000-2001 with the suppressive measures becoming tighter- there were 1018 papers and 888.5 million copies printed in Iran. Moreover, during Mohajerani's tenure, women's papers constituted 2.2% of the total copies that were being printed in the country. Papers also received 22 to 18 million US dollars as subsidies—the lowest amount of subsidies was between 13 to 20 million US dollars in 1998-1999 (See Graph and Table 2).

When the Dust Settles

Ahmad Masjedjame'ei, a reformist politician and Mohajerani's deputy, replaced him and was re-appointed in Khatami's second cabinet as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Masjedjame'ei studied Geography and urban management at the University of Tehran.¹¹⁹ By the time Masjedjame'ei hold the post, many papers were closed, and many journalists had been imprisoned or fled the country. Moreover, legal tools that imposed censorship on the press were so powerful that the non-governmental authorities did not need the MCIG's censorship dominance to control the press. During this period, the role and responsibility of implementing censorship measures had been handed to other ministries and institutions such as the judiciary. For instance, Asieh Amini a woman journalist remembers that in the 2000s

¹¹⁶ Jila Baniyaqoob, interview with author, Tehran-Oslo, 18 October, 2019.

¹¹⁷ The judiciary used the *Qānūn-e Eqdamat-e Tamini* (Security Measures Act) of 1960 which authorizes a judge to arrest people they view as potential criminals to prevent them from repeating a crime.

¹¹⁸ "Mohammad Khatami's Eight Years in Office: Balance Sheet and Recommendation for Freedom of Expression and the Press in Iran," updated 16 June 2005, accessed 14 December 2019, <https://rsf.org/en/news/press-freedom-violations-recounted-real-time-january-december-2015>.

¹¹⁹ "Ahmad Masjedjame'ei," updated April 5, 2013, accessed July 6, 2021, <http://www.farhangname.org/احمد-مسجد-جامعی>.

the judiciary and Ministry of Communication imposed the filtering on weblogs, not the MCIG.

In such cases, the MCIG did not have any capital to defend the press or individual journalists against facing external pressures. It appears that their authority had been diminished, or even pushed aside by other political power brokers. Yet, despite all repressions, Masjedjame'ei's ministry focused on supporting the existing reformist papers and journalists as well as preserving civic institutions such as the Association of Iranian Journalists. Even still, between 2001 and 2002, the number of the press was decreased from 1018 to 900. The volume of copies did not increase significantly and reached 895 million copies, demonstrating only a 6.5 million increase within a year, indicates the outcome of the massive crackdown on the press. The situation for women's papers was not any different: amid the state's maximum coercion efforts, the number of women's papers did not change and remained just 21 papers in between 1999-2001¹²⁰ (See Graph and Table 2).

Within the next four years, Masjedjame'ei and his administration tried to facilitate a situation in which the press and many journalists survived the crackdowns continued working, respectively. Interestingly, although the amount of paper subsidies reduced drastically and fell to 16 to 23 million dollars in 2002-2003, from 2001 to 2005, the number of the press was increased from 900 to 1780. But the number of copies fluctuated from 895 million copies in 2001-2002 to 882 in 2003-2004 and 1140 in 2004-2005. This shows an average growth of 2.75 % within four years.¹²¹ In this time, the number of women's papers increased to 41 titles, which constituted 2.3% of the total titles that were printed in Iran.

There are no official statistics to indicate the number of women journalists working in this field; even the numbers provided by Shahidi and Farhadpour are not sufficient in providing us detailed information on women journalists' work situations. (See the introduction, Graph, and Table 4.) However, given the existing information shows that although women had very little share in the job market as journalists and license holders; they used the reformist administration of Khatami to improve their status.

Analysis

¹²⁰ Fathi, Short *Dastavardhay-e Farhangi-e Si Sal-e Jomhuri-e Eslami-e Iran* [The Cultural Achievements of Islamic Republic of Iran in Past Thirty Years (1979 – 2009)], 71-72.

¹²¹ Fathi, Short *Dastavardhay-e Farhangi-e Si Sal-e Jomhuri-e Eslami-e Iran* [The Cultural Achievements of Islamic Republic of Iran in Past Thirty Years (1979 – 2009)], 71-72.

President Khatami's tenure marked an opening for the Islami-leftist political parties, which was once part of the revolutionary forces that established the Islamic revolution though became politically isolated by fundamentalists soon after Ayatollah Khomeini died in 1989. They later returned to the Iranian political stage in the late 1990s and were known by the general term reformists.¹²²

Khatami's MCIG added marginal freedom to the heavily constrained field. Members of the press used this chance to increase their capital and the dominated party found a chance to express their "claims and contentions."¹²³ In this period, reformists' press and journalists captured an opportunity to work just as their fundamentalist colleagues and gained more editorial and professional capital. For instance, they published reports on urban riots and official scandals¹²⁴ and stepped into the fields that were previously considered forbidden zones for them. They addressed political, social, economic, and even religious matters that traditionally belonged to their fundamentalists' colleagues. The emergence of this diverse content was unprecedented, thus perturbing other powerbrokers, such as the majority of the fifth *Majles* and the judiciary as well as their media outlets, chiefly Kayhan newspaper. This persuaded the powerbrokers of Iran's central authority to use their own Repressive State Apparatus¹²⁵ to regain their political dominance by subsequently preventing the release of reformist press and subjugating reformist journalists. The amendment of the press laws by the fifth *Majles*, which was followed by the judiciary's massive closure of papers, is an example of such coercive actions.

Amidst the press's and authorities' power struggle, the fracturing of Iranian women's journalism followed suit. They used reformists' discourse on meritocracy and equality to carve their own path into the Iranian job market, one that had been traditionally male-dominated. Although Shahidi's official statistics are incomplete, it shows a significant increase in the number of women license holders and journalists during Khatami's reformist administration (see Graphs and Tables 4-6).¹²⁶ Women increased their agency and their political, economic, social, editorial, and professional capital by publishing papers that they

¹²² *Majma'e-e Rohanyon-e Mobarez* (The Association of Combatant Clerics) and *Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enghelab-e Islami-e Iran* (The Holy Warriors Organization of the Islamic Revolution of Iran) are two political parties with similar intellectual and political tendencies and are known as the left-wing. After 1987, due to various conflicts that were caused by *Jame'e-e Rohanyon-e Mobarez* (Assembly of Combatant Clerics) and with Ayatollah Khomeini's permission, the Association of Combatant Clerics was established but the new organization started its political activity in 1991 and after Ayatollah Khomeini's death.

¹²³ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices ", 42.

¹²⁴ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices ", 28.

¹²⁵ Bunn, "Reimagining Repression: New Censorship theory and After," 35.

¹²⁶ Shahidi, *Journalism in Iran : From Mission to Profession*, 90-91.

owned or run. For example, while women's journals were generally unable to pay a proper wage to hire women journalists, *Zanan* (Women) magazine, with Shala Sherkat as the editor-in-chief, was one of the exceptions of how women could successfully manage a paper. Also, being appointed to senior positions in the press, being a member of the press jury, and winning many awards contributed to more representation of women's voices in the Iranian press field.¹²⁷ (See Graphs and Tables 4-6).

Notably, this demographic change in gender representation in the press arguably changed women's capital and the power of negotiation with the authorities. Nearly after two decades since 1979, women could use print publications as platforms to articulate their demands, expectations, stories, and their experiences. According to Shahidi, in 1999 the percentage of female applicants who applied to get press licenses increased by 50% although all the applicants were not qualified to receive them. By 2005, women were publishing, managing, or editing nearly 130 newspapers—10.6 % of the country's total.¹²⁸ Subsequently, this also demonstrates that, during Khatami's reformist period (1997 - 2005), the media flourished in large part due to its absorption and hiring of more women reporters. The Association of Iranian Journalists estimated that there were 5,000 Iranian journalists by 2004, and the total number of women was approximately 1,150. Compared with the 88 members of the Association of Iranian Women Journalists before the 1979 Revolution, the number of women journalists had ascended 6 times faster than Iran's total population. In January 2005, the Association of Iranian Journalists had 2,706 members, of whom 623 were women—constituting 23 percent. This demonstrated a growth rate that was 4.8 times faster than that of the overall membership and 6.4 times faster than men.¹²⁹

Women's significant contribution to the existence of a polyphonic journalistic field undermined the dominant position of the authorities. When examining articles in some women-targeted tribunes such as *Zan*, *Zanan*, and *Payam-e Hajar*—even despite their different political and ideological stances—one finds that the majority of them focused on topics related to gaining women's agency and autonomy.¹³⁰ For instance, while in 1995 there

¹²⁷ Farhadpour, "Women, Gender Roles, Media and Journalism," 100.

¹²⁸ Shahidi, *Journalism in Iran : From Mission to Profession*, 84.

¹²⁹ Shahidi, *Journalism in Iran : From Mission to Profession*, 90-91.

¹³⁰ According to Shahidi, *Zanan* magazine had clearly stated that the key to women's problems had to be found in a religion, culture, law and education. In 1997 pre-election issue *Zanan* devoted 10 pages to the presidential race, and printed an interview with Khatami, and A'zam Taleghani (see foot note 62). Both of the interviewees expressed that they believe that women are as qualified as men to run the governments and be presidents. The other paper *Zan* that was published by Faezeh Hashemi in August 1998, stated that the paper intends to "write from a woman's point of view for women, but not only about women. It intends to create conditions in which our young girls do not feel inadequate because of "being girls" and we must not forget that historically rights have been there to be taken not to be given."

was only 3% of the news carried by newspapers related to women; in 2000 this number rose to 10 percent. Some papers such as *Iran*¹³¹ dedicated a page to publish about women's concerns and expanded into a weekly supplement. Shahidi affirms that since 2000¹³² the coverage of women's lives had increased in the Iranian dailies in a way that many of them allocated a page to women's issues which also paid more attention to women's issues in Iran and the region.¹³³ Consequently, such journalism was considered intolerable and thus unpublishable for the majority of government authorities who held fundamentalist, patriarchal views, especially those who promoted the idea that women belong to home and not society. Consequently, certain government institutions and their officials placed pressure on women and accused women journalists of espionage, "threatening national security," and "participating in illegal gatherings."¹³⁴ Their papers were shut down and women journalists were banned from journalism and were sentenced to long prison terms.

Still, regardless of the external pressures and challenges, Iranian women journalists did not abandon the press field. Those who remained and were allowed to work adapted in different ways to respond to these myriad pressures and constraints. (How they have stayed resilient is the subject that I discuss in chapter six.) In what follows, I survey and analyze the complicated censorship policies that were designed and implemented during Ahmadinejad's two-term presidency.

¹³¹ *Iran* newspaper is the official daily newspaper of the Iranian government that was launched in 1995.

¹³² Shahidi's statistics can be taken into account until 2007 that he published his book, *Journalism in Iran, From Mission to Profession*, 86-90.

¹³³ Shahidi's statistics can be taken into account until 2007 that he published his book, *Journalism in Iran, From Mission to Profession*, 86-90.

¹³⁴ Faezeh Hashemi and Nooshabeh Amiri are examples of journalists who experienced such treatment.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) and the Press: A Tighter Siege of the Media

This chapter investigates the political and economic suppressive measures implemented during Ahmadinejad's fundamentalist tenure. It explores the confrontational approach of MCIG toward the press and women journalists in particular, which led to the closure of many papers, news institutes, and the Association of Iranian Journalists (IJA). An outcome of the unprecedented suppression of women journalists was their high unemployment. But for those who stayed in the country and remained working in the profession, took on exceptional approaches and strategies to survive in the press field, using a wide range of avoidance methods.

In 2005, the fundamentalist politician Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the sixth president of Iran. He belonged to the Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran political party.¹³⁵ For both of his administrations, he appointed two fundamentalist politicians as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. For the first term, he appointed Mohammadhossein Saffarharandi, a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and a former journalist.¹³⁶ Saffarharandi's close relationship with Ahmadinejad was distorted after a disagreement between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei¹³⁷ and was then replaced by another fundamentalist politician, Mohammad Hosseini after Ahmadinejad's controversial re-election in 2009.¹³⁸ Hosseini was

¹³⁵ Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran political party, *E'telāf-e Ābādgarān-e Īrān-e Eslāmī*, was an Iranian conservative political party that was formed in 2003. The core of the party was made by some members of Mobilization Resistance Force (*Sāzmān-e Basij-e Mostaz'afīn*) also known as *Basij* (the mobilization) and Revolutionary Guards veterans who rose to mid-and senior-level administrative positions but marginalized during the government of Hashemi Rafsanjani.

¹³⁶ "Saffarharandi Be Sepāh Bargašt [Saffar Harandi Returned to IRGC]," Tabnak 2009 accessed September 7, 2019, <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news>.

¹³⁷ After the 2009 election, President Ahmadinejad decided to appoint Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei as a First Vice President, although Ayatollah Ali Khamenei advised him against such an appointment. Rahim Mashaei that was an Iranian politician and former intelligence officer is known as one of the closest alliances of President Ahmadinejad. After a week Mashaei was ordered to resign by the Leader. Fundamentalists such as Saffarharandi did not tolerate the bold action of Ahmadinejad and criticized him for neglecting the order of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. To show his disapproval, Saffarharandi and Gholamhossein Mohseni-Eje'i (then the Minister of Intelligence) left the cabinet, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. This encounter created a deep split among the fundamentalists and some of the fundamentalists accused Ahmadinejad of being against the principle of Velayat-e Faqih.

¹³⁸ The 2009 Iranian presidential election was held on 12 June 2009, in which incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was running against three other candidates. Ahmadinejad was announced as the winner of election by the Islamic Republic News Agency broadcasted that with two-thirds of the votes counted, Ahmadinejad had won the election with 62% of the votes cast, and that Mir-Hossein Mousavi had received 34%. There were large irregularities in the results, surprising many and thus resulted in protests of millions of Iranians, across the country and around the world, and the emergence of the opposition Iranian "Green Movement" Many news

a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war, a military figure, and a member of the fifth *Majles* that impeached Mohajerani (the first MCIG minister in Khatami's tenure). He persuaded the drawing up of the press law amendment that imposed more restrictions on newspapers and women journalists who followed Saffarharandi's restrictive policies on the press and journalists.

Bound by Law

During his tenure as head of MCIG, Saffarharandi challenged the press, journalists and antagonized the non-governmental organization of the Association of Iranian Journalists. He viewed IJA as a political opposition party, and his pressure on this organization led to its closure in 2009. Saffarharandi's administration was considered unique in large part due to the personal approach he took towards the press and journalists. He openly threatened members of the media and encouraged them to practice self-censorship to avoid being interrogated or imprisoned.¹³⁹ Many journalists stated that appointing Saffarharandi meant that "The authorities were determined to impose more suppression on both the press and journalists."¹⁴⁰ At first, Saffarharandi used the Press Supervisory Board (PSB)'s enforcement tools to directly close down nearly 20 papers. Although the PSB is legally authorized to shut down press offices, none of the previous administrations had made use of this power beforehand.¹⁴¹

Notably, Saffarharandi's administration limited the paper's income by evaluating the content of the papers and manipulating the advertisements contracts. Content of the papers was evaluated based on if the press contained local, regional, and provincial news; religious and Quranic teachings; articles about the Islamic Revolution; the Sacred Defense war (meaning the Iran-Iraq war), and promoting high social and religious values such as the

agencies such as Aljazeera, Irish times, Reuters, BBC News and CNN reported clashes between the protesters and the police force, until now there is no official report on the number of casualties. Three major features Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Zahra Rahnavard and Mehdi Karoubi rejected to accept the results of this election are in the house arrest since 2010.

¹³⁹ "Kudeta-y-e Kāzandeh-e Maṭbo'at 'Alayhe-e Dowlat ... [Press' Crawling Coup date Against Government Or...]," 2007, accessed December 9, 2019, https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f4_press_coup_against_government/401358.html.

¹⁴⁰ "Dastor-e Raees Jomhur Šamele Šekayathay-e Bad Az Rooz-e Kābarnegar Nemišavad [The Presidential Order Does not Include Complains That Have Been Filed Before The Reporters' Day]," Iran, updated November 8, 2009, <https://www.magiran.com/article/1785760>.

¹⁴¹ "Tašviri az Važ'eyat-e Rūznāmeḥ Negārān Dar Sal-e Haštād o Panj [The Portrait of Journalists in 2006]," RSF, 2007, accessed Decmeber 7, 2019, <https://rsf.org/persan/news/%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%B9%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%A8%D9%A5..>

hijab.¹⁴² In other cases, MCIG ordered private companies to revoke their advertisement contracts with reformist papers, leading many of them to file for bankruptcy.¹⁴³ Another censorship strategy that was implemented by MCIG was controlling journalists through orchestrating their positions and access privileges. For instance, many journalists were appointed to government posts such as “Director of Public Relations.”¹⁴⁴ This created a win-win situation for the MCIG and some journalists. On one hand, the government established its hegemony on the flow of information and could provide its favorite version of the news to the public. On the other hand, those journalists were closer to the source of news, which increased their editorial capital. Also due to closeness to the fundamentalist government as one of the sources of power, they placed themselves within the safety zone and reduced the risk of being prosecuted by the other fundamentalists’ bodies such as the judiciary. All these policies were being exercised by MCIG even when Ahmadinejad and Saffarharandi fell out on the last days of the first cabinet and for the second run, Mohammad Hosseini was assigned as the MCIG minister.

Another Fundamentalist in Power

Mohammad Hosseini was a former deputy director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcast (IRIB), an advisor of the Islamic Culture and Communication Organization,¹⁴⁵ and the Iranian cultural attaché in Kenya.¹⁴⁶ He taught Islamic law at Tehran University and was a parliamentary member of the fifth *Majles* that suggested the suppression of reformist officials and media.¹⁴⁷ Hosseini was appointed to be Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance with 194 votes in favor and 61 votes against. His tenure was unique in large part due to the controversial election of 2009. During Ahmadinejad’s second administration, MCIG and the Press Supervisory Board implemented many legal tools (such as Article 9 Note 7) to add direct pressure to the journalists. While reformist journalists practiced self-censorship, journalists who supported Ahmadinejad were allowed unfiltered access to social media, such

¹⁴² “*Naḥvey-e Pardākt-e Yaraneh Dar Hozey-e Maṭḥoa’ t Ta’een Šod* [The Instruction on How the Press Subsidies Will Be Paid], (Paygah-e Eṭeala Resani Dowlat, 2009).

¹⁴³ Masoumeh Naseri and Nooshabeh Amiri, interview with author, Oslo-Washington-Paris, July-August 2020

¹⁴⁴ Masoumeh Naseri, interview with author, Oslo-Washington, 25 July, 2020.

¹⁴⁵ Islamic Culture and Communication Organization (*Sazman-e Farhang va Ertebaʿat-e Eslami*) is one of the subdivisions of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance that was established in 1995. In the website of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is written that the focus of this organization is exporting the cultural and national products of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

¹⁴⁶ “*Parvande-y-e Naqez-e Hoqoq-e Bašar : Seyed Mohammad Hosseini* [Human Right’s Violator Record: Seyed Mohammad Hosseini],” Justice For Iran, updated June 22, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://justice4iran.org/persian/human-rights-violators-bank/human-rights-violators-database-individuals/mohammad-hosseini/>.

¹⁴⁷ Ali Alfoneh, “All Ahmadinejad’s Men,” *Middle East Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (2011), https://www.meforum.org/2935/ahmadinejad-power-struggle#_ftn50.

as Twitter, which has been banned in Iran since 2009. The reason for such gifts and privileges was to ensure the strategic use of journalists to produce and disseminate Ahmadinejad's administration's preferred version of news content for the public.

One of the most significant features of Hosseini's tenure was the collaboration of the MCIG and security bodies in misleading the public opinion by broadcasting the distractive news Shirin Ebadi¹⁴⁸ elucidates:

In 2011, international attention was drawn to Hoda Saber¹⁴⁹ -a political prisoner, and his cell mate's hunger strike that was to protest the government crackdowns. Concurrently, other news was broadcasted about a woman that was in danger of execution by stoning. The civil and women's rights activists tried to seek help from international organizations to stop the execution. Automatically all the attention was diverted to save a life of a human being, and everyone forgot about the political prisoners on hunger strike. After some time, we realized that thirteen other women were sentenced to death by stoning, but only this case that could raise more attention was widely broadcasted by the Ministry of Intelligence to blur the importance of the political prisoners' actions.¹⁵⁰

It should be noted that all lives are invaluable and precious, what is being criticized is abusing and manipulation of human rights by the authorities to distract the public attention. Hosseini's background in designing and planning restrictive methods while being a member of fifth *Majles* and his appointment as the minister of MCIG provided him with a unique opportunity to securitize the journalism context which resulted in the internalization of self-censorship among journalists, and in particular women journalists. His censorship measures made him the only MCIG Minister that was sanctioned by the European Union in October 2011 for his alleged repressive approach towards journalists in Iran.¹⁵¹ According to *Tabnak*,¹⁵² by the end

¹⁴⁸ Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian political activist was born in 21 June 1947, in Hamedan. Before the 1979 Revolution she was a judge and after the revolution due to the creed which forbade women to work as a judge, she became a lawyer and later a human rights activist. On 10 October 2003, Ebadi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her significant and pioneering efforts for democracy and human rights, especially women's, children's, and refugee's rights.

¹⁴⁹ Hoda Rezazadeh Saber was an Iranian intellectual, economic scholar, journalist and social-political activist. He served several prison terms since 2000, and died while on a hunger strike on 10 June 2011.

¹⁵⁰ "Dowlat -e Yazdahom va Modernize Šoadan -e Sansor [Eleventh Administration and Modernization of Censorship]," IranWire, 2017, accessed January 23, 2019.

¹⁵¹ "Parvandey-e Naqez-e Hoqoq-e Bašar : Seyed Mohammad Hosseini [Human Right's Violator Record: Seyed Mohammad Hosseini]."

¹⁵² *Tabnak* is a news website that is associated with Mohsen Rezaee, a conservative politician and a member of IRGC and secretary of Expediency Discernment Council.

of Hosseini's tenure 35 papers (including newspapers, weeklies, monthlies, and quarterlies) were suspended; 11 papers' licenses were revoked; one news agency was closed down, and 106 official written warnings were sent to journalists and news outlets."¹⁵³

Analysis

Regardless of the occasional disputes among Ahmadinejad, his government, and the powerbrokers aligned with Khamenei, existing interwoven political and ideological ties bound these actors together. This connection added to MCIG's capital, reinforcing its power to pursue and implement suppressive policies. One of the ways that was utilized by Ahmadinejad's administration was tampering with advertisements, which were the main source of the papers' revenue. In this regard and to operationalize their censorship policies, the MCIG revoked private and government advertisements and subsidies, leading to the closure of many reformist newspapers that were staffed with women journalists.

Also, by sending the official written warnings to the press and journalists which turned into a usual practice in Ahmadinejad's tenure, it was intended to remind the journalists that they were under the government radar and any mistake would cost them their jobs and security. According to Azra Farahani, these warnings made the journalists "unemployable," because no one was interested to employ a journalist that can jeopardize their paper.¹⁵⁴ In some cases, many women journalists became professionally isolated or lost their jobs after being warned by the MCIG. The ultimate result of these restrictive measures that targeted women journalists' autonomy and agency was silencing them or pushing them into being part of the coercive machine.

In the same regard, Ahmadinejad's government offered some perks to women journalists who were willing to play in favor of power. Although they would lose their professional autonomy, they hoped to gain financial, social, and professional security. Moreover, by getting closer to the source of the news and gaining protection against legal confrontations, some women journalists achieved higher editorial capital, which added to their professional power.¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

¹⁵³ "Dowlat-e Dahom Čehel-o Šeš Našri-e Ra Toqif Kard [Tenth Administration Suspended Forty-Six Papers]," Tabnak, 2013, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.tabnak.ir/001W0G>.

¹⁵⁴ Azra Farahani, interview with author, Tehran-Oslo, 28 October 2019.

¹⁵⁵ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices " 61.

The previous chapters investigate and analyze the censorship policies of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance during three consecutive administrations from 1989-2013. During this time there was a major power struggle between three main political parties that each had different and sometimes contradictory interpretations of how to govern and control the freedom of speech and flow of information. For example, during Rafsanjani's administration, political suffocation limited the number of papers. Almost all of the newspapers that were published at this time were politically, economically, and/or ideologically connected to fundamentalists that controlled major political, economic, and ideological centers.

In addition to these political challenges, Iranian women journalists had to struggle in the job market that was "amalgamation of state policy, dominant patriarchal attitudes and gendered approaches to employment."¹⁵⁶ Consequently, the scarce number of women journalists who obtained an opportunity to practice journalism tried to "avoid risks and stay in conformity with the news organization,"¹⁵⁷ and were advised by the editors and their colleagues to be vigilant and not step over certain government red lines. It can be concluded that during Rafsanjani's administration, women journalists became invisible players in the Iranian press field who safeguarded themselves against unemployment and imposed self-censorship to survive the MCIG's suppressive measures.

Iranian women journalists seized the opportunity that was created by Khatami's reformist administration to navigate their way within the state's complex power structure. Although Khatami did not promise gender equality, his emphasis on *šayesteh salari* (meritocracy) was hailed by women.¹⁵⁸ A significant increase in the quality and quantity of women's journals and women journalists shows how women used this opportunity to articulate their agency. Although through the theoretical lens of Bourdieu, in the game of MCIG (dominant) and women journalists (dominated), women had less financial and political capital; they employed the existing chance to scaffold their position in the press field. They also addressed public concerns and helped to raise public awareness about women's issues. One of the most significant examples is the one and only women newspaper (*Zan*) that was published during Khatami's administration. According to Faezeh Hashemi, *Zan*'s founder, license holder, and executive manager, its goal was to raise the "public" understanding of

¹⁵⁶ Zahra Nejadbahrām, "Women and Employment " in *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, ed. Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey (England University of London 2012), 85.

¹⁵⁷ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices " 86.

¹⁵⁸ Nejadbahrām, "Women and Employment " 83.

women's challenges and inform women about their rights." She explained, "By public we meant both men and women and the fact that the newspaper received feedback from both men and women who lived all over the country showed how successful we were in achieving our goal."¹⁵⁹ At the same time, the number of women that practiced journalism rose significantly; women won prizes, became active members of IJA, and applied for more paper licenses.

On the other hand, the authorities, such as fundamentalists and those associated with hardline members in government, did not tolerate such movements. Their future policies and actions, such as Mohajerani's impeachment, press law amendment, and the massive closure of the press, revealed their determination to hinder women journalists' progress. While these excessive responses made the press field a more dangerous zone, they simultaneously encouraged women to innovate and practice defense strategies. It also directed them to employ a new individual and collective habitus. According to the evidence and information provided by informants for this study, Khatami's administration facilitated the presence and growth of women journalists and contributed to them asserting more their agency in the workplace and the field. However, many of these gains were impeded or lost in the next administration under Ahmadinejad, when journalists, among others, would see many restrictive measures being implemented and enforced.

Despite many of these pressures, Iranian women journalists' resiliency advanced them and kept them in the press field. As I discuss in the next chapter, women journalists were determined to stay in the game and preserve their professional autonomy by using innovative and unique techniques to circumvent censorship. By using both archival sources and information collected from my informants, I will elucidate some of the avoidance techniques that they utilize to survive in the Iranian press field. These interviews provide invaluable insight into the multiple effects that such struggles have had on the profession of journalism for women during such different government administrations, in which political and ideological tendencies varied.

¹⁵⁹ Faezeh Hashemi, interview with author, Tehran, 27 January 2020.

Iranian Women Journalists' Habitus

Adaptive Defense Mechanisms

Studying the regulative measures from 1989-2013 indicates the various measures that have been implemented by different administrations. This chapter investigates how women journalists survived these measures. The findings of this study show that to ease the burden of censorship Iranian women journalists employed their experiences which “oriented their actions, regulated their [professional] patterns and enabled them to read the future.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, the coercive measures coupled with their previous experiences re-shaped women journalist’s “habitus”¹⁶¹ through how they chose to approach their profession. In this regard, women journalists were on a constant quest to raise their agency within the Iranian patriarchal context. Although this objective has not yet been fully met, Iranian women journalists “familiarized themselves with the working process” in the male-dominated press field to raise their economic, social, and editorial capitals and bypass organizational [restrictive] policies.¹⁶²

Pushback and Other Survival Techniques

As previously discussed in the literature review of this study, journalists that work in a similar political context (such as Russia and or China) practice similar strategies to avoid censorship. For instance, a prime example is the pushback strategy, which is a common practice of Chinese and Iranian women journalists in response to political constraints. According to Hassid, Chinese journalists proactively “push for changes in the status quo,” “act out to push at the edges of the regime that controls them,” and “ignore or chafe at specific restrictions or directives.”¹⁶³ Chinese journalists in particular have picked a “pushback” strategy to contend with the power holders in a way that seems permissible [for authorities]. On the other hand, Iranian women journalists have practiced similar strategies depending on the political climate of the moment. Jila Baniyaqoob compared the controlling measures of Rafsanjani and Khatami’s administrations and argued that Rafsanjani’s restrictive actions did not leave any chance for women journalists to “push back” the boundaries. She remembered interviewing

¹⁶⁰ As discussed in theory section of this study.

¹⁶¹ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 62-63.

¹⁶² Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 101.

¹⁶³ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 103.

the Syrian minister of Culture during Rafsanjani's administration who proudly said, "There was not any imprisoned journalist in Syria." But her investigations proved otherwise, as she recounts:

I knew that there was not an imprisoned journalist in Syria because of the severe self-censorship of Syrian journalists and not because the Syrian government respects freedom of speech and/or has high tolerance toward being criticized by journalists.¹⁶⁴

Baniyaqoob extended her comparison to the Iranian press situation during Rafsanjani's time. She concluded that given the strict conditions to publish a paper, the fragile financial situation of a post-war Iran, and the political constraints, the press was composed of primarily state-approved papers. In such conditions, a journalist could neither think nor write, autonomously. But during Khatami's administration and before the clampdown of the press,¹⁶⁵ the semi-liberal policies of MCIG and the relatively open political atmosphere gave women journalists a moment to challenge certain restrictions, pushing the boundaries or red-lines of the state in their favor.¹⁶⁶

Being "objective" was another method to dodge repressive actions.¹⁶⁷ Gaye Tuchman explains objectivity as "[when] reporters try to present facts as true statements by obtaining verification from reliable new sources." She explains different ways of gaining objectivity. For instance, when the verification of a statement is not possible, journalists "present supporting pieces of evidence" to make the reports more objective. In this regard, the reporter tries to support the statement by providing additional facts that are "commonly accepted as truth."¹⁶⁸ For instance, Maryam Kazemzadeh recalled that it was a difficult task to find cars' spare parts during Rafsanjani's tenure. Public's anonymous tips to *Kayhan* newspaper stated that the big auto dealers were hoarding automobile spare parts— asking directly about this and getting accurate information from the Ministry of Trade was almost impossible. Subsequently, to verify the news, Kazemzadeh disguised herself as a buyer, seller, and university student to collect genuine information from import agents, dealers, and customers. Then she cross-checked these findings with limited governmental statistics, later, her report

¹⁶⁴ Jila Baniyaqoob, interview with author, Tehran-Oslo, 18 October 2019.

¹⁶⁵ The term "*Bastan-e Faleh-i Maṭbo'at* [Papers' clampdown], was coined by Mir-Hossein Mousavi, an Iranian prime minister from 1980 to 1989 and one of the leaders of the Green Movement in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election.

¹⁶⁶ Jila Baniyaqoob, interview with author, Tehran-Oslo, 18 October 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 102.

¹⁶⁸ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 102.

containing adequate and solid evidence was published while it was supported by editors and it did not encounter the official objection.¹⁶⁹

The other strategy for achieving objectivity is “structuring information in an appropriate sequence,” which prevents reporting false news to the public.¹⁷⁰ This is done through arranging the material in the form of a reversed pyramid, and adherence to the popular formula of the five w’s—who, what, when, why, and how. Journalists contend that by using these strategies, they let readers draw their own interpretations, based on evidence rather than on explicit statements, and assist journalists to restore the public trust in their news outlet.¹⁷¹ For instance, in the early days after Khatami’s presidency, Azra Farahani received solid tips confirming that Tehran’s district mayors had been tortured in detention. Before she questioned the head of the judiciary, Mohammad Yazdi,¹⁷² she was assured of the authenticity of the news, and despite future harassment and threats, Yazdi and his fundamentalist associates were not able to legally prosecute her.¹⁷³

Another method used by journalists is the “presentation of conflicting possibilities” in which the news worker presents different and even antagonistic viewpoints.¹⁷⁴ In this way, they can claim objectivity, as the report presents both sides of the story without supporting anyone’s side.¹⁷⁵ This is one of the techniques that has been used by journalists in the post-2009 controversial election in Iran when the topic of election fraud is discussed; it has since become forbidden by the authorities. A reporter whom I interviewed explained that reformist journalists had interviewed conservative and fundamentalist officials. Then they reported their arguments rejecting the fraud’s claims. In this way, the journalists reminded their readers of the possibility of votes being compromised and presenting the counterarguments of the opposing party to avoid being censored by fundamentalist authorities.¹⁷⁶

One of the other ways to make a report more objective is the use of “Judicious quotation marks”¹⁷⁷ in such cases, a reporter quotes from sources that are acceptable to officials. The use of such marks around a statement or phrase releases journalists from

¹⁶⁹ Maryam Kazemzadeh, interview with author, Tehran, 12 February 2020.

¹⁷⁰ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 102.

¹⁷¹ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 102.

¹⁷² Mohammad Yazdi (born 2 July- December 9, 2020) was an Iranian cleric who served as the head of Judiciary System of Iran between 1989 and 1999.

¹⁷³ Azra Farahani, interview with author, Tehran-Oslo, 28 October 2019.

¹⁷⁴ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 102.

¹⁷⁵ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 102.

¹⁷⁶ Azra Farahani, interview with author, Tehran-Oslo, 28 October, 2019

¹⁷⁷ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 102.

accountability, enabling them to shirk any responsibility for their statements.¹⁷⁸ This is one of the popular techniques that were employed by women journalists during Ahmadinejad's administration. One of the examples traces back to 2009 when there were many reports on the death of jailed detainees. Reformist newspapers used the statements of conservative officials, such as Omidvar Rezaee,¹⁷⁹ who verified forensic reports, stating that some detainees had been killed while they were imprisoned.¹⁸⁰

Also, like their Singaporean, Malaysian, and Russian counterparts, Iranian women journalists have practiced "placing sensitive content towards the end of the article or expressing sensitive content in certain ways that disguise the true meaning."¹⁸¹ In an Iranian political context in which every detail can turn into a sensitive matter, this technique has been helpful. For example, Faezeh Hashemi told me that her father (President Rafsanjani) had advised her to avoid printing the provocative news on the front page of the paper or in another case to sidestep encountering religious fundamentalists; Faezeh Hashemi altered the word "dance," and replaced it with "rhythmic moves."¹⁸²

Notwithstanding similar circumvention patterns that exist between the Iranian women journalists and their foreign colleagues, some other bypass methods are also used. Writing anonymously¹⁸³ is one of the popular techniques of Iranian women journalists that was and is used in the press and digital media. It is noteworthy to remember that in the history of Iranian literature, many writers and translators used pseudonyms and/or fake identities to bypass censorship. In the early days after the 1979 revolution, many women journalists followed this trend to secure themselves from any possible dangers and hurdles.

As I interviewed more journalists and read their writings, I learned of another method of subversion and bypass which I refer to as "diversion/projection." In this method, the journalist picks a context that is politically and religiously compatible with the Iranian context—the most popular example being the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan where Islamic laws form the basis of the constitution and a patriarchal system governs women's affairs.

¹⁷⁸ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices", 102.

¹⁷⁹ Omidvar Rezaee, an Iranian conservative politician and a member of 5,6,7,8th parliament. In 8th *Majles* he was dean of the Health Commission.

¹⁸⁰ "Gozarēš Heyat-e Vižeh Majles va Eteham Be Saeed Mortazavi dar Mored-e Kahrizak [Report of the Majles' Special Board and Saeed Mortazavi's Indictment on Kahrizak's Case]," BBCPersian, updated January 6, 2010, accessed September 14, 2020,

https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2010/01/100106_107_kahrizak_gozarash_majles.

¹⁸¹ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices," 107.

¹⁸² Faezeh Hashemi, interview with author, Tehran, 27 January 2020.

¹⁸³ Ranji, "The Art of Journalism in an Uncertain Context: A Study of Iranian Journalistic Practices," 102.

Many journalists such as Jila Baniyaqoob indirectly addressed Iranian women's issues through the Afghanistan context; in this way, she raised public awareness about a topic like domestic violence and also bypassed the authorities who have banned her from writing about Iranian topics. Moreover, she has used Afghanistan's context as a screen to "project" Iranian women's issues onto it. It seems like this method had been used before but has gained popularity after 2004 during Ahmadinejad's first administration. It must be noted that practicing such methods should not be interpreted as if Iranian women journalists do not genuinely care about regional problems and/or they are abusing Afghanistan's situation for their benefit. As a matter of fact, Iranian women journalist use this method to accomplish their mission as a journalist, raise regional and global awareness toward what is happening in Iran and its neighboring countries and avoid censorship.

Despite the multiple tactics that are practiced by women journalists to amend and protect their reports and careers, their situation did not improve, significantly. Besides, the ongoing game of cat-and-mouse between journalists and the state has affected their personal and professional lives, tremendously. In other words, how have women journalists protected themselves against being prosecuted when, according to the press law Article 9, Note 7, the writer is held accountable for the published content? And more importantly, what happens when these evasion techniques seem to be inefficient in guarding women journalists against the ever-increasing restrictive actions of the MCIG?

The Final Station

The combination of political and financial pressures led to the closure of papers, fewer job opportunities, and women losing their political and economic autonomy. MCIG's increasing restrictions neutralized the aforementioned bypass techniques and pushed women into "governing themselves in the absence of any central [external] pressure."¹⁸⁴ Badrolsadat Mofidi explained:

In a dysfunctional political context, self-censorship is the first and the last shield that journalist uses to protect himself/herself. The reason for this suppression is how the authorities perceive the papers and journalists.

They see us as spies and press offices as the nests of foreign enemies.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴Michel Foucault, *Security, territory, population : lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, ed. Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

¹⁸⁵ Badrolsadat Mofidi, interview with Author, Tehran-Oslo, 12 September 2020.

Lily Farhadpour's memory is a self-explanatory example of this "dysfunctional political context," and how it impacts women journalists:

The magazine that I worked in was sealed by the judiciary in 2009. After some time we were permitted to re-open the office, and we filmed that event. After a while, my director friend asked for that tape. But I could not remember who the cameraman was.

After some time, her director friend could obtain the tape. Farhadpour asked about the identity of the cameraman and then she remembered his identity. She continued: "I was the one who invited him since he was a close friend of mine. That was the time that I felt the heavy curtain of self-censorship that had covered my memories."

But what made this journalist forget her friend? Her psychologist explained the reason for her forgetfulness. She remarked, "The horrendous distress from frequent interrogations and being afraid that uttering the names of my friends amid interrogations can create problems for them, pushed me into the selective forgetfulness."¹⁸⁶ This is similar to what Bourdieu concludes as the result of constant suppression: "some thoughts [are] not only unpublishable but also unthinkable."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Lily Farhadpour, interview with author, 1 August, 2020.

¹⁸⁷ Bunn, "Reimagining Repression: New Censorship theory and After," 31.

Conclusion

Censorship is a multifaceted phenomenon and cannot be studied as an isolated entity consequently, This thesis thus investigates the role and function of Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance as the official institution directing the multilayered regulative measures on press and journalists during three consecutive administrations from 1989 to 2013. To sharpen the analysis of this study, I have focused on how MCIG policies influenced and re-shaped women journalists' professional attitudes, exploring the context in which they formed and developed. This means that much time was spent looking at the political dynamics of major actors in government who designed and implemented such restrictive policies via the MCIG. The Bordieuan theory of practice and in particular the concepts of dominant, dominated, field, capital, and habitus help in offering a frame to understand how these different agents are interlinked and more so, how they engage in certain power relationships.

I have extended this research to study the connections between the combination of ministers at the MCIG and the securitization of the press field during three government administrations. During Rafsanjani's presidency, with one reformist (Khatami) and two fundamentalists (Larijani and Mirsalim) as the ministers of MCIG, women journalists seized upon limited opportunities to stay active in the press field. Yet the controlling measures of the state led to the invisibility of women journalists.¹⁸⁸ Khatami's administration (1997-2005) on the other hand, attempted to remove some of the limitations, offering a semi-liberal opening for Iranian women journalists to increase their capital and agency. According to official statistical data, given the growth in the number of newspaper applicants, women journalists, women in the Jury, and winners of press awards, these improvements have led to significant changes in newspapers' content.¹⁸⁹ Women reporters have covered a wide range of topics, such as challenging Islamic laws, questioning political and societal issues, and highlighting domestic economic hardship, gender inequality, and much more. Furthermore, they have navigated and negotiated their presence, mobilizing their societal and professional capital under the reformist government. However, certain politicians and leaders among Iran's clerical authority have attempted to limit women journalists' presence and practices. The

¹⁸⁸ See Appendix B, Graph, and Table 1.

¹⁸⁹ See Appendix B, Graph and Table 2, 4, 5, and 6.

press law amendment and the closure of the papers are just two examples of such actions that neutralized the semi-liberal policies of the reformist president and his ministers. Moreover, the powerful fundamentalist Ahmadinejad administration (2005-2013) denigrated the political, economic, and societal capital of women journalists.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, this study, confirms the enduring prominence of the IRI's cultural hegemony and how it has made use of the MCIG and its ministers by making it one of the most important censorship institutions that are supervised by the IRI's Supreme Leader who for any reason, can dis/qualify MCIG's director. Given this fact, the ministers of MCIG are not only the executors of the state's censorship policies but are also expected to be politically and ideologically loyal to certain cultural frameworks that are designed and planned by high-ranking members of the clerical authority.

Moreover, the MCIG's coercive measures that were intensified during Ahmadinejad's administrations persuaded women journalists to practice methods that would shield them from being censored. In this regard, this thesis is one of the few academic studies to examine how Iranian women journalists perceived, digested, and reacted to different political administrations that targeted their agency, autonomy, security, and writing techniques. Each of the 11 women who participated in this research project, although coming from different backgrounds and experiences in the field of journalism, had expressed how they dodged and navigated around many of the MCIG's controlling and limiting measures. The findings of this research confirm that in addition to the circumvention methods of Iranian women journalists that are compatible with ones used by journalists in China, Ethiopia, Russia, Syria, Turkey, and Tajikistan, Iranian women journalist practice another method, which I refer to as projection/diversion.

While MCIG is a powerful institution, there are still other religio-political forces and security bodies that are participatory in devising and executing censorship measures—such as the judiciary or the Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution. As a future line of inquiry, one might examine the regulatory measures extending from these two institutions and investigate how they, too, have targeted other aspects of women's lives, such as their sexuality. They would add to more diverse scholarship on state regulatory measures and how they have been consequential for women's agency or their political capital. Regardless of the findings of that research, the process of collecting information, conducting interviews, and

¹⁹⁰See Appendix B, Graph, and Table 3.

cross-examining archival sources, should contribute enormously to a nuanced portrait of women's subjectivity within contemporary post-revolutionary Iran.

Certainly, Iranian women, journalists have referred to self-censorship as their “first and most loyal companion.”¹⁹¹ But the process of conducting this research has transformed my perspective as an academic researcher and dexterous interviewer to examine how they have “befriended” other dodging techniques that have contributed to them finding novel ways to scaffold their resiliency in the political game of cat and mouse.

¹⁹¹ Badrolsadat Mofidi, interview with Author, Tehran-Oslo, 12 September 2020.

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Appendix A

Presentation of the interviewees

1. Asieh Amini

Asieh Amini (1973) is an Iranian poet, journalist, and women's rights activist. She received her Bachelor's degree in the field of social communication and journalism in 1993 from Allameh Tabatabaei University. She is one of the founders of the "No to Stoning Penalty Campaign," and has received some international awards such as Oxfam Novib Foundation and World Pen Association. She has worked with many newspapers in Iran. Financial problems challenged her efforts to establish an independent news agency. She was the editor in chief of the *Zanan-e Iran* (the Iranian women) website, the first online women newspaper for Iranian women. She was arrested on March 4, 2007 along with 32 other women activists such as Jila Baniyaghoob. Baniyaghoob has explained this incident in her book "Women on the 209 Ward," and explained that they had sat out outside the Revolutionary Court to protest the suppressive measures of the authorities against women rights activists. Amini was released after five days and was cleared from all the charges. Since 2009 she has been residing in Norway

2. Azra Farahani

She has worked as a journalist for more than 25 years at well-known newspapers in Iran. After asking questions from the then head of the judiciary Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi She became beleaguered after being harassed by the judiciary system.¹⁹³ After the inauguration of the Association of Iranian Journalists, she was elected as one of the inspectors¹⁹⁴ of the

¹⁹³ On the early days of March, 1998, Azra Farahani participated a new conference of the Head of Judiciary system. In her interview with me, she explained: "I told Mr. Yazdi that we [in Salaam newspaper] have received reports stating that mayors that have been arrested by judiciary have been tortured in detention." Before the news conference she consulted the editor in chief of Salaam newspaper and they chose the right wordings. The next day she asked the question but the head of the judiciary "Mohamad Yazdi," rejected any extra-legal attitude, instead he publicly threatened her that she has falsely accused the judiciary system and she is trying to obscure the justice. As she explained for me after a while she received a phone call that summoned her to the court and she refused to do so, instead she replied if judiciary consider me as a suspect, then officially summon me to the court. This never happened and she was never been summoned or interrogated officially.

¹⁹⁴ According to Article 30 of the Status of the IJA; inspectors have six major responsibilities. 1. Inspectors should supervise all the actions of the board of directors and the executive secretary within the provisions of this status, Examining and supervising the offices and papers and financial documents and expenses of the trade union association and taking care of the financial and administrative affairs of the trade union association -3 . Following up and handling the complaints of the members and, if necessary, preparing a report and submitting it to the Ministry of Cooperation, Labor and Social Welfare, as well as submitting a copy of the report to the board of directors or the general assembly (If necessary.) -4 Reviewing and commenting on the financial report for submission to the General Assembly -5 .Inviting and convening a general assembly, if necessary, according to

association. She is a member of the board of directors of the Association of Media Managers and chairwoman of the *Raz* media institute and CEO of *Donya -e Qalam* (The World of Pen).

Now she is a Ph.D. student in Culture and Communication major and the author of “The Collection of the Press Court Cases, from 1991-2001,” in which she documented all the legal complaints against the press and the related court sentences in three volumes.” She intends to continue this theme in the future and compose a sequence that contains the same topic within three decades.

3. Badrolsadat Mofidi

Badrolsadat Mofidi is one of the Iranian woman journalist pioneers. She has worked at various newspapers and has been executive secretary of the IJA since 2007. She and her husband were arrested on 28 December 2009. They were charged with “Participation in Ayatollah Montazeri’s Funeral.” She was kept for six months in prison without any official charges. In her interview with the author she remembered that she was kept in solitary confinement for 21 days, then she was transferred to the public ward, despite never being informed of her charges. The prison and stressful environment created physical challenges, including heart problems, for her. She said that while she was in prison she was interrogated while she was heavily drugged and was asked about her writings from 30 years before being imprisoned. She confirms that she was at risk of providing forced confessions but luckily she was free from prison before that happened. She admitted that the suppressive measure of the security bodies did not stop, she was sentenced to five years in prison and banned from journalism for six years.¹⁹⁵ She explained, “I was sentenced by the court, but at the same time Mr. Du’aei¹⁹⁶ mediated and I was pardoned by the leader’s decree.” After some time she became the editor-in-chief of *Iran-e-Farda* (Future Iran) magazine, but after two years she resigned from that position, due to external pressures.

4. Faezeh Hashemi

Faezeh Hashemi Bahramani, better known as Faezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani (1963), is an Iranian politician and women’s rights activist. She was the license holder, founder, and

the authorities contained in this status -6 .Participating in the meetings of the board of directors (if necessary according to the decision of the board of directors), without having the right to vote.

¹⁹⁵ “ *Badrolsadat Mofidi has been sentenced to 6 years in prison and 5 years banned from journalism,*” *Donya-e Eqtesad*, 11 August, 2010.

¹⁹⁶ Seyyed Mahmoud Du’aei (born April 20, 1941 in Yazd) is an Iranian cleric and an influential politician. Du’aei was one of Ruhollah Khomeini’s companions during his stay in Najaf. He was Iran’s ambassador to Iraq.

executive manager of *Zan*(Woman) which was the first and the last Iranian women's newspaper lasted from July 1998 till 6 April 1999. She found a newspaper that was aimed to challenge the hegemony of patriarchal discourse and succeeded in creating a new discourse that women were the main part of it. After publishing a caricature about women's blood money¹⁹⁷ and Farah Pahlavi's¹⁹⁸ New Year's message the hardline judiciary closed down the paper two times. At first, it was banned for two weeks in February 1998 and again on April 6, 1999.¹⁹⁹ As the daughter of late President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, she has been one of the policymakers in women's affairs and served as a member of the Iranian parliament (*Majles*) from 1996-2000. Her close ties to political and religious figures gave her a unique position in Iran's social and political context.

5.Jila Baniyaghoob

Jila Baniyaghoob (1971) is an Iranian journalist and women's rights activist. She had worked at different papers such as *Nowrouz*, *Sarmaye* (Capital), and many others. She is currently the editor-in-chief of the website *Kanoon Zanan-e Irany* (The Iranian Women Association). She started journalism at the daily newspaper *Hamshari* (Citizen)²⁰⁰ while she was a student at Allameh Tabatabai University. She focused on women's issues from the beginning of her career. She was reporting on a women's rights rally when she was arrested and imprisoned by security forces. She was charged with "acting against national security" and "participating in an illegal demonstration," but she was acquitted in January 2007. On March 8, 2007, she was arrested for the second time during a rally for International Women's Day while she was reporting the event. Although she carried a journalist-identity card, she was transferred to ward 209²⁰¹ where she was interrogated by officers from the Ministry of Intelligence.²⁰² In 2008 she was imprisoned for the third time for covering a women's rally on charges of "disruption of public order," "failure to obey police order," and "propagandizing against the Islamic regime." In 2009 she was sentenced to one year in jail and banned from journalism

¹⁹⁷ The caricature showed that a couple were being rubbed and the husband asked the rubber to shut his wife, saying "kill her since her blood money is half of mine."

¹⁹⁸ Farah Diba is the widow of Mohammadreza Shah Pahlavi, the last King of Iran.

¹⁹⁹ "Who the women press is working for?(Nashriat-e Zananeh Baraye Keh Midamand?)," The office of women's studies and research, 17 December, 2011.

²⁰⁰ Hamshahri newspaper was the first coloured newspaper in Iran that was published by Tehran Municipality. It was founded by Gholamhossein Karbaschi then mayor of Tehran.

²⁰¹ The 209 ward, is located in Evin prison but it is not governed by the State Prisons Organization that is officially in charge of prisons. This ward is one of the secret prisons and detention centers that belong to the Ministry of Intelligence. All of prisoners in this are being interrogated by the employees of the Ministry of Intelligence. The detainees are being held away from their legal rights, for example none of the them had access to the lawyers.

²⁰² She has inscribed her prison memoir in her book, "women on the 209 ward."

for 30 years. Amnesty International designated her as a prisoner of conscience. That same year, she won the award of “Courage in Journalism “ from the International Women’s Media Foundation. The following year, the Reporters without Borders nominated her for the award of “Freedom of Speech.” She is the author of many books such as Ahmad Shah Masoud,” the Afghani commander, which is a collection of her interviews with Masoud’s companions and comrades.

6.Lily Farhadpour

Lily Farhadpour (1962) is a writer, women’s rights activist, actress, and journalist; she got her Bachelor’s degree in translation and journalism. From the mid-1990s until 2004 she was senior editor of the literature and art sections for many papers and websites. She was also on the editorial board of several newspapers and the editor of two monthly journals including the weekly *Feminist Journal*. These newspapers and journals were closed down in the mid-2000s. Farhadpour was arrested on 21 January 2009 in her house and after she was released from prison, she left journalism for acting in cinema. She was charged with “disruption of public order and national security,” which was irrelevant to her career as a journalist. In her interview with me she emphasized that:” while I was being interrogated, I was reminded that my presence as a well-known journalist in the protests would cost me a lot. I was frequently summoned [by Ministry of Intelligence] to explain, or answer some questions that made me quit my job as a journalist.”

7.Maryam Kazemzadeh

Marym Kazemzade (1956) is a war journalist how after receiving her diploma in 1967, moved to England to become a journalist. She became acquainted with the union of Islamic Students Associations in Europe and America. She returned to Iran on 2nd February two days after Ayatollah Khomeini arrived in Tehran). In April 1979 she was invited to work at *Enqelāb-e Eslāmi* (Islamic Revolution) newspaper that belonged to Abolhasa Banisadr(then-president); she worked there as a photographer. On her first assignment, she was sent to Kurdistan and was accompanied by Dr.Mostafa Chamran and Abou Sharif (the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps). Later she visited the Red Scarves Corps and their commander Asqar Vesali. Being within them eased the process of taking pictures in distressed cities of Kurdistan. She married Vesali in 1980 and some days after their wedding Iraq attacked Iran. The newlywed couple was sent to Kermanshah, Vesali was the commander of the region and she was a journalist. As she stated in her biography,” capturing the war

scenes brought me a new approach to photography.” In the same year (1980) Vesali was killed in the war and she experienced the most tragic event of her life.” In 1983 she worked at *Zan-e Rouz* (The Today’s Woman) magazine and sometime after that she was offered a job at *Kayhan* newspaper and worked there for 20 years. She was in charge of ”daily reports” and “social news.” The letters that were sent to the newspaper were delivered to her, she was responsible for finding answers to the people’s questions from the relevant authorities. In 2005 she retired from *Kayhan*. A year later she was offered to work with *Zanan* magazine and since then she has focused on cultural issues and problems of girls and women as her first concern.

8.Masoumeh Naseri

Masoumeh Naseri is an Iranian woman journalist who was born in 1975 in Ahwaz. In 2004, she was one of the White Scarves group that defended women’s rights to enter and attend matches at Iranian football stadiums. She was also a board member of “womeniniran.org,” the pioneer Iranian feminist website. She has worked in various newspapers and has been one of the first women journalists that obtained access to report a domestic football match in the early 2000s. She has worked as a member of the board of directors in *Chelcheragh* weekly magazine that was founded in 2002. *Chelcheragh* contained cultural and societal stories for its young readers. She was a member of the editorial board of *Eqbal* a reformist newspaper that was banned when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president in 2005. She left Iran in 2006 to work for *Radio Zamaneh*, an Amsterdam-based multimedia platform in the Persian language. She was writing a weblog named *Cafe Naseri* and currently, she works as a freelance journalist and social media advisor for some Persian language media outlets.

9.Minoo Badiie

Minoo Badiie(1956), is one of Iran’s women journalist pioneers and university professor who worked for more than 39 years at different papers such as *Kayhan*, *Neshat* (Joy), *Asr -e Azadegan*(The Era of the Free People), *Akhbar -e Eqtesad*(The Economic News) and has a Ph.D. in Planning and Management of the Cultural Affairs. After being terminated from *Kayhan*, she was appointed as director of *Tavanir*’s²⁰³ publication that focused on publishing the technical and professional magazine. She has been the secretary of a reporting group and director of education in *Samt*²⁰⁴ newspaper. Badiie has held many positions in the IJA since

²⁰³ A company that is affiliated to the Ministry of Energy, and is responsible to develop the production, distribution and selling of electricity.

²⁰⁴ *Samt* (Sana’t, Ma’dan ,Tejarat)is the newspaper that is affiliated with Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade.

its establishment. She has been the Member of the Central Council of the Iranian Association of Women journalists "ROSA." She was one of the judges of the press festival and urban media festival. She lectured at various universities and has trained many young journalists. She has written several journalistic books and reviews such as a review of the American film *Not Without My Daughter*.²⁰⁵

10.Nooshabeh Amiri

Nooshabeh Amiri (1952) is an Iranian journalist and the only woman journalist that interviewed Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and a Master's degree in Sociology. She has worked as a journalist since 1971 and was forced to leave her job as *Kayhan's* political editor in 1979. She has been a member of the editorial board of "Film Report" until it was closed down in 2001. She worked as a journalist in many reformist newspapers but was forced to leave Iran in 2003. She started an online newspaper *Rooz Online* that was based in the Netherlands. She is currently residing in Paris and working with Iran international news channel.²⁰⁶

11.Zahra Ebrahimi

Zahra Ebrahimi (1956) is the first woman journalist that was appointed as a parliamentary journalist. She is a political science graduate from Tehran University and started her job as a journalist in 1993 in *Hamshahri* (Citizen). She was a parliamentary journalist for 12 years until Ahmadinejad became Tehran's mayor. As the new mayor, Ahmadinejad appointed a new team to direct *Hamshahri*. The new team decided to terminate Ebrahimi's mission as a parliamentary journalist while she had experience in reporting three terms of *Majles*. She was assigned to work in other fields (such as the Women's field) at the newspaper, mainly due to her having a divergent opinion from Ahmadinejad's team. She also worked *Zanan* (Women) with Shala-Sherkat ,its the editor in chief of.

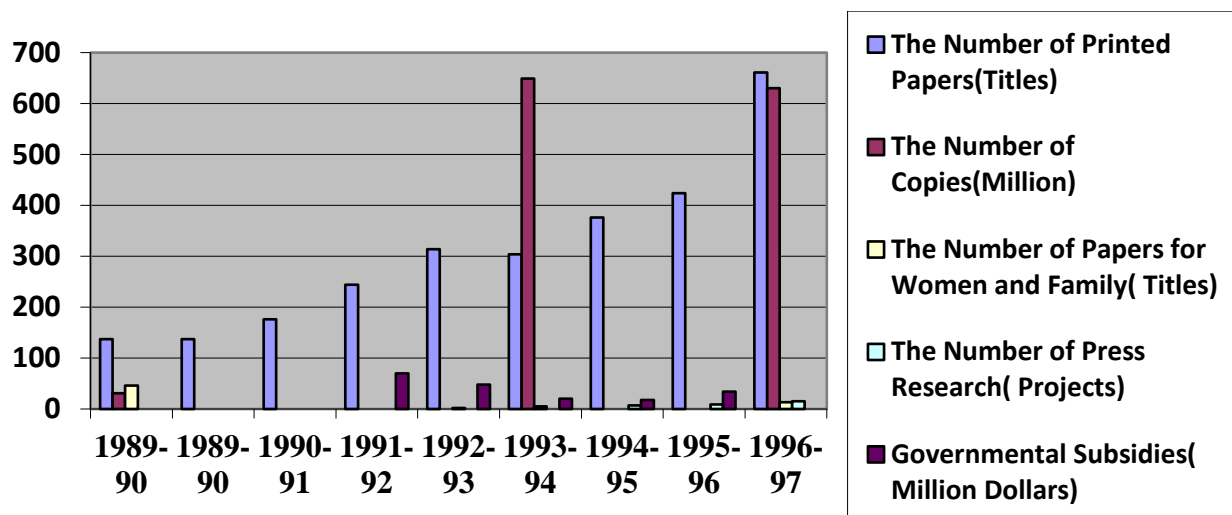
²⁰⁵ *Not without My Daughter* is the book of Betty Mahmoody which was subsequently made into a film.

²⁰⁶ "*Hich Mokhalefi Ra Sansor Nakonim Va Honar-e Shenidan Ra Biamozim*[We should not censor any opponents and learn the art of attentive listening]," Bamdad Khabar, 2009, accessed March10, 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20090813202004/http://bamdadkhabar.com/2009/01/post_361/.

Appendix B

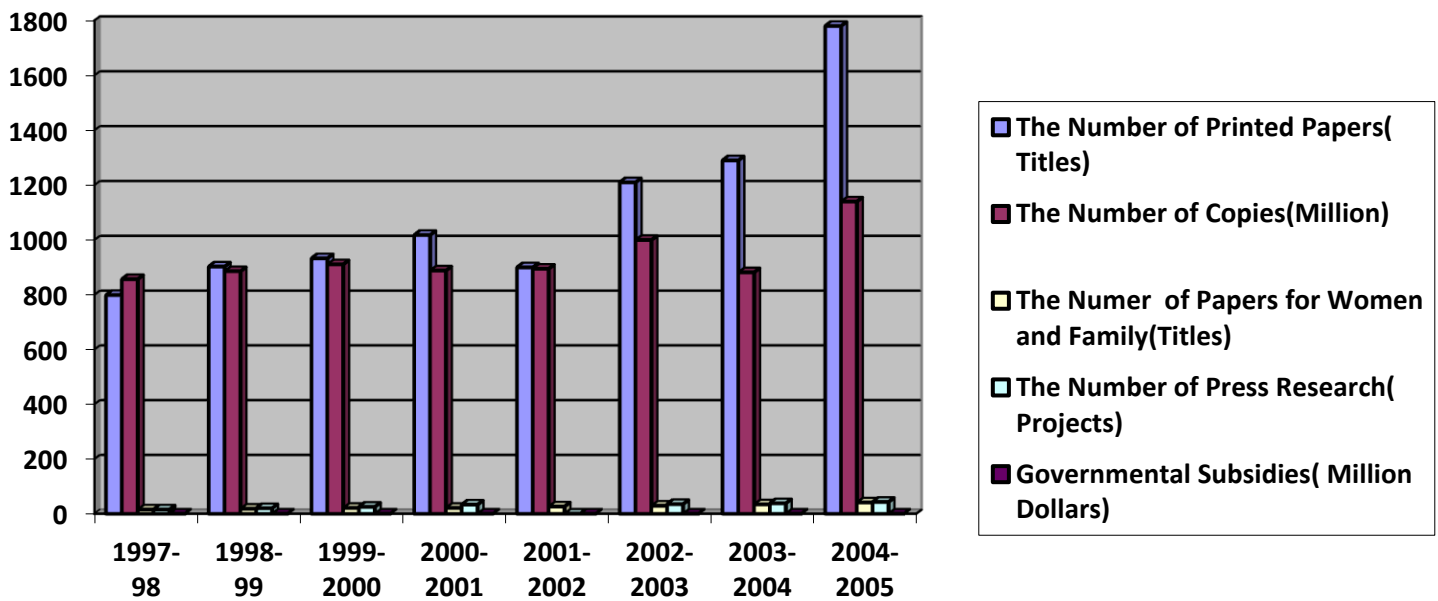
Graphs and Tables

Graph and Table 1, Status of press indicators according to the report of the Deputy of Strategic Studies and Planning of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance- Rafsanjani's administration.



No	Titles of indices	Unit of Measurements	1989-1990	1990-1991	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997
1	The number of printed papers	Titles	137	176	244	314	304	367	424	661
2		Million	-	-	-	-	649	686/8	703/3	630
3	The number of papers for women and family	Titles	-	-	-	2	5	-		13
4	The number of Press research	Projects	-	-	-	-	-	7	9	15
5	Governmental Subsidies	Million Dollars	-	-	70	48	20	18	34	37(40)

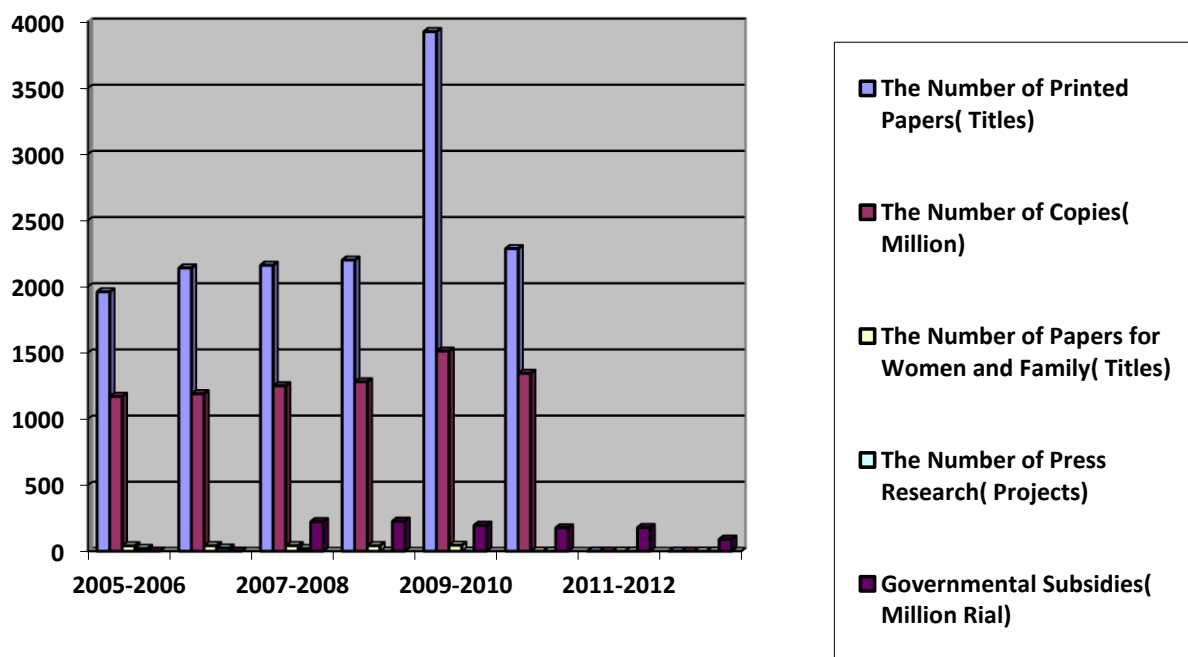
Graph and Table 2, Status of press indicators according to the report of the Deputy of Strategic Studies and Planning of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance- Khatami's administration.



No	Titles of indices	Unit of Measurements	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
1	The number of printed papers	Titles	799	903	933	1018	900	1210	1290	1780
2	The number of copies	Million	857	886	911	888.5	895	1000	882	1140
3	The number of papers for women and family	Titles	15	18	21	21	26	29	34	41
4	The number of Press research	Projects	15	20	25	33	-	35	38	43
5	Governmental Subsidies	Million Dollars	22(25)	13(18)	13(20)	18(26)	22(25)	16(23)	18(25)	-

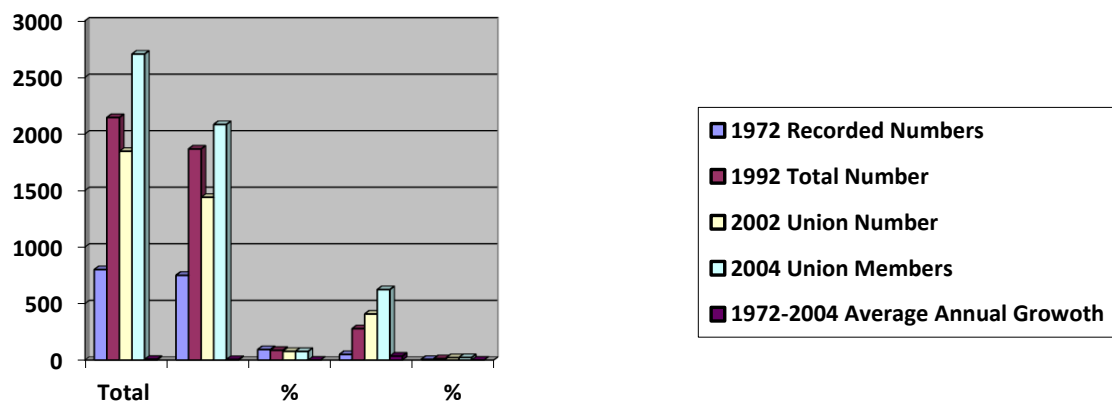
Graph and Table 3, Status of press indicators according to the report of the Deputy of Strategic Studies and Planning of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance-

Ahmadinejad's administration.



No	Titles of indices	Unit of Measurements	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
1	The number of printed papers	Titles	1960	2140	2160	2200	3926	2286	-	-
2	The number of copies	Million	1170	1190	1250	1280	1512	1344	-	-
3	The number of papers for women and family	Titles	41	42	42	42	45	45	-	-
4	The number of Press research	Projects	21	24	20	-	-	-	-	-
5	Governmental Subsidies	Million Rials	7.486.00	11.743.136	222.808	226.449	196.026	176.311	178.568	90.476

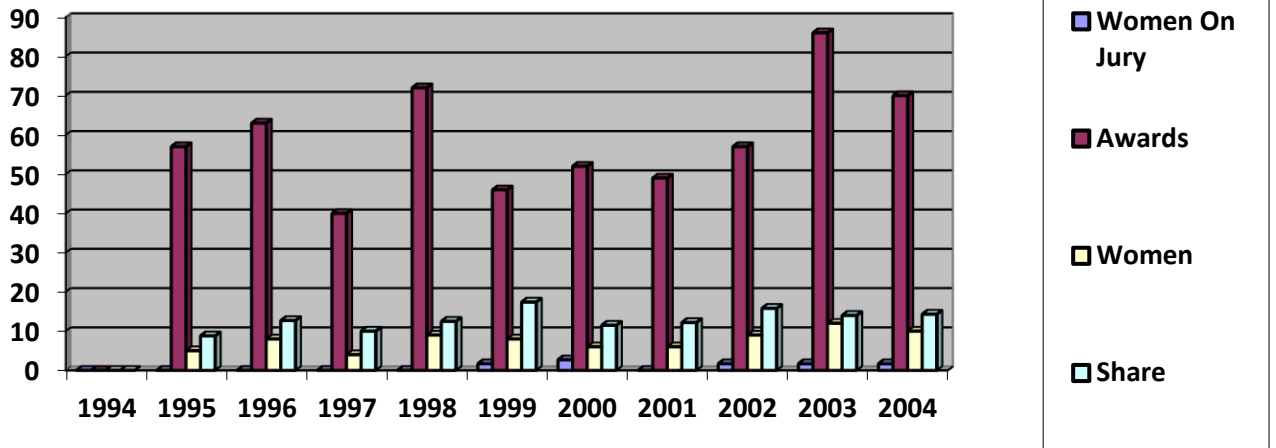
Graph-Table 4, Number of women journalists in Iran. (1972-2004)



Year	Total	Men	%	Women	%
1972 Recorded total numbers	800	750	93.8	50	6.3
1992 total numbers	2,145	1,867	87	278	13
2002 union members	1,846	1,439	78	407	22
2004 union numbers	2,706	2,083	77	623	23
1972-2004 average annual growth %	7.4	5.6	6.4 times faster than men	35.8	4.8 times faster than total

Note: Hossein Shahidi, "Journalism in Iran from mission to profession."

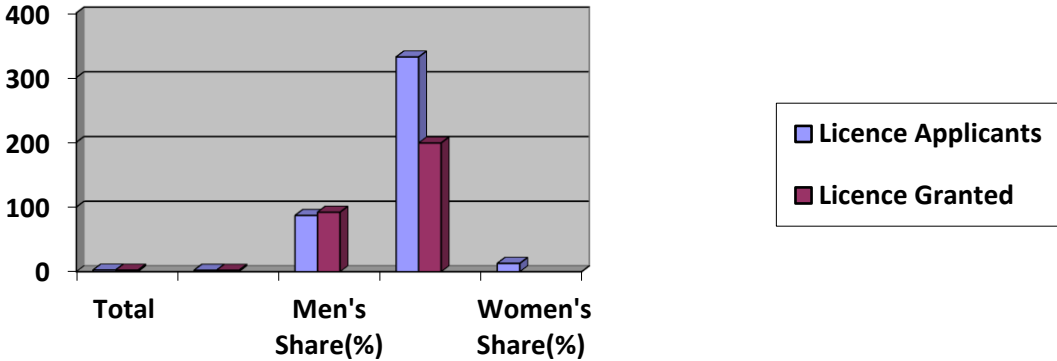
Graph and Table 5, Women's award winners at Press Festival (1994-2004).



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Women on Jury	0	0	0	0	0	1/7	2/7	N/A	1/7	1/7	1/7
Awards	N/A	57	63	40	72	46	52	49	57	86	70
Women		5	8	4	9	8	6	6	9	12	10
Share %		8.8	12.7	10	12.5	17.4	11.5	12.2	15.8	14	14.3

Note: Hossein Shahidi, Journalism in Iran from mission to profession, Iran Studies

Graph and Table 6, Newspaper licenses in March 2003-



Category	Total	Men	Men's share (%)	Women	Women's Share (%)
License applicants	2,628	2,296	87	332	13
Licences granted	2,421	2,222	92	199	8