# Media, Culture and Society in Iran

Living with globalization and the Islamic state

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# 13  Secularization in Iranian society[1]

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## Introduction

There is no society in which some form of religion does not exist. However,
each society is different from others in the form and type of religiosity. Religion
in Iran has a long history and is entwined with long traditions. The structures of
religious norms have been relentlessly reproduced, and religiously oriented insti-
tutions have always been active. Often governments have formally preached
religion. Iran has undoubtedly been an utterly religious society. A social revolu-
tion that was termed the Islamic Revolution reintroduced and re-energized reli-
gion in Iranian society in unprecedented ways. What made this revolution all the
more perplexing is that it had taken place in the wake of years of modernization
projects that had tried to secularize Iranian society. After nearly three decades of
"Islamization" projects, one would expect secularization to be at its end.
Although it is widely assumed that the establishment of an Islamic regime would
elevate religiosity to its highest level, we argue that secularization nowadays
challenges society's religiosity.

Secularization is primarily regarded as inevitable. As societies undergo
specialization, rationalization, and structural/functional differentiation, they are
destined to be secularized. Parallel to this process, autonomy of subsystems
(e.g., economy, science, polity) and their independence from religion prepare
the ground for society's secularization. On one hand, subsystems, with their
independence from religion, derive their basis for legitimacy from norms, laws,
and regulations. On the other hand, religion itself turns into a subsystem, one that
can provide society with some of its functional requirements. In this context, one
cannot speak of a religious system any longer, since religion has turned into a
type of subsystem. If secularization implies that the society in proportion to
specialization and complexity of its segments attains sovereignty from the institu-
tion of religion, the process of secularization will necessarily be inevitable.

Considering Iranian society against this background raises several questions.
If we assume that Iranian society has undergone structural and functional
differentiation, specialization, and rationalization, is secularization in Iran an
inevitability? What do the Islamization projects of the states with its various
institutionalizations of religion at the systematic level entail for the religious

beliefs of individuals? Will religion lose its influence in Iranian society? These questions address fundamental issues in Iran. In this chapter, we address the problem of analyzing secularization, religious revival, and the consequences of Islamization projects for the religiosity of individuals in Iran. The first section reviews some of the relevant literature on religion in society. In the second section, we discuss an analytical tool for answering the questions we have raised. The final section discusses secularization in Iran by using conceptual tools described in the previous section.

## Secularization: a framework for analysis

Theoretical views on secularization are not homogeneous. There exist various definitions of religion and secularization. However, many explain the phenomenon of secularization by emphasizing internal religious factors in relation to Max Weber's "theory of rationality." According to Weber (1958), the history of the Church and religious rules are another part of this process. Based on this view, Peter Berger emphasizes factors and forces of "rational drive" that contribute to religious and social secularization (Berger, 1967, 1991). Other theorists attempt to account for external religious factors, rationality, social institutions, the development of science, and specialization. Some believe that secularization denotes the decline of religious beliefs; others believe that these two phenomena should be studied independently of each other. Others talk of emergent movements and cults created in the modern world. To them modern society might have weakened the institution of the Church, as a result of which ritual and church religion have declined – though it may have caused new forms of religion (see Hamilton, 1998).

Bilton *et al.* (1987) question the idea that society is increasingly moving toward secularization. Our analytical and methodological tools determine the kind of explanation we can provide in addressing the degree of the secularization or religiosity of a given society. For instance, one aspect of secularization process relies on our definition of religion and the level, condition, and status of religiosity in a given society. Most sociologists define religion and secularization based on the category of institution. In terms of institutional definition, religion is delineated as church attendance, observation of religious rituals, and every single movement away from this institutional participation is called the decline of religion. Some have described secularization as a process through which religious institutions lose their significance in socialization. They point to statistical evidence of secularization from England and America that reflects the decline of "organized religious participation." As a result, the Christian Church has lost its direct influence on individuals' ideas and behavior (see Bilton *et al.*, 1987). However, there is evidence that indicates the opposite might be true. Contemporary studies show that the following trends have not declined: interest in religion, membership in church, attending church weekly, believing religion is important in one's life, and believing God's will is important in one's life (See Glasner, 1977).

Secularization takes place concomitantly with the process of rationalization and industrialization of society, and thus is reflected in the separation of religion and the state, where the state is the dominant factor. Parsons (1999) assumes that this separation is an evolution from a simple form to more complex ones. This separation identifies society's increasing "structural differentiation." Should one accept that a religious institution has adapted itself to its environment, it does not follow that the process of industrialization has had the same effect on religious acts. For example, while participation and membership of British religious institutions have declined, the level of American religious acts has remained constant, if not increased (Bilton *et al.*, 1987).

Some believe that secularization signifies the death of religion, i.e., it has been reduced to entertainment in society. Others argue that religion is undergoing a process of transformation, not extinction. Robert Bellah (1991) emphasizes individual autonomy as the salient characteristic of modern religion. Today people hardly accept their religious ethos without question. He considers this idea as a by-product of religious evolution. Bellah thinks that civil religion is an evidence of everyday needs of sacred symbols (see Thompson, 1995).

All these theories illustrate that sociologists disagree about the form of the secularization process and the meaning derived from that concept. Our understanding of secularization in this chapter is that secularization largely goes hand in hand with each society's socio-historic background and transformations to the extent that the meaning of this process is generally context-specific. This is so because the level, condition, and status of religiosity are different in each society (depending on the type of religion and society). Therefore, religious resignation, or lack thereof, must be analyzed based on its previous status, which is different in each society. Apart from attention to the level, condition, and status of religiosity, we can analyze secularization based on other factors present in every society. For instance, while in the West religion's relationship to familial and cultural domains is considered as a significant variable for the analysis of secularization, in Iranian society it must be assessed at other levels such as economy or polity. Economic and political levels, according to Berger (1991), are among the first on which secularization occurs. This process occurred in the West during past centuries and now it has reached deep into the lower levels (e.g., family, values and norms, and culture). However, in Iranian society, where religious frameworks are more dominant, following secularization at the lowest levels of the life-world may not be meaningful. Thus, taking into account the level of society's industrialization and modernization, we should strive to analyze the process of secularization.

Given the disagreements about the secularization theories and their universal applicability, we need to construct a framework and an analytical tool in our analysis of secularization in Iran. We will look at Karel Dobbelaere's (1999) work on levels of secularization and Yves Lambert's (1999) work on religious institutions and religious symbols for the purpose of our analysis.

According to Dobbelaere (1999), secularization should be addressed at three levels. First is the macro (societal) level. Second is the meso (subsystem) level.

Third is the micro (individual) level. The macro-level analysis addresses processes dealing with structural and functional differentiations often associated with modernity. The meso level addresses religious changes and the tendency toward *this-worldliness*. The micro level addresses individuals' faith in their participation in religious activities.

Referring to the existing literature, he cites different "exemplars" to organize various secularization "paradigms" according to the three different levels of analyses he has proposed. He locates institutional differentiation or segmentation, autonomization, rationalization, societalization, disenchantment of the world, privatization, and generalization on the societal level. The meso level includes pluralization, relativization, and this-worldliness. At the micro level, he locates individualization, bricolage, unbelief, and the decline of church religiosity.

Dobbelaere (1999) points out that among these exemplars segmentation, rationalization, and this-worldliness are central to the secularization paradigm to the extent that other exemplars are related to these three. For the macro analysis at the societal level, differentiating between public and private spheres is important to the analysis of secularization. Dobbelaere (1999) criticizes this dichotomy from two aspects. First, it limits secularization only to the public sphere by leaving out types of secularization that happen in the family (private sphere). Second, he argues that this dichotomy is not a structural feature of society but concepts that sociologists have adopted from the discourses of liberal and socialists of the nineteenth century who wanted to legitimize the autonomy and differentiation of those institutions they deemed "secular." Dobbelaere believes the Habermas's conceptual dichotomy of system versus life-world is a better conceptual tool because it allows us to account for "societalization" (where relationships become formal and utilitarian) and life-world (where relationships among family and friends remain communal). In this sense, secularization comes back to the social system; secularization of the social system does not necessarily cause the decline of individuals' religious participation (see Willaime, 1999).

On the meso level, according to Dobbelaere (1999), secularization is discussed in terms of pluralization and the emergence of new religious movements (NRMs). The multiplicity of religious views has meant that a competition-based "religious market" would take hold. Either through lower levels of transcendence accepted by new religions or through involvement in mundane and "this-worldly" affairs by historical religions, we approach what is called "internal secularization." Berger (1991) has extended this type of secularization. Here internal secularization is decentralized. This decentralization builds the foundations for pluralization. A pluralistic situation is one in which faith is a voluntary issue; man is free to be or not to be faithful to religion. Thus, religious tradition that could once impose itself on individuals can now only display its products in a market where customers are free to purchase or not to purchase. With this, Berger (1991) sheds more light on the relationships between pluralization and secularization. A commodity (or in this case a religious act) with a

reasonable price will dominate the market, because of which the social structure of religious groups will be changed. Religious groups transform from monopolistic groups into competitive groups. In such a situation religious groups organize themselves in a new form. In a competitive environment, all members with a common goal need to attract customers and consumers' attention, so a record of achievement gains importance. Attempts to be successful in a competitive situation lead to rationalization of socio-religious structures.

Exemplars for the micro level include individualization, bricolage, unbelief, and a decrease in church religiosity, by which Dobbelaere (1999) means the "unchurching" of individuals and lower levels of church involvement. Religious individualization addresses the movement of religion into the "private sphere." Here attending church is a matter of belonging to a particular community and all it has to offer. This is a community that one chooses. Thus, attending church expresses individuals' preferences and inclinations. Church attendance as a matter of expression places the Church in the domain of the life-world (see Bellah *et al.*, 1985).

So far, we have described Dobbelaere's (1999) views on the levels of secularization. Lambert (1999) provides a sharper analytical tool by discussing two "thresholds" of secularization across Dobbelaere's levels of secularization: autonomization from religious authority in the form of religious institutions and a decline of religious symbols. He argues that secularization in each domain (religious institutions and religious symbols) must be studied at the three levels of secularization independently of each other to provide a richer account of secularization. His account of religious institutions in this regard is as follows. The macro-level analysis shows that states have become independent of religious institutions, even if some form of relationship exists between them (e.g., civil religion in the U.S.). On the meso level, we can examine school and education and point out that even when religious authority still exerts some form of influence, they operate within the constraints of the national norm. Other institutions of culture remain independent of religious authority. At the micro level, Lambert (1999) argues that individuals give themselves a certain degree of autonomy from religious authority even as they accept the importance of religion in their lives (pp. 303–308). As for the second threshold of declining religious symbols, Lambert argues that we have crossed that threshold in a limited scope. His account of religious symbols on the three levels is as follows. On the macro level, only a handful of states have eliminated references to religion from their constitution. On the meso level, only science and economy could be said to have passed this threshold, although that should not be perceived as rejection of religion in these sphere entirely. Religion undoubtedly remains a presence in the cultural arena. On the micro level, two contradictory trends are observed. A decline in belief in God and a rise in the percentage of non-religious are accompanied by the rise in belief in afterlife, spirituality, miracles, NRMs, and loosely organized groups. In short, Lambert (1999) concludes, although there is widespread secularization for the first threshold (autonomization in relation to religious institutions), secularization for the second threshold (decline in reli-

gious symbols) depends on the state, (sub)populations, and the presence of parallel beliefs.

In this chapter, we incorporate both Dobbelaere's classification as well as Lambert's dichotomy, and benefit from Habermas's (1984, 1987) critical theory in systematic rationality in the life-world. We show how stratification of religion leads to secularization and identify its dominance over the life-world.

## Secularization in the Iranian society

Socio-economic modernization has changed all dimensions of Iranian society. One major consequence of modernization is structural and functional differentiation of institutions. With the advent of this process in society, the life-world is separated from system and every element acquires a definite function. In the traditional society, the institutions of economy, religion, family, and polity used to be merged. Functions such as judgment, education, and information all belonged to the domain of religion. With society's modernization and functional differentiation, religion, once in charge of a part of people's needs, relinquished some of its functions to modern institutions such as the judiciary and education. On the other hand, religious domination over society was diminished due to this differentiation, and religion as an institution alongside other institutions started to interact with them. As a result, religion itself turned into a subsystem. The changing of religion into a subsystem means that it must respect the legitimacy of other institutions. The institution of judgment received a different structure with the formation of modern rights as college graduates undertook this institution. Traditional schools (*Maktabkhane*) were eliminated with the advent of modern schools and universities in Iran. This development caused the institution of religion to lose its educational function at the monopolistic, macro level, whereby this function was reduced simply into religious teachings. In the past, the clergy's pulpit was among the most valid of communication and information means and the clergy played a leading part in the delivery of information. Because of modernization, this role was handed down to the modern institutions of news media. Moreover, the institution of economy opted for its secular devices (tax instead of *Khoms*, civil law for *Feqh*, and so forth) and attained a greater degree of autonomy. This process of autonomy is another characteristic of Iranian society's secularization.

As they strive for growing rationalization, modern organizations attempt to select the most efficient means to achieve their goals. Modern institutions move ahead with the aid of rational programming, decision-makers' calculations, and scientific supervision. Rationalization directs subsystems to structural bureaucracy; religious subsystems go through this process as well. Modern organizations with their rising bureaucracy contribute to greater complexity of society. Finally, a new realm named as system comes into life that is the realm of this-world and instrumental rationality. Religion, as a subsystem whose previous prowess is diminished through relinquishing various functions to complex and modern institutions, is subject to secularization in Iranian society.

## Rationalization of the life-world

Sociologists like Weber who assumed merely the negative aspect of rationality and instrumental rationality in the modern world supposed that through the processes of modernization the entire society suffers disenchantment. Historic experience clarifies that extensive disenchantment does not ensue in any society, and religion can still be present in numerous forms in the modern society. Secularization analyses in Iran are largely related to the system level. It is possible for Iranian society to go through secularization on the system level. However, in the life-world, religious associations consolidate, and the rate of participating in ad hoc religious gatherings, visits to holy shrines, and contributions to charities increases. Although Iranian society is in a transition, it still has the following features: it has a tough life-world; tradition remains powerful; religious culture guarantees the basis of the government's legitimacy; and social integration is provided partly through religious and traditional sources. Cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization are three categories contributing to the expansion of rationality and the transformation of the life-world.

In Iran, the system found a way into Iranian society that was alien to the Iranian life-world. This alienation agitated the life-world and put Iran into a "compounded crisis" (*bohran mozaaf*). The first one was created due to the presence and dominance of system in the life-world. Unlike Western societies where the subsystem of economy has made social relations "monetary" and "utilitarian" (Bowring, 1996), in Iranian society this subsystem has not played any role in the colonization of the life-world. Basically, economy as a subsystem has always followed the political system, and in general all other social and legal spheres as well as the life-world have been under the colonization of the political system. This colonization throughout the history of Iran has impeded the rationalization of the life-world.

One of the ways through which the life-world can be rationalized is the expansion of the public sphere, which has always been under the ruling of the ideology of the system. Among those spheres protected from colonization by the system were religious ones. Mosques, religious groups, and the clergy's pulpit partly undertook the responsibility of criticism, thinking, and rethinking of society, and contributed to the maintenance and reproduction of cultural elements and the reinforcement of social integration.

Influence of power in the life-world, where it should not be present, troubled reproduction in this realm. Relations based on power have always existed either in the public or the private sphere of Iranian society. Thus, the Iranian life-world did not succeed in its evolution and rationalization. The fact that the "system" was not entirely indigenous and had come from the West caused another crisis. This caused a reaction on the part of the life-world in the process of system secularization. Governmental power during the Reza Khan Dynasty interfered in the life-world: the fight against *hijab* (cover for women) was carried out vigorously; religious schools were abolished; and mosques were monitored. Interference in the life-world disturbed social relations. Public and private spheres have

always been under the supervision of power. Although the life-world was pushed toward secularization during the Pahlavi dynasty, this top-down dictated secularization did not significantly affect the laity and people's religious faith. In contrast, the scant remainder of the Iranian public sphere continued to criticize, think, reflect, and reproduce, even though the political system in the Pahlavi era was anti-religious and its formal organizations advocated secularization. In everyday life, the level of religious and social relations did not fall but rose, and the emergence of political-religious communities in the public sphere accelerated. The Pahlavi's secular education was overwhelmed by the life-world's secularization, and in the end the Pahlavi regime collapsed due to the crisis of legitimacy. The Revolution, as a cluster of radical acts, came out of the life-world, and consequently the new government's structures relied on the legitimacy of this sphere, and constructed religious frameworks. The religious government struggled to make the system, as well as the life-world, religious through the religiosity of subsystems and all institutions. The systematization and bureaucratization of the society that is related to specialization of institutions and their independence from each other continued on its own route following the Revolution. Structural and functional differentiation of institutions is a procedure occurring in proportion to greater complexity and modernization of societies. Therefore, in spite of the religious government's endeavors, the system pursued its own secularization process. Moreover, some spheres of the life-world, enchanted by secularization, entered the system.

The life-world after the Islamic Revolution is still under the dominance of "power." The Islamic government has attempted to play a direct role in making Iranian society religious. In its attempts to impose religion on the entire society, it has tried to inject religion into the veins of governmental offices, ministries, and laws. The *hijab* has become mandatory and even the color schemes for clothing have been subject to interference. Furthermore, beliefs, individual attitudes, and gender relations that belong to the private sphere became the target of attention and were subject to interference and domination. In the public sphere, publications and the media were controlled and religious institutions such as mosques and religious schools that were beyond the state's control were supervised to a great extent. The colonization of the life-world resumed. This time the crisis of legitimacy captured the subsystem of religion by means of agitating reproduction in everyday life. Overall, one may argue that since the legitimacy of religion has become the target of criticism and suspicion, the process of secularization has accelerated.

## The subsystem of religion

The complexity of the modern world causes each subsystem to have definite and limited responsibilities. This condition eliminates the absolute domination of one over others. This way when religion loses its dominance, society becomes secular. In conjunction with the secularization of other parts of the system, religion also becomes secular. This secularization in systematic analysis is

illustrated with proxies such as institutional differentiation, rationalization, this-worldliness, and pluralization. The subsystem of religion akin to other ones is founded on rational programming. At the meso level, there is mainly a discussion of formal organizations and groups. Like other formal organizations, religious organizations are based on bureaucracy, rationalization, and specialization. For instance, following the Revolution the growth of religious bureaucratic organizations in Iran was observed. The religious school (*Howze*), as a traditional, religious institution, has progressed toward bureaucracy and rational programming. Granting academic degrees to religious students (*Talabe*) charmed the clergy with secular, academic rankings.

Bureaucratic status of religious organizations and rational programming for the ease of affairs invite religion to this-worldliness. On the other hand, religion's entrance to the systemic sphere, social reconstruction, and the constitution means religion is evaluated and critiqued in the same vein as other subsystems are evaluated and critiqued. Religious organizations, as others, are subject to monitoring, report writing, and audits. As such, these organizations are subject to processes of judgment. This procedure of organization bears desacralization too. Religious organizations under the influence of religious subsystems direct their members' acts toward rational goals and provide frameworks based on rules and regimentations to encourage those acts. Religious organizations too can form competitive organizations. They, for example, hold different game shows and contests with secular prizes (e.g., car, PC, house, free excursions, sport and art classes) in order to attract the youth to religion. This process is a rationalization of religious internal structures. Secularization at the system level and in formal organizations does not imply that religion has declined in the public and inter-subjective sphere. System secularization does not indicate the situation of believers' acts in the public sphere of the life-world. Research carried out in Western societies shows that system secularization does not mean a decline at the level of religious acts (Wilson, 1982, 1996). However, this does not mean that changes in the system sphere do not affect the life-world. Therefore, even though the public sphere of believers' acts such as mosques, Friday Prayer, religious gatherings, and communal prayers have not been secularized to the extent that the system level has, studies conducted in Iran suggest that the level of religious activities in the public sphere has decreased and the presence of this process is observed more in the public rather than in the private sphere (Faraji, 2000; Serajzadeh, 1998). This situation emerged because the system has influenced religious relations. Mosques, Friday Prayer venues, and other religious places are directed by system centers. In proportion with religious elements' moving from the life-world to the system, the level of people's participation in these spheres dropped (Marjaei, 2000). Many of the elements of the life-world have been transferred to the system sphere: specific associations were established for prayer (*Namaz/Salat*) and religious advice (*Amr-be-Maroof*). The Islamic Propagation Organization (*Sazeman Tableeghat Islami*) manages some affairs that used to reside in the sphere of people's everyday lives. Even cleaning the mosques is among its formal activities and a day is

devoted to this activity. Therefore, some major parts residing in the system level should be brought back to the sphere of everyday life. Here, we aim to point out some spheres that belong to the believers' life-world.

## Mosque and the life-world

The mosque, like every other institution, is always a part of the life-world; some people spend many hours in such a place. It is a part of society, and a "loving community" (Bellah *et al.*, 1985) in which people live. People attend it voluntarily and feel the joy of belonging. While it is considered a local communion, church has this potential to be institutionalized and formalized: mosques are fundamentally different from churches. Although all through the history of Iran rulers have tried to take control of the mosques, they have never been formalized or stratified and have always remained in the life-world. The mosque is located in the life-world because its structure is not bureaucratic. Sharing duties, distributing revenue sources, and allocating budget are not programmed or rationalized in mosques. Believers' mosque attendance is not for rational-strategic but spiritual aims. Their relations are primary and face-to-face, not based on rules. Passion, sympathy, and mutual understanding have located believers' acts in the sphere of communicative acts. With this description, it is clear that mosques do not undergo the process of secularization easily, and as long as they remain a part of people's everyday life, they continue to form a part of their way of life.

Attending, running, and cleaning mosques have always been based on voluntary acts. Up until recently, people had never been invited to the mosques by the government; for instance, they devote a day to cleaning them. System's interference during recent years, although improving the beauty, wealth, and orderliness of the mosques, damages their internal community and voluntary and local character. People abstain from mosques the moment they realize they are governed and influenced by power. In an environment in which power lingers, a type of strategic rationality with definite aims is observed. Should mosques become the colony of the system, the mosque attendance will have this-worldly benefits for people, and then they can legitimize both the system and the people attending by the encouragement of the system. This issue changes people's collective idea about mosque attendance: mosque becomes a place of strategic acts (utilitarian and opportunistic) rather than that of genuine spiritual acts (approaching God), hypocrisy creeps into the mosques and this undermines attendance.

When cultural reproduction in the life-world is disturbed due to system's interference, the first crisis will be the collapse of traditions. Traditions subside as a result of weakness in the process of socialization. In this context, the system of meaning is altered and the basis for the interpretation of religious acts will founder. Religiosity is fused with this-worldly desires. This amalgam ends up in a decline in the level of religiosity, and the secularization of everyday life ensues as people abstain from certain religious rules and beliefs.

## The clergy: transition from life-world to the system level

Before the Islamic Revolution, the clergy were active in the life-world at the same level as were other citizens. They invited people to religious participation through dialogue, and reproduced religious and cultural elements actively. Therefore, the interaction between people and the clergy was evident. This relationship had the characteristics of the life-world; it was emotional, informal, friendly, indefinite, undefined, and unlimited. At the time, although the clergy were at the same level of people, they were revered, and religious knowledge was held in high esteem. People used to refer to the clergymen, who solved all kinds of their everyday personal, social, political, and religious problems. By and large, the ideal type of the clergy in people's minds was formed partly because of their position in the life-world.

However, after the Islamic Revolution a transformation caused the clergy's transition from the life-world to the system. They attained a systemic characteristic, which caused their roles and functions to be altered. In a sense, their involvement with the life-world of fellow citizens was altered. Residing at system level, the clergy changed their relations with people. These transformations made their ubiquitous presence in the life-world limited. This was the threshold of the clergy's secularization. They gradually started to lose their revered and sacred position. Subsequently, society's classification for the clergy changed. Their active participation at the system level caused the greatest transformation of people's attitudes toward the clergy. As a result, a secular, critical, rational, this-worldly, and desacralized impression of the clergy was formed.

Some religious elements remain at the level of the life-world and are still approved by the people. Some of these elements include the clergy's previous roles. However, roles accepted by the clergy at the system level are being secularized. In fact, the presence of the clergy in the systemic roles has conquered the previous traditional-religious ones. Clergymen are considered system agents and shoulder posts such as the minister, chairman, vice-president, representative, and adviser, positions that are all of a secular nature. The secular roles expose them to criticism and cause their sacredness to founder. In short, the clergy through this transition have lost their previous influence and credibility in the life-world.[2] Since they guarantee the legitimacy of the system, the system has been superficially sacralized. However, the public sphere is deprived of criticism and thinking due to the predominance of religious ideology. Once the critics of the system in the public sphere, the clergy have exited that sphere and this transition has put society in doubt in terms of criticism and thinking. It seems that the life-world, however, has given priority to thinking.

A decrease in the level of acceptance of religious authorities' orders (*Fatwa*) by people, especially on internal, political issues, stems from the transition of the clergy's position who have abandoned the life-world. Systemic orders issued recently – e.g., concerning elections – are different from those of the past. Recent decrees are backed by power and a strong political ideology. The media in numerous ways publicize these decrees. The union of these decrees and the

support of power structures reduces their influence and might. In the past, *Fatwas* were not supported as much by power, the official media, and economic might. They were a part of people's everyday instructions of the life-world and people obeyed them instinctively. In accordance with the secularization of society and specially the systemization of religion, secular religious rules required systemic legitimacy in order to be enforceable.

## Individuals' religiosity

In this section, we address individual motivations, beliefs, and acts. At this level we address the definition of secularization and religiosity as they apply to individuals. Our argument is that in the sphere of everyday life individuals remain religious even if in the systemic sphere their spiritual world is secularized. In a similar vein, individuals may aspire to gain autonomy in relation to religious institutions but they live in a world filled with religious symbols. As a whole, it may be said that individuals distinguish between strategic (rational and goal-oriented) and religious, and emotional acts. In this sense, they always remain religious in some parts of the spheres.

Formal ideology in the life-world socializes a specific type of religiosity compliant with itself. This type is recognized in Iran with definitive dress codes, tastes, language styles, and transparent beliefs. Systemic or organizational religiosity is a type in which individuals are guided in order to serve in the organization and in line with instrumental rationality. Because they think mainly of materialistic and socio-economic aims, they advance individual acts and motivations toward secularization. Since organizational religiosity has definite socio-economic consequences, it attracts a number of individuals with this-worldly aims.

Systematically, a religious individual is one who possesses the characteristics presented by formal organizations. Thus, there would be a type of reductionism in labeling individuals as religious. In Iran, many people not fitting formal definitions of religiosity were regarded as non-religious. Therefore, formal religious centers have improved the symbols of secularization at the individual level.

Apart from the formal definition of religiosity, people live with religious symbols in the life-world. Many consider themselves as religious individuals even though they may not accept some religious rules, or formal religious organizations might not approve of their religiosity. Secularization analyses in Western societies were initially based on people's departure from ecclesiastical religion. Later, researchers realized that this departure does not entail religious decline among people but the emergence of a new type of religiosity necessitating the denial of links such as the Church (Bilton *et al.*, 1987). Thus, one should not assume that individuals' non-religiosity is tantamount to deviation from organizational and formal religiosity. This deviation in Iran is perceived as new forms of religiosity, i.e., formal religiosity declines, but in relation to the life-world religiosity is alive in various forms. Experimental studies in Iran also confirm that people tend to keep away from formal religiosity.[3] Therefore, they

withstand the influence of formal patterns in the life-world. Individuals may not particularly favor religious institutions and formal structures of religiosity, and thus people are secularized on this level. People, for instance, may not refer to the clergy and formal organizations as they used to (Marjaie, 1999) or they may not be willing to pay Islamic taxes (*Khoms* and *Zakat*) to them, but they live in a world filled with religious symbols.

Iran is awash with sacred and religious symbols. Religious figures such as Imams are still revered and beloved institutions in people's eyes. Individuals continue to respect the sacred symbols, and religion is highly valued by many. Religious experiences are deemed precious and religious beliefs are still very important in their lives.[4] In the sphere of religious symbols it may be said that the Iranian life-world is religious and secularization is not at the same level as it is observed at the level of institutions. Therefore, Iranian society does not move toward a perfect and complete secularization. Institutionally, individuals declare independence from religion. Especially in the political domain, they do not rely on religious institutions for their social and political decisions and orientations (Marjaie, 2000). In these spheres individuals' acts are founded on their rational calculations: a type of qualified secularization at the individual level. However, Iranian society is not secular but largely religious at the level of symbols.

On the other hand, the system demands a type of rational, instrumental action. Individuals in the political and economic arenas act in line with rational calculations and individual benefits. Strategic action is to maximize profit in the economic arena and power in the political arena. Yet, religious action is a communicative act achieved through mutual and meaningful understanding, love, passion, and a sense of seeking truth in order to consolidate the religious community of individuals in public spheres such as mosques and gatherings.

We expect religious individuals not to seek out utilitarianism, individual benefits or power when acting religiously (e.g., contributing to charities, holding communal prayers, and conforming to religious norms) since they deal with God, not rulers. This connotes that individuals ought to differentiate principally between rational-instrumental and rational-value actions. At the strategic level, individuals' acts, although secularized completely, they do not necessarily entail non-religiosity: an investor acting rationally in his/her trade may donate money to charities and religious ceremonies simultaneously.

The volume of attendance at religious ceremonies and places must increase from the individuals' actions. Secularizing individuals in the private sphere through family, friends, and personal experiences identifies their orientation in the public sphere. However, the public sphere in Iran is oriented not in a bottom-up (private sphere) but in a top-down (system) fashion. Top-down interference in everyday life obscures the latent rationality residing in motivating individual and communal acts. When religious actions are rewarded by the system, motivations of such acts change from value to this-worldly, instrumental rationality. Some religious actions such as attending the Friday Prayer and communal prayers, when employed for office or university admission, cannot be labeled strategic or genuine religious acts, thus making the distinction between true

believer and a rational, calculating one difficult. Therefore, socializing individuals in this manner, that is, directing them from communicative toward strategic action, is perceived as a secularizing process at the individual level – people become this-worldly more than ever. The religion itself – i.e., religious acts – becomes secular at the individual level and it will be deployed for this-worldly aims.

This disturbance causes the crisis of motivation and identity. Religious actors will have lower levels of motivation concerning religious and communal actions in centers under the management of the system. Therefore, there would be a decline in tendency toward religious group activities.[5] This tendency accelerates the process of the individuals' secularization and brings about a crisis of identity at the individual level. Confusion in detecting types of religious acts causes an identity crisis, the nature of religious life becomes prone to criticism, and the phenomenon of "hypocrisy" spreads to the individual level. A hypocrite is one who presents strategic actions under the guise of religious ones – hypocrisy comes into vogue because exhibiting religious actions includes this-worldly and political-economic benefits. The pollution of the context of the act due to hypocrisy diminishes the volume of religious acts and even symbols (clothes, beliefs, and attitudes) in society. Therefore, Iranian society is moving toward secularization if we consider secularization from this perspective.

## Conclusion

Secularization in Iran is different from other societies, especially in the West. Secularization is accomplished in accordance with the structure of the life-world in every society. Although social complexity and modernity may create social and functional differentiations, they may not produce a similar form of secularization in all countries. Western societies with their Christian foundation have experienced a type of secularization that has never existed in Iran. Religious structures of Christianity, churches, are different from their counterparts, mosques, in Iran. The Church has been the center of power and decision-making of Christendom. The independence of power and economy, however, provided society with a type of secularization that is unique to the "Western" experience (to the extent that one can generalize that experience across the Northern Hemisphere). Iranian mosques have never entered the domain of bureaucracy the way churches did. For this reason the process of internal secularization of the mosques is basically meaningless in Iran. On the other hand, they have never undertaken economy or agriculture. Moreover, the separation of religion and state as a principle and an experience does not apply to Iran unproblematically. Overall, we cannot compare church with mosque secularization. However, Iranian society is experiencing secularization on its own terms and in forms that are unique to Iran.

How is "secularization" defined in Iran? It is not necessarily the death of religion. It does not mean that religious symbols, teachings, and institutions are becoming irrelevant. Even though the credibility of religious institutions has

declined, they remain significant and powerful factors in Iran. We have not encountered the clash between humanistic and religious ideology that we find in Western societies. Religion is accepted by people as an instruction for everyday life. Conversely, religious instructions at the system level and in the public sphere of religion are broadly active. In Iran, secularization is tantamount to rationalization, specialization, structural-functional differentiation, bureaucracy, and autonomy of the social subsystems. Although we could observe secularization in the form of specialization and bureaucracy, it cannot be inferred that subsystems are differentiated significantly. We ought to admit that the subsystem of religion bans full autonomy and independence from the social system. After all, secularization is a process occurring eventually at the system level. However, it does not include the secularization of the life-world. Proxies suggested by the scholars shed light on the system rather than on the life-world. Iran is a religious society in the everyday life domain and systemic secularization is not equal with the decline of religious beliefs and consciousness, even though secularization of the system sphere is influential in the structure of the life-world.

System tends to dominate the life-world. The consequence of this supremacy is the secularization of everyday life through the expansion of instrumental rationality. Due to the presence of system in the life-world of Iranian society, secularization has accelerated. Another cause is the movement of some elements (e.g., the clergy, mosques, the Friday Prayer, some forms of religiosity, and *shar'ia*) from the life-world to the system. The organization and formalization of a number of everyday life elements has led to the secularization of those parts of religion that have moved to the system level. On the other hand, the system attempts to control the public spheres of religion via ideology, power, and the media in order to direct everyday life. Directing the life-world with the aim of providing a more religious society leads inadvertently to secularization, and causes unwillingness of the religious people to participate in communal acts, resulting in the desacralization of the clergy.

Secularization of society must be a bottom-up process if everyday life is to be socialized. Rational programming directed to increase the level of people's religiosity (by means of formal organizations) only leads to secularization. However, the true path is the relocation of religious elements from the system on the life-world. In Habermas's term, we have to turn the systematized elements into "communicative" ones, i.e., religious actions need to be saved from the realm of rationality and strategy and brought back to the speech act domain. These acts should not bear this-worldly, economic, or political consequences and the system cannot push everyday life toward organizing and formalizing *shar'ia* and rituals. The clergy must come back to the public sphere to reclaim their credibility. This sphere should be devoid of ideology, power, and wealth and continue to revise, criticize, and reproduce. Society needs to be free to make itself religious, and cultural reproduction, social consistency, and socialization must be achieved in *this world*. What is clear to us is the imperative to have a space for criticism in order to prevent the system from monopolizing all spheres of our existence.

## Notes

1 *Editor's note:* While I have edited this chapter for style, organization, and language, I have tried to preserve the authors' voice.
2 In a survey, only 18.4 percent said that they listen to clergymen's speeches on TV or radio (Rajabzadeh, 1998). In another, their speeches achieved the rank of 28 out of 51 sources of religion (Marjaei, 1999).
3 A survey in Shiraz showed that the new type of religiosity with characteristics such as individual religious experiences, rejection of formal, traditional religiosity, religious pluralism, and collaboration of religious and scientific knowledge were most frequent (Parsa, 1998). Marjaie also asserts that new religious types are being formed among university students (Marjaie, 1999).
4 The level of people's religious beliefs, rituals, and emotions according to the studies performed in Iran is high (Marjaie, 1999, 2000; Serajzadeh, 1998; Taleban, 1998).
5 In a survey, although the level of respondents' religious beliefs was high, only 4.1 percent said they attended the communal prayers and 4.3 percent stated that they went to Friday Prayer (Serajzadeh, 1998).

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