

LOGOS

Journal of the World Publishing Community

Volume 22, Issue 1, 2011

LOGOS

Journal of the World Publishing Community

Scope

Logos is a forum for opinion and the latest research from the world of publishing. The journal is international in scope and invites contributions on authorship, readers, book publishing, librarianship, and bookselling. Articles about the related fields of journals and magazines are also welcome, as are contributions about digital developments such as blogging and multimedia. Submissions are invited from both professionals and academics, and research articles will be subject to peer review. We also encourage publishers to send us books for review.

An English-language scholarly journal, published quarterly since 1990, *Logos* provides a platform for communication between publishing professionals, librarians, authors, scholars, and those in allied professions. It features articles from and about the publishing world, illustrating the unity, commonality, and conflicting interests of those who write, edit, manufacture, publish, disseminate, preserve, study, and read published works. *Logos* is international and intercultural, bridging gaps between academia and business, the developing and developed worlds, books and digital media. The constituency comprises professional publishers and booksellers, both trade and academic; publishing studies, book history, new media and communications scholars, researchers and students; consultants, analysts, managers, and owners of publishing businesses; library managers and information professionals; as well as editors, typographers, and designers operating within the publishing industry.

Logos welcomes research articles, as well as feature articles, opinion pieces, and stories of personal experience by professionals and academics from the field of publishing and related professions. Feature articles provide professional and/or academic insight into publishing often gained through personal, real-life experience, and are accessible to a wider public. In addition, *Logos* invites analyses, reviews, book chapters, and interviews related to recent trends or important developments in publishing, librarianship, bookselling, etc.

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Logos (print ISSN 0957-9656, online ISSN 1878-4712) is published quarterly by Brill, Plantijnstraat 2, 2321 JC Leiden, The Netherlands.

Logos website: brill.nl/logo
Logos blog: www.blogos.eu

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Printed in the Netherlands (on acid-free paper).

Logos website: brill.nl/logo

Logos blog: www.blogos.eu

LOGOS

Journal of the World Publishing Community

Volume 22, Issue 1, 2011

- 5 The Editor's Place
- 6 Susan Wallace Boehmer
E-tomorrow at Harvard University Press
- 12 Miha Kovač
*The end of codex and the disintegration of the communication circuit of the book:
Seven hypotheses on the future of trade publishing*
This article has been peer reviewed
- 25 Michael Bhaskar
*Towards paracontent: Marketing, publishing,
and cultural form in a digital environment*
- 37 Vinutha Mallya
Dotting the 'i' of Indian publishing... while measuring its length and breadth
- 47 John Feather
1710 and all that: the Statute of Anne revisited
- 53 Arash Hejazi
'You don't deserve to be published': Book censorship in Iran
- 63 Gill Davies
On writing a publishing textbook

Book reviews

‘You don’t deserve to be published’

Book censorship in Iran

Arash Hejazi

Arash Hejazi is an Iranian publisher, novelist, journalist, and physician. Born in 1971, Tehran, Iran, he graduated from medical school in 1996 and in 1997, co-founded an independent publishing house in Tehran, named Caravan Books. He was publisher and managing director there until 2009, when he was forced to leave Iran. He has also been the editor in chief of two literary and cultural magazines; *Kamyab* (2000–03) and *BookFiesta* (2003–08). The latter was closed down by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Iran in 2008, as a result of publishing a short story by the Italian writer Primo Levi. He is a member of the Tehran Union of Publishers and Booksellers (TUPB) and was the managing editor of its journal, *Sanat-e-Nashr* (Publishing Industry), from 2006–07. He was one of the nominees to receive the Freedom to Publish prize held by International Publishers’ Association (IPA) in 2006.

Hejazi is also a novelist, whose best known novel *The Princess of the Land of Eternity* (2003) has sold more than 20,000 copies in Iran since its first publication in 2003. His memoir, *The Gaze of the Gazelle*, will be published worldwide in English in March 2011.



Introduction

Censorship is as old as human intellect. It has been practised in almost every country at some level throughout history: from 399 BC, when Socrates was forced to drink poison, to the horrors of the Inquisition, and the official coining of the concept with the publication of *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* by the Roman Catholic Church; from the obliga-

tion of English publishers to register their books with the Stationers’ Company in the 16th century until the case of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*; and the Nazi book-burning campaign and the absolute official control of the governments of the USSR, China, and Eastern European countries over published material. It has always been a highly controversial issue as well, especially since

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) requested the member states of the UN to enforce freedom of speech in their countries.

The concept of censorship has been defined by various authors and organizations, but no agreed definition has yet been given; therefore the term covers a wide range of activities which sometimes overlap with other concepts, such as moderation, regulation, sensitivity, and intervention. However, for the purpose of this research, the term *censorship* only refers to restrictions imposed by an authority or authoritative body on a creative work, which impedes the availability of the original work to its potential audience prior to or after its publication, or forces the creator to modify or omit parts or all of the work against their free will. Therefore, editorial intervention does not fit the criteria, as it can be prevented by the free will of the author. The only exception is *self-censorship* which can be categorized under *censorship by fear*; one of the most powerful restrictive tools which may have the power to act as an authoritative body, inflicted by conditions outside the author's control.

The importance of addressing censorship as an issue becomes more evident when considering that, despite the abolition of most of the traditional and historical tools for imposing restrictions on freedom of speech by the coming of information technology and the internet revolution, it is still being practised, and controls a wide range of the mind's expressions, including books. Therefore, it seems that raising awareness towards the consequences of censorship has never been more important since the Enlightenment, and the censorship practised in Iran today is a good example.

The history of book censorship in Iran dates back to long before the 1979 Islamic Revolution and since the 19th century, when the first Censorship Department was founded by Naser-al-Din Shah (1831–96 AD) (Cohen 1981, pp. 36–37). After Mohammad-Reza Shah's coup in 1953 and the formation of SAVAK (the Country's Intelligence and Security Organization), prepublication censorship was established. In 1978–79, just before the Revolution, the atmosphere became more liberal and prepublication censorship was almost completely abolished, although SAVAK still performed large-scale post-publication censorship, collecting, confiscating, and destroying any books that would be recognized as

'harmful' (Khosrawi 1999, pp.164–167, 169–150). During this period, the censorship was mainly focused on political issues (IPA 2009).

In 1979, the Islamic Revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini abolished the monarchy in Iran and replaced it with the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), claiming to be a democratic republic regime observing Islamic laws and Sharia. During the first two years after the Revolution, the Iranian press and publishing industry experienced complete freedom of expression (Motazed 2008). However, the Iran–Iraq war (1981–88) and the campaign to suppress all the opposition groups within the IRI ended in the introduction of strict censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech by the government. After the end of the war in 1988, censorship became 'monopolised by the traditional extremists, and the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (SCCR) issued in the spring of 1988 resolutions on limitations of publishing' (Newth 2001).

The intriguing fact is that, despite such fierce controls over the printed and online media, the IRI has always denied practising any kind of censorship, especially prepublication, for books. The implementation of such a complex system, aiming to ensure that no unfavoured idea has a chance to reach the public, and in the mean time leaving no concrete evidence of such practices, has made it difficult for organizations advocating freedom of expression to create a clear case against these prohibitions. These practices are also in direct opposition to Iran's international obligations as a member of the UN and a signatory and state party to the 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' (ICCPR), which obliges state parties to enforce freedom of expression asserted in Article 19 of the UDHR.

Nevertheless, in this age of the communications revolution, the government cannot cover all the traces and evidence of this system, though for someone unfamiliar with Iranian culture and the infrastructure of the Iranian publishing industry, any attempt to compile and analyse the evidence might remain either fruitless or challenging. By contrast, the writer of this article is, as an Iranian author, publisher, and journalist who lived and worked under this system for 20 years, in a unique position to collect sufficient data and evidence to uncover this system for the first time in an academic context: a task which will be the main objective of this article.

The study is limited to censorship imposed on books; though, the range of censorship practised by the IRI is far wider than books.

The laws and regulations for restricting freedom of speech

Although the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran clearly recognizes freedom of expression in Article 24, an exception has been introduced. Freedom of expression is enforced, 'except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public. The details of this exception will be specified by law' (Constitution 1989). It is this exception that has been used as a leverage to restrict freedom of expression when deemed necessary.

Nevertheless, the details of these exceptions have never been explained by law, except in a resolution issued by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, called 'The Objectives and Policies and Conditions of Publishing Books', which outlines seven subjects that 'do not deserve to be published', as they are believed to be 'misused for propagating intellectual carelessness and disturbing rights of the public' and that the 'healthy and constructive atmosphere of book printing and publishing' should be 'guarded' and 'secured' by observing these limitations: books that 'promote profanity and renounce the fundamentals of religion'; 'propagate prostitution and moral corruption'; 'incite the public to uprising against the IRI'; 'propagate and promote the ideas of destructive and illegal groups and strayed sects, also advocating the monarchy, dictatorship, and imperialism'; 'create tumults and conflicts between the tribes or religious groups or inflict damage to the unity of society and the territorial integrity'; 'mock and weaken the national pride and patriotic spirit, and create loss of self-confidence and national values before the imperialistic regimes'; and 'propagate dependence on each of the global powers and contradict the policy and insight based on guarding the independence of the country' (Supreme Council 1988).

This resolution has been challenged by different bodies on various occasions. Its legitimacy as law has been questioned by Shirin Ebardi, an Iranian lawyer and the 2003 Nobel prize laureate, and several other people, claiming this cannot be considered as law as it is not legislated by the Parliament (FARS 2007).

Another problem is the generalizing effect and ambiguous nature of the terms used for defining the restrictions on book publishing, which leave space for personal interpretation as almost anything can be interpreted as violating one of these restrictions, especially when considering terms such as 'profanity', 'moral corruption', 'uprising', 'destructive', 'strayed', 'tumult', 'mock', 'national pride', 'national values', for which no one can give a concrete definition or criteria. This has led to confusion in interpretations imposed on publishers by censors: sometimes only pornography is considered profanity and sometimes a man simply holding the hand of his wife is labelled as corruption.

Finally, the resolution is in complete incompatibility with Iran's international obligations as a member of the UN, and subject to the UDHR and a signatory and state party to the ICCPR. Any laws legislated in parliament should be in accordance with these international obligations with which the resolution is obviously in contrast.

This Resolution has been used by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) to justify pre-publication censorship, which has been labelled as 'Prepublication Scrutiny' by the officials (Jamejam 2008b). Saffar Harandi, Ahmadinejad's first Minister of Culture, has stated clearly that the government follows strict policies to control book publishing, although he never explained what he meant by books that would 'insult the intellect' or what the 'certain ideas' were: 'We are decisive to prevent the publication of books which insult the intellect of the readers and also books that propagate certain ideas, even if they have already received the permission to be published' (Advar 2006).

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His cultural deputy, Mohsen Parviz, claimed that 'prepublication scrutiny' meant 'protecting the health of the society and has nothing to do with censorship...' (Jamejam 2008a). According to him, prepublication scrutiny should be considered a national security measure, as its abolition would result in the 'publication of poisonous books...' (Afarinesh 2008). In a different point of view, Ramezani Farani, the Director of the Book Department, mentioned that scrutiny was performed to guard the language and literature (ISNA 2008).

[Censorship is the] official prohibition or restriction of any type of expression, imposed by governmental authority, religious body or ... a powerful private group... [It may be] either preventive or punitive, according to whether it is exercised before or after the expression has been made public (Columbia Encyclopedia 2007).

No matter how the officials claim that prepublication scrutiny is not censorship, it is a procedure in which the books are *scrutinized* before publication, and if they do not fit the criteria and standards accepted by the bylaws, the publication of them can be prevented or become subject to certain changes or modifications. This procedure precisely fits the definition of censorship, which means it is against the Constitution of IRI, the resolution of SCCR, and Article 19 of UDHR, ICCPR and IRI's international obligations to protect and support freedom of expression in Iran: '[Censorship is the] official prohibition or restriction of any type of expression, imposed by governmental authority, religious body or ... a powerful private group... [It may be] either preventive or punitive, according to whether it is exercised before or after the expression has been made public' (Columbia Encyclopedia 2007).

The MCIG seems to be aware of this incompatibility and therefore, despite all its efforts to justify *scrutiny*—and although they interpret SCCR's resolution to be a leverage enabling them to censor books—every precaution has been taken so that no official evidence exists of the exact content and context of these scrutinising procedures. This accounts for the development of a highly sophisticated censorship system that, despite being untraceable, leaves them with absolute free reign to control the content of every publication.

The multi-layered censorship system

Prepublication censorship is only one of the several layers arranged by the ministry to control the content, publication, and distribution of books in Iran. There are several other methods the government uses to ensure its control.

Layer 1: Acquiring a publishing licence

No one is simply allowed to register a publishing company and start publishing books, nor is self-publishing permitted, as any Iranian who wants to set up a publishing house will first need a Publishing Licence (PL) from the MCIG. Not every person is eligible for applying for a PL. The applicants should provide evidence that they are: a well-respected citizen of Iran; at least 27 years old with sufficient knowledge and specialty in the field of publishing; possess sufficient funds; and the holder of at least a Bachelor's degree. They should have completed military service and have no criminal records or history of fraudulent or strategic bankruptcy (MCIG 2009). Then, the Security Department (*Herasat*) checks the background of the applicant. If no suspicious political, religious, or *moral* background is detected, the application is scrutinised by a special committee in the MCIG and, if approved, a provisional PL will be issued for the applicant who henceforth will be considered as the Responsible Manager of the publishing house (ICQ 2009). The licence is usually valid for one year.

The licence is non-transferable and if it is cancelled by any pretext, the name of the publishing house will disappear. Therefore, no large publishing group or conglomerate exists in the book market and the private publishers are mostly independent, small and medium sized and entrepreneur-owned. This might be a precaution taken by the government to prevent the accumula-

tion of power in one company, which may grant them a remarkable bargaining leverage against the MCIG or other parts of the government, and a substantial control over the market.

The government's control over the Responsible Managers and the ongoing fear of refusal of the MCIG to extend the validity of the licences creates the first controlling leverage over the contents of the books. Publishers are expected to control the contents of the books they acquire and apply *necessary* modifications and deletions before submitting them to the MCIG. Therefore, thousands of manuscripts are being rejected or censored by editors, only because they simply know that they are not likely to receive a prepublication permission and may jeopardise the validity of their licences.

Layer 2: Prepublication permission (PPP)

Prepress or prepublication censorship is not a new concept. However, today, Iran is one of the few countries left that still enforces it. No printer is permitted to print a book without first verifying that the book has obtained a PPP. When the publishers decide to publish a book, they have to commission the translation (if necessary), copy-editing, typesetting, cover design, and proofreading, and then submit it in the final press-quality PDF format to the Book Department of the MCIG (MCIG 2009). The publishers are responsible for paying all these origination costs even before they know whether they will receive a PPP for the book.

In the next step, the censors *scrutinize* the book. If they find no problems, they issue a PPP. If they find some problems, they inform the publisher about modifications needed to be made—on a piece of paper with neither a letterhead, nor a signature. The publisher has to make the changes and resubmit the book. If it is decided that the book does not 'deserve to be published' at all, they declare their decision to the publisher verbally, with no written documents involved.

The decisions of the *scrutinizers* are not always consistent and depend largely on the taste and individual interpretation of each scrutinizer whose names are never revealed, as 'otherwise no scrutinizer would be available to work' (FARDA 2008).

Any reference to sex, heresy, feminism, supporting religions other than Shiite Islam, mystic or exotic beliefs or even religions such as Buddhism, criticizing the

government of the IRI, a historical account not compatible with the officially approved history, relationships outside wed-lock, nudity (even in books on history of art), pigs, dogs, alcoholic drinks, defending western democracies, and non-orthodox Islamic studies, may be subject to censorship (Sadi 2002). A few examples of the censored content are provided here.

When the book *The Gift of Therapy: An open letter to a new generation of therapists and their patients: Reflections on being a therapist*, by Irvin D. Yalom (containing case studies to depict how patients and therapists can get the most out of therapy), was sent to the MCIG in 2007 by the Iranian Publisher Caravan Books, two paragraphs were asked to be removed because they mentioned homosexuality. One of them concerned the necessity of encouraging protected sex to a homosexual patient, and the second piece discussed the subject of openness when talking about sexual orientation. The mere mention of homosexuality made the censor decide that these parts should be removed.

The MCIG had also asked the publisher to remove chapters 47 and 63 from the book. Chapter 47 described a patient who, despite having a long-term relationship with his girlfriend, had grown a passion towards another woman. Chapter 63 concerned the conditions in which the therapists are recommended to touch their patients. The Publisher was also asked to change any references to 'girlfriend' and replace them with 'fiancée'.

In another instance, 11 months after the translation of the novel *Kafka on the Shore* by Murakami was sent to the MCIG, the publisher was asked to apply a few changes to the book. One of the paragraphs was asked to be removed on the pretext that encouraging teenagers to leave home would loosen the sacred foundation of family. Another censored passage had nothing to do with morality but was considered to be propagating heresy, as it touched the concept of karma and reincarnation, which is taboo in Islamic Sharia. In the next part, the censor had touched a completely different aspect of censorship, in which all mention of genocide during the Holocaust was censored. Since Ahmadinejad has denied the Holocaust on several occasions, the MCIG has had a policy to censor any notions of this historical event in books. For the book *Raising Smart Kids for Dummies* by Marlene Targ Brill, the censor requested the publisher to remove any notions of

dancing throughout the book, as dancing is forbidden in Islam. The publisher was forced to replace the word 'dance' with 'rhythmic movements'. For the *Love Poems* (translated as *Sokut Ayandeyeh Man Ast: Silence is my future*) by Erich Fried (a German poet), the subject of questioning 'authorities' was the victim of censorship: '*Mit Leonardo los von den Autoritäten!*' (With Leonardo, let's free ourselves from the authorities!) (p. 206).

Another possible reaction from the MCIG is no response at all (Article 19 2006). There are books that have been submitted to the Book Department for months, even years, with no response from the department, the only answer to the publishers' queries being 'the scrutiner has not yet declared his decision'.

A recent trend has been issuing provisional PPPs that authorize the titles to be printed only once and not reprinted, unless the validity of the permission is extended. This strategy seems to account for keeping the number of new titles published in Iran at a favourable level, which enables the government to claim that statistically the number of titles published in Iran is higher than several other countries, and at the same time keeping the number of readers of certain books to a minimum. Another possibility is revoking previously issued permissions. The PPPs of hundreds of already published books were revoked by Ahmadinejad's administration, the pretext being (according to the Minister of Culture) that a tougher line was needed to stop publishers from serving a '*poisoned dish* to the young generation' (Tait 2006a).

Layer 3: Book receipt: Permission to distribute

According to a resolution by the SCCR, publishers are required to deliver between two and ten copies of each book published to the MCIG, against an official receipt called a Book Receipt (*E'lam-e vosool-e ketab*) as an official declaration of the publication of a book (SCCR 1989). However, this document has been used as a permission to distribute the published books after it has been printed with a PPP. Therefore, the Book Receipt, supposed to be only a bureaucratic formality, in fact shapes another layer in censorship. There are several hundreds of books that are printed and bound but have not managed to receive a Book Receipt, or the publishers have been asked to return the PPP of the book to the MCIG if they wish to receive the Book Receipt.

Layer 4: Eligibility of books to be purchased for libraries

An annual budget is usually allocated to purchasing new titles by the MCIG for public and specialist libraries, the aim being supporting book reading. However, requests by the Tehran Union of Publishers and Bookellers (TUPB) to the MCIG to announce how and where this budget was spent, and to publish the list of purchases, including publishers' names, books titles, the number of copies purchased during 2005 and 2006, and also the bylaw of the decision-making process for choosing books, have remained unanswered (TUPB 2007, p.25). Research by the TUPB in 2007 revealed that the MCIG had purchased books from only 12 percent of the publishers during the afore-mentioned period, and 137,000 books were purchased from just one publisher, the worth of which was approximately £257,000 (ibid.). The subjects of the approved books were mainly religion, and the publishers from whom the purchases were made were mainly public publishers, as well as a few private publishers, in close relationship with the MCIG (TUPB 2007). This discrimination deprives any publisher not approved by the government of the large library market sector.

Layer 5: Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF) and provincial fairs

The Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF)—described as 'the largest book fair in Central Asia and the Middle-East' (IPA 2009)—is the most important event for publishers in Iran. Here, they meet their potential customers directly, sell books and increase their cash inflow, and also meet international publishers from various countries (FBF 2008).

Since 2005, a new practice was established of unofficially asking publishers not to sell certain titles during the TIBF (BBC 2005). Since then, every year during the TIBF, several authorities move from one stand to another, informing the publishers about the titles they are not allowed to sell during the fair (Iran Daily 2005). Even more control is taken over provincial fairs, in which several unfavoured publishers are not even permitted to exhibit.

Layer 6: Prosecution

Even after obtaining all these permissions, a book is not safe. The attorney general has the right to prosecute

any book he finds disturbing and, in some cases, even the authorities who authorized the book's publication have been prosecuted. In 2003, 2 publishers, 1 author, 1 translator, 1 newspaper book reviewer, and even the director of the MCIG who had signed the PPP of two particular books were prosecuted and sentenced to 1 year in prison (Iran 2003a; Iran 2003b).

Layer 7: Censorship by fear

Censorship by fear is one of the most powerful tools at the hands of the authorities. The publishers, who have established a business and invested in it, do not want to lose their licences or be sentenced to prison by publishing doubtful materials; authors fear to let their imaginations fly, lest they create something unfavoured by the government; censors fear losing their jobs or being prosecuted for approving the publication of a controversial text; the directors working in the MCIG fear establishing more open policies for the content of the books, lest they are held responsible ... and the circle goes around, reaching a point where no one dares to push the limits and risk new ideas.

Layer 8: Purging the libraries

Another strategy of Ahmadinejad's administration has been to control the books held in public libraries and restrict public access to certain books deemed unfavourable by the government, even those which had already received a PPP (Etemaad 2007a; Etemaad 2007b).

Layer 9: Online censorship

The large obstacle of obtaining PPPs for books, the scale of post-publication censorship, and the closure of the press in the past 10 years (Sabra 2001) has led to the refusal of several authors to send their manuscripts to the MCIG, instead exploring the new online and digital opportunities for publishing their works. Several authors and periodicals launched websites dedicated to publishing books, news, and other content that were not permitted or were unlikely to be published in Iran. However, the Ministry of Communication installed a filtering system to restrict the access of Iranian residents to the 'unsuitable' websites (OpenNet 2006). More than '10 million websites' are currently being filtered in Iran, including some highly popular websites such as BBC, VOA, Twitter, and Facebook (Boghtrati 2007). This

attitude resulted in a report by the Reporters Without Borders which placed Iran among the 13 countries branded 'enemies of the internet' in November 2006 (RSF 2007; Tait 2006b).

It is too early to decide whether the internet is giving more power to the hunter or the hunted. Technologies are evolving side-by-side, some empower censors to gain more control over the users and the accessibility of the content, and some provide more flexibility for users, bloggers, and site-owners to use unlimited opportunities for enjoying more freedom of speech. The future will reveal whether the internet is as democratizing as claimed, or a powerful tool for even more control over freedom. Nevertheless, thousands of video clips, photos, and news feeds posted by protesters to the outcomes of the election during the 2009 post-election turmoil in Iran, give hope that the new age of information technology has created a borderless global environment for the press, in which no system of censorship is able to prevent the exchange of information.

Layer 10: Copyright

Iran has never signed any of the international copyright agreements such as Berne, The Universal Copyright Convention (UCC), or WIPO Copyright Treaty (WCT). Therefore, it is not bound by any obligations to protect the copyright of works published outside Iran. The main reason for this decision might be to ensure a total lack of control by non-Iranian authors over the translations of their works, and therefore their unawareness of any kind of censorship applied to their works.

Conclusion

In Iran, censorship controls almost every aspect of expression, from religious ideas to human relationships, from hundreds of taboos set by tradition or Sharia, to unfavoured political ideas believed to have the potential to undermine or inflict damage on the order of IRI. This order has been established mainly through these traditions rather than on universally accepted rules of managing a country, such as democracy and human rights.

The complex process of censorship leaves the destiny of books waiting to be published in the hands of a few hand-picked agents. This has created an atmosphere of uncertainty among authors and publishers,

and has also victimized a significant number of books among the world's literary heritage that were on their way to reach their Iranian readership. Some of these works have been mutilated by the diktats of the MCIG, and others have been denied publication.

This situation has led many Iranian authors to give up writing or at least trying to publish their works, resulting in a decline in Persian modern fiction. As explained before, censorship by fear is one of the most powerful tools used by the authorities to control published material. The significant number of Iranian writers, journalists, translators, publishers, bloggers, and artists who have been murdered, imprisoned, exiled, prosecuted, or banned during the past 30 years seems to have been enough to create an enormous fear among the active members of the publishing community. This results in extreme caution in anyone who tries to venture into a creative activity. Thus, self-censorship has become a common practice among Iranian authors who, out of fear of censorship by the MCIG, try to cut out 'problematic' content in their books themselves, before their work becomes slaughtered by the censors. This self-censorship imposes serious limitations on writers' artistic creativity and has restricted the international appeal of Iranian fiction, which has been deprived of the controversial issues that usually stimulate the creative minds of authors, such as sex, identity, ideology, and religion (IPA 2009).

The significant interventions of the MCIG have also inflicted serious damage on the literature translated and published in Iran. Firstly, Iranian readers are deprived of several works of fiction, widely acclaimed or popular internationally. Iranian readers have never had a chance, or the chance was taken from them after a brief period of availability, to read classics such as *Ulysses*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The New York Trilogy*, *Tropic of Cancer*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, or best-sellers such as *The Da Vinci Code*, *Eleven Minutes*, or *The Shadow of the Wind*. Secondly, several books that were eventually published contain several modifications and deletions, which in many cases damage the whole creative purpose of the book. Books such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and several other acclaimed works, have been published with several parts cut out or even changed. This has created a significant mistrust among

Iranian readers towards translated literature in the Iranian book market, which in several cases has led readers to desist totally from reading them.

Besides the intellectual damage to the book industry, this multi-layered process, and the complicated procedures that the publishers have to endure in order to publish a book, has caused several economic and financial burdens for the Iranian publishing industry as well. Firstly, the prolonged and exhausting process of obtaining a PPP creates significant financial hurdles for publishers. Lack of success in receiving a PPP for a book after paying for the origination costs imposes a considerable burden on the already low margin of the publishers, which cannot be compensated easily. On the other hand, even those books that successfully receive a PPP receive it only several months after being submitted, inflicting a significant loss of profit as a result of a large proportion of the investments of the publisher remaining stagnant for 3–12 months. Furthermore, on a national level, the significant amount of public funds that could be used to support and improve the book industry and encourage book reading in society is being spent on maintaining these highly expensive control measures on the content of books published. Hundreds of censors, administrative staff, and sophisticated software and hardware used to control the procedures of book publishing account for a significant expense in the annual budget of the MCIG.

Another implication of these controlling measures is that publishers can by no means draw up a publishing schedule or set a publication date for their titles. It can be said that, despite the long tradition in producing written culture and literature in Iran, these practices have damaged the growth of the publishing sector significantly, both in the content of the books published and in the development of an efficient and strong publishing industry that is able to interact properly with the publishing world. It has also imposed a strong barrier against the evolution of Iranian literature. Finally, censorship is illegal, according to both the Iranian Constitution and also Iran's international obligations.

The 1948 UDHR, which the member states of the UN are obliged to enforce in their countries, leaves no doubt that freedom of expression is a basic and essential human right that no one is allowed to restrict on an arbitrary basis. The facts presented here show that

this essential right has been undermined in Iran for the past 30 years. All the efforts made to reason with the censorship system to show that these activities are illegitimate and against the laws of IRI, whether by a governmental body, lawsuits raised by independent bodies, or statements issued by the independent associations and unions of authors or publishers, have so far been fruitless. Official follow-ups are interrupted by invisible hands, and legitimate objections have remained unanswered. This lack of dialogue has created a dead-end situation for the publishers and authors who are left with no opportunity to debate a possible solution to this problem.

The 2009 post-election events in Iran showed that the new age of information technology has provided humankind with powerful tools with which to overcome any restrictions imposed on sharing information. Despite the extensive filtering of online content by the Iranian authorities, the horrifyingly high number of Iranian or international journalists and authors who were imprisoned during the post-election turmoil in Iran, and the strong controls of the government over the printed and broadcasted media of hundreds of reports, videos, and photos of events in Iran, there seems

to be an online revolution starting that none of these censorship systems, however sophisticated, will be able to control or impede. The government of Iran expelled the foreign reporters, closed down a number of Iranian independent newspapers, and detained a significant number of Iranian reporters in order to prevent the distribution of the news of the horrible crimes committed by the government. However, none of these efforts succeeded in preventing the publication of the news—the most prominent case being the murder of a young woman called Neda Agha-Soltan, who was shot by the government's militiamen. Her death was captured by an amateur's camera phone and broadcast by the international media within hours.

The effects of this digital revolution on the book industry needs to be studied in a few years time, as the book publishing sector has always moved slowly in comparison with other media such as music and film, and the ways to create profitability in the book industry via online publishing are still being debated. Future developments in e-publishing may overcome these much debated problems and open a new way towards abolishing these arbitrary censorships throughout the world. ■

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