CHAPTER 5

GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND ILLIBERAL REGIMES
Mary Kaldor and Denisa Kostovicova

Introduction
Zimbuyer.com is a UK-based website that allows Zimbabweans living in the UK to purchase groceries and other items such as satellite dishes for friends and relatives back home, using the internet and mobile phones, and thus avoid the costs of run-away inflation. The ordered goods are delivered by hand to households in Harare, Chitungwiza and Bulawayo. There are several other websites that offer similar services. For example, Mukuru.com is a UK-based platform through which money can be transferred (at the black-market rate), as well as payments for fuel and mobile phone airtime. Likewise, Beepee Medical Services, based in the UK, allows the diaspora community to pay for doctors’ appointments, prescription drugs and surgery for people in Zimbabwe; the service was set up by a Zimbabwean doctor in the UK and has staff working full-time in Zimbabwe.

These websites could be regarded as a form of economic dissidence, which is just as important as political ones because of the various forms of political dissidence in creating space in illiberal regimes. Whether we are talking about people smuggling in North Korea, the tourist market in Cuba, or blogging in Iran and China, increasing interconnectedness has weakened the state’s ability to exercise administrative, economic and even ideological forms of control. Individuals, groups and networks use their global links to break out of the constraints imposed by authoritarian or repressive regimes.

The authors would like to thank Julia Chan, Wonyoung Choi and Sabine Selchow for their assistance with this chapter, and to those people around the world who responded to our questionnaire.

This Chapter is about global civil society in illiberal regimes. We define illiberal regimes in terms of the spaces that exist for what might be described as civil society. And we ask whether and how these spaces are opened, closed or transformed in the context of globalisation. The Chapter is based on a study of civil society in six countries: China, North Korea, Burma, Belarus, Iran and Saudi Arabia; and we also refer to Cuba, Russia and Zimbabwe. Each case study was based on a survey of available literature and websites, personal interviews and interviews via email. Our main argument is that globalisation, even in the most closed authoritarian systems, has led to some form of involuntary pluralisation and that different types of illiberal regimes are based on various forms of this involuntary pluralisation. Pluralisation is not the same as democratisation and global connections may help both to dismantle and to strengthen illiberal regimes.

We start with a critique of the literature on illiberal regimes and the failure of most scholars to take globalisation into account. We then describe the ideas, the forms of activism and the spaces that characterise civil society in different illiberal regimes, and their global connections. We show that the idea of separation between the outside and inside does not hold. Rather, they are interconnected and embodied in civil society that is both local and global at the same time.

The nature of illiberal regimes
Remarkably little has been written about totalitarian and authoritarian regimes since the fall of Communism. The main preoccupation of scholars in recent years has been the process of democratisation rather than the nature of contemporary illiberal regimes. Linz and Stepan, in their classic book on the transition to democracy, identified five modern regime ideal types: democracy, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, post-totalitarianism and sultanism (derived from Weber’s extreme patrimonialism), which they described in terms of the defining characteristics of pluralism, ideology, mobilisation and leadership.

Of particular interest for our argument is their perspective on pluralism and, more specifically, the space of civil society in these regimes. According to Linz and Stepan, there is no civil society in sultanistic and totalitarian regimes due to the extensive power of the sultan or the party respectively. Totalitarian regimes were characterised by a pervasive ideology that, at their height, controlled even private spaces. By contrast, they argue that there is limited pluralism in authoritarian and post-totalitarian regimes. In the former, pluralism is mostly social and economic, with limited political pluralism. In the latter, there are various degrees of a ‘second culture’ or ‘parallel society’ that is limited and persecuted, but nonetheless a potent and independent political alternative (Linz and Stepan 1996: 38-54).

Imply in these definitions is the assumption that it is the state that grants or at least tolerates these liberties and, hence, free spaces. The state is understood as an all-powerful institution capable of controlling society. Yet it was always the case that the state is the expression of a set of social relations and the degree of control depends on the way that such relations are regulated. The difference between democratic and non-democratic regimes has to do with whether control is based on consent or coercion; usually state control depends on a mixture of consent and coercion. In democratic societies, control is based largely on consent, which in turn is the outcome of a debate within civil society. In non-democratic societies control is based on a mixture of submissive consent and coercion. We would contend that in the age of globalisation it is increasingly difficult, though not of course impossible, to exercise control on the basis of submissive consent and coercion. The consequence is that, contrary to the image of the all-powerful state, illiberal regimes are often weak regimes.

The assumption that the state is all-powerful is linked to the tendency to focus on domestic factors and to treat external influences as add-ons, exogenous rather than endogenous determinants of democratic developments. Because of their focus on domestic factors, the analysts of ‘troubled’ democratisation tend to emphasize the legacy of the past more than the contemporary global context.

By contrast, we introduce globalisation into the analysis of democratisation, or, put more modestly, into the opening up of illiberal regimes. From this vantage point, the distinction between the external and internal does not hold. Instead, globalisation becomes internal to the changes in illiberal regimes. Our argument is that contemporary illiberal regimes are being pluralised involuntarily under the complex pressures of globalisation. The nature of these illiberal regimes changes as civil society spaces are carved out, either in the virtual world or in physical space or as a combination of both these spheres.

Involuntary pluralisation is a result of the impact of global political, economic and cultural/media forces. The state’s ability to exercise control has been undermined both in a functional and spatial sense: in the ability to deal with challenges like the HIV and AIDS epidemic or environmental crisis, and in the increasing porosity of national borders and the ‘infiltration’ of global criminal networks that bypass the state, as illustrated by smuggling people out of North Korea.

Illiberal regimes have found themselves affected both by progressive and regressive globalisation. Commonly, when we think about globalisation and democratisation, the focus has been on the impact on norms and human rights, which was so important in Latin America and Communist Europe (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Kaldor 2003). Schmitter has pointed out that ‘this world beneath and beyond the nation state...
Box 5.1: The 2008 Beijing Olympics: a ‘once-in-a-lifetime opportunity’ for global civil society

Controversy and much public debate followed the 2001 decision of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to grant China the 2008 Olympics. Britain’s Guardian called the decision ‘the most controversial one in the history of the IOC’, and US Democrat Tony L. Liberman labels the mind-boggling $15 billion decision ‘the most important step in the history of the Olympic Games despite having one of the most abominable human rights records in the world’ (in Chaudhary 2003). Olympic Watch (URL), an initiative set up by Timothy Garton Ash and other public figures, warned that the decision was ‘an important and risky step with far-reaching potential consequences. At stake is nothing less than the Olympic idea of peace, friendship and solidarity’. Clearly, despite the promising 2008 Olympic slogan ‘One World. One Dream’, many facets of China’s domestic policy simply do not match the Olympic ideals as promoted in the Charter of the Olympic Movement. Human rights abuses in general, the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in particular, censorship and the control over the media, the opression of civil society, the systematic destruction of Tibetan culture, the excessive use of the death penalty in an environment which does not guarantee access to appropriate legal defense and fair trial, and widespread abusive labour conditions are just the most obvious contradictions between Chinese political reality and Olympics, which Roche links to ‘key elements of the rhetoric and mission of post-war internationalism embodied in the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ (Roche 2002: 16). In a report about China’s ‘execution frenzy’ during which 2,586 people were sentenced to death just before the 2001 IOC meeting in Moscow, Amnesty International points out:

Ironically, sports stadiums were the last places where many of those condemned to death were taken, to be subjected to ritual humiliation in front of large crowds, just before being executed. In the past stadiums like the Beijing’s Workers’ Stadium, which may be used as the Olympic football venue in 2008, have hosted such macabre events. (Amnesty International URL)

Some even went as far as to draw a comparison to the 1936 Olympics: following the ex ample of Nazi Germany in 1936 and the Soviet Union in 1980, Communist China will use the games as a powerful propaganda instrument destiny to consolidate its hold on power. (French politician quoted in Chaudhary 2003).

On the other hand, many, such as IOC executive director Francois Carrard, saw the decision as a ‘bet that in the coming seven years up to the 2008 Olympic Games, the interaction, the progress and the development in many areas can be such that the situation in China can be improved’. China’s yielding to international protests against the planned beach-volleyball competition in Tiananmen Square was considered a step in the right direction. The IOC decision put China under an extremely bright and global spotlight. Oscillating between actual world politics, explicit nationalistic identities and the promotion of world peace and human solidarity, the Olympic Games are per se highly polity driven. As Bauman observes on Austrian ‘Clauswitzian’ famous statement to suggest that sport is ‘the continuation of politics by other means’ (2006: 91). And the first Olympic Games in China are particularly special. Firstly, there is hardly any host country that is more controversial than China. Secondly, China is one of the most promising markets for Olympic sponsors, which adds another dimension to the commercialisation that has characterised recent Olympic Games. Closely related to this is the fact that, more than ever, the Olympics will be a global media spectacle. Whereas the founder of the Olympic Movement Baron Pierre de Coubertin, had to provide VIP treatment for journalists in order to get any coverage of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, in 2008 (at Qatar), the US channel NBC is paying US $890 million to carry the 2008 event (Scandin 2003). Thirdly, the Beijing Games will take place in an era that is characterised by a ‘re-styling of politics’ (Corner and Pels 2003), in which the relation between politics and media is significantly reshaping political practice, and in which celebrity politicians (Street 2004) and celebrities as global civil society activists are the most glamorous signatures of these ‘spectacular’ times. In particular, the 2008 Games are embedded within the context of a growing communicative power of global civil society thanks to new forms of communication outlined in this volume. In this respect, the 2008 Beijing Olympics offers a unique chance for global civil society activists to promote their concerns and to globally stage their protests: a ‘once-in-a-lifetime opportunity’ according to Nicholas Bequelin of Human Rights Watch (Reuters 2007).

Most human rights groups have an explicit Olympic agenda. Human Rights Watch, for instance, highlights three issues on its Beijing 2008 website: censorship, forced evictions and labour rights. A letter which ‘A Trump For Human Rights in China’ can be downloaded (URL). A number of campaigns and coalitions have been established in response to the Beijing Olympics, such as the above mentioned Olympic Watch and the Collectif Chine I 2008 (URL), which includes, for example, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and Reporters Without Borders; in addition, countless individual websites and blogs advocate variously free speech access to the internet, human rights, fair labour conditions and even boycotts against Beijing Games. Two of the hundreds of videos critical of the Beijing Olympics on YouTube is one posted by noo REGIS (URL) that includes a

tragic-comic take on the Olympic logo, which ends with the announcement: “Olympic Gold for mass execution: China!” The video then goes on to show footage of what appears to be clashes between official forces and protesters in China. Various activist groups have hijacked the Olympic symbol and the 2008 Beijing logo in order to make their points, including the Students for a Free Tibet who changed the official Olympic slogan into: One World. One Dream. Free Tibet. They also adopted/reclaimed one of the official Olympic mascots, the Tibetan antelope, which Chinese organisers had named Yingying, arguing that it was being used as a ‘propaganda tool to cover up [China’s] military occupation of Tibet’ (URL). They renamed Yingying, Yingjie, produced stickers adorning a free Tibet, and created a website on which they explain: ‘We’ve defected from the Olympic team because I can no longer stand being used as a puppet to cover up China’s destruction of my homeland.’

One of the most interesting global civil society campaigns is the use of the Olympics to highlight China’s relationship with the Sudanese government, and to hold the Olympics host responsible for not putting pressure on Khartoum to allow an adequate UN peacekeeping force into Darfur. The genocide in Darfur has long been a focus of civil society activism in general and of (US) celebrity activism in particular. The Not On Our Watch campaign (URL), launched in spring 2007 by members of the film crew of Ocean’s 13, George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Don Cheadle and eny Wrinkintraut, is just the latest example of Hollywood’s attention to an issue that has become ‘holocaustian’ (Glaister 2007). In March 2007 Mia Farrow and her son Ronan Farrow, published an article in The Wall Street Journal entitled ‘The Genocide Olympics’ (Farrow and Farrow 2007), in which they refer to China’s extraordinary position to influence the Sudanese Government, and argue that ‘China is bankrupting Darfur’s genocide’. There is now one thing that China may hold more dear than its unfettered access to Sudan: their successful staging of the 2008 Summer Olympics, ‘they wrote. In order to take advantage of this point of leverage they ask the Olympic sponsors to put pressure on China, warning that the Olympic slogan ‘One World. One Dream’ might become the ‘Genocide Olympics’.

Indeed, this catchphrase has not only provoked media attention but spread quickly: in mid-June 2007 it generated more than 70,000 hits in a google.com search. The Farrowes also criticised Steven Spielberg, founder of the Shoah Foundation and artistic advisor for the Olympic ceremonies, comparing him to the director of the Nazi propaganda film about the 1936 Olympics, Leni Riefenstahl. This broadside was successful: Spielberg publicly regretted his lack of awareness of the link between China and the genocide in Darfur. Four days later he wrote to Chinese President Hu Jintao: ‘At the beginning of April 2007 China dispatched a senior official to Sudan in order to encourage the Sudanese government to allow UN peacekeeping forces into the region, and to visit refugee camps in Darfur. The New York Times and other papers credited China’s reaction to the campaign, as an indication of how ‘a pressure campaign, aimed to strike Beijing in a vulnerable spot at a vulnerable time, could accomplish what years of diplomacy could not’ (Cooper 2007).

However, while China’s move was a first important step, further action, such as sanctions, have not (yet) followed. For global civil society, the campaign to shame China has moved on: on 11 June 2007 Mia Farrow, together with Sudan expert Eric Reeves, launched the Olympic Dream for Darfur with the goal of ensuring a UN protection force to prvide verified security for civilians and humanitarian workers in Darfur (URL). To achieve their aim, the campaign plans an ‘Olympic Torch Relay on 8 August 2007 ‘through countries that define the history of genocide…[e.g., Rwanda, Armenia, Bosnia, Germany, and Cambodia], which will start at the Darfur-Chad border and end in Hong Kong’. It remains open if China’s intervention in Sudan is ‘more of a commercial than a humanitarian nature’, as Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Raymond Johnsen argued (in Fabrlics 2007), and it is impossible to predict a significant long-term shift of China’s policies with regard to Sudan. It would be naive to assume, that the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the global civil society activism surrounding it, will turn China into a human rights advocate.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt the campaign linking China in the Darfur genocide by framing and framing the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the ‘Genocide Olympics’, triggered the change in attitude towards Khartoum. In this sense the campaign is a prime example of the communicative power of global civil society actors in their role as ‘signifying agents’ (Snow and Benford 2000), of the potential of new media to launch a ‘viral’ and ‘potent, creative, focused and uncontrollable’ campaign (Reeves 2007). It is also an example of the logic of contemporary (celebrity) politics and the impact of the Hollywoodisation of certain political issues. While Darfur, which has become the top issue on the list of contemporary (US) celebrity activism, is the clear winner in the global civil society race for pressuring China on the grounds of being the host of the mega sports spectacle, other issues have (not) received similar attention.

Sabine Selchow, Research Officer, Centre for the Study of Global Governance, LSE
GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND ILLIBERAL REGIMES

The second is economic. Totalitarian or sultanic regimes exercised total control over the economy. Today, economic control is exerted through patronage, for example, through oil rents, as in the majority of authoritarian regimes, or through prestation, as in Zimbabwe. The growth of global markets, such as China’s, creates economic spaces that require a political response lest they open the floodgates for freedom, as happened in the former Soviet Union. The third form of control is through communication, as Joseph Nye puts it, soft power (2004). In the global era, this may be the most critical form of control. New forms of communication such as the Internet and the electronic media are inherently global, and these connections can help and hinder illiberal regimes in promoting their ideology.

Today, most illiberal regimes are populist, mobilising consent around powerful nationalistic or religious ideologies. They use modern communications to promote their messages and they thrive on external hostility or pressure. Bush’s phrase the ‘axis of evil’, for example, has helped to substantiate the anti-imperialist claims of regimes in Iran and Venezuela. Paradoxically, these same communications offer space for debate and discussion that is often difficult to close down. Ending regimes can be as simple a matter of shutting down communication and closing spaces. In Iran, for example, the Internet blocked the regime’s control; or we can count those dark spaces in the street that hold the first alternative, beyond the Internet, that the regime cannot close down. The Internet is bound to remain the last bastion of totalitarianism. Zimbabwe and Belarus both seem to be characterised by mad leaders, but while Lukashenko has managed to sustain a relatively orderly repressive society, Mugabe’s government has degenerated into spreading prestation that is completely unable to control a burgeoning civil society. In Burma, brutal violence against the Burmese and ethnic minorities, and pervasive control by the military junta of all aspects of state and society give this dictatorship totalitarian characteristics.

In all these regimes, civil society expands and contracts as the regime passes through cycles of reform and repression. The more that civil society takes advantages of openings, the less able the regime is to close them again. Thus Iran experienced a brutal period of repression after the revolution. The sweeping victory of Khatami in the 1997 presidential elections and of reformists in the parliamentary elections of 2000 ushered in a ‘Prague Spring’ with talk of illiberal society, rule of law and a ‘Dialogue of Civilisations’. The victory of the hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential elections led to a wave of arrests, executions (including of people under 18), and closures of civil society spaces. Despite the crackdown by religious authorities and the removal of reformists from the government, the debates did have a deep impact on Iranian institutions; above all, as one person interviewed put it, the reform period ‘demythified Islam and separated Islam from Absolutism’. There is a parallel here with the hollowing out of Marxist-Leninism in the last years of communism.

Civil society

What is a civil society in an illiberal regime? The survey of ideas, activism and spaces of civil society in the illiberal regimes selected for this study tells us that civil society is least likely to resemble the liberal Western conception of civil society as a space between the family, market and state. It may be a family affair, as with the activism of China’s most famous dissident couple; we may talk about ‘market dissent’ in Cuba or North Korea, about societal autonomy created by NGOs that were originally created by the state to further its control, or we can count those dark elements in society who embrace ideologies more extreme and repressive than the ideology of the ruling regime (Salame 1994).

It is more helpful to view the autonomy of civil society in terms of its impact. Civil society activists from Burma to Iran have demonstrably undermined various degrees the state’s ultimate claim to political control over society, which is the essence of illiberal regimes and their survival. One Iranian theorist defines civil society as ‘the sphere of social discourses, trends and autonomous social movements that attempt to regulate society’ (Amirachichi 1996). According to this definition, we can identify something that could be called civil society in every illiberal regime that exists today, ranging from economic dissenters in North Korea to the very lively range of different opinions, movements, organisations and spaces that exist in Iran, even after the recent elections and the retreat of the reform process, and in Zimbabwe.

Civil society in an illiberal regime is shaped and constrained by its own repressive political environment as well as complex global connections. Autonomous initiatives are exercised at a great risk, including persecution, imprisonment, torture and even death. Nonetheless, they do take place, though how and where they do are as different as the regimes they challenge. In the next section, we provide an overview of the ideas, activism and spaces of civil society in an illiberal regime.
society, which reveals the diversity of challenges they can present against even the most repressive state in the context of globalisation.

Ideas

The ideas guiding civil society activities in illiberal regimes can be grouped as follows:

1. Ideas informed by Western liberal thought and a commitment to political and civil liberties.
2. Ideas that are about reforming the system framed within the dominant discourse of the regime.
3. Ideas about specific issues such as environmentalism, women’s rights, poverty, or HIV/AIDS that can be framed within a liberal discourse and within the dominant regime discourse.
4. More extremist ideas than those of the regime. The persuasiveness of these more extremist positions within some illiberal regimes dispels the notion of civil society as a solely progressive and liberal space.

1. Western liberal ideas

This group of ideas is pursued by Western liberals in a non-Western setting who campaigned for democratisation based on the defence of the political and civic rights. They are a small but visible minority threatened with severe persecution by their rulers. Their language is the language of democracy, rights and the rule of law. Perhaps the embodiment of this set of ideas is Aung San Suu Kyi, who has become a global symbol for a non-violent struggle for democracy and against repression in Burma, on a par with the South African leader Nelson Mandela. For most of the time since the 1990 electoral victory of her National Democratic League (NLD), which the military junta refused to recognise, Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for her beliefs. The Lady, which is how the Burmese call her in deference, describes what she is fighting for:

“When we ask for democracy, all we are asking is that our people should be allowed to live tranquilly under the rule of law, protected by institutions which will guarantee our rights, the rights that will enable us to maintain our human dignity, to heal long festering wounds and to allow love and courage to flourish. Is that such a very unreasonable demand?” (Suu Kyi: 1997: 205).

Similarly, there are Chinese dissidents who have put the struggle for democracy and political rights at the forefront of their activism. Xu Wenli, known as the ‘godfather of dissent’ in China was involved and imprisoned for involvement in the ‘Democracy Wall’ movement in the 1970s. The wall was a notice board for dissident views. In 1988 he tried to establish the China Democratic Party, the first opposition party in China, directly undermining the regime’s soul. Subsequently jailed for 13 years and released on medical grounds, Xu Wenli joined a growing number of Chinese dissidents in exile. However, the political struggle and its persecution in China has continued, exemplified by Hu Jia and his wife Zeng Jinyan. Their latest house arrest and ban on foreign travel is part of a crackdown on human rights activists in the run-up to the 2008 Olympic games in Beijing (see Box 5.1). Hu Jia began as an HIV/AIDS activist in the 1990s. However, he soon realised that social challenges in China could not be tackled without first addressing politics, and consequently turned his efforts to the struggle for the freedom of speech and the press.

2. Reformist ideas

Alongside the dissenters who mount a direct political challenge to the regime, there has been a ferment of ideas that challenges the regime on its own terms, both in religious or ideological terms. Such ideas are often framed in terms of the discourse of Islam in Iran and Saudi Arabia, for example, as well as in terms of ‘rightful resistance’ in China.

In Iran many of the radicals who made the 1979 revolution became the backbone of the reformist movement in the 1980s. Particularly important has been the Islamic reform movement or the New Religious Thinking that argues that Islam, in particular Shi’ism, depends on human interpretation. Hajjat al-Islam Hasan Yousefi Eskanvari has been an outspoken and influential critic of the current Iranian version of theocracy. After speaking at a conference in April 2000, he was condemned to death for ‘apostasy’ and ‘war against Islam’, a sentence that was later commuted to five years in prison. In Box 5.2 Eskanvari outlines his thinking in the context of current Islamic perspectives.

The missing Imam in Shi’ism implies that no one has a direct line to God. Rules that are said to be Islamic are, in practise, the result of Islamic jurisprudence, that is constructed by men. Every individual is able to interpret the right ‘way’, i.e. Shari’a, and there is no ‘objective interpretation of divine law, independent of historical, geographical and socio-cultural context’ (Amir-Majidi 1996).

The dominant group within the Iranian religious discourse are the secularists, who want to separate politics and religion and dismantle the velayat-e feqih (the religious institutions that ‘supervise’ democracy). Particularly important was the Republican manifesto of Akbar Ganji, a political activist who spent eight years as a result of his investigation into the involvement of government officials into the murder of hundreds of intellectuals and journalists during the 1990s. As was the case with East Europeans, a critical change in the thinking of the Iranian reformists has been the rejection of revolution and the belief in gradual change towards a more open society, ‘instead of seeking radical change in the name of a holistic utopia’ (Hoodgrant 2002).

Similar ideas are espoused by Islamic reformers in Saudi Arabia, often supported by the Shi’ite minority in the East of the country. The Islamic reformers, who were among the signatories to the Petition for a Constitutional Monarchy in December 2003 along with liberal reformers, argue that Islam and democracy are compatible and religion has to be interpreted by human beings, and what is moral behaviour therefore varies in different periods of history.

Another method of challenging the system within the existing paradigm is the analysis of local reforms in rural China in terms of ‘rightful resistance’. This concept has been applied in other contexts, for example in East Germany during Communism when activists challenged power structures by ‘taking the state at its word’ (O’Brien and Li 2006: 16-17). Recent grassroots activism in rural China has been triggered by socio-economic changes and media development. ‘Rightful resisters’ have challenged local authorities for not delivering on their promises. These rights mainly have to do with policy implementation, and not with the struggle for wider civil and political rights to association, expression and participation. Nonetheless, O’Brien and Li argue that rightful resistance has created a new class of activists, and has led to the rise of rights consciousness, and the emergence of ‘rights talk’ and ‘rights defense’ (2006: 126-7).

3. Specific issues

This set of ideas has to do with specific issues and how they relate to broader questions of political and civil rights. In many illiberal regimes, environmentalism or humanitarianism is tolerated and movements of this type, as in the former Soviet Union and East and Central Europe, become new spaces within which novel ideas can be generated. In Burma, for example, a new concept of ‘earth rights’ has been developed to capture a nexus between environmental protection and human rights.

The construction of the Yadana gas pipeline linking gas extraction off the Burmese coast to a power plant near Bangkok illustrates how environmental and human rights issues converged. This project caused environmental degradation and human rights violations. Karen and Mon minorities opposed the project, which went ahead with the support of the Burmese military. The Karen Human Rights Group documented forced labour, forced relocation, rape and summary execution of Karen villagers.
Box 5.2: The New Religious Thinking in Iran

As a Muslim cleric who belongs to the New Religious Thinking in Iran, I would like to say a few words about the recent thinking of Jürgen Habermas on the interaction and understanding between believers and unbelievers, particularly given the importance of this subject, the special place of Habermas as a critical and secular intellectual, the growth of violence in the world and the need for peace and tolerance.

To start with, let me point out that in the world of Islam (even among the European Muslims), there are four active Islamic social tendencies:

1. Traditional Muslims: followers of traditional, non-political Islam, who pay little attention to the modern world and are largely content to lead a life on the basis of belief and Sharia.

2. Cultural Traditionalists: adherents of traditionalist and non-political Islam, who accept the old culture and civilization of Islam as a valuable historical heritage, and do this through a philosophical-mystical and at times juridical-theological approach; they are intent on keeping this heritage and at most introducing it to the modern world. The thinkers of this tendency do not tolerate any serious criticism of Islam or of current Muslim culture and knowledge. They are realists (misjudged) and not reformists (misinterpreted).

3. Dogmatic Fundamentalists: followers of political, fundamentalist Islam who are essentially intent on the revival of Islamic political authority in the mould of the ‘Islamic Caliphate’, and are not much concerned with its culture and civilization. The theoreticians of this tendency only see colonialism, and the West’s political domination, to be the enemy of religion and an obstacle to the realization of Islamic Caliphate and Empire, but they often as a whole consider the modern culture and civilization of the West to be in contradiction with (their understanding of) Islam and the interests of the Muslims. Their aims are political, and in their struggle to defeat the Western world they use all available means.

4. Islamic intellectuals and adherents of the New Religious Thinking who seek to realize a modern Islamic civilization. The theorists of this tendency believe that this can be achieved by the revival of authentic religious belief, by trimming the accretions from the religious domain, the rationalization of the totality of the religious system, criticism of historical Islam and traditional Islamic knowledge in the light of the latest human philosophical and scientific theories, and eventually the ‘reconstruction’ of Islamic thought.

If we consider the differences among these tendencies, it is evident that the main audience addressed by Habermas and others who are keen on peace, tolerance and dialogue among religions, civilizations and cultures, is in fact the New Religious Thinkers, not the Traditional Muslims nor the Cultural Traditionalists nor the Dogmatic Fundamentalists. This is so because, first, the New Thinkers are the only Islamic tendency that accepts the fundamental principles of modernity and its products (such as science, critical reason, democracy, freedom, justice, human rights and so on). They see them as being basically Islamic, or at least compatible with Islam. Secondly, impelled by their intellectualism and by remaining on modern critical reasoning, they are simultaneously engaged in a critique of Islamic tradition and heritage (i.e. historical Islam) and a critique of some of the foundations and products of modernity. But it must be added that their critique of tradition and modernity is positive and constructive, not negative and destructive. Thirdly, the main project of the New Muslim Thinkers is the modernization of Islam not the Islamization of modernity, and they see the way to the realization of this project to be in making links with free thinkers, by criticism, dialogue, tolerance and understanding, not by force, imposition, war and violence. In fact, the acceptable Islam of the New Thinkers is critical Islam and a synthesis of tradition and modernity.

Critical Islam rests on the following foundations:

1. Rational criticism (criticism of everything, including religion, the pathology of religious history and rituals, Islamic law (fiqh) and reasoning (ijtihad)).

2. Human emancipation from the four prisons (the prisons of nature, society, history and the self).

3. Exposing the different faces of power (including the power of the clergy over people’s lives and their hold on politics and government, and the power of men over women).


This type of critical Islam, which became known in Iran with Ali Shariati, is close to the critical theory that is known as the Frankfurt School. In view of the place of the ‘public sphere’ in critical theory, we can propose that the most suitable place for debating the truths, authority and legitimacy of religion, is the public sphere. While welcoming Habermas’ recommendations, I say that one thing that the modern and secular world can learn from religion is the spiritual interpretation of the world and humanity that modernity is lacking. Muhammad Iqbal of Pakistan, in the early decades of the twentieth century, in his critique of the modern and non-religious world and what it lacks, said that the biggest deficiency of the modern world is that it has been emptied of its spiritual element. For this reason, new religious thinkers such as Iqbal, and Shariati in Iran, tried to compensate for this lack by designing a modern worldview and anthropology that is also topside, spiritual and ethical (i.e. an Islamic humanism).

In the light of these considerations, I suggest that religious thinkers and intellectuals of all religions, secular intellectuals and even anti-religious but democratic intellectuals, should strengthen their intellectual and cultural relations with the New Religious Thinkers (including Iran). Experience has shown that in the world of Islam, any lasting change is impossible or at least difficult without taking account of religion. Habermas’ correct recommendation is that religious people, in order to secure their survival in the modern world, must be able to ‘translate’ their thoughts in such a way that they are meaningful for the secular world. In this case, new Muslim thinkers are the ones that have the logical and ethical capacity for dialogue and mutual understanding with the world. They are also able to pave the way for social and political change by changing the thoughts and minds of Muslims. At the same time, this does not mean that one should not have a dialogue with the Traditionalists and even the Fundamentalists. It is important to leave the door open for dialogue with any tendency.

But it must be pointed out that, attempting to solve the problem of violence in the world and to fight terrorism, whether its Islamic version or otherwise, by sheer violence and oppression is not only impossible, but ends up playing to the interests of the fundamentalists and strengthening the seekers of violence. The intellectuals and politicians in the West must pay attention to the deep roots of violence in the world, especially among the Muslims. It appears that several factors have been at work in the rise and growth of violent fundamentalism in the world of Islam.

1. The dominance of Western colonialism in the Muslim world in the course of several centuries.

2. Euro-centricism and the constant actual and ideological humiliation of Muslims and Muslim societies.

3. The failure of modern or semi-modern social movements in Muslim societies and their suppression by secular governments and politicians.

4. Poverty, increasing deprivation and the growth of class differences and the North-South gap.

5. The continuation of old despots in the Muslim Middle East.

6. The weakness of Islamic intellectualism and New Religious Thinking in the Muslim countries.

Without due attention to these root causes, and without offering practical and logical ways, any solution or action will be unsuccessful or at least insufficient. It is not right, on the pretence of fighting against violence, terrorism and fundamentalism, to fight against the basis of religiosity and religious values and principles. It is not possible to eliminate modernity and its products from the lives of religious people, nor is eliminating religion either possible or useful; even if it were possible, it could not be achieved except by violence and suppression, which would also mean the destruction of all the philosophical, anthropological and social and political foundations and privileges of the modern and secular world. One cannot expect much from statesmen and the holders of power, but peace-seeking and democratic intellectuals must by no means abandon the path of understanding and dialogue; in the same way, Muslims must not give in to extremists. According to Habermas, in liberal secular Western states, religious people (mostly Muslims, particularly after Sept 2001) are subject to various psychological and social pressures (even physical abuse). Believers are often expected to draw an absolute line between the private and public realms, and to render the public realm entirely to the government. But is this really possible? A secular government is right to expect religious people to accept the principle of democracy and the neutrality of the government and political system with respect to the beliefs and thoughts of all people, and to have equal respect for the rights of every citizen. But why shouldn’t religious people have the right to express their religious and ethical teachings in the public sphere, even in political matters and in seeking to secure the basis of freedom and justice, and in criticizing the status quo? In particular, it must be pointed out that secular or liberal governments should not patronize religious beliefs, or even worse, insult their religious sanctities (as happened recently with the unacceptable cartoons in Denmark).

In conclusion, I believe that the revival and reinforcement of authentic religious-centred values and ethical rules, including those of Islam in the modern world, will certainly help in the spread of peace, justice, tolerance, love, sening human beings, respect for law and democratic rules. Of course it will also help the growth of freedom and the spirit of justice.

Hojjat ol-Islam Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari

This is an edited version of remarks by Hojjat ol-Islam Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari at the School of Oriental and African Studies on 12 May 2006, which were translated by Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper, to mark the launch of Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform. London: I B Tauris 2006.
Publication of their reports exposed the use of sexual violence as a regime strategy for intimidating and terrorising opponents of the pipeline (Doyle and Simpson 2006).

In both Iran and Saudi Arabia, new ideas about the role of women have been developed within the Islamist discourse. Thus, when women campaigning for greater rights in Saudi Arabia point out that Muhammad was committed to equality and that his wife Khadija was a successful businesswoman, they point out that there is nothing in the Koran that says women must not drive or must cover their faces. Similarly, in Iran it is argued that discriminatory laws against women contradict the fundamental Islamic belief in justice and equality (Mir Hosseini 2006). In particular, women are supposed to have a privileged position as mothers yet they do not enjoy fundamental rights (Gheychanji 2001).

In Zimbabwe, it is women who have provided the inspiration for the civil disobedience movement. Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), a movement with 35,000 both male and female members, has adopted the slogan ‘Tough Love’. The idea that the power of love can conquer the love of power comes out of Zimbabwean traditions and norms. The argument is that ‘Tough Love’ is the disciplining love of a parent; women practice it for press for and to bring dignity back to Zimbabweans. Political leaders in Zimbabwe need some discipline, it is argued, and who better to dish it out than mothers? Tough Love is used as a ‘peacemaker for better governance and social justice. Annual marches held on Valentine’s Day demonstrate the power of ‘Tough Love’ (URL).

4. Extremist ideas

Alongside the liberal, the reformist and the issue-based ideas, civil society harbours extremist ideas as well. There is a tendency to believe that it is regimes that are bad and people that are good. But as was revealed after the end of Communism, prejudice and hatred are bred in authoritarian regimes just as much as a belief in democracy. There are extreme nationalists in Russia and Belarus and extreme Islamists in Iran and Saudi Arabia. In Iran, for example, in January 2007, the government closed down a fundamentalist website Baztub, which had accused Ahmadinejad of betraying the revolution because he watched a female dance show at the recent Asian games in Qatar.

In Saudi Arabia, the main opposition, at least during the 1970s, was extremist Wahhabism, which distinguishes itself both from mystical Islam and from Shi’ism. These conservatives argue that modernity and westernisation is threatening the true Islam both globally and locally, and that the royal family is failing to protect and promote the values of Islam. The Gulf War of 1990 was a turning point for these groups – the deployment of American troops in Saudi Arabia was considered a betrayal of Islam. Key issues are the defence of global Islam, opposition to corruption and demands for redistribution, and opposition to the American presence in Saudi Arabia, especially in the holy places.

Activism

By definition there is only a limited space for political activism in illiberal regimes. However, a close look at movements, NGOs and associations, reveals a busy civil society engaged in a spectrum of activities ranging from those that are political and persecuted by the regime, to those that are humanitarian and supported by the state. Women and youth groups are particularly important social forces in all our case studies.

Women

In Iran, discriminatory laws were introduced within weeks of the 1979 revolution, including the right of men to divorce unilaterally, lowering the age of marriage for women to nine years, imposing rigid dress code for women, introducing strict gender segregation, andlicting violent punishments such as flogging and stoning. Since the revolution, prohibitions on ‘immoral behaviour’ are enforced by the Revolutionary Guards, other paramilitary groups of the Ministry of the Interior, and by the Monirat.

A vibrant women’s movement developed during the 1990s, particularly around the magazine Zanan. It includes both Islamic and secular women and brings together rich and poor women. It has succeeded in prohibiting stoning and in reversing some laws, such as the rules on divorce. The daughter of Iran’s former president Ali Khorami Hashemi Rafsanjani, Faezeh Hashemi, played an important role as a member of parliament (1996-2000) in defending women’s rights. Shirin Ebadi’s Campaign for Equality became famous around the world after she won the Nobel Prize. Despite the crackdown, women’s groups are still very active, as illustrated by the One Million Signature Campaign in 1999, which was explicitly political demands, especially among student groups.

NGOs and associations

Across the spectrum of illiberal regimes there is a myriad of NGOs and associations in some places and hardly any in others. For example, they number some 8,000 in Iran, hundreds of thousands in China but hardly any in others. For Iran, for example, there is hardly any in others. For example, they number some 8,000 in Iran, hundreds of thousands in China but cannot be counted in Belarus because of the government’s policy of ‘judicial liquidation’, a series of repressive administrative measures that aimed to ‘root out’ civil society. In some countries NGOs cover the young people’s protest. In Burma, university students were a critical force in the 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations that were brutally suppressed, but they are still defiant and active. Despite the regime’s repression of dissent, some 1,000 people gathered to mark the birthday of the imprisoned student leader Min Ko Naing in October 2006 (Hin 2006).

In Belarus as well, the regime has been particularly afraid of youth activism. Grassroots movements of youth groups and unregistered NGOs, such as Malady Front (Youth Front) and Zubr (Bison as the country’s national symbol) have flourished, even as their members have been imprisoned. They have launched campaigns like “Enough!” modelled on the Serbian youth movement Otpor (Resistance), organising street actions or satisﬁring the regime. They collaborate with the young Ukrainian activists, in Pora, National Alliance, and Sobota, learning from their role in the Ukraine’s Orange Revolution (Schipani-Arduriz and Kudrnytsi 2005; see Chapter 4 of this volume).

Youth

Young people are often singled out as a political threat by illiberal regimes, one might say not without good reason. While thriving on and learning from transnational connections facilitated by information and communication technologies, they have challenged their respective regimes in numerous creative and humorous ways. Their activism has managed to capture and mobilise popular support.

In Iran, young people’s movements include non-political movements of young people who want to be able to meet the opposite sex freely in public places or dress as they please, as well as those who make more political demands, especially among student groups. Unemployment is also an important factor in young people’s protest. In Burma, university students were a critical force in the 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations that were brutally suppressed, but they are still defiant and active. Despite the regime’s repression of dissent, some 1,000 people gathered to mark the birthday of the imprisoned student leader Min Ko Naing in October 2006 (Hin 2006).

In Belarus as well, the regime has been particularly afraid of youth activism. Grassroots movements of youth groups and unregistered NGOs, such as Malady Front (Youth Front) and Zubr (Bison as the country’s national symbol) have flourished, even as their members have been imprisoned. They have launched campaigns like “Enough!” modelled on the Serbian youth movement Otpor (Resistance), organising street actions or satisfying the regime. They collaborate with the young Ukrainian activists, in Pora, National Alliance, and Sobota, learning from their role in the Ukraine’s Orange Revolution (Schipani-Arduriz and Kudrnytsi 2005; see Chapter 4 of this volume).
Box 5.3: China’s environmental movement in the making

An environmental movement has been in the making in urban China since the mid-1990s. Its main feature is the development of grassroots environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOs). Since the launching of the first ENGO in 1994, over 200 have been founded. In addition, according to a survey by the All-China Enviromental Federation (2006), there were 1,116 college student environmental associations and 1,382 government-organised ENGOs as of 2005. The grassroots ENGOs are relatively independent from the state and come closest to the common understanding of civil society organisations as autonomous, non-profit, and voluntary associations.

These grassroots ENGOs have launched many campaigns. The first major campaign was about the protection of the snub-nosed golden monkey. In 1995, when environmental activists learned of a local government’s plan to cut an old forest—a habitat of the endangered monkey—they organised a petition and succeeded in stopping the plan. Another national campaign was launched in 1996 to protect the Tibetan antelope. And since 2003, Chinese environmentalists have been engaged in a sustained campaign to stop dam-building on the pristine Nu River in southwest China. A sign of its initial success was the state government’s decision in 2004 to suspend the project, subject to environmental impact assessment.

The archetypal movement in modern Chinese history—recall the student protests in 1989—was mounted as direct challenge against the state and its delegates. It adopted confrontational tactics, invariably met with repression and never-developed legitimate movement organisations. The emerging environmental movement differs markedly. It does not challenge central state power, but instead targets business and consumer behavior and, at times, local government authorities. It has a developed legitimacy over government organisations. The emerging environmental movement differs markedly. It does not challenge central state power, but instead targets business and consumer behavior and, at times, local government authorities. It has a developed legitimacy over government organisations. The movement’s decision in 2004 to suspend the project, subject to environmental impact assessment.

Besides public campaigns, Chinese ENGOs organise a broad range of activities. In Beijing, Friends of Nature runs an environmental monitoring station on the Qinghai-Tibet plateau. In Yunnan, Green Watershed leads a citizens’ movement to protect rivers. The list goes on.

The good news is that the 1998 regulations give legitimacy, at least to those organisations that can manage to register. And of course, China’s much publicised national policy of sustainable development and the associated “greening of the state” (Guobin Yang, Barnard College) also offer political space for the growth of ENGOs. Increasingly, for example, environmental activists are making use of legal instruments such as environmental impact assessment laws to push their agendas.

While the Chinese government has some valuable resources and skills, one skill is transnational competence (Koeth 2006: 379) such as the ability to communicate in English and knowledge about international NGO culture and practices. International awards given to Chinese-environmentalists certify their transnational competence. Well-known leaders of environmental groups such as Liang Congjie of Friends of Nature, Liao Xiaoyi of Global Village of Beijing, and Yang Chang of Green Watershed, have all received major international awards. Furthermore, Chinese environmentalists are well connected with the mass media, another major resource. Many are media professionals themselves. Green Camp, Green Earth Volunteers, Green Plateau, Tianjin Friends of Green, and Panjin Black-Beaked Gill Protection Association, are all led by journalists or former journalists. Friends of Nature has influential journalists in its membership. These media professionals serve as direct links between the mass media and the environmentalists.

The two kinds of resources are mutually-generative. Transnational competence is conducive to building connections with the global community that is generating more social capital. Connections with the mass media give them easy access to the otherwise politically-controlled media channels. Such access can translate into media visibility, which then becomes a source of cultural prestige.
the whole spectrum of opinion; in others, only pro-
government NGOs have been allowed to exist.

In Saudi Arabia, religious charities became the
breeding ground for extremist Islam during the
1990s and only recently has the government imposed
restrictions, which have affected moderate charities
as well. A few NGOs and associations are also
tolerated. These have included the establishment of
professional syndicates where women have been
allowed to stand and vote, for example, the Saudi
National Agency of Engineers, the Chambers of
Commerce, and an organisation for journalists.

In Iran, there are many pro-government groups,
such as Ansar-e Hizbullah, Muslim Students
following the Imam, and the Tehran Militant Clergy
Association. There are also pro-reform groups like
the Office of Strengthening Unity among students,
and opposition groups. And there are groups representing
minorities who are discriminated against (such as
Arab, Kurdish, Azeri, Christian and Bahai).

Whether in Iran, Burma, Belarus, Saudi Arabia or
China, the regimes themselves have resorted to the
creation of NGOs. In Burma, the state created its
own ‘civil society’, embodied by the Union Solidarity
and Development Association (USDA). Its focus on the youth
is an important element in its campaign to forestall the
discord within society, especially after the 1988
pro-democracy demonstrations. Like USDA, the
Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) seeks to
appeal to youth, but also intimidates and harasses the
regime’s opponents at universities and schools. BRSM
is known as ‘Lukashenko, a combination of Lukashenko and
Kornosol, the Youth Communist League from the
Communist Period. In Saudi Arabia, two human rights
bodies have been established by the government
although they have no autonomy and could not, for
example, defend the signatories of the Petition for a
Constitutional Monarchy, some of whom were arrested
and imprisoned.

The state-led creation and/or tolerance of NGOs
also has a functional justification: to offload services
onto the non-state sector and to fill in gaps in service
provision. In Iran, the grassroots response to the
humanitarian crisis after the Bam earthquake, and NGOs specialising in dealing with drug addiction
or poverty play a critical role. In China, ‘civil society’
has been allowed to assist the state in service
provision where the state and market cannot deliver
(Chong 2005), for example fighting the HIV and AIDS
epidemic or environmental degradation (see Box 5.3).

In both China and Iran, the government has
maintained a restrictive legal environment in order to
‘contain and control’ the civil society, lest it should
provide a political challenge to the state (Zengie
2007). Despite this, many NGOs have managed to
circumvent these restrictions. No one knows who
uploaded his 600-page memoir in December 2000,
which criticised the ideological foundation of the Islamic
state and opposed the ‘dogma’ of velayat-e faqih.

However, since 2003, the Iranian regime has
stepped up its attack on the space provided by the
Internet. Some 450 Internet cafes have been shut
up, dozens of websites have been closed down,
including popular western sites like Amazon, YouTube
and the New York Times (in 2007), and many bloggers
have been arrested. Egyptian bloggers have also been
targeted by the state – see Box 5.5.

In Saudi Arabia, the Internet has also become a
space utilised by both government and opposition. As
in other Islamist countries, the religious
establishment regards the Internet as an important
forum to propagate its message. The Saudi regime
interdicts many popular western websites; nevertheless technically-savvy people can find ways
to circumvent these restrictions. No one knows who
runs the Committee Against Corruption website (http:
www.cektoos.net). The Internet has also been
inaugurated by ‘people with strong ties to the
business community in the US and Saudi Arabia’.

In China, virtual technology provides a way to side
step restrictions on public gatherings and social
activism. It has become a ‘hotbed of collective action’,
a site for making cyber-protest and organising cyber-
gatherings. The death of young graphic designer
and student Sun Zhiqiang, in Guangzhou in March
2003, illustrates the power of the Internet. Arrested on his
way to an Internet cafe for not having a residency
permit, he was taken to a local detention centre for
beggars and vagrants. Three days later he was
found dead in a local hospital. A local reporter published a
story on the his paper’s Internet edition. It led to a
nationwide public outcry. Pressure built up through
online postings in chat rooms, blogs, online petitions
and protest letters. It resulted in charges against
government officials and police officers, financial

compensation to the family and eventually the repeal of
the out-dated law on urban vagrants (Tai: 159-268).

Since the introduction of the Internet in China, the
government has played a ‘cat and mouse’ game,
using various approaches to control it, including
regulation, self-censorship, ‘cyber police’, surveillance, a crackdown on internet cafes, and the building a ‘Great Firewall’ around China (Dineshaw 2004). However, having learnt from its inability to stop
the use of satellite dishes in China, it has not tried to
ban Internet access. A Chinese official compared the
Communist Partys’ strategy towards the Internet to
the Chinese peoples’ historic struggle to control the
Yellow river. According to him, the proper technique is
not to try stopping the water but to guide it in the right
direction (Tai 2007).

In Burma, restrictions on the Internet are physical,
such as restrictions on where people can open email
accounts (only in hotels, government offices and
businesses), and technical, such as blocking access
to Yahoo and Google. Still, people can use a handful of
Internet cafes to surf and to sidestep government
restrictions. A journalist from Burma with whom we
corresponded said:

There are Internet cafe owners who are asked by
military intelligence to monitor the users and inform
the officials if they try to look at the banned sites. But
many Internet users are still reading banned sites with
the help of proxy software and sites. Internet
connection starting installation fee is about US$ 2,000.
But in cafes, hourly usage costs only US$ 0.6. While I
am trying to send this letter to you, I am using a proxy
web to use gmail illegally in a café and sometimes we
need to spend one hour to send a letter.

Like the youth movement Otpor in Serbia and
Kmara in Georgia, Belarus’ Zrub has relied on mobile
Box 5.4: Controlling the Internet

The Internet was once seen as a boon to civil-society led democratisations and the spread of liberal values on a global scale. Increasingly today, the Internet is as complex as the societies in which it is embedded, and a forum for economic, criminal and political struggle.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, and in particular during the Internet ‘DotCom’ heyday of the mid-to-late 1990s, a unique combination of historical, technological, and social forces came together fortuitously to create an open Internet environment. With the end of the Cold War, the spread of Western-led techno-optimism, and an unprecedented economic boom fueled by new technologies, governments were willing to take a ‘hands-off’ approach and delegate Internet design choices to networks of engineers and computer scientists. These engineers and scientists held both a technical and political philosophy that encouraged openness, which in turn complemented the hope (and belief) of policy elites (particularly in the United States) that such a hands-off approach to the Internet was the best way to encourage continued innovation and rapid economic growth.

But beneath the euphoria and democratic openness of the Internet, a ‘dark side’ of it was lurking. The open networked communications environment also enabled deep and often divisive challenges to political and economic authority. Some of these took the form of organised street demonstrations against capitalist globalisation. More serious was the facilitation of networked forms of militancy and extremism, most vividly illustrated in the Al-Qaeda terrorist network. It also allowed the illegal trade in copyrighted material and the spread of what many societies perceived to be pornography, cultural decadence, and hate speech. The hands-off approach to the Internet adopted by political elites was bringing about unintended and increasingly negative implications.

The ‘DarkNet’ comes of age

Since the mid-1990s the Internet has served civil society as a means to circumvent state authority by providing a platform for networking, advocacy and mobilisation. Notable cases, such as the 1999 anti-globalisation riots in Seattle, and Zapataista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, 1994-1996, drew media attention to what many civil society actors were already aware of: the latent potential power of global networking for local causes. But civil society actors were by no means the only ones to benefit from being globally connected and represented. By what means and others seeking voice, fame or economic gain had colonised cyberspace and presented a new challenge to states and global order.

The ‘social networks’ first described by David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla in their analysis of how the Zapatistas circumvented the armed might of the Mexican military (Arquilla, Ronfeldt and Fuller 1998), are now a significant feature of all contemporary conflicts – economic, criminal and political. Mexican and Colombian gangs regularly post videos of grisly gangland executions to the popular site YouTube (see for example Watson 2007). These videos are used to intimidate competitors, bolster their image, and often to serve as a warning to those who resist demand for ransom in cases of kidnappings. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the battle with insurgents over ‘hearts and minds’ is as often fought in cyberspace as in physical engagements. Insurgents film attacks, often from several camera angles, and produce vignetted with powerful propaganda resonance. Consequently, the Internet has emerged as the ‘great equalizer’ where even the smallest groups can greatly amplify their strategic effect in a ‘battlespace’ that military and police forces are ill equipped to contest (see Keenan in Chapter 10 of this volume). A recent study of Iraqi insurgent media carried out by Radio Free Europe concluded that their ‘product’ was increasing in reach and sophistication. It is progressively finding traction and appeal in the mainstream Arab press. Moreover, the study concludes that ‘there is little to counter this torrent’ (Kimmage and Ridolfi 2007). But criminals and militancy are not the only ones shaping the future Internet. Increasingly, individuals acting alone or as a group can have an effect previously thought to be restricted to states. In May 2007, the removal of a statue from a park in Estonia led to an acrimonious row between Russian and Estonian nationalists.1 The conflict spilled over into cyberspace where, in the words of Hillar Aarelaid, chief security officer of the Estonian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT), a ‘cyber-riot’ ensued that at one point threatened a complete shut down of Estonian banking and telecom systems.2 The degree of disruption was considerable and worrying, as it appeared to have occurred in a self-organised fashion rather than as a consequence of a planned and coordinated campaign.

As a consequence, the variegated terrain of cyberspace is now increasingly contested as states attempt to enforce nationally defined rules on conduct in cyberspace, in order to render it less ‘ungoverned’. Borders, checkpoints and ‘fences’ are being built, but with mixed results (Deibert and Villenueve 2004). In part the very nature of cyberspace, as a technical human-made domain dependent on cooperation for its very existence, makes the issue of traditional sovereignty built on the basis of defensive borders, difficult to conceptualise, much less enforce. However, this has not stopped states from trying.

Borders and checkpoints in cyberspace

A 2007 study by the OpenNet Initiative (ONI) found that 25 of 41 countries surveyed engaged in some form of technical filtering of the Internet (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski and Zittrain 2007). More worryingly, the testing revealed that the content targeted for censorship included political expression, social themes, and topics deemed dangerous to national security. However, very few of the countries limited their filtering to a narrowly defined set of targeted subjects. Instead, a majority filtered a broad set of topics, suggesting that filtering regimes, once put into place, generally ‘creep’ beyond their initial mandate. The lack of legal norms and public oversight over filtering contributes to increasingly non-accountable practices while the technical nature of filtering often leads to the mis-recognition of content, which is therefore blocked - for example, maternal healthcare sites have been classified as pornography.

The ONI study also suggested that filtering is a fast-moving and evolving trend. First generation filtering relied on passive means where lists of banned websites were loaded into routers such that requests to the servers hosting those websites were denied. These methods, used by countries such as China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, are relatively unsophisticated and easy to defeat.3 Moreover, they are also difficult to hide. As ONI testing revealed, it is relatively easy to determine what content is being filtered, and by whom. As a result, countries engaging in first generation filtering have been quickly targeted by advocacy groups and labeled as ‘pariahs’. It is therefore hardly surprising that first generation methods are being supplanted by ‘second generation’ strategies designed to be more stealthy, dynamic and sophisticated.

Filtering ‘2.0’

Evidence gathered by ONI points to several emerging trends that characterise second generation filtering strategies. First, the value of information is fixed in time, and therefore filtering does not have to be permanent, but present only when a particular kind of information has greatest value (or potential for disruption). This is particularly true during elections, when interest in media reporting and political communications is heightened, and where the consequences of an electoral loss may have major repercussions. In two cases, the February 2005 election in Kyrgyzstan (which led to the topping of President Askar Akayev in the ‘Tulip revolution’), and during the 2006 presidential elections in Belarus, ONI documented ‘just in time’ filtering against key opposition media and political sites. This filtering differed from first generation strategies in two ways, first, it was applied temporarily, in these cases

---

1 For more information concerning the bronze statue of Tallinn incident, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bronze_Soldier_of_Tallinn
2 Author interview with Hillar Aarelaid, Võru, Estonia, June 2007.
3 Proxy software, such as Psiphon, which are based on social network principles, provides an easy-to-use solution that can confound many national firewall systems. See, for example, BBC Online (2006) ‘Web censorship: bypass’ unveiled’, 27 November. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/6374868.stm
during the election period; and second, in the method used to apply it. In the Kyrgyzstan and Belarus cases, access to sites was disrupted through offensive means, by attacking web servers hosting information services using denial-of-service attacks, which flooded the servers with requests rendering them unable to respond. In the Kyrgyz case, these attacks were accompanied by an ultimatum to the Internet Service Provider (ISP) hosting the websites, demanding that they be removed (OpenNet Initiative 2005). In the case of Belarus, denial-of-service attacks were accompanied by other tactics, such as introducing deliberate errors in domain name servers (which are necessary for finding servers on the Internet), and once temporarily shutting down all Internet access in Minsk (Rohozinski 2006). There are indications that these second generation techniques are not restricted to technologically sophisticated states. During 2007, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Cambodia shut down access to SMS services during politically sensitive times, presumably in recognition that these technologies offer a means for opposition movements to mobilise (Zuckerman 2007).

Another trend of second generation filtering emerging from ONI research is the specific targeting of critical resources, rather than broad-brush censorship of whole categories of content. This form of filtering is also closely linked to surveillance. In several countries, notably Egypt, a combination of surveillance and selective prosecution is used to effectively curtail bloggers, and specific minority groups (especially the gay and lesbian community) (Abbas 2007). The message being sent by the state is that you cannot hide in cyberspace. It is a clear warning to anyone seeking the anonymity of cyberspace to voice political criticism or express alternative lifestyles: you can be found, and you can be prosecuted.

At third emerging, but as of yet unverified, trend, is that countries can buy ‘pre-filtered’ Internet access from countries that apply these practices on their national segments. In 2004, ONI research revealed that an ISP in Uzbekistan demonstrated the same patterns of filtered content as that used by China Telecom. Further investigation revealed that the ISP purchased its connectivity from China Telecom. Similar patterns, albeit on a lesser scale, were highlighted by the 2007 ONI survey, which found that several CIS countries that buy their access through a Russian-based ISP shared similar filtering patterns (Rohozinski 2007). Evidence is preliminary, but the idea of outsourcing national filtering to a third country has appeal in that it provides a plausible pretext for denying culpability, or at least the ability to deflect criticism by blaming a third party. It is also perhaps indicative of a broader trend in the Internet as a global infrastructure.

Lastly, second generation filtering is increasingly multifaceted, reflecting the growing importance of the Internet to economic life as well as politics. The Internet is opening up areas of commercial interest previously the preserve of state monopolies. For this reason, many countries block new services, such as Internet telephony, ostensibly to protect national providers from competition, and to retain lucrative licensing and revenue streams.

Balkanization, or an increasingly competitive and militarised commons?

As the Internet continues to grow and evolve as a universal platform for communication, pressures to contain, control and dominate cyberspace will continue to develop. At present, the tendencies seem to point in two directions. On the one hand there is the possibility that the Internet will become increasingly Balkanised, and divided among tightly controlled national networks. This possibility, however, is unlikely given that few countries are large enough to support a truly autarchic Internet economy, and doing so would mean that many of the advantages of a globally connected Internet would disappear. The fact remains that only large and powerful countries like China – which may soon eclipse the US as the largest country in cyberspace – seem content to pursue ‘great firewalls’ to defend and control national cyberspace at great expense and effort.

The second tendency points to an increasingly competitive cyberspace commons where states, individuals, civil society and ‘dark nets’ jostle for agency and advantage. In this scenario, states will more aggressively defend their interests in cyberspace without concern for blocking their national borders from information flows. States like the US acknowledge that they now fight on a level playing field against sophisticated network actors who are adapt at operating in global cyberspace. It is therefore no coincidence that the US National Military Strategy for Operations in Cyberspace (2006), which remains classified, defines cyberspace as a domain equal in importance to land, air, and sea, and one in which the US must seek appropriate tools for war fighting, and superiority (Wynne 2006).

Which outcome will prevail is a matter for future historians. But it is clear that the Internet has evolved into a domain capable of supporting a sophisticated social and political ecosystem – a domain that seems destined to shape the great geopolitical struggles of our century.

Ronald J Deibert, University of Toronto, and Rafal Rohozinski, University of Cambridge, are principal investigators of the OpenNet Initiative, a collaborative research project between the Universities of Cambridge, Harvard, Oxford and Toronto, which aims to identify and document Internet filtering and surveillance, and to promote and inform wider public dialogue about such practices.

---

1 Although this document remains classified, an unclassified powerpoint summary was circulated in mid-2006.
independent journalists and writers. Accused of down. In Belarus, the unregistered underground 2006, Iran’s most popular daily Khатami period, and many journalists arrested. In the same time, many magazines and journals have been restricted to elites and a handful of dissidents in such as Cuba, Burma and China, Internet access is restricted to elites and a handful of dissidents in urban areas. Magazines and journals continue to be crucial spaces for dissent. In Iran, the ideas of the religious reformer Abdül-Karim Soroush were first restricted to elites and a handful of dissidents in 1988 demonstrations they negotiated with the military and later put pressure on the regime to recognise the results of the 1990 elections by refusing to accept the official results. 100,000 North Koreans into China in the last decade. There they remain as illegal labourers, doing casual and unskilled work in restaurants, construction and farms, or work as domestic maids. Though compared to what they would earn in North Korea, and they use any opportunity to send money back home, even returning to visit the families left behind (Lankov 2004).

Cross-border smuggling and trafficking has an explicit gender aspect. The shortage of brides due to the migration of young women into urban areas and China’s one child policy, has produced a lucrative business in young Korean women. Its underside has been massive human rights violations (Davs 2006). Many women who enter into an agreement to be sold for marriage find themselves at the mercy of traffickers, forced to work in the sex industry, physically maltreated, or even killed for resisting. Others are lured by promises of a job in China. One victim was reported as saying, ‘it is better to find a man, any man, than to stare to death in North Korea’ (quoted in Davs 2006: 133).

From Cuba and China to Burma and North Korea, tourism has been a potent yet contradictory force. While it opens up countries to outsiders, it also provides a welcome cash flow for regimes, a source of black market income for guides, minders, and others who are permitted to work in tourism. Even in North Korea has become tourist destination, its rarity value attracting Chinese tourists and the occasional American or Briton. Like journalists, tourists are assigned minders to prevent a corrosive political impact on the locals (The Economist 2007a).

Religious spaces
Religious venues provide another forum for communication. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, religious institutions may be dominated by hardliners but nevertheless they do provide spaces for reformers as well. Just as the Church provided space in Poland and East Germany in Communist times, so religious institutions, even where the regime is fiercely secular, can sometimes carve out spaces. Buddhist monks organised in sangha (order of monks) were involved in the Burmese pro-democracy movement. During the 1988 demonstrations they negotiated with the military and

and other public and private spaces
Concerts, football matches, parcs, teashops, or art galleries are all in different ways offer potential public spaces for free expression. In Iran, many young people want to participate in music festivals and sporting events, especially football. They want to do what young people do in the West, to meet in public parks or cafés. There are several groups of women sports fans. For example, there is a campaign among women to be allowed to cycle. In the Burmese cities of Rangoon and Mandalay, intellectuals, artists and scholars meet in teashops even though there are restrictions on what they can say. And, of course, in all but the most repressive regimes (perhaps only in North Korea), people are able to talk freely within the confines of their homes. And sometimes it is in private homes that dissent is expressed through discussion or lectures and performances. In Burma, three comedians, the Moustache Brothers, who have been banned from public venues and imprisoned previously, performed a traditional Burmese vaudeville in a private home that ridiculed the military regime.

In Saudi Arabia too, there are obviously some informal spaces within the home, although even homes are usually segregated. The group of women who protested their exclusion from the municipal elections held a weekly cultural salon in their homes. Azar Nafissi’s enthralling book Reading Lolita in Teheran describes the conversations in a women’s reading group in Iran.
Box 5.5: Egyptian bloggers, the state and civil society

The story of the Egyptian regime and bloggers is a significant, multifaceted and illuminating account of how an absolute and hard-hearted state deals with the noisy march of activism into the new possibilities and frontiers of cyberspace. It is an experience that can be read in many lights, from media, international politics and activism, to mass psychology and literature, and from which important lessons and insights can be drawn. Between creativity and acute repression, Egyptian bloggers have been able to swiftly jump between virtual and physical space, sometimes saving themselves from the state’s iron fist, sometimes not. In so doing, they have opened the way for a new era for Egyptian civil society, in both normative and practical terms. This contribution aims to outline the relationship between Egyptian bloggers and the state, with a special eye for the relevance of this relationship, its different experiences, and various impacts on Egyptian civil society actors.

From May 2005, Egypt – the state, its people and, until then, its forcefully numbed civil society – became aware of a new reality. For the first time, the Egyptian regime prepared for multi-party elections in order to create a democratic reform, especially in the eyes of its macho ally, the US. Opposition groups disputed the tactical move by the government, and called for a boycott on voting day. The government hired thugs to organise pro-government rallies, who beat up anti-government protesters in downtown Cairo and sexually harassed female activists.

Little did activist Wael Abbas know that day he would be setting the stage for the role of Egyptian civil society as an alternative and reliable media provider, pulling the carpet from underneath the government’s media monopoly. He used his mobile phone to document the state-sponsored violence against protesters, and recorded a testimony of one of the thugs, who admitted he had been paid by the government. Wael then uploaded the story to his blog (misrdigital.tl), thus instigating a practice that is now widely used and even endorsed by some of the world’s biggest news providers.

Wael broke new ground striving for civil society concerns, receiving half a million hits on his blog in two days, and offering substantial evidence against the government’s shameless denial of the incident. This, however, did not suffice to save him from being arrested the next day. He was freed shortly after. Since then, providing alternative news – not just information on social and political issues – to local and international communities has become a quintessential function of Egyptian bloggers’ electronic activism; news that otherwise would have been buried by the noisy drums of the one-party state media.

Bloggers have brought to the fore awareness about issues like police torture, state-sponsored violence, electoral frauds, labour strikes, and sectarian violence. They also caused a public frenzy when reporting on the infamous group assault of women at the end of Ramadan in 2006, which had been scandalously neglected by the state police. Such silenced issues that shame the government were unheard of in the media before.

的重要角色的是，博客们现在是埃及记者、知识分子、政府雇员、意见领袖和国际媒体之间的重要桥梁。他们传播信息，提供中间新闻，鼓励变革。博客们能够迅速响应，提供即时新闻，尤其是关于政治和警察活动的信息。博客们还利用社交媒体，如Twitter和Facebook，进行在线讨论和抗议活动。博客们还呼吁政府改革，支持民主和人权。博客们的活动还吸引了国际关注，包括媒体、外交官、学者和政策制定者。

Other bloggers – especially women – have quit after being summoned to the state security offices. Nonetheless, despite being in the spotlight, their cause languishes, a state of affairs they share with other besieged civil society actors. And, although they brought to public and international awareness many novel stories and hidden facts, so far, unfortunately, little has changed on the ground of action, which are occupied by the state’s territorial despoticism, whether in physical or the virtual space.

Tarek Ghannam, writer, translator and editor of Islamica Magazine

One of the most recent events in the Egyptian blogosphere involved Abdul Karim Suleiman Amer, who blogs under the pseudonym Karim Amer. Amer was sentenced to three years for insulting Islam and inciting sedition, and one year for insulting the Egyptian President. The incident not only created havoc in the media, it illustrated the ability of bloggers to organise and mobilise with other activists in Washington DC, New York, Chicago, Paris, Ottawa, London, Berlin, Rome, and Bucharest, in order to lobby for his release.

Bloggers’ activism and coordination with international organisations has also been a focus and function. Unfortunately it has proved a source of danger. In addition to Amer, the widely-covered arrest of Abdul-Moneim Mahmud, a blogger, journalist and editor of the website of the banned (yet tolerated) Muslim Brotherhood, is a case in point. After he was freed he wrote on his blog that he was arrested - without warrant - on the night he met with a delegation from Amnesty International, and chiefly for that reason.

Egyptian bloggers face a raft of obstacles and dangers. In an accident that draws legitimate parallels with the practice of burning of books in the Middle Ages and the struggles for freedom of expression, pro-government judge Abdel Fattah Mourad filed a lawsuit calling for the closure of 50 blogs and websites claiming that they ‘defame Egypt’s image, insult the president, and harm national interests’. In addition to persecution, arrest, and even torture in some cases, bloggers are threatened with the closing down of their web pages. There is evidence that the government exercises censorship by influencing Internet Service Providers and search engine companies; for example, the website of the Muslim Brotherhood does not open from one particular ISP.

Bloggers also face tarnishing campaigns through the pro-state media, who call them ‘immature’, ‘traitors’, ‘sellouts’, and ‘agents of America’, a set of stigmas that aim to strip them of any credibility in the eyes of the public. An immediate problem and potential danger is the personal nature of their challenge to the authorities because, as blogger Nora Younis says, they ‘have put a name and a face to state security torturers and therefore the battle became personal’ (norayounis.com).

Unlike other less fortunate, less technologically savvy and less vocal activists, Egyptian bloggers are privileged to have attracted many ears and eyes, especially in the West. Their experience has been widely covered internationally. Younis, in her post ‘War on Bloggers Unfolds’, explains:

[blogger] Sandmonkey quitting echoed for [appealed to] foreigners more than Egyptians. Bloggers enjoy wide readership among embassies, diplomats, scholars and policy makers all over the world. If you want to know about Egypt but can’t sit at a cafe and chat with people, you read the blogs. (norayounis.com)

Tarek Ghannam, writer, translator and editor of Islamica Magazine
Diaspora and global cities

Diasporas continue to play a complex role in the opening up of illiberal regimes. Exiled dissidents, such as those from China and Burma, are critical for maintaining the struggle for democracy and human rights in their homeland. However, global diasporas are contested spaces, and they harbour proponents and opponents of liberalisation. Diasporas have been able to exercise political power through economic leverage. Until recently, the Korean diaspora in Japan, numbering some 600,000, played a part in bolstering the regime through profits made in pinball arcades that were channelled to North Korea (The Economist 2007b).

London has become an important venue for the Saudi opposition. London is host to the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights, responsible for the Memorandum of Advice in 1991, and its splinter group the Movement for Islamic Reform. London is also host to Saudi establishment newspapers and Middle East Broadcasting, owned by the royal family, which are more liberal than media in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Lithuania and the Ukraine have proved havens for Belarusian civil society. Banned from universities at home, Belarusians organised a parallel university in Vilnius, while both Lithuania and the Ukraine have been critical for enabling Belarusian NGOs to operate their programmes, hosting activities organised by Belarusians.

Conclusion

In all illiberal regimes, it is possible to identify some kind of space – underground or open, private or public – that are real, at home or abroad – for autonomous activity. The kind of people and groups who fill those spaces are not necessarily democrats. On the contrary, in illiberal regimes, especially those of long-standing, criminals and economic dissidents, right-wing nationalists, anti-imperialist populists or religious fundamentalists are probably more widespread than democrats. Most of these spaces are constructed out of global connections. Trading links, both legitimate and illicit, tourism and travel, new forms of communication, especially the Internet and mobile phones, provide the basis for new nodes in the global system in which some people are able to organise themselves and act independently of the state.

In other words, it is very difficult, in the context of globalisation, to sustain closed authoritarian regimes, even in the most repressive systems like North Korea, Burma or Saudi Arabia. This is what we mean by involuntary pluralisation. The implication is that governments increasingly depend on consent as well as coercion. But consent is not the same as democracy. Globalisation is both regressive and progressive. Today’s authoritarian regimes depend on the global economy because they are linked to economic and other forms of international business like tourism, or they are linked to criminal networks as well as other authoritarian regimes. And they use modern communications to mobilise consent around radical nationalist or religious ideologies.

The dominant approaches to democracy promotion adopted by Western governments are based on rather traditional analyses of illiberalism, developed during the Cold War. They presuppose a clear distinction between internal and external and they assume that overthrowing the government – ‘regime change’ – will lead to democracy. One approach is what we call the geo-political approach. These are aggressive forms of democracy promotion based on military and economic threats. This approach echoes the Western method of dealing with Communism during the Cold War and is characteristic of the Bush policy towards Iran, Syria, North Korea, Cuba and Venezuela. This approach often tends to reinforce illiberalism. It contributes to xenophobic popular sentiment and reinforces the dominant ideology in the way that Cold War ideologies of anti-communism and anti- imperialism were mutually self-reinforcing. Our North Korean interviewees who have recently arrived in the UK said, ‘US is the enemy. Everything that goes wrong is because of the US’ and ‘Famine is because of the US’. Similarly, most Iranian dissidents take the view that American policy helps to strengthen the hardliners in government and vice versa. Bush and Ahmadinajad are seen as mutually supporting each other. As one Iranian commentator said:

The regime’s greatest strength has been its claim to be the only country in the Middle East standing up to the United States. The nuclear question, particularly the way it has been spun in Tehran, has permitted the regime to emerge as the champion of Iran’s sovereign rights, even in the eyes of many Iranians who despise their leaders. (Milani 2005:49)

Moreover, air strikes or sanctions weaken legitimate institutions and encourage illicit underground or criminal networks that benefit extremist and authoritarian factions. This is what happened in Milosevic’s Serbia or Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.

Another approach is the provision of money for the democracy promotion. Such assistance can be beneficial provided it is aimed at creating the enabling conditions for a democratic civil society. Too often it is spent on trying to overthrow regimes, as in the colour revolutions, or in constructing artificial NGOs, which can easily be dubbed ‘enemies of the regime’ (see Chapter 4 of this volume). In Iran, for example, few NGOs are willing to accept the money announced by Condoleezza Rice to promote Iranian democracy. On the other hand, support for legitimate spaces, such as independent or external media, universities, culture and sport, especially where these enable international exchanges, can be very helpful.

But most important in empowering and enabling those civil groups who favour democracy is communication and dialogue – making use of the spaces that exist to engage in a debate based on reason rather than promoting ideology. Both outside pressure and money can sometimes be useful provided it is guided by a debate of this kind and is supported and even promoted by local democratic reformers. This is what our interviewees who corresponded with us from the heart of illiberal regimes said. What matters to them is contacts and ideas.

Explaining their goal to set up the nucleus of a future journalism school and an association to defend the rights of journalists, our Burmese correspondent told us:

We welcome all the cooperation and assistance from the outside and also would like to participate in activities such as conferences, seminars, workshops, etc. We would love to connect the civil society in our country with global mainstream civil society movements. We would also like to welcome anyone who wants to come to this country in order to strengthen civil society and develop the media industry.

The best prospect for democratising illiberal regimes is through liberalising civil society spaces and stimulating a debate and deliberation. Of course globalisation does provide an unprecedented opportunity for doing this even if it also opens up illiberal spaces. As a Chinese student told us: ‘Globalisation is our only hope for democratisation’.