In her memoir, *Iran Awakening*, Shirin Ebadi sketches the turbulent socio-political history of Iran and the far-reaching consequences that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 had on the people of Iran in general and women in particular. The dynasty of the Pahlavis came to a dramatic end with the ousting of the Shah of Iran from power and with the establishment of an Islamic Republic in its place in 1979. This new Republic was headed by the fiery demagogue, Ayatollah Khomeini, who not only revolutionized the Iranian public by creating an anti-monarchy and anti-West sentiment but was also largely responsible for the imposition of the rigid Islamic law or Sharia that led to massive repression of the Iranian women.

Being both a sufferer of the political upheavals in her country and an objective observer, Ebadi’s account is personal as well as political. Her life is one of unswerving determination as she fights for justice for the weak against a regime which believes in silencing its critics and opponents by the use of force. In other words, imprisonment, torture and execution are methods commonly used by the revolutionary regime to quieten dissidents who dare to raise their voice against it. Ebadi picks up cudgels on behalf of those people, especially women and children who are victims of violence and whose families have to struggle to get justice; even selling their own houses to arrange for the “blood money” or “financial compensation” for the executions of the accused (113).  

In this chapter, I analyse another significant facet of the process of globalization, that is, its cultural manifestations. This is, by far, the most complex aspect of this process as culture is the expression of an entire civilizational ethos of a people. It is an amalgamation of social mores, ethics and more often, religion. The latter forms a crucial part of most cultures, especially those of traditional, conservative societies. In the Iranian society, the relationship between religion and globalization has been uneasy, even antagonistic. This is partly due to the fact that
the modernization programme in Iran was started by Reza Shah after he crowned himself king in 1926. Under his modernization campaign, he tried to transform overnight a hitherto conservative society into a secular, modern one. He even tried to emancipate the Iranian women by banning the veil and actively encouraged them to emulate their Western counterparts. This enforced modernization coupled with extravagant pageantry of his successor, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, who indulged in excesses (for instance, organizing spectacular celebrations to mark the twenty-five hundred years of the Persian Empire while a majority of the poor Iranian masses did not even have access to clean bathhouses) led to widespread anger and resentment among the Iranian people against the monarchy. This wave of restlessness was seized upon by the Shi’ite clerics, headed by Khomeini, and given a religious tenor, thus resulting in the 1979 Iranian Revolution when Iran became an Islamic Republic.

Therefore, modernization or more appropriately, Westernization, which I will conflate with globalization here, in this particular context, has been largely linked or rather attributed to the Pahlavi dynasty. Significantly, though most Muslims around the world would support modernization of their societies, they vehemently oppose Westernization since the adoption of newer means of communication and technology also amounts to embracing Western cultural norms and values. The Pahlavi regime has also been a comparatively secular monarchy. Contrary to this, the rise of Islamic nationalism in Iran in the twentieth-century has been largely the legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini and his Shi’ite followers. The immediate reason for this upsurge in Islamic nationalism in Iran was the widely-resented complicity between America and the Pahlavi monarchy. The blatant American support given to the Pahlavis in return for the huge share that its multinational oil companies enjoyed in the Iranian oil made the dynasty unpopular among the Iranian public. This antagonism increased further when Mohammad Mossadegh, a charismatic and popular Prime Minister, was overthrown by an insecure Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in a coup d’ etat staged in 1953 with full American backing. Therefore, in a broader context, globalization can be significantly accredited to the Pahlavi regime whereas religion has been the prominent concern of the Shi’ite clerics led by Khomeini. Moreover, the rise of religious fundamentalism in Iran and in the Muslim world in general is not only a reaction to the neo-imperialistic acts of the West but at a deeper level, an expression of the inner tumult that these societies have been undergoing in terms of threatened identities, both individual and collective. Globalization has served to accentuate this cultural anxiety
which increases when repressive political regimes come into contact with globalizing forces.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine Shirin Ebadi’s memoir to highlight significant aspects of her early life (1947-70) that have resonance in her later life as a lawyer and an activist. Her childhood and growing up in Tehran in a secular household instilled in her a sense of equality and justice. Being treated the same as her brother by her impartial father, Ebadi grew up with high self-esteem and confidence which she later regarded as her “most valued inheritance” (12). The second part of the chapter is an exposition of the Iranian peoples’ shattering of illusions in the post-revolutionary period when the Khomeini regime unleashed its repression that had terrible consequences for the Iranian women. Their rights related to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance were taken away and regressive laws introduced in their place. Ebadi rues this development by referring to it as “the bitter taste of Revolution” (39). She became a Judge at the young age of twenty-three in 1970. After serving in the judiciary for almost a decade, Ebadi was stripped of her office in 1980 by the new Islamic regime which forbade women from becoming judges. She was demoted to the position of a clerk and transferred to a legal office. Law, being her great passion in life, she did not give up and as soon as she got a license again, she started her own practice as a lawyer, opening her office in a room on the ground floor of the apartment building she lived in. Soon her practice flourished and people started coming to her to fight cases on their behalf. The last part of the chapter deals with the politics of the ‘purdah’; how it has been used as an instrument of power by different political regimes to further their agendas. Not only is the veil indicative of Iranian women’s status in society but is also a site of conflicting political interests and maneuverings. Once a symbol of honour and shame, it has now acquired multiple connotations and signifies honour, religious devotion and even power for the women. The removal of the ‘purdah’ or forced unveiling under the Pahlavi regime was an attempt to modernize the Iranian society. This was seen by conservative Iranians as an act of westernization (as also globalization) and deeply resented against. The legal recourse that Shirin Ebadi takes to resist the oppressions of a chauvinistic clergy is also explicated in this part of the chapter. Excessive Islamicization, a reactionary counter-movement to globalization has had debilitating effects on the lives of Iranian women, pushing them back into the darkness of the Middle Ages. It has been a painful journey marked by outrage,
indignation, helplessness and finally reconciliation for the Iranian women, albeit an uneasy one. In this scenario, Shirin Ebadi continues her struggle to bring about reform in the rigid Islamic Law to make it more gender-sensitive.

'A TEHRAN GIRLHOOD': IMBIBING VALUES OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Gender segregation is encouraged from an early age in traditional Middle-Eastern societies. Women are discouraged from public participation and mentally conditioned to accept their inferior status vis-à-vis men. As children grow older, the privileges of boys expand while those of girls contract. In her memoir, Shirin Ebadi expounds upon the preference for sons in the Iranian culture. The traditional viewpoint was that “it was considered natural for fathers to love their sons more; the sons were the repository for the family’s future ambitions; affection for a son was an investment” (11). Ebadi considers herself fortunate that she is spared from the “low self-esteem” and “learned dependence” that most Iranian women brought up in more traditional households internalized (12). It is in this context that Ebadi recalls her growing up in a secure, protected environment in a secular household in Tehran. It did not seem extraordinary or unnatural to the young Ebadi that she and her sisters were not treated any differently from their brother. This attitude of her parents was “perfectly natural” to her young mind (11). It was only later that she realized that “in most Iranian households, male children enjoyed an exalted status” (11). With gratitude and pride, she gives credit to her father for his liberated views on the upbringing of girls:

It was not until I was much older that I realized how gender equality was impressed on me first and foremost at home, by example. . . . My father’s championing of my independence, from the play yard to my later decision to become a judge, instilled a confidence in me that I never felt consciously, but later came to regard as my most valued inheritance. (12)

Political awareness and consciousness came early to young Shirin due to the vibrant, intellectually charged atmosphere of the Ebadi household. The political seamlessly interweaves with the personal as Ebadi vividly recollects her childhood memory of one of the seminal events of Iranian history when its body politic suffered irreparable
damage due to neo-imperialistic machinations. While spending the vacation at her grandmother’s place in the summer of 1953, she clearly recalls hearing the news of the American-engineered coup that ousted the popular Prime Minister Mossadegh and dealt a crushing blow to the fledgling Iranian democracy. After playing hide-and-seek with her cousins in the fruit orchards and “returning by sunset to gather around the radio with the adults”, she finds them “in a terrible mood, for once unmoved by our disarray” (3). It was a “trembling voice” that announced on the radio that “Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh had been toppled in a coup d’état” in Tehran after four days of political turmoil (4). Being only a child at that time, she writes:

To us children, this news meant nothing. We giggled at the downcast eyes and somber faces of the adults and scampered away from the still, funereal living room. (4)

Though young Ebadi did not understand the full import of this news, she did pick up on the dismay and grief of the adults in her family. Indeed this incident changed the entire course of Iranian political history in the second-half of the twentieth century for Mohammad Mossadegh was not an ordinary political figure. According to Ebadi:

For secular and religious Iranians, working class and wealthy alike, Mossadegh was far more than a popular statesman. To them, he was a beloved nationalist hero, a figure worthy of their zealous veneration, a leader fit to guide their great civilization, with its more than twenty-five hundred years of recorded history. (4)

The love and respect for Mossadegh had increased in the eyes of the Iranian public because he had, in 1951, nationalized Iran’s oil industry which had until then been “effectively controlled by Western oil consortiums” (4). The latter had extracted and exported vast stores of Iranian oil under certain agreements that left Iran only a slim share of the profits. The nationalization of Iranian oil industry was a “bold move” of Mossadegh’s that not only raised his stature among the Iranian populace but also made him “the father figure of Iranian independence, much as Mahatma Gandhi was revered in India for freeing his nation from the British Empire” (4).

Ebadi recalls the feeling of national humiliation at the spectacle of the Shah verbally prostrating himself before his American masters. Since 1951, Mossadegh’s popularity grew enormously and the “unloved thirty-two-year-old shah” who was the
heir to a “newly minted, unpopular dynasty conceived of by a Persian Cossack army officer”, seemed “a green inferiority of little promise” (5). As the Shah’s anxiety grew at observing Mossadegh’s rapid rise, the two Western powers, the United States and Britain, having been “incensed by Mossadegh’s nationalization of Iranian oil”, adopted a wait-and-watch policy (5). It was in 1953 that Kermit Roosevelt, a grandson of Frederick Delano Roosevelt, “arrived in Tehran to reassure the skittish shah and direct the coup d’ etat” (5). The crowds in the impoverished areas of south Tehran were paid to march in protest, newspaper editors were bribed to run false headlines of rising anti-Mossadegh discontent. Within four days, Mossadegh was banished to a cellar and the young shah was “restored to power” (5). He famously thanked Kermit Roosevelt on Iranian national television, saying, “I owe my throne to God, my people, my army, and to you” (5). This, Ebadi writes:

was a profoundly humiliating moment for Iranians, who watched the United States intervene in their politics as if their country were some annexed backwater, its leader to be installed or deposed at the whim of an American president and his CIA advisers. (5)

After this, the deposed Prime Minister was forced to undergo a courtroom trial, following which he was given a death sentence which “in tribute to the shah’s superior mercy”, was eventually reduced to three years of imprisonment (6). He spent his retirement in his village of Ahmadabad, corresponding with his shattered yet loyal supporters. His replies to the letters of his followers, “penned in his subtle, lucid handwriting” later “appeared framed in the offices of Iran’s leading opposition figures, those who would a quarter century later thrust the shah from power in the 1979 revolution” (6).

Religion occupied an important place in Ebadi’s life and shaped her worldview. She spent a happy childhood amidst pools of swimming “silvery fishes” and summer evenings when the entire family would sleep outside, under the stars when “the air (would be) perfumed with flowers and the night’s silence filled with the chirping of crickets” (9). The only anxiety in her life at this time is her mother’s continuous ill-health which makes the young Ebadi pray to God to keep her mother alive “until (her) little brother and sister grew up. . . .In (her) young mind, (she) thought that if she (her mother) died, (she) would have to quit school and take on her duties at home (10). While praying to God in the attic of her house, she is suddenly
overtaken by an “indescribable feeling . . . starting in (her) stomach and spreading to (her) fingertips” (10). This epiphany was her first spiritual revelation that left her with an unshakeable faith in God. Describing the experience, she writes:

In that stirring, I felt as though God was answering me. My sadness evaporated, and a strange euphoria shot through my heart. . . . Before that day I had only said my prayers by rote, because I had been taught to say them . . . But after that moment in the attic, I began to recite them with true belief. (10)

Comparing this profound experience with that of falling in love, she writes that as it is “difficult to explain to someone who has never fallen in love the emotional contours of that experience”, so it is “hard to describe the awakening of spirituality” (10). It reminds her of a Persian poem — “Oh you, the stricken one/ Love comes to you, it is not learned.” (10)

The campus of Tehran University where Ebadi went to study law in 1965 was an “intellectually charged” one where the current politics of Iran was the subject of many a heated discussion (15). Protests by the students in the university were common and attracted young Ebadi like a “magnet” (16). These demonstrations were mostly against hikes in tuition fee but still “provoked the anxiety of the SAVAK, the shah’s secret police” which kept a close watch on the campus as also other Iranian cities and even abroad to “root out dissidents” (16). Describing the true sentiments of university students in those days, Ebadi proclaims:

To evade the tentacles of the SAVAK, students pretended to protest tuition fees, though what they really wanted to chant was more like “Stop squandering our oil revenue on fleets of American fighter planes!” or “Come back from St. Moritz and deal with urban poverty, please!”

By the end of the 1960s, the political climate in Iran had become more electrified. The year 1964 saw the shah expelling “a little-known, scowling cleric”, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to Najaf in Iraq because of his fiery speeches that attacked the government (20). Explaining the situation, when being anti-shah was considered fashionable, Ebadi avers:
To be anti-shah, in those days, did not mean you were pro-Ayatollah Khomeini. Often when I heard fragments of political conversations in the halls, it seemed to me students were becoming more and more anti-shah without knowing why, as though it were a badge of intellectual status, like reading Simone de Beauvoir. (20)

The moment of pride came for Ebadi when she became a judge at the age of twenty-three in 1970. A year after that, the shah organized spectacular celebrations to commemorate twenty-five hundred years of the Persian Empire. The site selected for the revels was the ancient ruins of Persepolis, the seat of Iran’s kings since before the birth of Christ. These outrageously expensive festivites were condemned by the exiled Khomeini. This “baroque” and “alien” reality seemed too “magnificently ephemeral” to ordinary Iranians to last for a long time (24). Ebadi elucidates:

I did not consciously credit the shah with running an Iran in which I could be a judge, in the same way that in the revolutionary days that were to follow, I did not imagine Ayatollah Khomeini heralding an Iran in which I could not. (24)

Being drawn to the opposition that considered Khomeini as its leader and supporting the unfolding revolution, Ebadi sees no contradiction in an educated, professional woman backing “an opposition that cloaked its fight against real-life grievances under the mantle of religion” (33). She writes about the pivotal position that religion occupied in her life. It was her parents who instilled in her a sense of religious discipline by advocating the importance of “namaz” or the daily prayer in a Muslim’s life. She explains why religion was so significant to her and the reason she chose an opposition of “mullahs” headed by the radical Khomeini over the Shah’s monarchy:

Faith occupied a central role in our middle-class lives, though in a quiet, private way; my mother had spent hours bent over the jah-namaz teaching me how to pray, and my father encouraged me to recite my prayers throughout my life. Who did I have more in common with, in the end: an opposition led by mullahs who spoke in the tones familiar to ordinary Iranians or the gilded court of the shah, whose officials cavorted with American starlets at parties soaked in expensive French champagne? (33)
It is no surprise then that Ebadi’s loyalties lay with the Muslim clergy. The role of the “mullahs” in Iranian politics is described by Ebadi as a “historical phenomenon” that was considered natural and taken as a matter-of-fact by the people of Iran (32). The 1906 Iranian Constitution which established the modern constitutional monarchy in Iran was produced due to the “critical support” given by the “mullahs” (32). Two important occasions, writes John Esposito, “the Tobacco Protest of 1891-92 and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11” had the “clergy play(ing) an important oppositional role in the emergence of modern Iranian nationalism” (Islamic Threat 106). For the previous two centuries, the two public places in Iran where political views and opinions were freely exchanged by the people were the “mosque” and the “bazaar” (32). The mosque, explains Ebadi was particularly an important public gathering place where “grievances against the moment’s king” could be aired “behind the semi protected walls of a holy building” (32). Thus, the role played by the “mullahs” in the socio-political milieu of Iran was unconsciously a part of the ordinary Iranian’s daily existence. Ebadi puts it succinctly:

Our history was dotted with such fruitful illustrations of the mullahs’ intervention, and so to the ears of ordinary Iranians, myself included, it was neither shocking nor particularly foreboding to hear Ayatollah Khomeini raining invective down on the shah from exile. (32)

When the revolution finally happened, nearly every Iranian, including Ebadi was swept into the frenzy and euphoria of the moment. The beleaguered Shah fled Iran on January 16, 1979, and Ayatollah Khomeini arrived at the Tehran airport on February 1, 1979, thus “ending his exile just sixteen days after the shah’s began” (35). The swelling masses crowded the streets of Iran shouting the Ayatollah’s name who ingeniously harnessed “the momentum of the marches”, instructing the Iranians to shout “Allaho akbar, God is Greatest” from their rooftops en masse (36). This seizing of the religious emotionalism of the day was a masterstroke from a shrewd politician. It brought together the restless masses into a collective force and lent vigour to the revolution’s course. Ebadi and her family were enthusiastic participants in the feverish activities. On February 11, Khomeini exhorted the people to defy the army-imposed curfew and come out onto the streets. The next day, the twenty-second of
Bahman on the Iranian calendar, the military surrendered and the revolution was successful or “victorious” (38). Ebadi describes her feelings on this momentous day:

That day, a feeling of pride washed over me that in hindsight makes me laugh. I felt that I too had won, alongside this victorious revolution. It took scarcely a month for me to realize that, in fact, I had willingly and enthusiastically participated in my own demise. I was a woman, and this revolution’s victory demanded my defeat. (38)

**THE SHATTERING OF ILLUSIONS: THE REVOLUTION TASTES BITTER**

Being rebuked by an overseer in the Ministry of Justice for not wearing a veil out of respect “for our beloved Imam Khomeini”, Ebadi encounters her first moment of disenchantment with the revolution (39). Banning of the “tie” that is seen as a “symbol of the West’s evils” and the “cologne” which signifies “counterrevolutionary tendencies”, it is austerity that is encouraged by the revolution’s leaders (41-2). The imposition of the new penal code, inspired by the Islamic Law, proves devastating for the Iranian women. It restricts their freedoms and curbs their rights. Under these new laws, popularly called ‘Sharia’ or a legal system based on the tenets of Islam, the value of a woman’s life is considered half that of a man’s. A testimony given by a woman in court as a witness to a crime counts only half as much as a man’s. A woman also has to ask for her husband’s permission for divorce. Such changes, Ebadi asserts, made most of the educated Iranians realize that the revolution was “veering in a vicious direction” (51).

Immediately after the revolution, a group of young Iranian men, calling themselves ‘Followers of the Path of the Imam Khomeini’ seized the U.S. embassy and took its staff hostage. Khomeini celebrated the siege, even proclaiming it as a “second revolution” (44). He challenged the American might by vehemently asserting, “America cannot do a damn thing” and this slogan was then “painted all over Tehran” (44). This hostage taking “intertwine(d) the fates of the United States and Iran for decades to come” and changed the once intimate relations between the two countries into hostility and mistrust (46). The hostage crisis lasted for 444 days, ending after a lot of political drama on both sides that resulted in a permanent souring of the relationship between the two nations.
Meanwhile, Ebadi was removed from her judgeship and demoted to the position of a clerk in the legal office of the judiciary. Furious at this anti-women purge undertaken by the Islamic regime, she refused to bow down to the clergy’s dictates. She tried to seek out the revolutionaries whom she knew personally and argue with them to get her point across; she questions them — “Just tell me why a woman can’t be a judge? I stood with this revolution. You owe me an answer” (56). But the answers she receives are always the same — “You’re right, of course. No one is arguing with you. Just be patient. We’ll attend to your rights later, they promised. But we have more urgent problems right now. Can’t you see?” (56). The arguments would thus infuriatingly end in the same way.

The political scene in Iran continued to seethe. Saddam Hussein attacked Iran in a belligerent full-blown invasion on September 22, 1980. Allegedly to “redraw the borders and take control of Iran’s oil-rich southern province”, this invasion was shrewdly named by him as “Qadisiya” (60). This was an attempt to “mythologize his war for territory and oil as a modern-day fight of Arab against Ajam” (60). Khomeini, on the other hand, called the conflict “the imposed war” and portrayed it as “an ancient Shia struggle against despotism” (60). In this long-drawn “war of the cities”, Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons on the Iranian army as “the world watche(d) mutely” (77). Later on, it emerged that the Reagan administration was providing Iraq with satellite images of Iranian troop deployment and other battle-planning assistance even as it knew that Iraq was using chemical weapons in most major operations. This seemingly unending war that went on for almost eight years led to large numbers of Iranians leaving their country for safer shores causing “one of the most serious brain drains in the world” (78). Emigration is thus a lesser known and documented aspect of the modern history of Iran:

[I]ts (emigration’s) images, unlike those of war and the revolution, are not cinematic shots of limb-strewn battlefields or three-million-person marches of extended fists. But if you ask most Iranians what keeneh, what grievance, they nurture most bitterly against the Islamic Republic, it is the tearing apart of their families. Memories of war fade, and very few people have the energy to sustain intellectual distress over the course of a lifetime, but the absence of loved ones . . . is a pain that time does not blunt. (78)
The turning point in Ebadi’s life came when her brother-in-law was executed by the prison authorities of a Tehran prison for being a Mojahedin-e-Khalgh (a counter-revolutionary organization) member. She exclaims, “Fuad, this naïve young boy, what had he done? His only crime was selling newspapers, a crime to which he had already surrendered his youth, serving seven years of a twenty-year sentence” (88). This incident marked a complete break and sense of disillusionment with the revolution’s ideals. Ebadi realized that human life was very “cheap” under the revolutionary regime and that laws did not protect all citizens equally (89). In this life-altering moment, Ebadi writes:

A mute fury settled in my stomach. When I think back and try to pinpoint the moment that changed me, the moment when my life took a different course, I see that it all began that night. (89)

Meanwhile, after being ill for a few days, Khomeini passed away on June 3, 1989. His death was mourned by millions of Iranians in mass-mourning processions: “Women swathed in black chadors beat their chests rhythmically, wailing in lament the way Shia have mourned their martyrs and their dead for centuries” (93). With his death, an era of seething political turmoil came to an end. A charismatic leader with the power to mesmerize huge crowds and hold sway over millions of Iranians, he left behind a legacy of bloodshed and violence. His successors were “a clique of revolutionaries” who lacked his “iconic stature” and “commanding presence” (95). Yet, the Shi’ite clerics consolidated their positions of power by making religion their guiding political principle. Any Iranian who tried to defy the Republic’s dictates was deemed an “enemy” of Islam. The “komiteh” or the morality police of the Islamic Republic was formed to safeguard the rules and regulations of the Republic, making it more difficult for the Iranian women to lead normal lives (100).

The consolidation of power by the “mullahs” for decades to come, wherein the Shi’ite clergy became the new ruling class is a case of a revolution bringing into power a group which distinctly defined its politics as being inseparable from religion. The ideological convictions of the representatives/leaders of this religious group veered towards a nationalism marked by religious extremism. After the Revolution, they came to form the dominant ruling class and eventually became the new oligarchs replacing the Pahlavi dynasty. It provides weight to sociologist Robert Michels’ ‘Iron
Law of Oligarchy': this law implies that all forms of organizations, whether democratic or autocratic at the beginning, will eventually and inevitably develop oligarchic tendencies. Michels quotes bureaucratization and specialization as the driving processes behind this law. These result in the rise of a group of professional administrators or leaders in a hierarchical organization, which in turn leads to the rationalization and routinization of authority and decision-making. The Shia clerics represented the dominant group in Iran, both in terms of numbers and influence. Their fundamentalist ideology made it easier for them to rule a people who would not dare defy religion (here Islam) and hence the state. The ideology worked on the psychological principle of guilt. It would have made any individual, even slightly or moderately religious to experience guilt if he/she went against the tenets and traditions of Islam. Therefore, the state indirectly commanded the loyalty of its citizens who by staunchly supporting their religion supported the state too.

The clergy replaced a dynasty that was complicit with the West, especially the American administration. Muhammad Reza Pahlavi was spending most of the oil revenue of Iran on his ambitious modernization project, ‘The White Revolution’, wherein he declared his intention to industrialize the country and bring about land reform. In his zest to introduce changes in the Iranian social system from education and health to law and administration, he endeavoured to model Iran on the secular, liberal tradition of the West. Though the efforts did bring about change in the Iranian social milieu, the effects remained limited to certain urbanized pockets of the major cities of Iran. This lack of equality in ‘development’ (as is understood to mean in the Western, capitalist sense of the word) led to a growing sense of frustration and resentment against the Shah’s rule among the urban poor and the unemployed rural masses. The actual situation was such that:

While the minority [in cities] prospered, a once agriculturally self-sufficient country was spending more than one billion dollars on imports. Those who poured into the cities from the villages expecting a better life, lacking requisite job skills, became unemployed inhabitants of over-crowded, congested urban slums: “For these millions, most of whom had been forced out of the villages into new shantytowns, the oil boom did not end poverty; it merely modernized it.” (Esposito 107)
The merchant class or the ‘bazaari’ as they were popularly called, felt threatened by the entry of Western banks and corporations into Iran. The emerging of a new entrepreneurial class that flourished with state support also posed a challenge to the small traders and businessmen. The ‘ulama’ or the Islamic clergy were troubled by Iran’s increasing dependence on the West and viewed it as “a threat to their status, economic interest, and religiocultural values” (Esposito 107). The compulsory banning of the veil was carried over from Reza Shah’s reign to that of his son, Muhammad Reza Shah, and followed by the modern elites of Iran. Religion was carefully controlled under the Shah’s regime and the religious establishment was either co-opted or coerced. The secret police of the Shah, the SAVAK, was used to suppress dissent or rebellion ruthlessly. All these factors were responsible for the wave of resistance that spread across Iran in the seventies.

It was during this time that Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as the clear leader of the opposition movement. Others like Jalal-e-Ahmad, Mehdi Bazargan and Ali Shariati who represented a cross-section of the Iranian society raised questions of national identity, neo-imperialism, social justice and political participation and thus greatly influenced a generation of “students, intellectuals, and professionals (scientists, engineers, journalists) drawn from both the traditional and modern middle class” (Esposito 109). The most prominent among these names was that of Ali Shariati, a Sorbonne-educated sociologist intellectual whose revolutionary populist Islam held a wide appeal for young Iranians, especially university students who were drawn towards his ideology of religious revivalism and social reform. He was responsible for the gradual radicalization of the Iranian youth and his rising popularity led the government to denounce him as an “Islamic Marxist”, imprisoning him in 1973 and finally permitting him to leave Iran (Esposito 110). He preached an “Islamic theology of Third World liberation, an indigenous populist Shi'i ideology for socio-political reform” which was a reinterpretation of Islam incorporating the sociology of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber and the Third World socialism of Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara (Esposito 111). He emphasized the reclamation of Islamic roots and Iranian national, religious and cultural identities to counter Western dominance. His ideological pre-eminence, explains Ebadi, was because of the reason that:
Shariati recast the dominant narrative of Shiism — the struggle of the martyr in his fight against injustice — to emphasize resistance rather than defeat. His lectures masterfully invoked Iranians’ discomfort with the free-fall Westernization of the shah and made modern heroes out of the seventh-century Shia figures of Imam Ali and the prophet Mohammed’s daughter Fatemeh. (64-5)

Down the years, Shi’ite Islam had become “scholastic, institutionalized, and historically co-opted by Iran’s rulers, eclipsing the true, dynamic, pristine revolutionary religio-social message of its early years” (Esposito 111). Under the ‘ulama’ or the religious establishment, traditional Islam had become “mired in a fossilized past of scholastic manuals, the popular, fatalistic opiate of the masses” and thus ceased being an effective force for social change (Esposito 112). But the events leading up to the revolution saw Shii Islam offering a “common set of symbols, a historic identity, and a value system — an indigenous, non-Western alternative, an ideological framework within which a variety of factions could function” (Esposito 114). Having been apolitical for a long time, Shii Islam became revolutionary in the seventies. The Shah and his military forces were portrayed as the modern-day Yazid and the fight against them as a holy war to restore God’s law and social justice.

Shariati envisioned a classless Islamic society that would provide justice and equality to the disinheritied and the dispossessed. His Marxist-socialist vision became the cornerstone of the revolution, having a profound impact in revolutionizing the youth of Iran. It was now left for Khomeini to take the momentum forward by providing the thrust of action to this build-up of anger and resentment against the monarchy. His charismatic personality and shrewd politics made him the “living symbol and architect” of the revolution (Esposito 112). He criticized the Shah’s rule as being oppressive and unjust and the Shah as merely a stooge of America. He blamed the West for the ills of the Third World and saw Islam as the panacea for all problems; a “system and program for all the different affairs of society” (Esposito 112). His hatred of Western colonialism and imperialism is evident from his words:
The foul claws of imperialism have clutched at the heart of the lands of the people of the Quran, with our national wealth and resources being devoured by imperialism . . . with the poisonous culture of imperialism penetrating to the depths of towns and villages throughout the Muslim world, displacing the culture of the Quran. (qtd. in Esposito 113)

This criticism of the imperialistic tendencies of the West through an incendiary mix of nationalistic, religious and cultural appeals was a strategy aimed at provoking a reaction from the Iranian populace against the excesses of the monarchy. The promulgation of his revolutionary message was through radio, videotapes and other mass propaganda means. The main issue that was stressed upon by Khomeini was the political, economic and military dependence of Iran on America. More importantly, he laid emphasis on the cultural imperialism of the West as a consequence of which the Iranian people, especially the educated elite in the cities, were merely aping the West and losing pride and confidence in their own centuries-old traditions and customs. In other words, the modernization programme undertaken by the Pahlavis was severely criticized and condemned by Khomeini as acceding to the appeasing powers of Western cultural propaganda that was nothing but a means to hegemonize a culturally-rich, conservative Muslim society.

THE CHANGING CONNOTATIONS OF ‘PURDAH’: A JOURNEY OF CONTENTIONS

Amidst the political upheaval taking place in twentieth-century Iran, especially in terms of its impact on women, it is pertinent to discuss the politics of the ‘purdah’. Curiously, the ‘purdah’ has been used to signify different political philosophies and ideological perspectives. From the Pahlavi era to the Khomeini regime, it has been contextualized according to the changing socio-political milieu in Iran. The pendulum has swung to both extremes in this highly politicized and contentious journey for Iranian women. From a forced unveiling to a compulsory wearing of the ‘hijab’, they have seen both ends of the political spectrum. The removal of the ‘purdah’ was seen by most Iranians as a direct symptom of Westernization. The latter can be seen as an avatar of globalization and resistance to forced unveiling was also a resistance to Westernization and/or globalization.
In his zest to transform a deeply conservative society to a secular, modern one, Reza Shah Pahlavi had banned the veil overnight. The Iranian women had been actively encouraged to emulate their Western counterparts. In the universities, “stylish young women bared their legs in homage to Twiggy, the fashion icon of the moment” yet this “mimicking of Western fashion amounted to little more than a trend” (19). This was because the students came from different backgrounds and “did not view their social lives as a realm for experimentation” (19). Even so, the atmosphere in the cities and especially universities was fairly liberal during the Shah’s reign. But the conservative clerics found this openness and Westernization outrageous for their tastes. To them:

[T]he university was a den of corruption, a polluted place where men and women sinned under the pretext of coed learning. To traditionally minded households, overseen by fathers who preferred to keep their daughters out of school . . . the advent of the miniskirt became a symbol of Western cultural invasion, the perfect excuse to invoke against the possibility of a university education. (20)

These extremes of viewpoints and reactions are a pointer towards the fact that women’s bodies are sites of patriarchal oppression in Iran. Whether it is the Westernized notion of liberalism and freedom given to them (reflected most prominently in their way of dressing, especially the ‘hijab’) or it is the conservatism of the Islamic clerics, it is the body of the Iranian woman over which various political whims and fancies are played. It [the body] becomes a site of contestation of different political ideologies. Compulsory and forced veiling and unveiling are strategies of dominance and control over women. A noticeable fact is that both regimes — one secular and modernist, the other fundamentalist and conservative, used the issue of veiling to assert their particular political viewpoint. This invariably leads to the insinuation that it does not matter much what the ideological and political convictions of different groups vis-à-vis their secularist or fundamentalist tendencies or their liberalism or conservatism are. Rather, oppressing women by asserting their (different groups’) political ideology is a strategy of continuing the patriarchal dominance over women. This tactic has been used by many ruling groups around the world.
For the Pahlavis, the modernization of Iran prominently included the Westernization of Iranian women; hence the compulsory unveiling. On the other hand, the Shia clerics under Khomeini envisaged the Islamic Republic of Iran with a strict veiling of the women, that is, compulsory wearing of the ‘hijab’. Zillah Eisenstein believes that the Iranian revolution was a rejection of the Pahlavi dynasty’s “despotic secularism, not secularism itself” (213). It was a rejection of “Westernization and not modernism” (213). She also asserts that the “rejection of secularism is not necessarily the same as rejection of modernity” (213). She cites the instance of the Al Qaeda terrorists who in attacking the World Trade Centre made use of cell phones, computers and knew how to fly planes (213). The religious hard-liners in Iran also want investment, modern technology, family planning and so on, indicating the need for modernization while at the same time rejecting Westernization (213).

Explaining how veiling bespeaks the crucial site of female bodies for expressing relations of power, Eisenstein elucidates the implicit and explicit connotations of veiling:

Veils express an inside and outside, the forbidden against the seeable/knowable. A veil creates a private space against a public other. Veils, like any piece of clothing or drapery, cover over; they create both fantasy and fetish at the same time. All clothing is used to cover over desire — to repress it by putting it out of sight. But the covering also is always a reminder of what is covered, of the desire itself. (170)

She elaborates upon this concept by stating that the denial of desirous pleasure is always “unstable” and “to repress it is to simultaneously expose it” (170). Considering the other extreme of pornography as opposed to veiling, she writes that the pornographic woman supposedly controls the very desire because it is already exposed and known and there is nothing more to see or to fantasize (170-1). Criticizing the West’s obsession with the veil, she asserts that in both colonialism and in decolonization, the “preoccupation with women’s bodies is an enduring site of democratic possibility” (171). “The veil covers over and porn uncovers, exactly what the West wishes to dominate. Whether covered, or displayed, female bodies continue to speak fantasies tied to human freedom”, writes Eisenstein (171). The inference that can be drawn from this argument is that women’s bodies give the patriarchal
authorities a lot of ground for playing their political games. Religion becomes a clever tool of oppression here. It justifies and also helps in propagating the victimization of women. In the name of Islam, the chauvinistic clergy introduces regressive laws that limit women’s freedoms to a large extent and further weakens their social position.

Fareed Zakaria in *The Future of Freedom* writes about the increasing appeal of religious fundamentalism over the years. The latter, he explains, gives a “powerful language of opposition” to the dissident factions. The common Muslim man/woman whose voice has been suppressed by harsh, oppressive regimes also sees in religion a mythical hope:

The language of opposition became, in these [Muslim] lands, the language of religion. This combination of religion and politics has proven to be combustible. Religion, at least the religion of Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), stresses the absolutes. But politics is all about compromise. The result has been a ruthless, winner-take-all attitude toward political life. (142)

This attitude has manifested itself in the way that Islamic Law or Sharia has been used to subordinate Iranian women. Laws related to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance are heavily biased against women. The pro-natal agenda of the Islamic Republic that banned contraception has had terrible consequences for the demography of Iran. Its population has grown exponentially over the years and the growth rate jumped at one point to the highest in the world (109). To feed this burgeoning population, writes Ebadi, Iran “needed to integrate into the world economy or risk devolving into a truly impoverished Third World nation” (109). Liberalizing the economy was the need of the hour; privatization, focusing on industry rather than agriculture and attracting foreign investment all became imperative for the Islamic Republic. But the problem was that Iran lacked the “knowledge and human resource base to undertake such ambitions. The Islamic Republic had wrapped women in veils and stuck them in the kitchen. Now it needed to rebuild itself after a devastating war, and it needed them back” (110). The Islamic Republic “championed traditional women” who would carry the Iranian traditions and customs forward and at the same time be submissive and willing to suffer under the patriarchs (109). But this also made them “ruthlessly vulnerable” because they had been given a new awareness of
their rights (by encouraging them to come out and support the revolution) “but only crude tools with which to advance them” (109).

The “involuntary pragmatism” of the Republic of including women into the formal sphere of employment helped Ebadi get her license from the Iranian Bar Association and to begin practicing law. She decided consciously not to take commercial cases and instead to exclusively take on pro bono cases where she could “at least showcase the injustice of the Islamic Republic’s laws” (111). Thus began her journey of courage, dissent and struggle for justice where she fought against the theocracy’s legal discrimination against women. By writing articles in newspapers and journals and narrating personal stories of victimized women and children “which are more powerful than any dry summary of why a given law should be changed”, she chose the legal recourse to resist the chauvinistic clergy. Telling stories was her mode of soliciting support and solidarity from the Iranian people:

Whether it is the storyteller of legend Scheherazade, staving off beheading by spinning a thousand and one tales, feminist poets of the last century who challenged the culture’s perception of women through verse, or lawyers like me, who defend the powerless in courts, Iranian women have for centuries relied on words to transform reality. (Epilogue 209)

Wanting to correct Western stereotypes of Islam, especially the image of Muslim women as docile, forlorn creatures has been Ebadi’s major motive in writing this memoir. Even though a preoccupation, rather an obsession with shame and honour, prevails in Iranian culture, there is also an “acute sensitivity to injustice” (111). The latter is significant as it gives human rights activists like Ebadi hope of amending the current laws to make them more gender-neutral. This assurance has a basis:

The revolution against the shah, after all, had premised itself on the ethos of zolm, or oppression; it was a revolution conducted in the name of mustazafin, the dispossessed. People had to see how the dispossessed had now become the dispossessors. (111)

Awareness of a “visceral consciousness of their oppression” makes the Iranian women resist the patriarchal system (108). This “consciousness” does not come suddenly but takes birth after long years of formal education including higher education. Women passing out of universities in Iran did not want to sit and suffer
silently in their husbands’ homes. They had become aware of their rights and were not willing to compromise. Many cases of “tragic exhibitionism” such as self-immolation came to the forefront and suicide rate among women rose after the Islamic Revolution (109). This was, asserts Ebadi:

Women’s way of forcing their community to confront the cruelty of their oppression. Otherwise, would it not simply be easier to overdose on pills in a dark room? (109)

Contrary to this popular belief that women in Iran suffered a great deal in terms of their social and economic status after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Roksana Bahramitash proclaims that women’s formal employment rates increased in the 1990s and did so much faster than they had during the 1960s and 1970s when a pro-Western secular regime was in power (Islamic Fundamentalism 551). This was in accordance with the common pattern of women’s employment in the South, that is, an overall increase in female employment. This fact, she asserts, suggests that the forces of international political economy, rather than religion, appear to be a determining factor in the state of women’s economic role in Iran (551). But she does admit that rising revenues from oil in the 1970s went into the growth of capital-intensive industries that drew largely on male labour. This industrialization tended to exacerbate the gender gap. However, female employment grew more quickly in the service sector. This was because the expansion of education led many women to enter fields like teaching, nursing and clerical work (556). Despite this increase in paid female labour, she points out:

Women constituted a huge part of those who joined the Islamicists in rallying against the Shah. The reasons for this apparent paradox go straight to the heart of the problem of the Shah’s modernization, which ultimately provided a fertile ground for the rise of political Islam. (557)

As mentioned earlier, the reasons for this support of the revolution were mainly the disenchantment with the Shah’s rule and his increasing ruthlessness in suppressing dissent. The Iranians, especially the urban poor, felt disappointed with the unfulfilled promises of employment and prosperity made by the Shah. The failure of his much-publicized White Revolution led to a growing resentment against his rule. The youth in the cities and also those who had migrated to the cities from rural areas for want of employment and better opportunities felt culturally alienated by the Western lifestyle
followed by the Shah as also the rich elite class of the cities. Many female activists were imprisoned and tortured by the Shah’s secret police, the SAVAK. The constant exposure of Iranian women to the “modernized version of ‘woman’”, “the deliberate efforts made to cultivate a mass-consumption consciousness”, “slavish imitation of European fashions” and the “commercialization of women” created a “confused, alien model of womanhood” that was greatly resented by the members of the merchant class and traditional petite bourgeoisie (Tohidi Third World Women 257). These factors coupled with the revolutionary interpretation of Islam preached by thinkers like Ali Shariati inspired the educated young to mobilize against the Shah while believing in Islam as a political alternative to either a capitalist monarchy or even communism. Suffice it to say that these cumulative factors led to women participating in large numbers in the anti-Shah Islamicist movement.

However, after the dying down of the initial euphoria of the Revolution and the Khomeini regime’s consolidation of power as the ruling oligarchy of Iran, it unleashed its repression of the Iranian women. Shifting its original position of trying to unite all opposition forces, the regime adopted an increasingly conservative religious interpretation of the role of women and excluded them from the social and political mainstream. This was despite the instrumental role played by women in bringing the clerics into power. Under the new Islamicist ideology, women were primarily viewed as “mothers” and were supposed to be confined to the four walls of their homes (Bahramitash 559). The new Constitution reversed all legal reforms made under the Shah’s regime and replaced them with orthodox, heavily discriminatory ones. Women were banned from certain professions like law and judiciary. Certain subjects at the university level like civil engineering were closed to them (559). These changes in women’s social and legal position affected the upper and middle classes more than the low-income urban, rural and tribal women (559). This was because the urban educated women who held positions of prestige were forced to leave their jobs; the imposition of the Islamic dress code or the ‘hijab’ compelled many of them to resign from their jobs, thus rejecting the dress code in the process. On the other hand, the low-earning women could not be easily made to leave their jobs as their families relied heavily on their incomes. A change in the ideology of the state or dress code did not make much difference to their social status. Also, the agricultural sector could not survive without high female participation (559).
Therefore, as Bahramitash argues, “the overall impact of state policy did not do much to force women out of the labour market as might be expected at first glance — in fact, indicates a gradual increase” (559).

These trends would lead one to think of the Revolution’s impact on women in Iran as contradictory. What emerges out of Bahramitash’s argument is the idea that instead of political Islam, it is the global political economy that has largely influenced women’s economic role in Iran as in many parts of the world. But this line of argument is flawed to a great extent. Considering that women’s formal employment did increase in post-revolutionary Iran, the debilitating impact of the Islamic Law or Sharia on women’s lives which made many to leave their jobs cannot be ignored. Though the numbers of the upper and middle class women might be less than the low-income women in urban and rural areas, the intensity of the impact of the legal and social changes was prominently borne by the former. Also, the employment rate is not the only parameter to measure the social position of women in any society. There are other less obvious ways and means through which patriarchy is exercised (for instance, domestic violence). Also, the impact of the global economy on women is highly inconsistent. As discussed in the previous chapters, globalization has emancipated women belonging to the upper and middle classes but has had an incapacitating impact on those of the lower strata. This consequence along with the rise of religious fundamentalism in a country like Iran has led to a complicated situation. Now, the Muslim (here Iranian) women are aware of their rights and social position vis-à-vis women in other parts of the world but cannot or do not want to completely throw away the consoling mantle of religion from their lives. This has made them arrive at the conclusion that Islam ought to be made compatible with globalization through an intellectual and innovative interpretation of Islam, that is, the ‘ijtihad’. This flexible interpretation of the Koranic teachings has been practiced by jurist and clerics over the centuries to debate their meanings and apply them to modern ideas and situations.7 This practice of ‘ijtihad’, explains Ebadi, “creates an exciting space for adapting Islamic values and traditions to our lives in the modern world” (191). The downside of this practice is that though it “frees us [the Muslims] by removing the burden of definitiveness”, it can be distorted by patriarchal authorities to suit their political agendas (191).
Even decades after the 1979 Revolution, Ebadi continues to fight the theocracy by taking on cases of people like the “brave journalist Akbar Ganji” who has served time in prison for criticizing the regime (192). His writing of a book in prison, *A Manifesto for Republicanism* in which he advocates a complete separation between religion and state made him the most prominent dissident in the Islamic Republic in late 1990s. His fifty-days hunger strike did not make the hard-line clerics budge from their position. In the end, he was forced to relent but it is through people like him that Ebadi sees hope for a more democratic future for her country and its people. She herself had to undergo imprisonment when she was cleverly trapped in a false whistle-blower case and was convicted for falsifying information against the Islamic Republic. Calling herself ‘a prisoner of conscience’, she upholds the cause of dissidents like her:

Many Iranians, I found, had not heard the news of Ganji’s hunger strike, but his manifesto did circulate. The difference between today and the Iran of 1979 is that information technology and the Internet have made blackout censorship impossible. When I saw televised photos of Ganji’s emaciated body in the hospital, I thought only that generations to come would appreciate his sacrifice. (194)

Turning to Islam as a “source of identity, meaning, legitimacy, development, power, and hope”, there is a wider “Islamic Resurgence” that Samuel P. Huntington feels is spreading throughout the Islamic world (109). This Islamic Resurgence, he believes, is the “latest phase in the adjustment of Islamic civilization to the West, an effort to find the ‘solution’ not in Western ideologies but in Islam” (110). It is a harking back to the ‘golden age’ of Islam when Islamic culture, values and traditions were flourishing in the sixth and seventh centuries of the first millennium. These were then carried forward by the Muslim Caliphates of the Ummayad and Abbasid dynasties in Damascus and Baghdad respectively. Islam saw its peak during these first few centuries after Prophet Muhammad’s death in 632 A.D. Thereafter, the bloody Crusades of the tenth and eleventh centuries started the whole history of hatred and hostility between the Christians and the Muslims that has carried on till the present times in one way or the other that Huntington asserts is the “Clash of Civilizations”.

Whether one looks at it from this generalizing extremist perspective or sees the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as a severe reaction to the forces of globalization, it cannot be denied that the consequences of this hostility have had damaging repercussions for the Iranian women.

Interestingly though, the ‘purdah’ is no longer simply a symbol of honour and shame but has acquired more subtle connotations. It is now a Panopticon-in-reverse as women can look through the burqa and return the gaze. For them, it stops being a symbol of oppression and becomes a garment of liberation. Moreover, by hiding female bodily contours and providing an illusory androgynous cover, it provides Muslim women with a certain sense of power. Through the difficulty of being recognized, it makes them subvert the male voyeuristic gaze fearlessly. Haleh Afshar explains this changed perceptive stance:

Veil as the symbol of Islamification . . . is a liberating, and not an oppressive, force. They [the Muslim women] maintain that the veil enables them to become the observers and not the observed; that it liberates them from the dictates of the fashion industry and the demands of the beauty myth. In the context of the patriarchal structures that shape women’s lives the veil is a means of bypassing sexual harassment and ‘gaining respect’. (124)

An interesting point is made by Ashraf Zahedi when she writes that, “Women’s resistance to unveiling and reveiling has been resistance to assigned identity, assigned image, assigned symbolism, and assigned gender roles” (The Veil 263). This resistance is then their quest for self-determination and choosing their own identity and place in society. Information technology, advanced means of communication and other forms of interaction with the outside world have made the Iranian women aware of their rights as women and they no longer want to suffer under either a West-aping monarch or an oppressive clergy. Their struggle to strike a balance between paying obeisance to their religion and fighting for their freedoms continues. So does Ebadi’s legal battle against the Iranian theocracy.
End Notes

1 Subsequent page numbers of *Iran Awakening* are given parenthetically in this chapter.
2 The Tobacco Protest was a response to Nasir al-Din Shah’s attempt to sell tobacco concession to a British company. This would, thought the clerics, eventually create a monopoly.
3 "Qadisiya" was the seventh-century Arab-Muslim conquest of Persia.
4 The reasons behind the oligarchization process are: the indispensability of leadership; the tendency of all groups, not excluding the organization leadership, to defend their interests; and the passivity of led individuals, more often than not taking the form of actual gratitude towards the leaders. For more information, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_law_of_oligarchy.
5 The caliph Yazid defeated the Shii forces and killed Husain at the battle of Karbala in 680 A.D. He symbolizes the evil in Shii Islam.
6 Another reason for making the ‘veil’ compulsory is convincingly put forth by Ashraf Zahedi in her essay, “Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran” in *The Veil* (ed., Jennifer Heath). She maintains that the clerical regime had a “vested interest in enforcing the black veil” (262). This was because it supported “the conservative merchants of the bazaar, who have enjoyed annual sales of $30 million in chadri fabric imported from Korea and Japan. In the past few years the sale of black veils has reached $40 million. With such financial gains, these merchants will continue to support the regime and push for keeping the veil mandatory.” (262-3)
7 As Ebadi explains, “Sunni Islam effectively closed the door to ‘ijtihad’ several centuries back, but in Shia Islam, the process and spirit of ‘ijtihad’ thrive. ‘Ijtihad’ is central to Islamic law, because sharia is more a set of principles than a codified set of rules” (191).