Incapable of keeping satellite TV out of Iran, Iranian authorities and state TV executives are now borrowing from global entertainment formats, and injecting them with ‘Islamic values’.
Iran’s state broadcaster, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), is in trouble. Over the past decade an unending torrent of satellite TV content has poured in from the diaspora, threatening IRIB’s media monopoly. In order to maintain its dominance in the media landscape and challenge the “domineering empire of Western media” (IRIB English, 2010), the corporation has been forced to invest massive sums of time and money, and dramatically change the way it makes TV.

This chapter describes the origins of TV and media policy in Iran, while highlighting the centrality of revolutionary ideology to IRIB’s activities. It will also engage with case studies to show how IRIB has been radically innovating to maintain cultural relevance. Finally, this chapter looks to the question of women’s participation in IRIB, and assesses the impact of reforms upon women in television.
Cultural Khomeinism and the Revolutionary Potential of the Couch Potato

During the formative years of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini heralded the positive cultural role of the media and chastised the old media establishment for broadcasting television content that “[promoted and preserved] the dominant order... [and] guaranteed the dominance of corrupt powers” (in Guivian, 2006: 79).

Harnessing his newfound power, Khomeini completely overhauled Iran’s state media to ensure conformity with the new religious cultural values of the Islamic Republic. His remedy for ‘Westoxification’ was to turn the Pahlavi-era’s cultural orthodoxies on their head, boldly declaring, ‘We want our radio and television that have served Satan, to serve God’ (Ibid: 76), and proposing that television be conceived of as a ‘public university’ in which Iranians could be educated in the ‘purification’ of their culture (Ibid: 79).

The changes were sweeping. IRIB oversaw a dramatic expansion of religious content and documentary programming in its early years, signalling a dramatic shift away from the light entertainment shows that had been imported by the Pahlavi regime and aired on National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT), the pre-revolutionary state broadcaster.

Despite being banned as ‘vulgar’ by the new Islamic government, these pre-revolutionary entertainment shows retained their popularity amongst many sections of Iranian society (Shahabi, 2008: 115). Old films and entertainment shows were whisked from the archives and out into the diaspora, where they were duplicated, smuggled back into Iran, and aired at underground ‘video clubs’ (Ibid: 115).

With the advent of new technologies such as satellite television and the internet, which began to permeate Iran in the 1990s, this appetite for the forbidden soon started to pose immense problems for state authorities, and especially for IRIB.
A Changing Landscape - The Growth of Satellite TV in Iran

Television, be it state-run or satellite, is the single most important transmitter of culture and information in Iran today. A 2012 poll showed that 96% of respondents consider it to be amongst their three most important information outlets (Wojciesak, Smith and Enayat, 2012: 11). Though surveys struggle to pin down reliable estimates for the percentage of Iranians who have access to satellite television—owing in large part to participants’ nervousness around its legally-dubious status—Iranian state estimates put the figure somewhere between 45-60% in 2011 (Ibid: 14), suggesting that IRIB’s media monopoly now lies in tatters.

The explosion in satellite television began in the early 1990s. By 1995, around half a million satellite dishes were estimated to have been set up in Tehran alone (Barraclough, 2001: 30). The state’s battle to control satellite television is one of the most definitive struggles in the cultural politics of post-Khomeini Iran, so it should come as little surprise that IRIB has been the recipient of a great deal of state funding and innovative policy initiatives in recent years.

A Global War – Television During the Rafsanjani Years

Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic of Iran’s spiritual, moral and intellectual leader, died in 1989. At the time of his death it did not seem that the cultural orthodoxies established by his ‘First Republic’ would encounter any existential danger. Khomeini’s transformation of IRIB into a ‘public university’ had been ruthless and comprehensive: entertainment content had been slashed to 3.7% of total programming by 1990, while Qur’anic readings and calls to prayer had risen to 4.9% (Abutaleb-Joula, 2007: 86). By 1991, 85.3% of Iranian television programming was produced inside the country (Ibid: 84-5); programming produced in the US had almost completely disappeared from Iran’s broadcast schedule (Kamalipour and Mowlana, 1994: 86). These statistics indicate that the state’s management of IRIB did not change in any significant way after Khomeini’s death. The figures are in line with his promises to Islamicise national culture, and to “spread the divine ethos in society” (In Guivian, 2006: 82).

The emergence of new communications technologies such as satellite television provided the impetus for change, and pushed Khamenei’s Second Republic³ into a more defensive stance. Since 1989, Iran has
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worked to reframe cultural discourses around the idea of ‘cultural invasion’ by the ‘satanic’ West. To this end, it has cast diaspora television producers as Western ‘collaborators’, in order to delegitimise their secular constructions of Iranian cultural identity (Ibid: 84).

Khamenei has taken a leading role in driving assertion that Islamic television should respond to the growing popularity of Western satellite TV broadcasts, personally writing a number of newspaper editorials on the topic. In them, he describes a civilisational war in which ‘Islamic values’ must be protected from Western influences so that the ‘totality’ of Western egoist culture might be overcome and vanquished (Boroujerdi, 1996: 161).

[Islamic television should] never forget the ugliness of the enemies of God and the people [or] capitulate to the enemy’s propaganda.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Jomhouri-ye Islami, 1989

(in Guivian, 2006: 86)

This reactionary language found voice in the 1995 ban on the use of satellite dishes, which was met by derision from the more liberal politicians. The difficulty of controlling such a medium was highlighted in the debates preceding the parliamentary vote on the ban, in which one MP reportedly dismissed the initiative on the basis of its absolute impracticality, stating that a ban on satellite dishes would be impossible to enforce “even if we bring in our entire army” (in Barraclough, 2001: 32). Nevertheless, ideological considerations trumped practical ones, and the ban was enacted with a large parliamentary majority.

Unlikely Reformers - Larijani and the Restructuring of IRIB

As early as 1995, some reformist voices were calling for a restructuring and reorientation of IRIB that would make it more popular with consumers. An article in the newspaper Salam pinned the blame for the popularity of satellite TV on broadcasting authorities who were ‘not familiar with existing tastes and interests in society’ (Ibid). In their view, IRIB was stale and culturally irrelevant.

In 1994 Mohammad Hashemi, the moderate head of IRIB, was replaced by the arch-conservative Ali Larijani. Despite his reputation, Larijani oversaw a number of dramatic organisational reforms. The number of channels doubled, and each channel was granted its own unique identity.5

Channel 3 became dominated by youth-focused television, whereas Channel 4 hosted the majority of IRIB’s dense theological programming.
Entertainment shows also started ‘borrowing’ from existing diasporic formats in order to attract wider audiences. Barraclough cites IRIB game show Mashq-e Bozorg (‘The Big Exercise’), in which couples compete for prizes, as one such example (Ibid: 39). Larijani’s reforms thereby demonstrated Iran’s recognition of the need to satisfy the public’s cultural demands, and its willingness to replicate popular diasporic productions to this end.

In this way, the early years of the Second Republic were characterised by unevenness of policy and early examples of adaptation and syncretism in which IRIB attempted to match the influx of Western popular culture with ‘sanitised’ alternatives.

A Blind Eye - Satellite TV and State Responses under Khatami and Ahmadinejad

The surprise election of the avowedly reformist and socially liberal Mohammad Khatami as President in 1997 brought hope to Iran’s youth for increased engagement with the West and for an end to cultural authoritarianism on the part of the state (Axworthy, 2008: 282). Yet his presidency, lasting from 1997-2005, was marked by a pervading sense of powerlessness in the face of Supreme Leader Khamenei’s authority.

Despite having the backing of a reformist parliament, Khatami was unable to change the trajectory of Iranian broadcasting policy. Each time Khatami attempted to legitimise cultural heterogeneity in the Iranian media, the conservative authorities moved to reassert their hegemony and forbid cultural exchange with the West.

Nonetheless, Khatami’s government turned a blind eye to the issue of satellite receivers, allowing diaspora broadcasters to undergo a boom. By the time Ahmadinejad came into office, 37 Persian-language satellite channels were broadcasting to Iran from the US, Europe, and the Gulf States. As early as 2003, academics estimated that around 24 million young Iranians had access to cultural imports from the West as a result of both satellite TV and Internet access (Piri and Ab Halim, 2011: 90).

Ahmadinejad’s administration, far more dedicated to upholding Khamenei’s cultural orthodoxies, did what it could to reverse this explosion in satellite ownership, intensifying the satellite ban in 2006, giving the basij militia free rein to attack and confiscate receivers.

In 2003 the ultraconservative Guardian Council blocked parliamentary legislation that would have legalised private satellite receivers.
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IRIB continued to grow rapidly under Ahmadinejad. By 2011, it managed a £675m budget, and was responsible for around 100 websites, 8 national channels, and 6 satellite channels. For more see Sheikholesami (2011: 49).

and increasing IRIB funding. The state also began to deploy satellite-jamming technology to disrupt broadcasts (see Figure 1), with BBC Persian, VoA, Radio Zamaneh and Rangarang all affected (Small Media, 2012: 36-41). Such censorship methods have been intermittently replicated by security forces under President Rouhani (Amoei, 2013).

In the past few years state broadcasters have been active in their attempts not only to shut Iran off from diasporic television productions, but to re-enact popular diasporic formats within the framework of state religious ideology. In doing so, Iranian authorities and IRIB executives have undertaken a dramatic strategic shift. Incapable of keeping diasporic media out of Iran, IRIB is now actively competing within the media market it sought to smother.

In the following case studies we illustrate how IRIB and other state-licensed programming has become dependent upon diasporic formats, taking on many attributes of globalised culture while attempting to resist the secularising influences of diasporic ‘Westoxification’. The popularity of diaspora-produced programming inspired IRIB-backed derivatives as early as the mid-1990s, but the growing number of satellite stations and expansion of high-quality original programming has led Iran-based producers to step up their campaign of cultural reproduction in recent years.

TV Dinners - Befarmaeed Sham and Sham Irani

One of the clearest examples of diasporic influence upon domestic Iranian programming is illustrated by comparing the relationship between Manoto1’s Befarmaeed Sham and the Iran-based production company Shabake Namayesh Khanegi’s Sham Irani.

Befarmaeed Sham rose to prominence in 2010, when it was launched on the London-based satellite channel Manoto1.

Itself a replica of the global ‘Come Dine With Me’ format in which contestants take it in turns to host dinner parties, Befarmaeed Sham proved to be a great hit in Iran, beamed into millions of homes via satellite and episodes uploaded to the Manoto Youtube channel typically receiving between 50,000-100,000 views each (ManotoTV, 2009). Filmed in the diaspora, Befarmaeed Sham subverts a number of the

Shabake Namayesh Khanegi is a state-approved DVD distribution network operating in Iran. The programmes that it produces and distributes must be granted official licenses from Iran’s Cultural Ministry, and so are subject to the same moral and aesthetic restrictions as IRIB-produced programming.

Small Media undertook an investigation into the activities of the network, but further information about the company is unavailable online. Small Media also approached an actor who currently works for the organisation, but they too were unclear as to who owned the company, or how the organisation was structured.
conventions of Iranian domestic television, and presents an image of a secularised Iranian diasporic existence.

Sham Irani, launched in 2011 by the Iran-based production company Shabake Namayesh Khanegi, drew immediate comparisons with the successful Manoto show. Journalist Reza Sadiq commented ‘[Befarmaeed Sham] heavily absorbed the domestic viewership. Now an Iranian version will be made and Iranised’ (Ghafoori-Azar, 2011). Sham Irani is exactly this: a programme that apes the structure and format of the popular Western-rooted Befarmaeed Sham whilst making clear efforts to cleanse it of ‘alien’ cultural elements.

Many of the comparisons are plainly reflective of differences in moral values and cultural norms between diasporic and domestic programming. Alcohol consumption is one striking difference. Whereas Sham Irani remains completely ‘dry’ (reflecting the IRI’s ban on alcohol consumption), Befarmaeed Sham’s contestants frequently consume wine or other alcoholic beverages, with cocktails and filled-to-the-brim wine glasses even making a front-of-stage appearance in the animated introductory sequence (Manototv, 2012: 0:31-0:46).

Although it might be tempting to ascribe alcohol’s presence in Befarmaeed Sham to the diaspora’s cultural distance from Iranian society, Sham Irani is less representative of regular life in Iran. Alcohol consumption is fairly widespread in Iran, with 39.9% of high-school-aged students reporting at least some level of alcohol consumption (Najafi, Zarrabi, Shirazi, Fekri and Mohseni, 2009: 21). Diaspora space is being used as a way of representing everyday Iranian life in a way that the prohibitive cultural norms of domestic media preclude, thereby establishing a level of authenticity and legitimacy in the eyes of its audience.
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Figure 1: Satellite jamming in Iran
In Persian, the word for jamming is ‘Parazit’, which is also the word for parasite. Portable terrestrial jammers have a range of 3-5 kilometres in urban areas and can be concealed on buildings or mobilised on vehicles.
The representation of women in Sham Irani is in line with state-defined notions of modesty and Islamic dress codes. Episodes are based around single-sex groups, with female-led episodes featuring women wearing ‘good hijab’ (wrapped tightly, with no hair showing) and interacting with each other in a relentlessly pleasant and polite manner. In contrast, Befarmaeed Sham nullifies gender difference, with numerous episodes featuring mixed-gender groups, and levels of informal physical contact that would be considered taboo by state broadcasters.
Such taboos are far less entrenched in the real fabric of Iranian society. Shahram Khosravi describes the dual constructions of ‘public and private selves’ in Iran, where chadors and gender segregation rule on the streets, and a far more permissive atmosphere predominates behind closed doors (Khosravi, 2008: 123).

The artificiality of Sham Irani is an extension of this public orthodoxy of pretence and inauthenticity. Fatemeh Sadeghi notes the symbolic importance of veiling to state-promoted discourses of anti-imperialism and anti-Westoxification, stating that ‘veiling is believed to signify the identity of the nation, and of Islamic society, fighting against the West for independence’ (Sadeghi, 2008: 219).

The significance of proper veiling within this constructed response to a Westoxified item of ‘cultural invasion’ like Befarmaeed Sham marks a reassertion of state-perceived cultural values in the face of subversive diasporic presentations of gender. This represents only the public orthodoxy, not the everyday realities of ‘bad’ or non-existent hijab in the private sphere (Khosravi, 2008: 123).

Diasporic programming such as Befarmaeed Sham, for all the physical distance of diaspora, is better suited to expressing an authentic and recognisable ‘private realm’ to young Iranian viewers than the domestic alternatives.

Befarmaeed Sham places little importance on the presentation of genteel, mild-mannered dinner discussions, and airs acrimonious
arguments when they occur (Didaniha, 2013). The programme also features a sarcastic, bitingly comedic voice-over in the tradition of the original British version of Come Dine With Me. Sham Irani features neither of these elements, reflecting the prioritisation of traditional values over entertainment in domestic productions.

The freedom from state censors also enables Befarmaeed Sham to present discussion topics that could never be broadcast on domestic television. In one episode, the guests engage in a lengthy discussion around homosexuality (Manototv, 2011: 39:20). Although the discussion swiftly spirals into one in which homosexuality is described variously as a mental illness and as a reaction to heterosexual heartbreak, the fact that the topic was broached at all is due to the freedom offered by diasporic broadcasters.

Ramadan Rip-offs - Haft Sang, Modern Family, and the Iranian Holiday Season

In recent years, the Ramadan season has emerged as one of the hottest times of the year for high-budget, populist TV. Whereas a decade ago, Ramadan programming was solemnly fixated on fasting and prayer, the growing popularity of satellite-based Turkish and Arabic-language Ramadan programming in Iran has triggered a dramatic re-examination of IRIB’s Ramadan broadcasting schedule. As a result of the broadcaster’s growing investment in seasonal television, today’s Ramadan sitcoms and high-quality soap operas are capable of drawing huge audiences.

One of the most high-profile examples of Ramadan programming in 2014 has been the IRIB sitcom Haft Sang (Seven Stones), which follows the lives and fortunes of an extended Iranian family. On first appearance, the show appears quite progressive both in terms of its content and its character development.

The show is dominated by a number of assertive and independent female characters, whilst marriages in the show appear to run counter to patriarchal conventions seen elsewhere in the Iranian media environment (although the show remains forbidden from showing physical contact between male and female characters, even if they are married on-screen).
The relatively liberal values on display in Haft Sang are not original products of the Iranian media environment. Haft Sang is a duplicate of the popular American sitcom Modern Family. The striking similarities between the two shows have been highlighted on social media, with videos offering side-by-side comparisons of scenes lifted directly from Modern Family and replicated for broadcast on IRIB (Haghighi, 2014).

Leila and Claire burst into their eldest child’s room to stop any funny business. (Haghighi, 2014: 0:17)

Mohsen and Phil stand in the garden, training their (fake) guns on their youngest son. (Haghighi, 2014: 0:00)

Amir and Haley stand on their balconies, arguing with their father below. (Haghighi, 2014: 0:53)
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**Haft Sang**

- Behrooz and Elham adopt a daughter, owing to Behrooz’s infertility.
- Leila worries about the relationship developing between her son Amir, and his friend Anoush, whom she fears will be a bad influence.
- The aging Nasir marries Mehri, a young, surly woman from a working-class family from South Tehran.

**Modern Family**

- Cam and Mitchell, a gay couple, adopt a daughter, Lily.
- Claire disapproves of her teenage daughter Haley’s relationship with her dim-witted boyfriend Dylan, whom she dislikes.
- Jay, the grandfather of the family, marries Gloria, a young and attractive Colombian woman.

Major changes and adaptations between Modern Family and Haft Sang

Despite the production team’s best efforts, the show was met with decidedly mixed reactions from the Iranian media and the wider public. A number of viewers and commentators skewered Haft Sang for its lack of originality, calling it a bland clone that had been poorly adapted for an Iranian audience.

*Did the American life of Modern Family translate into the Iranian life of Haft Sang? It didn’t. This TV series couldn’t connect with the majority of people; the makers were so obsessed with the American show that they didn’t even change anything when making the Iranian version.*

Mardom-Salari (2014)

*You can feel that it is not an Iranian film. Even jokes are not Iranianised to be compatible with our everyday life.*

Jafar, a 55-year old Iranian viewer (The National, 2014)

The makers defended the program and denied critics’ accusations of plagiarism. Haft Sang’s director, Alireza Bazrafshan, participated in an interview with Fars News to defend the show.

*70% to 80% of the show is original and only 10%-15% is adapted like everybody is saying. We took the ideas and installed our own story over the top of it... [only] a small amount is recreated. They can complain as much as they like!*  

Alireza Bazrafshan, (in Alef, 2014)
The controversy rumbled on, eventually reaching the IRIB Supervisory Council, which ruled that the show’s producers were not in breach of any laws, stating that adaptations are common in the film and television industries. They added that the show’s producers made efforts to inject Islamic and Iranian values into Haft Sang, and concluded that the series was morally consistent with the values of IRIB (Deutsche Welle Persian, 2014).

Haft Sang’s development is illustrative of IRIB’s current strategy for attracting larger domestic audiences through the emulation of foreign satellite programming. Consequently, it is becoming more difficult to characterise IRIB as a stridently ideological and revolution-minded broadcaster. Although its content remains noticeably more conservative and morally focused than satellite programming, numerous compromises have been made with Western-produced formats and programmes in recent years. This awkward syncretism between ‘Islamic’ and imported television has failed to impress clerics or enrapture audiences.

Owing to the Islamic Republic’s religiously inspired moral standards, women in the performing arts faced particular difficulties in the years following the revolution. The requirement for women to wear hijab whilst performing resulted in sluggish or awkward movement from actors and restricted their range of expression both on-stage and on-screen.

The variety of women’s roles also contracted dramatically in the post-revolutionary period, with female characters typically written as pious, dutiful, and lacking in complexity (Kar, 2010). Despite these setbacks, women continued to participate in IRIB programming and have been partial beneficiaries of the corporation’s efforts to reinvent itself in the eyes of viewers.

Suitable Attire - Dress Codes in IRIB Broadcasting

In the early years of the Islamic Republic, IRIB had only 2 major channels and, owing in part to the ongoing war with Iraq, entertainment output was limited. The majority of IRIB’s early serials depicted simple lives, plain furniture, and traditional families in which women tended to be restricted to the roles of housewives, wearing loose clothes and dark colors.
At the same time, prior to the standardisation of practices at IRIB there remained some degree of variance in the representation of women, and in veiling practices across the organisation. Women filming in studio locations endured more restrictions than women shooting in outdoor locations, away from the oversight of IRIB supervisors.

The differences that emerged out of such simple regulatory oversights are stark: whereas the women in the social issue-focused series Aayene (Channel 1, 1985) adhere strictly to Islamic norms of dress, those participating in the popular historical TV series Sarbedaran (Channel 1, 1984) are far from ‘revolutionary’ in their attire, despite the two shows airing on IRIB’s Channel 1 within a year of one another.

Sarbedaran is a particularly interesting case. Although they were forced to wear wigs, the female actors in the series were permitted to show a great deal of ‘hair’, something that would never pass in today’s media environment.

Aayene (1985), Channel 1 - a traditional family, showing women dressed very conservatively (Iranserial, 2014: 19:29)
In the following years, IRIB changed its policies and expanded its oversight of on-location filming. By 1999, women’s dress had been brought firmly into line with ‘Islamic’ regulations. Even the historical drama Kif-e Engliši (‘The English Bag’, Channel 1, 1999), set in the secular Pahlavi era, was trimmed of any female hair. Women in Kif-e Engliši were forbidden from wearing wigs, and were anachronously forced to cover their heads and wear long collars to obscure their necks.
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3. Since the early 2000s, women have been required to wear extra sleeves and headbands in studio-made and indoor locations programs, as evident in recent programming such as Sakhteman Pezeshkan ('The Doctors' Building', Channel 3, 2012). Yet this assertion of conservatism vis-a-vis hair and skin came alongside a limited liberalisation in the style of women's dress, as ever-brighter and more fashionable clothes made their way onto television screens.

The 'modern' look - colourful and comprehensive coverings in Sakhteman Pezeshkan (2011), Channel 3 (Javani, 2011)

The roles available to women have also expanded in the past decade. Whereas female actors previously had to make do as devoted housewives and mothers, today women can expect to play the roles of students, lawyers, and doctors in IRIB productions. So long as they maintain the conservative aesthetic of Islamic dress, more and more opportunities have been opening up for women to participate in the output of IRIB.

Screen Adaptation - Compliance and Resistance Amongst Female Actors

Female actors have reacted to the constraints imposed by IRIB in various ways, ranging from accommodation and compromise with the new system, to subtle subversion. Hamideh Kheirabadi and her daughter Soraya Ghassemi were popular and hugely prolific pre-revolutionary actors who continued to work in the domestic television industry in spite of the post-1979 restrictions, and the limited range of roles available to them.

In her post-revolutionary career, Kheirabadi most frequently played the part of the compassionate, religious and permanently chador-clad mother. Although her daughter belonged to a younger generation,
Ghassemi followed in her mother’s footsteps, for the most part playing morally uncomplicated, maternal characters.

Hamideh Kheirabadi (left) and her daughter Soraya Ghassemi (right), in the pre-revolutionary period (Unknown magazine, pre-1979)

Hamideh Kheirabadi on-screen in the post-revolutionary period, in Ejare Neshinha (1986) (Shariati, 2014: 3:38)
Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, born in 1961, is a television and cinema actor. She studied acting at the Tehran University of the Arts and began her television career working on children’s shows such as Madrese-ye Moosha (Mouse School). In recent years she has engaged in a number of small acts of defiance against the expected moral and social conventions of IRIB, and the state.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Motamed-Arya was one of the most prolific actors on Iranian television, appearing in a number of popular and highly regarded shows. One hugely successful series was Gol-e Pamchal (Primrose), a drama that followed the stories of internally displaced refugees from southern Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, which featured a particularly lax enforcement of Islamic dress codes, having far more female hair on show than would be permitted on IRIB today.
Although her hair passed under the radar in Gol-e Pamchal, Motamed-Arya’s liberal interpretation of the Islamic dress code has caused her more trouble in recent years. The actress has frequently provoked the ire of state authorities when travelling to foreign film festivals, as she rarely wears her hijab in public. She faced extensive travel restrictions from 2009-10 as a result of her conduct abroad, as well as her open support of the Green Movement (Payvand, 2010).

When Motamed-Arya attended the Cannes Film Festival in 2010, she wore a green wristband as a symbol of affinity with the Green Movement, and appeared without hijab, an act of direct defiance. As a result of this political statement, she was barred from appearing on domestic television and cinema. In 2013, as the Rouhani administration extended control over the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, two of her films were granted permission to air in cinemas. As of 2014, she remains barred from appearing on state television.

The cost remains high for those actors seeking to challenge the cultural orthodoxies promulgated by IRIB. Performers who seek to advance their careers inside Iran are expected to act in accordance with the moral and political views of IRIB, and concomitantly, the state establishment; those who do not comply are blacklisted and forced into the shadows.
The IRIB of today is a confused and contradictory organisation. Founded as a means of fending off Western cultural invasion through the dissemination of nationally produced, religiously infused television programming, it has slowly transformed into that which it has sworn to oppose.

From its very foundation, IRIB has appropriated and refashioned popular diaspora-produced show formats as a means of attracting new audiences. With the staggering growth of satellite television in the past decade, this syncretism has been dramatically intensified in an effort to maintain IRIB’s media dominance.

As a consequence, IRIB and other state-recognised content distributors have been pulled in a number of different directions in an effort to uphold conservative Islamic ideological credentials, whilst at the same time attempting to cultivate a reputation for contemporary, modern and youth-focused programming.

Despite IRIB’s best efforts, the ubiquity of satellite television in Iranian homes speaks to the organisation’s failure to adapt successfully to the current media environment, and to the continuing influence and cultural resonance of foreign-produced television in Iran today.
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