
Small Media, Big Revolution is written by a couple who represent the union of two worlds. Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi is a British scholar who worked in Iran during the 1970s. Ali Mohammadi is an Iranian activist who has taught communication in both Iran and the West. Each author brings to this work a wealth of experience and knowledge that can seldom be found in one place. As a married couple, these authors lived in Iran during the formative years of the Iranian revolution and experienced it first hand. Their knowledge of Iranian history and society, their experience as insider and outsider in that society, their diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, and their marriage have resulted in a fruitful intersection of cultures, scholarships, and human understanding. The book is a skillfully written work of scholarship, a passionate account of the Iranian revolution, and an interesting application of Western theories of communication.

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and sociology to the revolutionary Iran.

The book consists of a preface, eleven chapters, and a conclusion. The purpose of the authors is to show that the organizational character of the Iranian revolution can be best explained by a communication model because it was not a revolution generated by political parties and institutions. The revolution was generated by a religious elite whose sermons and commands mobilized a receptive population. The way in which the revolutionary leadership communicated and connected with the masses, related the symbolic patterns of struggle and political revolutionary concepts to the current situation, projected an alternative political system, and directed the struggle against the dictatorship from within and colonialism from without were all based on a communication organization available to the traditional religious leadership in the country. Therefore, the analysis of the Iranian revolution, from any perspective and within any discipline, will not be complete unless it deals with its communicative structure. The Iranian revolution was an urbanized Third World revolution formed by the application of small media. Contrary to the conventional wisdom which views communication as a byproduct of revolution and political processes, the Iranian case demonstrates how communication relates social psychology to the structural components of a revolution.

Mass media was one of the first and most important instruments of cultural imperialism in Iran. Radio and television were the most effective instrument of legitimation during the Pahlavi era. As opposed to this, mosques and pulpits were the major channels of communication used by clerics against Pahlavi propaganda. Tape recorders and night letters were important instruments used by the opposition for diffusing information and communicating with the public. Use of small media during the revolutionary process acted as both the cause and effect of events which forced the Shah out of his peacock throne. Various chapters of the book deal with theories of development and underdevelopment, the role of media in development, modernization and Westernization of Iran during the Pahlavis and its secular and religious opposition, the discourse and ideology of modernity and tradition in Iran among various political forces, the relationship between power and language in the context of both legitimation and delegitimation strategies used by political contenders, the role of small and big media in the Third World, and the communication and media policies of both Pahlavi and Islamic Republic regimes in Iran.

In analyzing the Iranian revolution, the authors of Small Media, Big Revolution offer a synthetic perspective based on various critical theories of development and communication. As much as this attempt makes their effort rich and comprehensive, it also denies it conceptual clarity and theoretical cohesion. Elements of various theories are effectively utilized to explain a variety of policies, events, processes, and structures. Though fruitful and effective, these explanations
remain ad hoc and unconnected. While correctly avoiding mechanical juxtaposition of modernity and tradition, the Mohammadis utilize the concept of re-traditionalization as an explanatory device for analyzing the change of regime in Iran. This is a problematic exercise because the concept of re-traditionalization is still based on a static notion of tradition. Tradition and modernity are not static realities whose boundaries can be easily drawn and elaborated. Modernization of Iran was not accompanied by a retreat in its traditional values and structures. Those values and structures variably resisted, adopted, and lived with aspects of changes brought about by modernization. Neither the process of modernization was uniform and homogeneous nor were the efforts opposing it.

Finally, as the authors rightfully acknowledge, the Iranian revolution was the product of multiple processes rooted in economic decline, colonial experience, dictatorship, social and political alienation, cultural anomic, and the values and ideals of independence and freedom. To see the media as the primary instrument of change is to place the cart ahead of the horse. Overemphasis on media and its size (big vs. small = regime vs. opposition) blurs the qualitative nature of the analysis of the revolution and reduces it to mechanical comparisons.

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