The history of the Iranian political language is the history of the Iranian experiment with intellectual, political, and aesthetic emancipation since the late nineteenth century. It is a history of intellectual emancipation from the inherited perceptions of social reality, and from political and social domination. Public education has always been seen as a precondition for the realization of these different expressions of emancipation. Public education and constitutional government as means of intellectual and political emancipation were the main promises of the constitutional revolution. The constitutionalists saw a popularly elected constitutional government as a guarantee of public education because, as they argued, an educated people who are aware of their constitutional rights support their government more efficiently than ill-informed people. After seizing political power in the early 1920s, Reza Shah used education as a means of public indoctrination to guarantee people’s obedience to his authoritarian rule. The dissented Iranian intellectuals continued the ideal of public education as a means of emancipation. The Iranian intellectuals have educated the people about both the causes of their impoverished and repressed situation, and about the possibilities for gradual or revolutionary changes to that situation. It seems that the formation and expansion of the public sphere have been the condition of possibility of new political and aesthetic experiences and emancipations. Whereas the Green Movement was the expression of the political experience of the Iranian people in 2009, the film A Separation (2011) was the expression of the aesthetic experience of the people who participated in or were affected by the green movement.¹

Over the past three decades, a considerable number of Iranian intellectuals have discussed whether they understand the meaning of modernity.
and its political language. Many became skeptical about the capacity of the Iranian people to understand the contemporary socio-political situation in Iran. They became uncertain about the indigenous ability to overcome the existing situation in favor of democracy, freedom, and equality. Some have argued that the Iranian intellectuals’ mischievousness with the modern concepts has generated the “current cultural and political confusion” in Iran. According to this view, because of their misunderstanding of the nature of the modern political language, the Iranian intellectuals have misunderstood the nature of modern societies. Thus, confused with the modern concepts, they failed to explain the relationship between the Western path of social, cultural, and political development and the conceptual framework explaining these developments. As a result, the Iranian intellectuals suffer from conceptual confusion. In the early 1990s, an economist reminded the Iranian intellectuals that it was not the unity of the modern state and society, but their differentiations, that paved the way for Western democracies. He claimed that insufficient differentiations between the state and society were the main obstacle preventing democracy to grow in Iran. He argued that, in addition to the recognition of the necessary differentiation between the state and society, the Iranian intellectuals must recognize Fukuyama’s thesis on the victory of the liberal state as the end of history. Otherwise, Iranians will never attain democracy. The reply to the Iranian economist came from Homa Katuzian, who argued that, regardless of their correct or incorrect understandings, Iranians have used modern political concepts to communicate with one another since the constitutional revolution. He argued that understanding the original meanings of the modern concepts could not help the historians and social scientists to understand what specific historical and political contexts meant. To him, concepts may or may not change their meaning in different contexts. During the constitutional revolution, the Iranian intellectuals, politicians, and activists struggled against the arbitrary rule of the Qajar Shah and demanded a constitutional government. They used the term *Hokumat-e melli* as a synonym for the constitutional government. Thus, a serious analyst would describe the struggle of the Iranian people in the constitutional revolution as a struggle for democracy. Katouzian claims that the main problem with Iranian politics is not the “conceptual confusion,” but the nature of the state. From its emergence, at the dawn of history, the Iranian state has remained independent from all social classes. The independence of the state from social classes deprived it of the legitimacy it needed at the time of crisis. It also deprived it of the legal system, which could construe it as an impersonal institution.