

THE 1979 IRANIAN REVOLUTION:

THE REVOLUTIONARY REVOLUTION

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The Iranian revolution of 1979 was a political revolution designed to overthrow the corrupt regime of Reza Shah, but more importantly it was an insurrection that revolutionized the previously held notion of a revolution. “Revolutions do not have religious causes; they develop out of economic, social, and political crises” (Halm 138). The Iranian Revolution, like many prior revolutionary events, developed as a response to the aforementioned crises, but “the fact that the Iranian Revolution legitimized itself with a religious ideology surprised many Western observers...” (Halm 138). Pre-revolutionary Iran was characterized by inflation, sociopolitical marginalization, political corruption, despotism, and policies of modernization that disenfranchised the vast majority of Iranian society. Prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, several disparate groups with unique ideologies existed, but they were able to unify and mobilize against the state. “In the case of Iran, the hatred born Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was such a unifying theme” (Milani 134). The Iranian Revolution, also referred to as the Islamic Revolution, can be analyzed through several different lenses as a means to ascertain the sociological origins of the revolution, as well as the relationships amongst the origins and the ideologies of the revolution.

This paper will address several aspects of the 1979 Iranian Revolution beginning with pre-revolutionary Iran, 1963-1979, under the Shah, particularly Iran’s socioeconomic situation prior to the Revolution to illustrate that the revolution was in fact a socioeconomic revolution that was routed in Shi’a Islamic ideology, as elucidated by subsequent formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Additionally, this paper will address the unprecedented governmental organization implemented by the mastermind of

the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, more specifically the ideas of *velayat-e faqih* and “The Council of Guardians.”

Theory

Prior to delving into the analysis of the Iranian Revolution, it is important to first clarify several important aspects of this paper. The Iranian Revolution is complex in that it is comprised of religious, political, economic, and social aspects. Additionally, the role of a charismatic, quasi-infallible figurehead is typical of a revolution, and as such all these aspects must be analyzed on a purely theoretical level. The following section will address the theoretical aspects charismatic leadership, revolutions, and religion in an attempt to provide the necessary background to adequately understand the subject at hand.

The success of a revolution is contingent upon the ability of its leader to capitalize upon the emotions of the citizenry and utilize that impetus to legitimize their rule. A charismatic leader’s legitimacy to rule originates from several sources, but the most effective means for claiming legitimacy is via religious ideological justification. Religion continues to be an effective means for mobilizing the masses, and if socioeconomic discontent already exists within societal discourse, a charismatic leader legitimizing himself/herself in religion can have a profound influence on the thoughts and actions of the discontent.

Revolutionary leaders are renowned for their charisma and awe-inspiring disposition, which the pre-eminent social scientist, Max Weber, elaborated upon. Weber contends, “The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission” (Weber 20). Weber goes one step

further by contending that contrary to a democratically elected leader, a charismatic leader does not legitimize their leadership by the will of the people but rather, "... it is the duty of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader" (Weber 20). Additionally, a charismatic leader is often viewed as a quasi-infallible individual that possesses special knowledge and leadership capabilities. "The natural leaders in distress have been holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody" (Weber 19). Such a leader, a leader that personified charismatic leadership, a leader that transcended social classes and merged groups with radically different ideologies, a leader by the name of Ayatollah Khomeini, led the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The charismatic Ayatollah Khomeini succeeded in gaining recognition by those he addressed, and as such was viewed as a legitimate leader, whom happened to also be a learned religious scholar that justified his rhetoric through scripture.

Guenter Lewy, a prominent scholar on revolutions and their relationship with religion, defines a political revolution as, "... an abrupt, though not necessarily violent, change in the political system, including the nature of rulership or constitution and the principles of legitimacy upon which these rest" (Lewy 6). Lewy's systematic definition of a political rebellion allows for a clear differentiation between a revolution and a rebellion. This difference is paramount in understanding and properly analyzing acts of political sedition. Rebellions, unlike revolutions, tend to, "lack an ideology that differs from the values prevailing in the society in question" (Lewy 6). In essence, a political rebellion, although an act of defiance, does not concern itself with changing the status

quo, but rather merely changing the face of the institution and not the ideology the institution is routed in.

Milani cites Karl Marx's definition of a revolution as an "inherently liberating necessity, the motor of progress" (Milani 19). Marx's postulation was realized during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and strongly influenced the revolutionary character within Iranian society. This revolutionary zeal was finally realized in 1979 when "Iran's long-awaited rendezvous with revolution finally became a reality" (Milani 19). Milani goes further as to define the word revolution in a strictly Iranian sense, that is in the actual context of the Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, was more concerned with the idea of restoration, a concept of the pre-French Revolution period. Khomeini's idea of restoration was, "...restoration of the Islamic government that existed during the rule of the Prophet Mohammad and the brief tenure of Imam Ali in the seventh century" (Milani 19). Additionally, Milani's definition of a revolution is important in distinguishing between a revolution and a *coup d'etats*, and succeeds in explaining why the 1905-1911 revolution in Iran and the White Revolution under the Shah were not actually revolutions, whereas the 1979 Iranian Revolution was a true revolution. For these reasons, the following definition of a revolution will be used as the systematic and definitive definition for the remainder of the paper. A revolution is, "... a rapid, fundamental change in the social structures as well as in the state's personnel, institutions, and foundation of its legitimacy, accomplished from outside the legal channels and accompanied in part by a movement from below" (Milani 21).

The 1905-1911 revolution in Iran was merely a populist reform movement and not a revolution because it did not succeed in altering the foundation of the state's

legitimacy, nor did it have a profound effect in changing the social structure of Iran. For the aforementioned reasons, the White Revolution of 1963 was also not a real revolution, whereas the 1979 Iranian Revolution was, based on Milani's above definition, a true revolution. "The Shah's regime was overthrown in part by the participation of the lower classes; the state's personnel and its foundation of legitimacy were changed; and new structures and institutions were built" (Milani 21). The uniqueness of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, also referred to as the 1979 Islamic Revolution, demands that one analyzes the influence religion plays in revolutions and revolutionary ideology.

The Iranian Revolution was inextricably linked to religion, which is "... a cultural institution, a complex of symbols, articles of faith, and practices adhered to by a group of believers that are related to, and commonly invoke the aid of, superhuman powers and provide answers to questions of ultimate meaning" (Lewy 4). Religion is a powerful emotional connection that rests upon faith alone and therefore cannot be disproved, and is commonly used as a successful tool for mobilizing the masses. Religion's ability to unite and mobilize a group of people is precisely its importance in revolutions and also its source of criticism by Marxists as they contend that religion is an "opiate of the masses".

Religion identifies a set of moral standards that society should adhere to and their actions judged by, particularly those of the ruling elite. For this reason "... those who are dissatisfied- politically, economically, socially, or spiritually- may find in religion strong support for their attack upon the status quo" (Lewy 584). Religious beliefs empower the common believer that they have a responsibility placed upon them by a higher power to reform society. This idea of social justice is particularly strong in Shi'a Islam and plays a strong role in Islamic politics.

Unlike contemporary Western governments, there does not exist a strong sense of separation between religion and politics in Islam, but rather a strong correlation that is historically rooted in early Islamic society. Referring to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, “There existed no separation between man’s obligation as a believer and his duties as a citizen. The temporal and the spiritual power were one and the same. The Islamic state was governed by G-d’s law revealed to Mohammed, his messenger, who functioned both as religious prophet and temporal head of the community” (Lewy 44). This inseparable relationship between politics and religion can be easily seen by the Shi’a image of the Imam, who is regarded as the only legitimate ruler, both religiously and politically. Given the intricate relationship between religion and politics within Shi’a Islam, it becomes readily apparent that an impious political ruler that neglected their religious responsibility would be wildly unpopular. In the event that a impious ruler is in power, Shi’a doctrine indicates that, “... the authority of such a ruler is subject to review, and it may be denied entirely; the precept that awards ultimate legitimate rule to the Imam alone has been utilized as doctrinal justification for rebellion against an impious ruler” (Akhavi 197-198). Religion, particularly Shi’a Islam, has an inherent revolutionary potential, that capitalized upon by the right charismatic figure can be transformed from merely revolutionary potential to revolutionary action.

Pre-White Revolution Iranian Politics

The 1979 Iranian Revolution was not Iran’s first encounter with sociopolitical unrest, but rather was merely a continuation of a courtship with revolution that can be traced back to nearly a century earlier. In 1891, the Iranian leader, Nasir al-Din Shah, granted concessions to an English company, Imperial Tobacco Company, allowing them

to have exclusive control over the cultivation and distribution of Iranian tobacco. The Iranian merchant class, along with the Shi'a *ulama*, staged large-scale protests in Shiraz and other major Iranian cities. "The protest against the tobacco concessions was the first successful mass movement in modern Iranian history" (Keddie 1). Additionally, the 1891 Tobacco Revolt illustrated the power that the Shi'i religious leaders, namely the Grand Ayatollah, had over the Iranian people. Grand Ayatollah Mirza Shirazi issued a fatwa, declaring the use of tobacco to be against Islam, and in a show of solidarity the vast majority of Iranians boycotted tobacco and ceased smoking tobacco altogether. The bazaaris, or merchant class, also shut down the bazaars throughout the country, putting increased pressure on the Shah to repeal the tobacco concessions. Most importantly the 1891 Tobacco Revolt, "... involved the first successful alliance between the *ulama*, modernizing reformers, and the discontented population of Iran, particularly the merchants-- an alliance which was to reappear in later protests and to come to fruition in the Constitutional Revolution" (Keddie 1).

The Constitutional Revolution of 1905 capitalized upon the alliance forged between the *ulama* and the merchant class during the 1891 Tobacco Revolt. Muzaffar al-Din Shah, like his predecessor, lived a life of extravagant decadence, funded by enormous loans from Britain and Russia. These loans led to an increase in concessions, including the oil concession to William D'Arcy in 1901. The D'Arcy oil concession granted oil to Britain for an extraordinarily low price, which infuriated the Iranian population. In an attempt to reform Iranian politics, a revolutionary council was convened, comprising the *ulama*, bazaaris, and liberal minded reformers. The result of the revolutionary council was the creation of the first Majlis, or parliament, in 1906,

which subsequently drafted a constitution that was modeled after the Belgian Constitution. Popular discontent began to grow as a result of rising prices and inflation, resulting in the Shah shutting down the Majlis in 1908. After a brief civil war a second attempt at the parliamentary system was taken and the majlis was restored in the summer of 1909, to only be re-dissolved in 1911, resulting in the re-establishment of the Qajar Shah regime. Despite the eventual failure of the Constitutional Revolution, it succeeded in reaffirming the alliance between the *ulama* and the merchant class, and alliance that was crucial in the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

The Qajar Shah dynasty was overthrown in 1925 when Reza Shah led the successful coup against the government and established the Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Shah was an ambitious, reform minded ruler that had visions of modernizing Iran via educational reform, increased infrastructure projects, and conscription. Reza Shah's modernization policies were not well received among the Shi'a clergy, particularly his conscription policies. The *ulama* believed that military service would lead to an increase in the secularization of young Iranians and as such opposed the Shah's attempts at reformation. The *ulama* and the bazaaris relied upon their earlier established alliance to oppose the Shah's conscription policy. "The anti-conscription movement in Southern Iran was led by the *ulama*, who utilized to the full their traditional networks of support among the guilds and the merchants in the bazaar"(Cronin 457). Throughout the Pahlavi era the *ulama* and bazaaris frequently capitalized upon their relationship, resulting in the closure of the major bazaars in an attempt to depress the economy to the extent that the Shah would repeal his reforms. In 1941, Reza Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, assumed control, only to be more disliked than his father.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi ruled in an even more despotic, corrupt, and decadent manner than some of his predecessors, and succeeded in marginalizing nearly every group of Iranians, save the religious minorities. In 1951, under immense pressure from the Iranian Parliament, the Shah appointed a spirited nationalist by the name of Mohammad Mossadegh, to the office of Prime Minister. Mossadegh was deposed in 1953 by a US backed *coup d'etat*, reinstalling Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as the leader of Iran. The *coup d'etat* was a result of rising British and American concerns over the growing power of Iranian Communist Party, supported by the Soviet Union. “The government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh was the last popular, democratically oriented government to hold office in Iran. The regime replacing it was a dictatorship that suppressed all forms of popular political activity, producing tensions that contributed greatly to the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution” (Gasiorowski 261). Newly reinstated, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi managed to avoid serious criticism and discontent as Iran received an influx of revenue, resulting in a rejuvenation of Iran’s stagnant economy. However, this brief ten-year period of relative political quiescence came to an abrupt end in 1963 when the Shah declared his reform program, referred to as the White Revolution.

The 1953 *coup d'etat*, had significant influence on the national mindset of the Iranian people, and laid a foundation for the ensuing revolutionary discourse. The 1953 *coup d'etat* was backed by the United States, a move that further enraged Iranian dissidents as they viewed the *coup d'etat* as simply another Western intervention in Iranian affairs. Such Western intervention was viewed through two distinctly separate lenses, as Keddie contends, “... increasing Western participation, helped create ‘two cultures’ in Iran: those with Western-style education and employment who mimicked

Western ways; and the peasants, nomads, bazaaris, urban migrants, and ulama who profited little if at all...” (Keddie 11). Not surprisingly, the aforementioned social groups who found themselves disenfranchised by Western influence were among the most influential and active groups in the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Additionally, Mossadeq was referred to as a martyr in much of the pre-Revolutionary discourse and was viewed as a symbol in the struggle against tyranny, namely against the tyranny of the Shah and his desire for Westernization. The 1953 *coup d’etat* reinvigorated the anti-Pahlavi and anti-Western sentiments in Iranian society, and more importantly paved the way for the introduction of Islamic religious rhetoric into the political discourse.

The White Revolution and the June Uprising

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was reminded of the discontent among the Iranian people when in 1963 he declared a policy of reforms that was referred to as the “White Revolution”. It was during the White Revolution that Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as a profoundly charismatic and influential leader of the masses of unrepresented Iranians, and “it was in the 1963 June Uprising that the seeds of the Islamic Revolution were sown” (Milani 69). The White Revolution was not merely a populist revolt against the Shah’s modernization policies, namely the land reform program, but more importantly “... substantiated the hypothesis that the potential for mobilization against an incumbent regime is exceptionally high when a brief period of economic contraction after a period of economic expansion coincides with a sudden loosening of political control after years of oppression” (Milani 69). The events of 1963 were crucial in the political ambitions of Ayatollah Khomeini and served as an example of his ability to mobilize the population

against an unpopular regime, a mobilization that would come to fruition during the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

The White Revolution was comprised of six reformation policies: land reform, nationalization of forests, sale of state-owned enterprises to the public, a workers' profit-sharing plan, female suffrage, and the creation of the Literacy Corps (Milani 85). The most contentious of these six reformations was the land reform as it was designed to allow the Shah to be the sole recipient of all revenue from the land reform. The land reform "drastically curtailed the political power of the landed upper class and for all practical purposes eradicated absentee ownership... the absolute authority of the landowners was replaced with that of the state..." (Milani 86). In addition to the aforementioned consequences of the land reform, the state's absolute control over the land meant that landowners and all Iranians in rural communities were entirely dependent upon the state. Additionally, agricultural output declined during the sixties and seventies because the land reform did not provide any substantial infrastructure in rural areas to manage the lands, resulting in an increased reliance on Western nations for economic security (Milani 86). Most importantly, "... even though land reform contributed to the political stability of rural communities, it indirectly caused political tensions in urban areas as millions of landless peasants migrated to the major cities..." (Milani 86). This political unrest within the major cities resulted in the June Uprising led by Ayatollah Khomeini. A more important ramification of the mass movement into large cities by rural peasants was the impact these discontent Iranians had on the future of Iran, as they were the grassroots revolutionaries of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

The years leading up to the June Uprising saw an alliance between the *ulama* and the Shah, a rather tenuous and ephemeral alliance, but an alliance nonetheless. The Shah recognized the *ulama* as a powerful political force with grounding in the Iranian populous, and as such made attempts to form a positive relationship with the *ulama*. This relationship was jeopardized by the Shah's reliance on the United States and by his attempts at modernization, and was effectively terminated by the introduction of the land reform bill. In addition to the degrading relationship between the *ulama* and the Shah, the death of the popular Ayatollah Borujerdi left a void within the leadership of the Shi'i hierarchy. One religious scholar by the name of Ruhollah Mussavi Khomeini ascended to the forefront and became one of the leading candidates for the position of *Marja'-e Taqlid*. "Khomeini superseded his rivals in political efficacy, vociferous opposition to the Shah, and the ingenuity to attract popular support" (Milani 89).

Ayatollah Khomeini's discourse became increasingly critical of the Shah and the White Revolution, and Khomeini justified his rhetoric by claiming that the Shah had no legitimacy to enact a national referendum, as defined by the 1906 Constitution. Khomeini also used Islamic principles to justify his vehement opposition to the Shah and his policies, stating that referendums or national approval has no validity in Islam (Milani 91). The Shah's regime reacted violently against the *ulama* that supported Khomeini's anti-Pahlavi discourse, which unsurprisingly only perpetuated Khomeini's fiery rhetoric, culminating in a speech given on June 3, 1963 in which Khomeini declared:

Let me give you some advice, Mr. Shah! Dear Mr. Shah... Maybe those people (advisers and government in power) want to present you as a Jew so that I will denounce you as an unbeliever and they can expel you from Iran and put an end to

you! Don't you know that if one day some uproar occurs and that tables are turned, none of these people around you will be your friends. They are friends of the dollars; they have no religion, no loyalty.

This was the first blatant, public attack on the character of the Shah and his regime since 1953, and was regarded by supporters of Khomeini as a tremendous victory against the despotism and impiety of the Pahlavi regime. Several prominent Ayatollahs, Khomeini among them, were arrested in Tehran in an attempt to stem the opposition to the Shah, but upon their release, Khomeini was received as a hero and "... emerged as the most popular religious leader in Iran" (Milani 93). Over the next year, Khomeini continued to protest against the Shah and began to direct his fierce opposition towards American imperialism and America's exploitative relationship with Iran. This anti-imperialist discourse only furthered his popularity, particularly amongst the merchant class and shopkeepers. The Shah quickly realized that Khomeini was amassing popular support and that his rhetoric was becoming increasingly revolutionary, and as such Pahlavi regime decided to exile him to Turkey.

He remained in exile until 1978, but the support Khomeini gained during the years leading up to the White Revolution and during the June Uprising allowed him to continue to have a substantial influence on the religio- political scenery of Iran. The June Uprising had several important implications on the future of Iranian politics, most notably the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini as a legitimate opposition leader. "He (Khomeini) is regarded by Iranian intellectuals, even those who have little regard for Islam, as learned, extremely intelligent and courageous... not since Mossadeq has one man brought so many diverse elements together" (Milani 99). Although the Shah

succeeded in quelling the June Uprising, “Fifteen years later, history repeated itself and the protagonists of the June Uprising confronted each other once again” (Milani 96).

Ayatollah Khomeini’s rise to prominence as a leading polemic against the Shah coincided with the emergence of the socioeconomic preconditions that precipitated the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Although Khomeini was respected within religious strata because of his place in the Shi‘a religious hierarchy, he still had to win over popular support from the Iranian masses. Rather keenly, Khomeini realized that by addressing the socioeconomic impacts of the Shah’s proposed reformations through the use of Islamic rhetoric, he would not only win support from the religious Iranians, but the secular Iranians as well. Ayatollah Khomeini capitalized upon the discontent the Iranian people felt towards the Shah’s reform policies, policies that threatened the economic livelihood of many Iranians. Without the Shah’s proposed reforms, it is unlikely that Khomeini’s religiously inspired anti-Pahlavi rhetoric would have been well received by the Iranian masses. Fortuitously, Khomeini’s rhetoric was well received by the discontent Iranian masses; rhetoric that allowed Khomeini to emerge as a prominent political figure whose leadership would be relied upon during subsequent periods socioeconomic and sociopolitical strife.

Post-1963 Iranian Socioeconomic Conditions

The period between 1963 and 1979 was for Iranians an age of reform, beginning with the White Revolution and culminating in the 1979 Iranian Revolution. During this age of reform, the Shah succeeded in marginalizing nearly every important social class within Iran and, through his marginalizing reforms, effectively established the necessary socioeconomic preconditions for a revolution. Among these preconditions was the

collective action of the Iranian people. According to Misagh Parsa, an expert on the social origins of the Iranian Revolution, “For collective action to lead to revolution, major social classes and groups must form coalitions, consolidate their forces, and disrupt the social order” (Parsa 23). Collective action is not easily achieved, but rather is contingent upon three major factors, all of which were present in pre-revolutionary Iran between 1963 and 1979. Collective action is attainable in the instance that within society exists economic crises, low levels of social and occupational differentiation, and high levels of social and economic inequalities (Parsa 25).

These factors necessary for consolidation are frequently found in developing third world countries, with the classic example being Iran. Developing third world countries are greatly dependent on the world market, leaving them politically dependent on the decisions of the more economically developed nations, resulting in a susceptibility to corruption and coercion from an outside influence. Additionally, developing nations are more vulnerable to “... frequent and severe economic crisis...” (Parsa 26). Iran’s oil production left them very reliant upon the United States and other world powers to supply them with adequate capital to finance the Shah’s reform policies, but also left them vulnerable to manipulation and coercion. Within developing nations, Iran in particular, “The dominant class is very small but appropriates the lion’s share of the national income...” (Parsa 26). This was particularly apparent in 1973 and 1974 when, “...the richest 10 percent of the population accounted for 38 percent of the total expenditures of the population, whereas the poorest 10 percent accounted for only 1.3 percent” (Akhavi 200). This type of disproportionality contributes to the high levels of social and economic inequalities and leaves the ruling minority very susceptible to attack by the

disenfranchised majority. “Finally, Third World societies are characterized by minimal social and occupational differentiation, with the result that economic crises generate similar experiences among large blocs of the population, thereby facilitating consolidation” (Parsa 26).

Pre-Revolutionary Iranian politics was also characterized by high state intervention, further influencing the call for consolidation and collective action against the government. The Shah’s policies advocated for a high level of state intervention, which was met by a high level of consolidation among the various social classes, and according to Parsa, “... high levels of state intervention in capital allocation and accumulation in combination with a high level of consolidation are likely to generate a revolutionary conflict” (Parsa 28). This increase in state intervention often leads to an increasingly polarized society that no longer identifies with the state and its ruler. The polarization of society results in the general population “... discrediting the government’s claim to serve societal interests. In the process, class conflict becomes politicized and is directed against the state” (Parsa 28-29).

Iran’s level of state intervention was so extreme that the state became the majority owners of the oil sector, the banking system, and the agrarian sector. “The state assumed responsibility for the construction of roads, harbors, airports, heavy industry, and the provision of a financial infrastructure (such as state-sponsored banks)” (Moaddel 58). The high level of state intervention and accumulation resulted in an uneven economic development, which saw the oil industry increase at the expense of small industry and agriculture, both of which were paramount for the livelihood of many Iranians (Parsa 62). The state’s intervention in the oil sector had the most severe consequences, as the

immense revenue gained through oil resulted in virtually complete domination of the economy by the state. This economic domination by the state resulted in the private sector receiving a dismal twenty percent of the national income. Throughout the 1960's and 70's it became increasingly apparent that the development policies of the Shah served the interests of the state and not those of the Iranian people. Additionally, the unprecedented growth in the oil sector had significant ramifications for the future of Iran. Robert E. Looney, a professor of National affairs and Economics, contends, "... that if the oil sector had been more closely integrated with the economy as a whole, thus providing a broad base and stimulus to development, many of the frictions and tensions built up in the mid-to late 1970s, eventually leading to the overthrow of the regime, could have been diffused or at least more positively dealt with by the authorities" (Looney 70).

The state also became the largest industrialist in the country by investing exorbitant amounts of money in infrastructure projects and quickly became the predominant owner of the manufacturing sector. Additionally the state owned the "...entire railway transportation system... air transport; the main sea transport... and all communication facilities" (Parsa 67). The state's intervention in capital allocation and accumulation transcended all sectors of the economy in so far as, "... the government itself became an intermediary for certain essential goods by either importing them or buying them from producers and selling to private retailers for distribution" (Parsa 67). The Shah's attempt at complete domination over all sectors of Iranian society was virtually complete when the state became the most prominent player in the financial sector. Prior to the 1979 Iranian revolution, "...nearly 69% of all banking capital in the country was owned by the state" (Parsa 67). By controlling the financial sector the

government was able to channel all of the capital in a manner that was most advantageous to their interests, utterly disregarding the interests of the Iranian population.

The Iranian agrarian sector employed over half of the Iranian population and prior to the Shah's reforms, agriculture accounted for 24.5% of the GDP and 56% of the labor force, whereas in 1977 it accounted for a mere 9.7% of the GDP and 34% of the labor force (Milani 108). The rising urban income increased the demand for agriculture but because of the deliberate neglect of agriculture in the government's development strategy, it could not meet those demands (Parsa 72). The decline in the agrarian sector, combined with the Shah's land reform, resulted in a mass influx of peasants into the larger Iranian cities. This only further exacerbated the already abysmal living conditions and preexisting housing shortage, perpetuating it into a genuine housing crisis.

As with all other economic sectors, the state was the primary holders of urban land, therefore controlling the housing market within the major cities. In 1972, urban areas fell short of sufficient housing by 1.1 million units (Parsa 75). The land ownership situation in the outlying peripheries was similar to that of the cities in that land reforms did not shift land ownership from large landowners to the Iranian peasantry. Rather, "...land [was] transferred only to *some* peasants, while power in the village [was] to a great extent appropriated by the state" (Akhavi 202). In the years leading up to the 1979 revolution, the Shah ordered commercial banks to cease giving financial assistance to those in need of housing, but rather use that money in more "productive sectors" (Parsa 78). By 1977 and estimated 35,000 families were homeless within Tehran and as a result shantytowns were erected to provide these families with housing. The most indigent members of Iranian society were forced to pay exorbitantly high prices for black market

supplies. Additionally, drinking water was provided at a criminal rate by private companies, a rate seventy times that of Tehran. “Eighty percent of the city budget was allocated to provide services for wealthy inhabitants of northern Tehran, shantytowns lacked running water, electricity, public transportation, ...” (Parsa 78). The healthcare and education systems were equally ineffective and corrupt, leaving those in dire need of such services utterly bereft of both.

The Shah’s policies of high state intervention and modernization had a substantially deleterious effect on the Iranian society. These policies created a visible gap within society and only furthered the polarization of the various social strata against the state. Pre-revolutionary Iran was comprised of three distinct Irans, all of which were uniquely affected by the Shah’s policies. The first Iran was, “... that of the rich, of the western educated and oriented... It was the Iran that the Pahlavis wanted the world to see and accept. The second was that of the middle class and of the educated, anti-shah dissidents... The third Iran was unknown and mysterious except to those who composed it... It was the powerless and innocuous Iran that supposedly posed no threat to anyone... Iran of the mosques, *takiyes*, flagellation processions... Shi‘i in religious predilection... unhappy about the penetration of Western culture and gradual decline of Shi‘i values...” (Milani 26-27). The Shah pretended to not notice the existence of the blatant and ever increasing disparity between the three social classes and believed that an increase in modernization policies would remedy the growing disparity and discontent within Iranian society. “The more doses of these policies he injected in the body politic, the more explosive the political atmosphere became, paving the way for the coming of the Islamic Revolution” (Milani 105).

The end result of the Shah's various modernization and reformation policies was a slowly declining economy that culminated in an economic crisis. The Iranian economy was heavily reliant on the world economy because of the Shah's reliance on foreign investment, particularly in the oil sector. The initial economic difficulty stemmed from the fact that, "... Increased oil income created a crisis in revenue absorption. The rapid growth of the oil industry was not matched by expansion in other sectors, especially production sectors. Therefore, the economy could not absorb the increased oil revenues, and the result was rising prices" (Parsa 82). The Shah and his regime did not anticipate such an influx of money and subsequent inflation, and as a result the Shah began increasing his borrowing from international banks, further perpetuating his reliance on foreign investors and the world market. The states level of intervention in capital allocation and accumulation only increased further, leaving them more susceptible to crisis, challenge, and attack (Parsa 85).

The Shah's modernization policies precipitated a number of important consequences that would drastically affect the future of Iranian politics. A dualism was created in the economy and society, a dualism that was so pervasive that it altered the ways of thinking and living for the average Iranian (Milani 127). These policies also led to an uneven economic development, further perpetuating the growing monetary disparity between the affluent and the indigent. Additionally, "The Shah's reforms alienated the bazaaris, the *ulama*, and the landed upper class- the three traditional bastions of support for the monarchy" (Milani 128). The alienation experienced by the Iranian people revolutionized their antipathy towards the Shah and his regime and made them more susceptible to the anti-Pahlavi discourse.

The economic crisis affected all members of society, but had a particularly strong affect on the bazaaris. Bazaaris makeup the merchant class and there livelihood is contingent upon a strong economy, and in an economic crisis such as the crisis that plagued pre-revolutionary Iran, bazaaris are most negatively impacted, resulting in the generation of a sense of solidarity and camaraderie within the bazaari community. The mobilization of the bazaaris against the state had broader implications as it encouraged and created an opportunity for other dissident social groups to act collectively against the state. The mobilization of the merchant class was arguably one of the most important precipitating forces for the 1979 Iranian Revolution and began in earnest after 1975.

Mobilization of the Bazaaris

In 1976, the state suggested that the Bazaar should be demolished and replaced with a more modern shopping market like London's new Covent Garden. "The state's economic policies, which favored large, modern commercial and industrial establishments, which were tied to and dominated by international capital, undermined the bazaar" (Moaddel* 358). The following statement of one bazaari accurately depicts the perception they had for the Shah and his policies; "“ If we would let him, the Shah would destroy us. ... The banks are taking over. The big stores will be given most of our business. The bazaar will be flattened so new buildings can go up”" (Parsa 102). The Shah and his regime viewed the bazaar as a remnant of an old Iran, an Iran that was backwards and unprogressive, and the bazaaris as an impediment to modernization.

As oil revenues began declining in the years prior to 1979, higher taxes were imposed on the bazaaris, national banks reduced giving loans, and severe restrictions were enforced on obtaining and maintaining operating licenses. The most damaging

restrictions placed upon the bazaaris were the price controls and anti-profiteering campaigns. “Prices were fixed at retail market level where merchants and shopkeepers operated, but no serious controls were imposed on factories that produced and priced commodities; nor were restrictions placed on the small number of large importers” (Parsa 103). These restrictions were enacted by the state in an attempt to curtail the economic and political power of the merchant class. Additionally, the profit rate was set at 14 % even though the inflation rate was double that, making it very difficult for the bazaaris to conduct business without violating the newly enacted anti-profiteering regulations. Essentially, the Shah’s reforms eroded away at the power base of the merchant class, making it very difficult for them to continue to earn enough money to survive in the inflated economy of pre-revolutionary Iran.

This erosion resulted in the bazaari class consolidating their power and uniting against the Shah and his reform policies. “Bazaari mobilization and collective action quickly emerged as the most significant features of the revolutionary conflicts and were of primary importance in bringing down the Pahlavi regime” (Parsa 92). Between 1977 and 1979, the alliance between the bazaaris and the *ulama* was pivotal in the unification of anti-Pahlavi discourse within the various social strata of Iran. “The struggles of bazaaris were soon channeled through the mosque... Mosques provided a national network for mobilization and a safe place for gathering and communication” (Parsa 29). The bazaaris frequently financed mosques that held anti-Shah activities, and more importantly the bazaaris supported antigovernment actions by clergy and protested the arrests of activist clerics. By financing of mosque-led activities, the bazaaris enabled the *ulama* to dominate the revolutionary rhetoric, while simultaneously strengthening the

alliance between the two most prominent groups within Iranian society. Additionally, the bazaaris played a central role in unifying all dissident factions by supporting other groups who acted against the Shah's despotic regime. The bazaaris, "...joined the opposition movement and provided extensive resources as well as audiences for the Islamic alternative to the monarchy" (Moaddel* 358). The bazaaris would demonstrate their solidarity for their anti-Pahlavi cohorts by attending student led rallies and by collecting money to support the workers who went on strike.

The most important and disruptive method utilized by the bazaaris was the cessation of the marketplace and all business conducted by the bazaaris. "Bazaar shutdowns disrupted trade and distribution of goods throughout the country, causing hardships for all consumers. At the same time, the lengthy disruptions signaled instability and thus created an opportunity for collective action by others against the government" (Parsa 119). This collective action came to fruition in 1978 during an ephemeral period of liberalization on the part of the Pahlavi regime, precipitated by the increasing mobilization and anti-government discourse. This period of laxity allowed several important social groups to band together, namely the intellectuals and professionals, the white-collar employees, and the industrial working class. "Toward the end of 1978, all major opposition social classes formed a coalition and consolidated their forces; they then disrupted production, trade, distribution, and services throughout the country. They all recognized the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini and supported the formation of an Islamic Republic" (Parsa 30). Although much of the bazaari community was considered to be secular, they nevertheless recognized Ayatollah Khomeini's legitimacy as the leader of the anti-Pahlavi movement. Much of the success of the 1979 Iranian Revolution stems

from the fact that prominent secular social groups, i.e. the bazaaris, supported Ayatollah Khomeini and his anti-Pahlavi cohorts, despite their distinctly religious rhetoric.

The Shah's suppression of Iranian social classes left a vacuum in the ideological framework of Iran, allowing the ulama and the teachings of the religious scholars, namely Khomeini, to dominate the religio-political discourse of the Iranian people. Islam emerged as the new political ideology of Iran, an ideology that successfully mobilized the Iranian masses to revolt against the Shah's regime. In an area of the world that has experienced and participated in numerous futile socioeconomic revolutions, all of whom were legitimized in secular ideologies, the leaders of the 1979 Iranian Revolution saw it as an opportunity to justify their cause in a more powerful and emotional ideology, Shi'ism.

Shi'a Islamic Ideology of Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Mehdi Bazargan

The ideological vacuum of pre-revolutionary Iran left a certain air of susceptibility in the religio-political mindset of the Iranian people. Not surprisingly the ideology that reigned supreme was that of the *ulama* as espoused by Ayatollah Khomeini and several of his influential predecessors. Keddie argues, "As in many third-world societies... leaders of 'orthodox' religion, and not always nationalist and reformers, often took the leading role" (Keddie 8). As such, the only reasonable ideology that could successfully fill the ideological void as well as capitalize on the already discontent Iranian majority was Shi'ism. Shi'ism has a long history of struggling against oppression, persecution, and political corruption, three of the most prominent ills plaguing pre-revolutionary Iran. This Shi'a ideology was not a novel creation by the mastermind of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, but rather a unique synthesis of previously developed

ideologies that were cleverly manipulated to instill the masses with a religiously based revolutionary zeal.

Prior to the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini as a prominent Iranian reformer, three scholars played an influential role in developing the aforementioned Shi'a ideology. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Mehdi Bazargan, and Ali Shariati all succeeded in utilizing classic Shi'a doctrines and propagated them in a strictly Iranian sense. Ayatollah Khomeini included the ideological developments of his predecessors in his revolutionary discourse.

Jalal Al-e Ahmad is most notable for his coinage of the phrase *Gharbzadegi*, or "Westoxification." Westoxification is defined as, "A social disease of blind and total imitation of Western culture" (cited in Milani 141). Al-e Ahmad was concerned that Iranian culture under the guidance of the Shah was straying from its Islamic heritage in an attempt to emulate the decadence and impiety of the West. Al-e Ahmad adamantly advocated for a "... return to Shi'ism and the rejection of all Western ideologies, including Marxism" (Milani 141). This idea of *Gharbzadegi* was particularly strong in the post-1963 period, but more broadly is an idea that originates in Islamic antiquity. There has always existed an importance for rejecting any change that strays away from the proper teachings of Islam, particularly if a corrupt, unjust ruler such as the Shah is leading one astray. This concept, defined more broadly in the Qur'anic term, *bid'ah*, refers to any innovation in Islam and its subsequent practice. Of more concern to the Iranian reform thinkers was *bid'ah* in the context of any innovation or practice that contradicts the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. In the eyes of prominent Iranian Shi'i scholars, the Shah was guilty of enacting societal reforms that contradicted proper

Islamic practice, and as such this concept of resisting *bid'ah* at the hands of the Shah was introduced into the revolutionary discourse.

Jalal Al-e Ahmad capitalized on that sentiment and advocated that the Iranian Shi'ites should embrace their Islamic heritage and tradition and oppose the corruption of their society and the corruption of their government. Al-e Ahmad felt that, "... religion was the only area not yet infected by the Western plague" (Halm 133). He capitalized on the fact that a large majority of Iranians were dedicated to their religious traditions, "...he instinctually sensed a revolutionary potential in this area that could far surpass the potential among students and intellectuals influenced by Marxist ideology..." (Halm 133-134). He relied heavily on the *ulama* for support in protecting Iran's Shi'a identity against Western imperialism, a theme that re-emerged in the discourse of Khomeini.

Mehdi Bazargan agreed with Al-e Ahmad insomuch as Iran's society experienced a certain level of moral, religious, and cultural degeneration, but he attributed this societal depreciation not to the West, but rather to internal causes. Bazargan also advocated Shi'ism as the best way to remedy the social corruption and political despotism. "One of the prerequisites to progress, he argued, is a reliance on the true teachings of Shi'ism and on the creation of an Islamic government to be run not by the Shi'i *ulama* but by experts who are committed Shi'ites" (Milani 143). This statement by Bazargan is the ideological progenitor to much of the discourse of Ayatollah Khomeini and the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

Ideology of Ali Shariati

Ali Shariati, a contemporary of Ayatollah Khomeini, was arguably the most influential of the three ideologues, espousing a pro-Shi'i rhetoric that was second only to

Khomeini. Ali Shariati, "... essentially developed a modern revolutionary ideology wrapped in traditional Shi'i images and symbols that he redefined and reassessed entirely" (Halm 134). Shariati agreed with his two predecessors that Iran experienced a socio-moral decline during the Shah's reign, and like Al-e Ahmad and Bazargan, emphasized Iran's reliance and emulation of the West as central to the declination of Iranian society. Shariati also attributed Iran's decline to the *ulama's* failure to teach true Shi'i ideals to the Iranian Shi'a population (Milani 145). He strongly advocated the idea that the depreciation of society was inextricably linked to the nation's desire to emulate the West; a result of the Shah's reign, and to oppose the Shah meant an absolute ideological rejection of Western ideals. A mere rejection of all things Western was progressive in Shariati's mind, but to properly remedy Iran's societal ills, a return to proper Shi'ism, the Shi'ism of Ali or Alavi Shi'ism was necessary.

Shariati categorized Shi'ism into two distinct entities, Alavi Shi'ism, or the Shi'ism during the time of Ali, and Safavid Shi'ism, which was transformed in 1501 into an official state-sanctioned political ideology. Referring to the era prior to the Safavid Dynasty, Shariati contends that, "the greatest merit of Shi'ism up till then was their opposition to all dynasties that established tyrannical regimes in the name of Islam" (Halm 135). Additionally, Shariati believed that Safavid Shi'ism was made into "a conservative ideology for legitimizing monarchical absolutism" (Milani 145). Ali Shariati vehemently rejected what he saw as a perversion of the true teachings of Shi'ism, and advocated Shi'ism not as an ideology for legitimizing political absolutism, but rather as a religion that protects the righteous from the tyranny and corruption of despotic political regimes. Shariati strongly opposed Shi'ism's political quietism and promoted the

engagement of the Shi‘a masses in the political discourse, which he believed to be an inherent responsibility of Shi‘i Muslims to oppose despotic regimes. In the rhetoric of Shariati, such malevolencies as tyranny and corruption were personified by the Pahlavi regime, and as such Shariati provided religious justification for resisting the Shah.

Ali Shariati’s discourse invoked powerful Shi‘a Islamic imagery as a means for inspiring and mobilizing Iranians to collective action. This imagery focused around an event that is of unprecedented magnitude in Shi‘ism, an event that taps into the deepest emotions of the Iranian people, the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. Shariati utilized the power of the sacrifice of Imam Hussein at Karbala to legitimize confrontation with the Pahlavi regime, and went so far as to refer to the Shah as Yazid, the caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty that was responsible for the murder of Hussein and his followers. Although Shariati was not the first to invoke Shi‘a Islamic imagery as a means for mobilizing the masses, he was the first to invoke such imagery in a strictly Iranian sense. Shariati succeeded in transforming the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at Karbala into a contemporary Iranian struggle against the Shah, and more broadly against any colonial intervention in Iranian affairs.

The invocation of the Karbala paradigm is central to the Islamic ideological significance of the Iranian Revolution, and the imagery of the martyrdom of Hussein at the hands of Yazid was given a rejuvenated, strictly Iranian connotation. Ali Shariati believed that the actions of Imam Hussein and the precedent set by his martyrdom in Karbala serve as a “... prototype for all societies and all cultures” (Akhavi 140). Shariati contended that everyday is Ashura, a day in which Shi‘a Muslims self-flagellate themselves in repentance and commemoration of the events at Karbala. By invoking this

notion of the martyrdom of Hussein, Shariati gave religious legitimization to resisting the Shah, as he was seen as the modern day Yazid. By comparing the Shah to Yazid, Shariati, as well as Khomeini, tapped into the emotional subconscious of the Iranian people. According to Shi'i custom, the lesson learned by the martyrdom of Hussein is that the Shi'i population has a religious and social responsibility to oppose any despotic, corrupt ruler, much like Hussein did to Yazid.

Politically charged slogans invoking the martyrdom of Hussein became ubiquitous in pre-revolutionary Iran, particularly during the 1970's. Michael Fischer, a prominent scholar on Iran, captures the essence of Hussein as a symbolic figure when he writes, "... his martyrdom is the model for others to emulate... The symbolism of martyrdom was thus omnipresent. Wall graffiti proclaimed that those who died did the work of Husayn... and those who did not fight did the work of Yazid" (Fischer 214). Another popular slogan stated, "there were no spectators at the martyrdom of Husain" (Hegland 228). This utilization of the so called "Husain-Yazid" model was received overwhelmingly well by the Iranian masses as they felt a close identification with their religious past, and saw an opportunity to emulate the actions of Hussein by resisting the Shah. Mary Hegland emphasizes the political importance of the Shi'i revolutionary ideology, one that focused on the martyrdom of Hussein:

Because of their own economic and political situation and because of the cruel political oppression they more and more observed taking place around them, the ideology of resistance increasingly reflected their own attitudes and view of the world. The Shi'i revolutionary ideology provided a unifying symbolic system around which groups of varying intellectual approaches could rally (Hegland 226).

It becomes apparent that this idea of martyrdom and opposing injustice was central to the pre-revolutionary discourse, and successfully transformed a socioeconomic

struggle into a religious struggle against the metaphorical oppressors of Hussein, namely Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Additionally, the typical commemoration rituals of Ashura were given a newly politicized importance, in contrast to the typical mourning processions that include self-flagellation. “During the revolutionary year, the most striking illustration of the active interpretation of Karbala was the suspension of traditional mourning processions during Muharram and especially on ‘Ashura: political marches were substituted” (Fischer 213). The success of the 1979 Iranian Revolution can be attributed in part to the eloquent interwovenness of religion and politics, an eloquence that was the direct result of the aforementioned ideologues. Heinz Halm contends that the de-ritualization of the traditional Ashura customs was paramount in transforming Shi‘ism as a religion into Shi‘ism as a revolutionary ideology (137). Ayatollah Khomeini, although not acting alone, can be seen as the most important and influential religio-political figure of the 1979 Iranian Revolution as he successfully mobilized the discontent Iranian masses through the dissemination of socio-politically charged Islamic rhetoric.

Ayatollah Khomeini as a Revolutionary Ideologue

Ayatollah Khomeini’s success as a revolutionary leader can be directly attributed to his ability to not only represent the concerns of the average Iranian, but represent them in a manner that appealed directly to their personal struggles. Ayatollah Khomeini first emerged as a dominant religious and political force in Iran during the June Uprising in 1963, where he demonstrated his ability to mobilize the Iranian masses against the Shah through the propagation of religio-political discourse. Marvin Zonis and Daniel Brumberg, two experts on Khomeini’s version of Shi‘ism, aptly demonstrate Khomeini’s ideological importance when they say; “He has, in other words, created an ideology

which promises a resolution of individual psychological crises, while achieving the distinctly political goals of Iran” (48). It is difficult to adequately elaborate on all of Khomeini’s ideas on the proper interpretation of Shi‘ism, so the following section will focus on his major ideas that were paramount in shaping the subsequent Islamic government of Iran.

Ayatollah Khomeini strongly capitalized upon the idea of the Shi‘is people as an oppressed religious minority amidst an impious majority. Khomeini was able to win the support of the Iranian people by appealing to not only the socioeconomic disparity that plagued their lives, but also by tapping into the emotional core of the Iranian people. “When ideologies speak to the deepest emotional concerns and when they do so in familiar idiom, they have a way of taking hold of imaginations and developing a dynamism of their own” (Zonis and Brumberg 62). Khomeini was able to gain indefatigable support from the Iranian masses as a result of his aforementioned role in the 1963 White Revolution, as well as through the “passion play” of Hussein at Karbala. “Khomeyni had become a major symbol of opposition to the shah in 1963, and his vindication became the rallying point of the revolution... For years in rawdas the shah had been identified with the arch tyrant Yazid, whereas Khomeyni was seen to uphold the ideals of Husayn” (Fischer 183). Essentially, Ayatollah Khomeini was equated with the redemption of society from oppression; he became the personification of the hero that defends the oppressed against the agents of tyranny.

Ayatollah Khomeini was a prolific religious scholar and politician, and he fused his two areas of expertise to create a political system that is based on his interpretation of previous Islamic teachings and scriptures. One of Khomeini’s most fundamental beliefs

was the lack of separation between religion and politics. In his book, *Islamic Government*, Khomeini declared, “In the prophet’s time, was the church separated from the state? Were there at the time of the theologians and politicians? At the time of the caliphs and the time of ’Ali, the amir of the faithful, was the state separated from the church? Was there an agency for the church and another for the state?” (Khomeini 16). The implied answer to these rhetorical questions was no. In his interpretation, and in Shi’i Islam, there does not exist a strong separation between religion and politics, and Khomeini strongly advocated a return to such a system of governance. Khomeini condemned the proponents of such a system in which religious and political life were two distinct entities, as he believed Islam, particularly Shi’i Islam was an all-encompassing religion. In an interview with an Italian journalist, Ayatollah Khomeini stated, “Islam means everything, also those things that, in your world, are called freedom and democracy. Yes, Islam contains everything. Islam includes everything. Islam is everything” (Khomeini 2). In this succinct yet powerful quote, Khomeini successfully explains that Islam is not merely a religion, but rather a belief system that governs every facet of life, ranging from social to political settings. Khomeini believed that without the creation of an Islamic system of governance, “... social chaos, corruption and ideological and moral deviation would prevail” (Khomeini 19).

Ayatollah Khomeini envisioned a system of governance that was completely and utterly innovative, a system that was based on Divine Law, a system that transcended politics and appealed to the socio-religious foundations of Iran. He believed that since all people, referring to the Islamic majority of Iran, had already accepted Islam, “... the Divine laws are more democratic than those of a republic or of a constitutional monarchy

where the members of parliament claim to represent the people, whereas they actually legislate whatever they want and impose it on all the people as laws” (Dabashi 443). Khomeini was concerned with the political and social corruption that ran rampant prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and contended that the only proper method for governing society and eliminating the social corruption was by implementing a system of Islamic law, or *Sharia*. “Islam promulgates the law, keeps it alive, implements it and works intrinsically for it. It is well known to what degree Islam has devoted attention to society’s political and economic relations so as to create a polished and virtuous human being” (Khomeini 21).

Ayatollah Khomeini was not keen on immediately divulging his ultimate plan for his envisioned Islamic Government out of concern that his ideas may be unpopular among some of the other political players. “Khomeini did not dwell upon the concept of the government of the jurist and cleric dominance, as it would have antagonized not only the liberals and the left but also conservative groups such as the Hujjatiyya, which deplored any suggestion of encroachment on the rights of the absent Imam” (Martin 150). Prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Khomeini adamantly stressed Islamic unity and the embracing of a common Islamic identity and was very careful not to disenfranchise any of his Islamic political-scholar counterparts.

Rather than elaborate on his idea of the ensuing Islamic Government, Khomeini spoke broadly about the need for an Islamic Government, relying heavily upon ‘*irfan*, or mystical philosophy (Martin 45). “Of particular relevance is Khomeini’s emphasis on the perfectibility of man-- a frequent theme in ‘*irfan*-- and the spiritual power that underlies the perfecting process. This ‘power of belief’-- ideological unity-- is the basis for Iran’s

revolutionary success...” (Rose 186). Khomeini utilized his *'irfani* training while justifying his revolutionary ideals to the Iranian people in July, 1979, roughly six months after the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime:

Islam sees another meaning in everything ... Anyone who refers to the Qur'an can see that. For all the spiritual aspects of the human sciences can be seen in the Qur'an, not in their natural aspects ... The injunction of the Prophet is to look at what is beyond this world. Those who see all the real world in reality see only part of it ... Islam is to take all perceptions and all the world back to the level of tauhid ... It is to return all nature and all oppressive shadows to that place of light which is finally the place of divinity ... What Islam wants is this – all science, natural or other, should be subjugated to the divine science and brought back to tauhid (Cited in Martin 168)

Two weeks later he expounded on other aspects of his 'irfani vision with relation to individual and community in a speech given to the Iranian people:

Purification of the soul is higher than knowledge and wisdom ... If the people of a country are purified and trained, that people is in the vanguard. If the leaders are likewise purified, then there will be no problems either for the country or for themselves (Cited in Martin 169).

Through his ingenuity, Ayatollah Khomeini succeeded in conveying that his idea of a proper government, and as such a proper society under said government, was one that is based upon Islamic principles and Islamic scripture, both of whom are absolutely necessary for the re-vitalization and re-purification of Iranian society. Indubitably, Khomeini's most revolutionarily important and influential idea was that of *velayat-e faqih*.

The Concept of Velayat-e faqih

Ayatollah Khomeini was adept at incorporating traditional Shi'a Islamic concepts into his revolutionary ideology, concepts that were pivotal for winning the acceptance of the Iranian masses as well as his political and religious counterparts. “In retrospect, perhaps the most significant ideological antecedent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran... was the doctrinal propagation of *velayat-e faqih*, or ‘the authority of the jurist,’ as

formulated by Ayatollah Khomeini” (Dabashi 11). The most notable aspect of *velayat-e faqih* is the, “appropriation of certain political authority for the figure of the Shi‘i jurist (*faqih*)” (Dabashi 11). Ayatollah Khomeini legitimized *velayat-e faqih* by citing a Qur’anic passage that, “...charges the ulama’, who are just and most knowledgeable of the Divine will, with actual command over the political authority of the Muslim community” (Dabashi 447). Although the concept of *velayat-e faqih* appropriates an incredible amount of power to the Shi‘i jurist in charge of the Islamic Government, that jurist is subordinate to the ultimate authority, G-d. As such, the jurist is held equally accountable for their actions via Divine Law, an aspect that is meant to be a deterrent for corruption and despotism of the jurist. “The role of the just and knowledgeable *faqih* is the same as that of the Imam or the prophet: to institute the divine law. It is the law which is supreme: no *faqih* can dismiss the opinions of other *faqih*, and so the guidance of the just government may be collegial” (Fischer 153).

Khomeini’s interpretation of the authority of jurist had three important consequences for the efficacy of the revolution. First, *Velayat-e faqih*, as interpreted by Khomeini, further politicized young Khomeini supporters, instilling a stronger revolutionary fervor in their already discontent minds. Second, *velayat-e faqih* elucidated the distinct and explicit incompatibility between Shi‘ism and monarchism. Third, *velayat-e faqih* provided a resuscitation and new interpretation to the legitimacy of the ‘*ulama*’s authority to rule during the occultation (Milani 154-155). The authority of the jurist can be seen as the culmination of much of the religiously charged ideological discourse, and it put Khomeini in a position of undeniable authority; a position that afforded him, “... a special and highly respected place among the opposition to the Shah. It reinforced his

image as the most outspoken opponent of the Shah and as a religious innovator. And most importantly, it gave religious legitimacy to rebellion against the Pahlavis” (Milani 155).

In conjunction with the concept of *velayat-e faqih*, Khomeini advocated for the *ulama* to have responsibility for overseeing the implementation of *Shariah*, or Islamic law. Referring to the *ulama*, “they should become the expositors, enunciators, and executors of Shi’i laws and traditions” (Milani 152). Khomeini’s political discourse relied heavily upon the concept of the *ulama* being the political and spiritual heads of society, and utilized this concept for justifying the absolute need for forming such a government. In his book, *Islamic Government*, Khomeini states:

If we want to immortalize the rules of Shari’a in practice, to prevent violation of the rights of weak People, to prevent corruption on earth, to apply the Shari’a laws justly, to fight the heresies and the deviations decided upon by the rigged up-parliamentary- councils and to prevent the influence and intervention of the enemies in the affairs of the Moslems, we must form a government, because all this is carried out by a government led by a trustworthy and pious ruler who commits no injustice, deviation or corruption (Khomeini 30).

Ayatollah Khomeini genuinely believed that the only way to reform society and return Iran to a morally just country, a government must be formulated based upon the aforementioned ideals, which could only be possible through a political revolution.

Khomeini advocated for a political revolution as a means for rescuing Iran from the depravity that plagued society. Interestingly, Khomeini relied strictly upon religious rhetoric for justifying such a revolution, but indirectly addressed the socioeconomic disparities that left the Iranian masses in a state of discontent. Khomeini often compared the Shah to despotic rulers in Islamic antiquity, adding a religious dimension to the

political corruption of the Shah's regime. Khomeini addresses the need for ridding Iran of the Shah and his impious, corrupt regime, but in a strictly Islamic rhetoric:

The persistence of these governments in their transgressions means obstructing the system and laws of Islam whereas there are numerous provisions that describe every non-Islamic system as a form of idolatry and a ruler or an authority in such a system a false god... At the same time, we are responsible for preparing the right atmosphere for bringing up a faithful generation that destroys the thrones of false gods and destroys their illegal powers because corruption and deviation grow on their hands. This corruption must be wiped out and erased and the severest punishment must be inflicted upon those who cause it. In His venerable book, G-d describes Pharoah as 'a corrupter.' Under the canopy of a pharonic rule that dominates and corrupts society rather than reform it, no faithful and pious person can live abiding by and preserving his faith and piety. Such a person has before him two paths, and no third to them: either be forced to commit sinful acts or rebel against and fight the rule of false gods, try to wipe out or at least reduce the impact of such a rule. We only have the second path open to us (Khomeini 25-26).

Khomeini Islamized the need to rebel against the corruption of the Pahlavi regime, a sentiment that was well received by the discontent Iranian masses. However, if Iran had not experienced such immense socioeconomic difficulties, which were the preconditions for the emergence of Islam as a revolutionary ideology, Khomeini's rhetoric would not have motivated the masses towards collective action. If the Iranian society and economy were not in a state of decline, most likely the Iranian populous would have been content with maintaining the status-quo, resulting in less of an adherence to the revolutionary discourse espoused by Khomeini. Fortunately for Khomeini such was not the case and his calls for Islamic reform were met with fervent support, support that resulted in the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime and the instatement of Khomeini as the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution and Formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran

In the moments leading to the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime, several disparate groups, all of which had their own ideas regarding the formation of the subsequent post-revolutionary government, united in a show of solidarity against the Shah. One of the most influential groups was in fact not an organized entity but rather a personification of the social ills that had resulted from the Shah's disenfranchising and corrupt policies. This group, the *mustazafin*, a Qur'anic word referring to oppressed people, or in an Iranian sense, the disinherited, were used as a rallying cry for the overthrow of the Shah's oppressive regime. "In fact, service to the oppressed from not just Iran but the world was seen as one of the goals of the revolution" (Martin 148). Other important political groups that played a role in the revolution were the secular National Front, the Islamic liberal Liberation Movement of Iran, a group that gained immense support from the bazaari community, and the Islamic socialist *Mujahidun* (Martin 148). The success of the revolution was contingent upon the aforementioned political parties uniting to formulate a cohesive, nonsectarian vision for the future of Iran.

Although much of the pre-Revolutionary discourse was inspired by and involved Ayatollah Khomeini, he was not actually in Iran until after the Shah was ousted from power. Khomeini's triumphant return from Paris on February 1st, 1979 was a moment of incredible jubilation for the Iranian masses. Khomeini's return signified a new era in the Iranian sociopolitical scenery, and was for many the first official realization that Iran had successfully persevered through the oppressive Pahlavi regime. Khomeini was met at the airport and in the streets by throngs of rapturous Iranians, a reception that was worthy of Khomeini's charisma and awe. Pre-revolutionary Iran was characterized by the voice of

Ayatollah Khomeini, a voice that represented justice and the future of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and upon his arrival in Tehran in 1979, the voice of the revolution had been transformed into the champion of the revolution and the future of Iran. The proceeding months after Khomeini's arrival were very prolific in the codification of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Prominent individuals involved in the revolution emphasized the importance of creating a unified organization that represented Islamic ideals, and as such the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), was formed in March of 1979 (Martin 158). "The new party proposed state control of large capital enterprises, the Islamization of the education system, and assistance for the 'dispossessed'" (Martin 158). Martin's allusion to the "dispossessed" refers not to *mustazafin*, but rather more broadly to the Iranians that were disenfranchised by the Shah and his policies. Later in the same month a vote was conducted and 98.2 percent of the populous approved of the creation of an Islamic state, resulting in the first draft of the new constitution being formulated in June of 1979 (Martin 158).

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran was designed, according to those responsible for its conception, to uphold, "...Islamic principles and precepts that reflect the aspirations of the Islamic community, the dignity of the human being and the noble values of humanity, together with responsibility before God. These provide for the establishment of justice, political, economic, social and cultural independence, and national integrity" (Martin 159). According to the Constitution, the leader of the republic is charged with embodying and protecting the values upon which the republic was established. Additionally, the leader must be a, "...pious, just, courageous, capable and

knowledgeable jurist, the nature of whose authority is set out in Article 5” (Martin 160). Article 5 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran mandates that during the time of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, the responsibility of *vilayat-i amr*, the mandate to rule, and *imamat-i ummat*, leadership of the people, rests solely with the leader of the republic (Martin 160). It is of paramount importance to note that Ayatollah Khomeini was not insinuating that the leader has comparable power to rule as the Imam, but rather the jurist has accepted the immense responsibility of guiding the people on a proper, just path. It is also important to note that although the leader, in this case Ayatollah Khomeini, was a knowledgeable jurist; knowledgeable jurists had not necessarily been considered political leaders before.

A jurist derived their power from the fact that they were considered to be mujtahids, and as such exercised *ijtihad*, or judgment. A jurist’s ability to exercise *ijtihad* was protected under Article 2.6a of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Martin 160). According to Ayatollah Khomeini, “If we say that government and administration are the responsibility of the [Islamic legal] experts... made up of religious mujtahids who know the laws of G-d, are just and altruistic, have no other ambitions than to serve the good of the people and carry out divine law... what in the world would be wrong with that?” (Halm 139). Khomeini’s words demonstrate the rationale behind implementing such legal experts, jurists, into governmental affairs. The role of a jurist is pivotal in interpreting Shari’a, Islamic law, and as such jurists were placed into the Council of Guardians.

Prior to discussing the framework of the Council of Guardians, one would be remiss to not briefly discuss the delineation between the responsibilities of the jurist and

the Imam. Difficulty emerges when addressing the responsibilities of the *mujtahid* during the period of occultation of the Twelfth Imam. During the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, it becomes the *mujtahid's* responsibility to articulate the doctrines of the Imamate, but “gradually and indirectly, they became the transmitters of the sayings, traditions, and practices of the imams and thus assumed the role of intermediary between the latter and the faithful” (Akhavi 204). Essentially the *mujtahid* assumed the role of a conduit between the Shi‘a faithful and the imam in occultation and was charged with disseminating the doctrinal principles of the Imamate. As such Khomeini, as the supreme *mujtahid*, was granted absolute political and religious control over Iran. In Khomeini’s own words, as recorded by Martin, his role as the leader of the community is as a learned jurist and not an imam:

There has been no one else like the Prophet, and in the succeeding eras there has had to be guidance for the people. Before the Prophet left the world he designated his successors till the time of the occultation . . . and after that the jurists were obliged [to take on the responsibility] of guarding the people (Martin 160-161).

Such *mujtahids* as discussed above comprise the Council of Guardians.

The Council of Guardians which is “... a supervisory council (shûrâ-ye negahbân) of six religious, legal scholars and six secular jurists has the task of monitoring all laws passed by the parliament (Majlis) to assure that they comply with the revealed, divine order...” (Halm 14). According to Martin, “the provision for six qualified (i. e. lay Muslim) lawyers reflects a desire to include the religious laity among the ruling elite” (Martin 162). Additionally, one could speculate that the inclusion of secular jurists in the Council of Guardians is an attempt to diversify the government and ensure that all jurisdictions do not lie with the religiously motivated jurists. Ayatollah Khomeini justified the creation of the Council of Guardians by referring to the failure of the old

Iranian constitution under the Shah. “One of the reasons for clergy rebellion against the shah had been his failure ever to implement article 2 of the old constitution, which had stipulated the creation of a council of mujtahids to certify the compatibility of legislation with Islamic law” (Akhavi 217). Khomeini’s creation of the Council of Guardians ensured that the religious jurists would have the ultimate say over the issuance of laws, allotting an unprecedented amount of power to the religious scholars.

Ayatollah Khomeini was very apt to stress the difference between his form of Islamic government and a Western system of government. “He distinguished between democracy, which he saw as a secular Western system, committed to the rights and interests of the individual; and Islamic government, in which there was no division of religion and state, but commitment to the Islamic community and the development of righteous individuals within it” (Martin 157). Khomeini’s government, at least in his interpretation, was a call for social justice and a return of Iranian society to a pious community that followed the example of Imam Hussein, an example that the entire revolution was legitimized by.

Conclusion:

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, like many prior revolutions, was a popularly supported response to a corrupt regime, but unlike many prior revolutions, the main ideology fueling the revolution was that of a religion. Shi’a Islam is characterized as being removed from the political arena, but in the buildup to the revolution and the organization of the newly formed “Islamic Government,” Shi’a Islam was the predominant ideology. The oppressed Muslim majority of Iran, comprised largely of Imami Shi’a, could empathize with Ali Shariati’s form of Shi’ism, which defined the

religion as, "... the struggle for justice against foreign rule, tyranny, feudalism, and exploitation" (Halm 134).

Ali Shariati's form of Shi'ism was one that concerned itself with more than religion, but addressed the need to overthrow corruption and embrace a just society free of political despotism and oppression. This form of Shi'ism is representative of the religious ideological background of the revolution as espoused by the leader Ayatollah Khomeini and his ideological predecessors. The utilization of Shi'a religious imagery motivated the discontent Iranian masses to collective action against the Shah's regime, but without the necessary socioeconomic precondition present in society, Ali Shariati's Shi'ism would have not been enough to transform revolutionary thought to revolutionary action.

The pre-revolutionary Iranian economy was characterized by uneven growth, particularly in the oil sector. The exorbitant influx of revenue from the oil sector allowed the Iranian government to become the majority shareholders in the housing, banking, land, and agrarian sectors. Iran's high level of state intervention resulted in the disenfranchisement of several prominent and influential social groups, as many of the Shah's policies eroded at their power base and livelihood. Additionally, the uneven economic development precipitated a dualism in society between the wealthy bureaucratic officials, most of whom were members of ethno-religious minorities, and the indigent Iranian masses. The pre-revolutionary economic disparity was deleterious to nearly every social group, but the *ulama* capitalized on the socioeconomic misfortunes of their Iranian brethren and promulgated their Islamically oriented remedy for Iran's socioeconomic strife.

It is very difficult to separate the socioeconomic/political and religious aspects of the Iranian Revolution, as they are not mutually exclusive but rather benefited from one another and needed one another. The Iranian Revolution was a successful revolution because all of the discontent Iranians in the various social strata united against the Shah. Such strong cohesion was made possible by the utilization of a common rallying point for the Iranian masses, Shi'ism, and more specifically a Shi'ism that charged itself with fighting for social justice and defending the oppressed. Ayatollah Khomeini, aware of the socioeconomic problems and the growing disparity between the affluent and the indigent, utilized Shi'a ideology to legitimize the rebellion against the Shah. Fortuitously, Iranian society was experiencing an ideological void left by the overthrow of Mossadeq and the Shah's ideology of modernization as elucidated during the White Revolution. As a result of the immense Western influence in Iranian affairs, many Iranians felt a void in their national identity and ideology, feeling as though Iran was merely a subordinate to larger Western powers. At the same time Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary ideology emerged as a prominent force in the minds of the Iranians.

As frustration grew towards the Shah's regime in Iranian societal discourse, Islam reemerged in the popular discourse as a reasonable and realistic alternative to the status quo. Islam was even seen as an attractive alternative within the more traditionally secular spheres of Iranian society, namely the bazaaris. What Shi'a Islam became in pre-Revolutionary Iran was a comfortable alternative to the corruption and despotism that was the Shah. However, it is imperative to highlight that Islam would not have been embraced so readily had there not existed the socioeconomic preconditions that plagued

pre-revolutionary Iran. Akhavi sums up the socioeconomic situation of Iran prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution as "... 'the rich got richer and the poor got poorer'" (201).

Shi'a Islam was the predominate ideology behind the 1979 Iranian Revolution, an ideology that articulated the oppression felt by Iranian society and provided an impetus for collective action against the state. Shi'ism offered a rallying point for all discontent Iranians to unify against the Shah, but more importantly Shi'ism symbolized the struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor, it symbolized the triumph over tyranny and despotism. Shi'i history is rooted in the struggle against oppression and as such the entire Iranian Revolution of 1979 attained a certain modern day Karbala significance. The Karbala paradigm held such symbolic significance in the revolutionary rhetoric that many Iranians attributed resisting the Shah and his corrupt regime as fighting alongside Hussein against Yazid at Karbala. To more secular Iranians, the Karbala paradigm did not play as significant of a role in their revolutionary passion play, but it did present an arena to share and disseminate revolutionary discourse and presented an opportunity for Khomeini and the ideas of his ideological predecessors to capitalize on the antipathy towards the Pahlavi regime.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution was a popularly supported political revolution that was a result of rampant socioeconomic disparities within Iranian society. Despite the socioeconomic background of the Iranian Revolution, much of the ideological justification was routed through Shi'ism, which was brilliantly espoused by the ideological mastermind of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini. One would be remiss to attempt to completely define the 1979 Iranian Revolution as either a political revolution or a religious revolution, rather it has become increasingly clear that it was a novel

combination of religiously charged ideological discourse that capitalized upon the socioeconomic problems of the time. The socioeconomic and religious aspects of the 1979 Iranian Revolution were not mutually exclusive but rather relied upon one another and complimented one another to create the uniquely successful revolutionary discourse of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

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