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# The Ideology and Praxis of Shi'ism in the Iranian Revolution

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The Iranian revolution of 1979 presents a case in which religion has stimulated profound social change, rather than serving only as a basis for social integration. Although scholars have recently been reminded of the revolutionary potential of religious commitments,<sup>1</sup> the view that religion tends to inhibit large-scale social change continues to enjoy currency. It may be that, in the light of events in Iran in the last five years, observers of Islamic societies will now be tempted to overstress the revolutionary tendencies of that great world religion. Yet it is difficult to exaggerate the force and depth of feeling which Shi'i belief and practice has generated in Iran for the purpose of the structural transformation of society.

There is, however, the risk of reifying the concept of Shi'ism, and thus care must be taken to identify the most important aspects in both the doctrinal/ideological and the practical/behavioral dimensions. What frequently has been termed Shi'ism in recent commentary on Iranian society and politics has perhaps led us into the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Behind the concept lurk elements of real political, social, and economic life. We need to focus on the fact that human beings are attributing varying meanings to Shi'ism, and the observer must identify the diverse individuals and groups for whom the point of reference is Shi'ism in all their intellectual and organizational variety. The conclusion of this article is that Shi'ism can and has meant different things to different social actors. Its adepts and practitioners in both the prerevolutionary and revolutionary periods have demonstrated varieties of thought and action almost such as to require the use of terms like "polycentrism" to characterize Shi'ism.

## THE QUESTION OF MODELS

The literature on the historical and political sociology of Iran has generated several models which may be useful in helping us to understand the role of the

This study was originally presented to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, New York, 3-6 September 1981. I am grateful to the following colleagues for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this article: Ervand Abrahamian, George E. Delury, Nikki R. Keddie, Houshang E. Chehabi, and M. Crawford Young.

<sup>1</sup> Guenter Lewy, *Religion and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

state in the country's social evolution. Soviet scholars surveying the various eras of Iranian history have tended to apply class analysis based on changes in the mode of production.<sup>2</sup> A second attempt to provide an appropriate model for the study of the Iranian state centers on the application of the concept of patrimonialism. This effort stresses the absence of feudal forms and structures in an otherwise basically medieval authoritarian system.<sup>3</sup> A third model, directed more specifically at the nineteenth-century Iranian state but with important implications for its twentieth-century counterpart, focuses on the concept of oriental despotism. This last effort is more satisfying than that listed first above because the analyst brings greater sensitivity to the empirical evidence.<sup>4</sup> Somewhat along the same lines, other specialists have directed attention to the phenomenon of the *rentier* state "whose sudden acquisition of enormous revenue sources leads to its hypertrophy. . . ."<sup>5</sup> More recently, dissatisfaction with existing models in the literature has led one observer to advance "bourgeois monarchical capitalism" as a substitute in the belief in its greater explanatory value.<sup>6</sup>

One is struck by the usefulness of most of these models. The Soviet interest in identifying different stages in the evolution of modes of production has the advantage of reminding us that the subject matter can best be approached within the framework of political economy. The stress on patrimonialism, in its turn, is of great interest inasmuch as it suggests the absence of intermediate autonomous groups with legal prerogatives of their own to defend and promote their interests. Oriental despotism, especially in the amalgamation of both variants (Marx's stress on "weak society" and Engels's emphasis on "strong state"), is of great importance for the analysis of the Pahlavi state. The concept of the *rentier* state suggests excessive growth in one sector—here, petroleum—at the expense of others and the evolution of a brittle and fragile sociopolitical and economic infrastructure that appears deceptively intact until fundamentally challenged.

It is at this point that I would like to advance the notion of corporatism. This concept permits an understanding of the nature of the state in terms of the dimensions of political participation and legitimacy. The impact of any state

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Ashraf, "Historical Obstacles to the Development of a Bourgeoisie in Iran," in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, Michael Cook, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 308–32.

<sup>3</sup> James A. Bill, "Class Analysis and the Dialectics of Modernization in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 3:4 (October 1972), 417–34.

<sup>4</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, "Oriental Despotism: The Case of Qajar Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 5:1 (January 1974), 3–31.

<sup>5</sup> M. Crawford Young, personal communication. For the Iranian example, see Hossein Mahdavy, "Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran," in *Studies in Economic History*, Cook, ed., 428–67.

<sup>6</sup> Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1979), 38–63.

on its society will be in relation to the degree of its legitimacy among members of the political community, as well as according to the nature of their participation in politics. A loose form of corporatism (lacking the historic features of *Gleichschaltung* associated with European corporate systems of the 1930s and 1940s) was the historical solution of the Pahlavi state (1926–1979). In the end, corporatism led to the bureaucratization of the state's power and of the regime attempts to control mass participation. In the formulation of public policy, the objective of Muhammad Riza Pahlavi, shah since 1941, was to maximize the people's support for the state and minimize their demands upon it.<sup>7</sup>

In corporate state systems, interests are centered in units that are "singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically-ordered, functionally differentiated." The state creates such units and licenses them to provide a monopoly of representation in designated functional areas. There is, however, no question of such units, once licensed, becoming free of the state. In fact, they must observe limits upon their activity which are set by the state through constitutional, statutory, or administrative codes.<sup>8</sup> Such arrangements are well suited to the strategy of maximizing supports while minimizing demands. And although the Pahlavi state was not able to mobilize power to the degree that some have suggested, it did have formidable repressive capacity when the regime chose to apply repression.

Yet, the corporatism advanced by the Pahlavi state contained a critical weakness. In an area of the world where the religious basis of political legitimacy is of central importance, the Pahlavi state so excluded Shi'ism that it failed to gain religiously sanctioned moral acceptance. Nor did the regime come even remotely close to meshing its corporatist structure with the salvationist yearnings of Shi'ites—especially the petite bourgeoisie and those at the bottom of the economic pyramid. In both prospect and retrospect one can see that this failure was due to two things: the coextensiveness of the religious and political spheres in Islam, and the abiding determination of Iranian Shi'ites to withhold their approval from the shah's claim to legitimacy. This is not to say that Shi'i doctrine categorically rejects the legitimacy of all temporal rulers. However, at best, 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

<sup>7</sup> Myron Weiner, "Political Participation," in *Crises and Sequences of Political Development*, Leonard Binder, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 161.

<sup>8</sup> Philip C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?" in *The New Corporatism*, Frederick Pike and Thomas Stritch, eds. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 93–94. As Houshang Chehabi has pointed out, classical corporatism features—in the case of authoritarian types of corporatism—very strict vertical integration of capitalists and labor by branch of activity. In the Iranian case, such rigorous integration did not exist, although the regime had begun this process in the 1960s so that, by the time of the revolution, one could speak of it in embryo.

Imam alone has been utilized as doctrinal justification for rebellion against an impious ruler.<sup>9</sup>

The Pahlavi variant of corporatism was structurally flawed in consequence. A wide gap existed between the corporatist organization of the economy and political life, on the one hand, and the continued if enfeebled ability of the religious forces to resist cooptation into the institutions of the Pahlavi system on the other. Through this gap were to pour the revolutionary masses, eventually overthrowing the old regime and initiating a new state order that remains difficult to categorize.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF PAHLAVI CORPORATISM

The structure of Pahlavi corporatism can best be illuminated by discussion of its institutions and public policies. This dual emphasis will highlight matters of organization and social mobility.

There is consensus that the Iranian political system from the time of World War II took on the following forms: 1941–53, pluralist politics; 1953–63, authoritarian mobilization politics; 1963–79, monarchical absolutism and bureaucratization of power. Although the features of the last period had their origin and development in the earlier years, this discussion will focus on the final period of the shah's rule.

During these sixteen years the major institutions of the state were the monarchy, the intelligence services, the military, the central planning apparatus, and certain key ministries, such as interior and information. There was a party structure, but it remained an ancillary feature of the regime and failed in its purpose to mobilize masses and intellectuals behind the shah's "White Revolution."

The central role of the monarchy is so obvious and has so often been cited<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A debate is taking place in the literature on the question of doctrinal principles and rule. Arguing in the tradition that the doctrine sanctions clergy assertiveness and revolutionary rejection of impious rule (*zulm*) are A. K. S. Lambton, "Quis Custodiet Custodes?" *Studia Islamica*, 5:2 (1956), 125–48, and 6:1 (1956), 125–46; Nikki R. Keddie, "The Roots of the 'Ulama's Power in Modern Iran," *Studia Islamica*, 29 (1969), 31–53; Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Leonard Binder, "The Proofs of Islam," in *Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, George Makdisi, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 118–40; and Joseph Eliash, "The Ithna'ashari Shi'i Juristic Theory of Political and Legal Authority," *Studia Islamica*, 29 (1969), 17–30. In a later article, "Some Misconceptions Concerning Shi'i Political Theory," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9:1 (February 1979), 9–25, Eliash admonishes against too literal an interpretation of Shi'i doctrine on *zulm*. As against the traditional view, the revisionists suggest that Shi'i doctrine has been quietistic on the question of rule. Consult Said Amir Arjomand, "Religion, Political Action and Legitimate Domination in Shi'ite Iran: Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries A.D.," *Archives européennes de sociologie*, 20:1 (1979), 59–109; and Mangol Bayat, "Islam in Pahlavi and Post-Pahlavi Iran: A Cultural Revolution?" in *Islam and Development: Religion and Sociopolitical Change*, John L. Esposito, ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1980), 89–94.

<sup>10</sup> Leonard Binder, *Iran: Political Development in a Changing Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962); James A. Bill, *The Politics of Iran: Groups, Classes and Modernization* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles Merrill, 1972); Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, 2d ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979); Marvin Zonis, *The Political Elite of Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

that not much need be added beyond the note that whereas the country's constitution (1906–7) stipulated that the shah reign—not rule—the actions of this shah since 1953 were in full disregard of these provisions. Though his military-based monarchy may not have become an arrant “fascist-style totalitarian regime,”<sup>11</sup> his manipulation of politics resulted in the gross violation of the country's fundamental law.

The identification of the state with the monarchy, if not with the person of the shah, became the key objective of this ruler. He used the security services and the army to ensure his purpose, and the proliferation of agencies within the military-security establishment to accomplish his ends should cause less surprise than the fact that internal rivalries among chiefs of agencies did not surface more often than they did. Of the numerous units, “four [were] in some ways overt police units, and the other four [performed] various intelligence and secret police functions.”<sup>12</sup>

Since military power alone is insufficient and inefficient in administering a society, the army, police, and intelligence services did not serve as day-to-day instruments of rule. The shah had to rely upon a socioeconomic program which government language characterized as progressive and even “revolutionary.” Because the state in many societies can mobilize such extensive power, it often becomes the paramount entrepreneur, as well. The shah's third, fourth, and fifth development plans (1962–79) were the major instruments of national integration. The expansion of the national market, under the aegis of national planning, into the periphery was an orchestrated effort that led to the sedentarization of the tribes, the capitalization of agriculture, the emergence of a massive oil sector, and the growth of a modest, if internationally uncompetitive, manufacturing sector. As part of this system, two new classes came into increasing evidence: the middle class and the industrial working class.

In the 1960s and 1970s the regime destroyed the autonomy of the organizations of these two classes. Such organizations had already begun to emerge by the 1920s, and the labor movement had been a vital part of the Iranian political scene up to mid century, with membership approaching half a million.<sup>13</sup> After his reinstatement on the throne in 1953, the shah reacted to the power of the working-class organizations by creating official unions that became integrated into the Pahlavi state. The Ministry of Labor, moreover, had less to do with the organizational aspects of these unions than did the secret police.<sup>14</sup> As for the middle class, it did not enjoy independence, even though as a group it benefited a good deal from the modernization policies of

<sup>11</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, “The Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution,” *Middle East Research and Information Project Reports*, 87 (May 1980), 25.

<sup>12</sup> Halliday, *Iran*, 76.

<sup>13</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 347–71.

<sup>14</sup> Halliday, *Iran*, 205.

the shah. That this class acquiesced to, but without participating in, decisions of the regime derived from its gains in growth from the industrialization policies. Deprived of decision-making authority for its institutions, especially the syndicates and the Chamber of Commerce, the middle class could not take the initiative on broad policy issues.<sup>15</sup> But this did not matter as long as members of this class, as individuals, continued to enjoy prosperity.

In summary, the Pahlavi state seemed patterned after corporate political systems, a chief trait of which is to keep access to the levers of power restricted to a small elite while establishing a hierarchical facade that purports to organize broad mass participation in endeavors of public choice. In evolving the corporate structure, an ideology was fashioned which in its pronouncements stressed distribution but which in practice favored production.

This leads, then, to the question of which groups benefited most from such policies and which lost the most? The capitalist middle class was probably the most direct beneficiary of these policies. This was largely related to the phenomenal increase of oil revenues after 1973, but it was also linked to deliberate administrative decisions already adopted in the previous decade to push hard for the consolidation of the middle-class, which had emerged in the 1930s. The spread of the industrial and foreign trade markets in the following decades led to the rise of a more clearly identifiable middle class, which the shah intended to make the social basis of his state while simultaneously denying it real decision-making authority. A corporate group of financiers, investors, traders, and industrialists thus arose as a consequence of over-all economic growth in Iran.

The investment ratio is a good general index of sectoral growth, and in the years 1962 through 1973 (the period of the third and fourth development plans), vast sums were channeled by the government into the economic sectors. Supplementing that effort was investment by private entrepreneurs, whose total investments amounted to "some two-thirds to three-quarters as much as the public sector. . . ."<sup>16</sup>

The relatively favorable position of private entrepreneurs may also be seen from figures on expenditures by urban families, as shown in Table 1. These data were generated by the Central Bank of Iran, and are arranged to show expenditure per population decile, ranked according to wealth. While expenditure figures are not as useful as those on income distribution, they are revealing. The 1973-74 statistics show that 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.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Bill, *Politics of Iran*, 53-72.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Issawi, "The Iranian Economy, 1925-1975: Fifty Years of Economic Development," in *Iran under the Pahlavis*, George Lenczowski, ed. (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1978), 137.

<sup>17</sup> Data for the United States in 1978 indicate that the top two quintiles showed about the same

TABLE 1  
*Distribution of Urban Expenditure in Iran, by Decile*

Decile (lowest to highest)	Percentage of expenditure	
	1959-60	1973-74
1	1.7%	1.3%
2	2.9	2.4
3	4.0	3.4
4	5.0	4.7
5	6.1	5.0
6	7.3	6.8
7	8.9	9.3
8	11.8	11.1
9	16.4	17.5
10	35.3	37.9

SOURCE: Ervand Abrahamian, "The Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution," *Middle East Research and Information Project Reports*, 87 (May 1980), 23. See also for confirmation, Firouz Vakil, "Iran's Basic Economic Problems: A Twenty Year Horizon," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 25:4 (July 1977), 723-25.

Figures for a single case are indicative, but a comparative perspective is more helpful. In a recent essay,<sup>18</sup> the discrepancy between rich and poor in Iran under the shah is shown to have been greater than that in Egypt, where the economy has been historically weak. The data, shown in Table 2, are not strictly comparable because the figures for Egypt are based on the years 1964-65 (*cf.* Iran, 1968) and households in both rural and urban areas are included (*cf.* Iran, urban households only). Yet, the statistics are of interest, particularly since poverty would tend to be reflected more in the rural areas in any case. These figures represent the situation in the late 1960s, but it has also been suggested that they marked an ongoing trend such that in Iran under the second Pahlavi shah "the rich got richer and the poor got poorer."<sup>19</sup>

The capitalist middle class also included farmers who benefited from the land reform policies of the shah. The regime's critics sometimes have ignored the accomplishments of its land reform. It is appropriate to note that, by the end of the reform in 1971, the number of those who owned no land prior to the

skew as that for Iran in 1973-74. However, the middle quintile in the case of the United States revealed a figure of 17.5 percent of expenditures, whereas in the Iranian case the analogous statistic was 11.8 percent, "suggesting the old 'small middle class equals low stability' equation." I am grateful to George E. Delury for bringing this fact to my attention.

<sup>18</sup> Elias Tuma, "The Rich and the Poor in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal*, 34:4 (Autumn 1980), 420.

<sup>19</sup> Gholam A. Liaghat, "Changes in a New Middle Class through the Analysis of Census Data: The Case of Iran between 1956-1966," *Middle East Journal*, 34:3 (Summer 1980), 349.



TABLE 2  
*Income Distribution in Iran and Egypt (in percentage)*

<i>Decile</i> (poorest to richest)	<i>Percentage of income</i>	
	<i>Iran, 1968</i> (urban)	<i>Egypt, 1964–65</i> (urban and rural)
1	1.2	1.5
2	2.8	3.1
3	3.8	4.2
4	4.9	5.3
5	5.9	6.5
6	7.2	8.1
7	8.8	10.1
8	11.0	12.8
9	14.7	17.3
10	39.7	31.1
Wealthiest 5% of population	29.7	19.2
Gini coefficient	0.5018	0.4337

SOURCE: Elias Tuma, "The Rich and the Poor in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal*, 34:4 (Autumn 1980), 420.

reform and became owners as a result amounted to 15 percent of the total number of landowners.<sup>20</sup>

The groups that lost most heavily under the shah's programs were the tribes, the poor peasantry, the petite bourgeoisie (bazaar merchants, shopkeepers, and artisans), and the urban poor (low-income industrial workers, self-employed—such as taxi drivers—and the lumpenproletariat). It will be noted that the landed aristocracy is not included in this list of losers. The reason is that this class was invited, on terms favorable to it, to become part of the urban middle class of industrialists, financiers, and entrepreneurs, or, if they wished to remain in the countryside, to become partners in the large state-regulated agribusiness farms that were spreading throughout the country after the mid 1960s. The structural transformation of the Iranian countryside in the 1960s and 1970s which resulted from the capitalization of agriculture did not shift power from large landowners to the Iranian equivalent of a self-sufficient small-holder yeomanry. Instead, "land [was] transferred only to *some* peasants, while power in the village [was] to a great extent appropriated by the state."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, "The Iranian Village before and after Land Reform," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3:3 (1968), 87.

<sup>21</sup> Halliday, *Iran*, 122. Halliday's italics.

But of course the one stratum of society whose downward mobility under the shah was most consequential for the collective social action that led to the revolution was the clergy. The bureaucratization of power was accompanied by the seizure of the clergy's jobs, lands, revenues, *madrasahs* (theological colleges), and administration of shrines. The process of declassing the clergy might have succeeded if the shah had not insisted upon appropriating the clergy's last remaining resource: "the cultural symbols which in the past [had] been so vital in inculcating among Iranians a sense of self, an explanation of the cosmos and social reality."<sup>22</sup> The masses that the clergy mobilized, therefore, were not only socially, economically, and politically deprived, but also culturally alienated.

#### THE SHI' DOCTRINE OF AUTHORITY AND THE STATE

The Shi'i position is based on the following beliefs: (1) Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, should be succeeded by his descendents, the imams; (2) salvation is vouchsafed to those who believe in the restoration of God's justice, to be accomplished by the last Imam when he reappears on earth; (3) every historical period requires a "proof" of God, incarnate in the line of these descendants.

Iranian Shi'ites are known as Imamites or Twelvers. The Imamite Shi'ites believe that the prophet's rightful heirs were twelve in number. Only the first in this line, 'Ali, actually ruled and then only briefly (A.D. 651–56). The others were persecuted as a matter of official policy by the rulers of the Islamic community. The social mythos of Shi'ism suggests that blame for the death of their imams must be placed at the door of the Sunni caliphs who ruled the Islamic world at that time, even though there is historical evidence that some imams did not die a violent death.

The practical role of the imams, except for 'Ali, consisted in spiritual guidance. The last Imam is believed to have disappeared as a child in the year A.D. 874. The faithful anticipate his return as the "One Who Arises, the Master of the Age, the Mahdi." His reappearance will require the apocalyptic visions and expectations of the true believers.

The doctrine of the Imamate—or rule by the Imam—addresses itself to the occultation of the twelfth Imam. Shi'ites must accept the fact of his absence for an indefinite period of history; yet, the doctrine specifies that every historical age must feature a proof of God manifested in the Imam. It became a part of the doctrine, therefore, that the twelfth Imam maintained contact with his followers despite his phenomenal absence from the community.

The clergy argued that the occultation of the Imam did not mean that the proof of God did not exist. They maintained that God commanded the Imam

<sup>22</sup> Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 183.

into hiding because of fear that he would be killed. Because the Imam was obeying the will of God, and God meant that there need be a proof of Him for every age, then the proof must be construed to exist. The complex logic is captured in the following explanation:

The existence of the [proof] was necessary because the non-existence of the Imam . . . would have meant the . . . end of the religious injunctions, because the latter would have no protector. But if he . . . went into occultation by the command of God, and if he had the known means of mediation, then the proof continued on earth, because both he and the means of mediation were present. The state of occultation did not invalidate the presence of the proof. . . .<sup>23</sup>

But what role was assumed by the clergy apart from articulation of Imamite doctrine? 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. The emphasis must be upon the word “indirectly,” because there is no doctrinal basis for arguing that the highest ranking clergymen, the *mujtahids*, received a categorical appointment from the imams themselves in their lifetimes to be the imams’ replacements. Nevertheless, in a much later period, around the seventeenth century, tampering with the doctrinal principles appears to have occurred in order to make it seem as though a categorical, *ex ante*, appointment of *mujtahids* had been granted by the imams.<sup>24</sup>

The Imam’s occultation also posed the dilemma of authority. If the community was to be organized, administered, and preserved according to a pattern that would be pleasing to God, then who was to lead? On this question the Imamites may be said to have equivocated. As long as they lived under Sunni rule, they were absolved from answering. The absence of a requirement for an oath of allegiance (*bay’ah*) to the hidden Imam until his reappearance permitted Shi’ites to be faithful and yet also acknowledge the rule of the Sunni caliph. However, after 1501, Imamite Shi’ism became the religion of a centralized Iranian state under the Safavid shahs (1501–1722). It became more and more urgent to discuss whether or not the clergy had doctrinal grounds for claiming the deputyship of the imams as secular shahs now began pressing such claims themselves.

Moreover, in the eighteenth century an intraclergy dispute resulted in a key victory on the doctrinal side for those who wanted an assertive social role for the clergy. The victorious faction successfully argued that the *mujtahids* were entitled to use their independent judgment in interpreting the law. A doctrinal principle consequently came to be used as a lever for clergy activism in social

<sup>23</sup> Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi’ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 105.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 101. Eliash, “Some Misconceptions,” has shown that *ex ante* appointment never occurred.

matters beyond the narrow compass of ethical and pietistic concerns of the past. On this view, as against that which insisted no room existed for independent judgment, authoritative opinions (*fatwas*) could now be issued anathematizing secular policies. Empowered with this prerogative, the clergy became a corporate stratum whose leaders—the *mujtahids*—could expect imitation by the masses in practical and legal matters. The most distinguished of the *mujtahids* soon came to exercise great informal political influence. During the time of the Qajar shahs (1796–1925), the clergy began to claim that the eminent *mujtahids* of the age were, in fact, the proofs of the Imam. This doctrinal shift ensued from tampering with tradition, but the clergy mentally justified the slight-of-hand, no doubt, on grounds of the increasingly intolerable acts of their secular rulers.

What is interesting in all this is that at the time the centralized state was created in sixteenth-century Iran, the clergy were the state's clients. The creation of Shi'ism as a state religion in the 1500s was not due to influence of the *mujtahids* but rather to the decision of a Sufi leader responding to chiliaristic expectations rife in northwest Iran and eastern Turkey. Having conquered the territory of Iran, this individual began then to import Shi'ite *mujtahids* into Iran to serve in the administration of the state. Clearly, then, these clergy were dependent upon and vulnerable to the granting or withdrawal of the state's largesse and the maneuverings of the shah. In due course, many of even the top-ranking clergymen who were already inside the country were brought into the state bureaucracy. Only a minority of the *mujtahids* in this period maintained a preferred aloofness from state service.

Doctrinally, the religious leaders legitimated Safavid temporal rule by acquiescing in the claims made by the shahs to be the descendents of the seventh Imam, an acquiescence which added weight to the Safavids' claim to be rulers of the community. These shahs came to be known by the sobriquet appropriated by them, and not contested then by the clergy—*zillullah*, the shadow of God.

The increasing involvement of the clergy in politics in the most recent two centuries has had to do with a variety of causes, not all of them doctrinal. For instance, the increasing penetration of imperialism led the clergy to forge an alliance with intellectuals, artisans, and merchants. This political activism of the clergy did not amount to categorical challenges to the sovereignty of the shahs. The ruler continued to be regarded as an imperfect leader, and clergy protest was for the most part confined to very specific grievances against unjust decisions affecting local interests.<sup>25</sup>

When a strong *mujtahid* challenge to the shah did occur in 1891–92 over the grant of a tobacco monopoly to the British, the shah quickly capitulated. But even then his sovereign authority was not in jeopardy. A decade later,

<sup>25</sup> Algar, *Religion and State*, *passim*.

during the constitutional revolution (1905–11), the stronger doctrinal argument rested with anticonstitutionalist clergymen.

Nevertheless, Shi'i doctrine contains implicit justification for clergy assertiveness. First, they have the residual right to warn the community of the violation of the Imam's justice. Second, doctrinal justifications could be found for political action in the Qur'an, for example, "You are the best community I have sent forth among the people, commanding the good and enjoining from evil," and "O you who believe, obey God, obey the prophet and those in authority among you." Enforcing good and preventing evil are seen as ultimately political acts which the entire community may undertake. "Those in authority among you" are considered by Shi'ites to be the imams and even, some believe, the *mujtahids*.

In no sense, however, did the clergy advance doctrinal arguments for locating sovereignty in their own corporate group. When they perceived that their secular allies in the constitutional revolution were moving toward Western notions of popular sovereignty and republicanism, the clergy defected and ultimately sponsored the rise to the throne of a military officer who appeared to be willing to strengthen the cause of Shi'ism. It was thus ironic that this individual was to embark upon a series of policies which in fact led to the evisceration of the religious institution. Three generations later, however, the successors of these clergy would lead perhaps the most astounding revolution in modern times.

Is there an Islamic theory of collective action? From the Sunni perspective, the fundamental unit of social reality is the community of believers. Collective social action is conceived in terms of salvation, and the charisma of the community is the key to its attainment. The importance of community charisma and infallibility may be seen in the verse already cited—"You are the best community. . . ."—and in the saying, attributed to the prophet, "My community shall never agree upon error."

Collective social action against constituted authority is sanctioned only in the event of a ruler's impiety, but unanimously accepted criteria by which to assess the rule of princes do not exist. Moreover, no machinery evolved for use in applying sanctions against impious rulers. There is only the general guideline in the Qur'an that "there is no duty of obedience in sin."<sup>26</sup>

In fact, revolution is considered ultimately a threat to the will of God. The concept of God's community cannot be faulty, for it is based upon membership of believers who have accepted rule over animals and plants as a trust from Him; it is organized by those whom God has sent forth to be the leaders of mankind. Even if a ruler be impious, the danger of revolution to the community is so great that overriding proof of dereliction is required before

<sup>26</sup> Bernard Lewis, "Islamic Concepts of Revolution," in *Revolution in the Middle East*, P. J. Vatikiotis, ed. (London: Weidenfeld, 1972), 33.

action is taken. In the absence of such proof, inaction may be preferable because a ruler cannot transcend the limits of his own mortality, and thus the situation can improve.

In the Shi'i view of collective social action, the charisma of the community is replaced by that of the Imam. Salvation is guaranteed only through the implementation of the Imam's justice. The Imam "was entitled to political leadership as much as to religious authority, [although] his imamate did not depend upon his actual rule."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the *mujtahids*, as a result of the eighteenth-century triumph noted above, have played a role that the Sunni clergy have forsaken: they exercise power to issue *fatwas* on crucial political issues.

Collective social action in the Iranian revolution is best seen in terms of both the ideal and material interests of those participating in it. The essentially Tocquevillean explanation of increasing general prosperity combined with a sudden change in the fortunes of a pivotal social force (here, the capitalist middle class, which began defecting from the regime in the mid 1970s as massive arms purchases led to a credit squeeze which severely restricted their borrowing capability, a liquidity crisis, and national borrowing in the international financial markets) goes some way to illuminate the weakness of the regime. Growing class conflict can be seen in the increase in the number of industrial strikes and incidents of labor turmoil in the 1970s over the previous decade. But indispensable to a proper understanding of the Iranian revolution is the Weberian notion that, in gauging interests, ideas must be seen to play an autonomous role.

Yet, it would be a mistake to believe that the revolution stemmed from mobilization through the doctrinal principles of official Shi'ism. Though the revolution was led by a grand *mujtahid*, the Ayatallah Ruhullah al-Musavi Khumayni, due emphasis must be given to the popular or folk aspects in considering its religious basis. On this dimension, the rituals, passion plays, and narrative accounts of the lives of the imams occupied a central place in the social drama. These rituals do not have inherent meanings. Instead, such meanings are attributed—as Weber argues—to the rituals by the actors in the drama. Within this framework, though Iranians were mobilized by one of Shi'ism's highest ranking official leaders, these people were really laying their lives on the line in order to redeem pledges to sacrifice themselves as part of a social order that calls for such martyrdom. The Iranian revolution came about through militant but basically unarmed demonstrations. The masses acquired weapons only at the very end when guerrilla groups attacked military depots and distributed weapons.

One of the hallmarks of the demonstrations prior to the shah's departure on

<sup>27</sup> Wilfred Madelung, "Imama," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (n.s.), III, fasc. 59–60 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 1167.

16 January 1979 were the passion plays. These enactments refer to the martyrdom of the third Imam, Husayn, on the battlefield at the hands of the forces of the Sunni caliph in A.D. 680. This Imam's cause was rebellion against Sunni impious tyranny. Present-day renditions of his story have clear implications for the legitimacy of the current Iranian regime, since the passion plays have allegorical value. People who are martyred for Husayn's cause are considered to be worthy themselves of the Imam's primordial sacrifice.

Such mass actions of collective social protest by demonstrators inspired by passion plays constituted efforts to be worthy of the Imam's trust on the part of the faithful, who thereby proved themselves members of an exalted community. To non-Shi'ites these actions may appear irrational. If the sacrifices are deemed a means for actuating the mechanism of solidarity within the community, however, they appear as structurally essential in protecting loyalty groups against disintegration.<sup>28</sup>

The official "high religion" of Shi'ism has little to do with passion plays—a fact that did not deter Ayatullah Khomeini from utilizing them in mobilizing the masses. Michael Fischer is essentially correct in arguing that the collective action of Iranians from October 1977 to February 1979 comprised a giant morality play on the national level.<sup>29</sup> The climax in such plays is the imam's martyrdom, but the triggering mechanism of martyrdom is the repeated question of participants: "May I be your ransom?" In the Christian tradition, the sacrifice of one leads to the salvation of all. The Shi'i tradition requires that the sacrifice be borne equally.

Thus, revolutionary mobilization stemmed not from ideational responses to abstract doctrinal elements. Instead, it derived from the conjuncture of two factors: (1) the latitude the doctrine provided to the *mujtahids* to pronounce social criticism of impiety, and (2) the cathartic function of the passion play. The revolution occurred both because the masses wanted to improve their life chances and because they were engaging in concrete, practical, and—for them—stable reactions to maintain the integrity of their community. Simultaneously, Ayatullah Khomeini's use of dramaturgical symbols and his own occultation from society as an exile for fifteen years provided powerful leverage for revolutionary action.

#### REVOLUTIONARY FACTIONALISM

Factions and splits have characterized the Iranian revolution. The cleavages are characteristic not only of relations between clerical and secular groups, as might be expected, but within the clergy itself. It is the latter which will

<sup>28</sup> Hans Kippenburg, "Jeder Tag 'Ashura, Jedes Grab Kerbala," in *Religion und Politik im Iran: Mardom Nameh—Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Gesellschaft des Mittleren Orients*, Kurt Greussing, ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1981), 217–56.

<sup>29</sup> Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 183.

receive attention here. In discussing such factionalism, it will be seen that the traditional labels of 'leftist' and 'rightist' do not serve the purpose of analysis very well. Principled coalitions, in the sense of group adherence to an internally consistent set of positions, have been difficult to identify.

In discussing tactics, strategy, and policies since the revolution, one of the most important points to bear in mind is that the clergy did not have a political party until after the seizure of power. The organizational weapon, as it were, wielded by Ayatullah Khumayni and his associates up to the time of the shah's departure consisted of the informal network of urban-based preachers and theological seminary students.

Upon his return to Iran, Khumayni supplemented this network with the Revolutionary Council (RC). Though the numerical balance between clergy and laymen in the RC favored the second group, the former remained much more unified. The RC soon became a forum of conflict between the adherents of former President Abu al-Hasan Bani Sadr and Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Bihishti (in many respects the *éminence grise* of the regime). Although conflict between the two men and their respective associates was not continuous, their differences were substantive and covered matters of ideology, strategy, tactics, and policy.

The RC had five separate chairmen through its nineteen months of existence. As many as twenty individuals served on it over this time, but membership apparently never exceeded twelve or thirteen at any given time. The members of the RC included (1) Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahhari (first chairman), (2) Ayatullah Muhammad Riza Mahdavi Kani (second chairman), (3) Ayatullah Mahmud Taliqani (third chairman), (4) Ayatullah Muhammad Bihishti (fourth chairman), (5) Abu al-Hasan Bani Sadr (fifth chairman), (6) Ayatullah Husayn 'Ali Muntaziri (Khumayni's supposedly designated successor), (7) Ayatullah 'Abd al-Karim Musavi Ardabili, (8) Hujjat al-Islam Javad Bahunar, (9) Hujjat al-Islam Muhammad 'Ali Khamanah'i, (10) Hujjat al-Islam 'Ali Akbar Hashimi Rafsanjani, (11) 'Abbas Shaybani, (12) Husayn Musavi Khamanah'i, (13) Mustafa Katira'i, (14) Mihdi Bazargan, (15) 'Izzatullah Sahabi, (16) Ibrahim Yazdi, (17) Hasan Ibrahim Habibi, (18) 'Ali Akbar Mu'infar, and (19) Sadiq Qutbzadah.

Of the clergymen, only Mutahhari and Taliqani had ties to the secular left. The departure of these two *mujtahids* in April and June 1979 respectively, Mutahhari through assassination and Taliqani via absence before his death in September, left the RC clergy united under Bihishti's guidance.

The coalitions within the RC apparently divided themselves along the following lines. Kani, Bihishti, Muntaziri, Ardabili, Bahunar, M. A. Khamanah'i, Rafsanjani, Shaybani, and H. M. Khamanah'i believed in (1) restricting political power to a self-designated elite (the clergy), (2) curtailing demands for autonomy by minorities, (3) encouraging activism by the clergy in matters of public morality, and in legislative, judicial, and executive mat-



ters. These are essentially "rightist" positions. But this group may also reasonably be said to have advocated (1) distributing the goods, values, and services of society more equitably, (2) seeking to enfranchise new groups in society, and especially the urban poor, (3) encouraging nationalization of certain enterprises, (4) acknowledging at least the principle of worker participation in the making of management decisions in the factories, (5) extricating the Iranian economy from the world capitalist system, and (6) expropriating property and redistributing it to the needy.

Similarly, Bani Sadr, Bazargan, Sahabi, and Yazdi might be termed "leftists" because they argued for (1) widening the scope of individual choice and access to the levers of power, (2) equitable distribution of goods, services, and values, (3) extensive enfranchisement for the downwardly mobile, (4) state intervention in the economy, (5) backing for workers' councils in enterprises, (6) extensive economic nationalization, and (7) disengaging Iran's economy from the international political economy of capitalism. On the other hand, at other times and in varying degrees, they also urged (1) restricting autonomy for Iran's nationalities and minorities, (2) backing the clergy's activism in the legislative and judicial branches of government, and (3) instituting measures of censorship against the opposition.

Of the remaining members of the RC, perhaps Katira'i aligned himself more with the "rightists," while Habibi, Mu'infar, and Qutbzadah leaned more toward the "leftists." In this framework, these four individuals might have represented swing votes. During their short tenure on the council, Ayatullahs Mutahhari and Taliqani probably supported the "leftists" on a number of issues.

We have no idea of how the RC made policy. Its spokesman, Habibi, certainly never gave any public statements about procedural or substantive issues. We have, thus, to infer positions from events. For example, from December 1979 through January 1980 the northwestern province of Azarbayjan was in turmoil over clashes between the adherents of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) and the supporters of Ayatullah Muhammad Kazim Shari'atmadari, an eminent Azari *mujtahid* resident in Qumm. A delegation of the RC (Ayatullah Kani, Bani Sadr, and Bazargan) went to Qumm to consult with Shari'atmadari, who is the spiritual leader of most Azarbayjanis. According to the RC alliances outlined above, the delegation was "leftward" leaning and therefore would be expected to have been sympathetic to the demands of the Azari minority. An arrangement was reached that was apparently agreeable to Shari'atmadari. Yet, Shari'atmadari soon denounced the "lack of implementation" of the plan he thought he had achieved with the trio and warned of civil war "if a single hair of the accord" were out of place.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Iran Times* (hereafter cited as *IT*), 23 and 30 Azar 1358 H. Sh./14 and 21 December 1979. This paper, published weekly in Washington, D.C., typically consists of fourteen pages in Persian and two pages in English. All references to *IT* are to the Persian language articles.

In keeping with its general policy toward the nationalities, the RC majority apparently prevailed to prevent the carrying out of its own delegation's agreement with Shari'atmadari. A clue to what went wrong may lie in Bani Sadr's trenchant rejection of Kurdish autonomy demands in February 1980.<sup>31</sup> In short, actors do not always behave strictly according to the labels ascribed to them. Moreover, positions may change over time, and assigning someone to a social action category on the basis of his later behavior (in this case, Bani Sadr's post-February 1980 sympathies for the Kurds) risks errors in analysis.

The following issues have divided the leadership in the last four years: nationalities policy and communal relations, due process of law, civil rights, financial policy, constitutional issues, autocracy, corruption, relations with other powers, economic development, and education policy. Limitations of space prohibit detailed investigation of all of these areas, and the discussion below will therefore be confined to the main outline of only a few of them.

#### INTRACLERGY CONFLICT

In the period before the shah's departure, intraclergy conflict already existed. The divisions deepened subsequently, as a hardline (*tundru*) position crystalized against a moderate (*miyanahru*) one. These cleavages can best be viewed in the respective arguments of Ayatullahs Khumayni and Shari'atmadari.<sup>32</sup>

An initial object of contention was the new political structure. Ayatullah Shari'atmadari had supported a broadly formulated question for the March 1979 referendum on the future political system of the country. Ultimately, the narrow formulation demanded by Ayatullah Khumayni and his supporters, (Do you favor an Islamic Republic? Yes or no?) prevailed over Shari'atmadari's preferred version (What kind of political system do you want for the country?).

Second, Shari'atmadari early had permitted his followers to establish a political party—the Muslim People's Party (MPP)—rival to the IRP, which had the support of the urban masses. Before its suppression in late 1979, MPP adherents, who were mainly from Azarbaijan, had broadly criticized many aspects of IRP policies and actions.

Third, Shari'atmadari consistently used terms such as national, nationalist, democratic, sovereignty, whereas Khumayni even more consistently anathematized them as Western terms intended to undermine Shi'ism.

Fourth, Shari'atmadari urged that a constituent assembly be convened to debate a new constitution. He strongly insisted that this body comprise duly elected representatives of the broad masses of the people. Khumayni countered with the narrowly based Council of Experts, to be dominated by IRP

<sup>31</sup> *IT*, 3 Isfand 1358 H. Sh./22 February 1980.

<sup>32</sup> An examination of the conflicts between Khumayni and Shari'atmadari may be found in Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, 172–80.

clergy. The latter carried the day, with predictable consequences for provisions favored by Shari'atmadari on questions of power and sovereignty.

A fifth issue separating the two grand *mujtahids* was that of freedom of association, speech, and the press. Shari'atmadari reasoned that dissonant views could be boycotted but should not be violently suppressed. The matter arose over the famous *Ayandigan* affair, in which that newspaper linked existence of a terrorist organization, Furqan, to religious motivations. The publication of material on Furqan's ideology and activities, without however any accompanying editorial comment, released a flood of accusations by IRP-oriented clergy. Khumayni himself led IRP denunciations of the paper for printing what he regarded as anticlergy propaganda. In the end, a violent mob attack on the paper's plant led to casualties, the destruction of property, and the suspension of publication for a number of weeks. After a brief return to the newsstands under chastened circumstances, the paper was completely taken over by the IRP and renamed *Azadigan*.

The divergence between the views of Khumayni and Shari'atmadari widened in 1980 until the latter either was compelled or voluntarily withdrew into silence. Perhaps the most critical disagreement has been over the new constitution, approved in a December 1979 referendum, which transformed Iran into a theocratic state.<sup>33</sup> Shari'atmadari's basic objection to the draft constitution submitted to the nation by the Council of Experts stemmed from his belief that articles 5 and 110, pertaining to the power of the *faqih* (the supreme clerical leader), and the provisions of articles 6 and 56, relating to national sovereignty, contravened one another. Shari'atmadari trenchantly, if politely, maintained that Shi'i doctrine has no provision at all for the principle of *vilayat-i faqih* (rule exercised on behalf of the imam by the supreme clergyman). Practically speaking, the need for a *faqih* can arise under extraordinary circumstances, he conceded. But once a chief executive is installed, a parliament is elected, and the government receives the latter's vote of confidence, then the need for a *faqih* lapses. Yet, the draft constitution rendered the office of *faqih* a permanent fixture of the political system. In Shari'atmadari's view, however, even during the state of emergency the *faqih*'s powers must be restricted, especially by assigning command of the armed forces to an accountable government official. Failing that, the problem of autocracy would arise once again.<sup>34</sup>

These arguments contrasted sharply with the views expressed by Ayatullah Khumayni in his 1971 book, *Islamic Government*. There, he consistently demands clergy activism in politics, citing a *hadith* attributed to Imam 'Ali concerning the prophet's supplication to God to bless those coming after him. Asked who will be his successors, the prophet had responded, "Those who

<sup>33</sup> Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Middle East Journal*, 34:2 (Spring 1980), 184–204.

<sup>34</sup> *Khalq-i Musalman*, 22 Mihr 1358 H. Sh./14 October 1979.

come after me who transmit my sayings and traditions *and teach them to the people in my absence.*"<sup>35</sup> Khumayni holds that the prophet intended the active teaching of his precepts to secure a dynamic and activist role for the men of religion in Islam. This was tantamount to a doctrinal directive for social action by the clergy.

But Shari'atmadari—this time joined by the immensely popular Taliqani—demurred, countering that in his opinion clergy activism had produced so many problems that he appealed to them to return to the mosques.<sup>36</sup> As if to underline that this statement was not fortuitous, he repeated it four months later, adding for good measure that to his mind the high clergy ought to avoid commerce, as well.<sup>37</sup>

On the role of educators, Ayatullah Shari'atmadari informed a group of visiting university professors at a time particularly trying for them that no group in society could serve it better than theirs.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, Khumayni has furiously demanded a purge of the universities, condemning them for harboring what he has termed communists, American agents, and imperialists.<sup>39</sup>

On the Kurdish question, Shari'atmadari aligned himself with the RC emissary, Ayatullah Taliqani, who stood for negotiation and reconciliation with the Kurds.<sup>40</sup> Khumayni, however, rejected Taliqani's recommendations, linked the Maoist Komela with the Kurdish Democratic Party in an undifferentiated "communist" alliance, and sent the Iranian revolutionary guards into the Kurdish cities. His feelings on this issue were so strong that he threatened to bring these guards before the revolutionary courts should they fail to suppress the Kurdish movement.<sup>41</sup>

Differences between the pair arose, too, on the taking of the American hostages. To Shari'atmadari, the action corresponded with revolutionary praxis, but not with the laws and prescriptions of Islam.<sup>42</sup> He held this view in the face of Khumayni's anti-American speeches during the week preceding the embassy capture. Khumayni's subsequent comments that the embassy had been a "nest of spies" and his warnings about imminent American intervention suggest that the action had his approval once it had taken place.

<sup>35</sup> Ruhullah al-Musavi Khumayni, *Hukumat-i Islami* (Najaf: Ashraf, 1391 H. Q./1971), 74ff. Emphasis supplied.

<sup>36</sup> *IT*, 18 Khurdad 1358 H. Sh./8 June 1979; 4 Aban 1358/26 October 1979.

<sup>37</sup> *IT*, 4 Aban 1358 H. Sh./26 October 1979.

<sup>38</sup> *IT*, 18 Aban 1358 H. Sh./9 November 1979.

<sup>39</sup> *Iranshahr*, 4 Urdibihisht 1359 H. Sh./24 April 1980; *IT*, 30 Aban 1359 H. Sh./21 November 1980; *IT*, 5 Day 1359 H. Sh./26 December 1980; *IT*, 25 Urdibihisht 1360 H. Sh./15 May 1981. Although clearly opposed to communism, Ayatullah Shari'atmadari has declared, as against Ayatullah Khumayni's position, "If the people should elect communists as representatives, it will be necessary to tolerate their existence." *Ayandigan*, 30 Tir 1358 H. Sh./21 July 1979.

<sup>40</sup> *Khalq-i Musalman*, 22 Mihr 1358 H. Sh./14 October 1979.

<sup>41</sup> *IT*, 16 Shahrivar 1358 H. Sh./7 September 1979.

<sup>42</sup> *IT*, 9 Azar 1358 H. Sh./30 November 1979.

Other elements of difference between the grand *mujtahids* include Shari'atmadari's rebukes to IRP officials for seeking to monopolize power and for spreading a climate of revenge in the country.<sup>43</sup> For Khumayni, monolithic unity appears as a categorical imperative, sustained by his threats to purge the bazaars, the ranks of the revolutionary guards, and even the revolutionary courts should they fail to evince sufficient revolutionary militance. His militance informs even his more conciliatory moments, as when he appealed to dissenting clergymen to unite in the new regime to prevent "those sitting in Paris" from overthrowing the Islamic Republic. If these clerics did not desist, Khumayni admonished, the masses would know where duty lay in the face of their "treason."<sup>44</sup>

Denying Khumayni's charge that the regime's problems were attributable to agents of imperialism, communism, and Zionism, Shari'atmadari ironically expressed his hope that the three million members of the MPP were not all "foreign agents."<sup>45</sup> Shari'atmadari's greater moderation emerged not only in the context of his appeal to the IRP to let non-IRP groups operate in the open. It ultimately encompassed the question of the fate of the shah. To him, the physical return of the shah to Iran was unimportant, provided the wealth he had taken out of the country were restored to the Iranian people.<sup>46</sup> But Ayatullah Khumayni's position was that the revolution would never be consummated without putting the shah on trial and revealing the true nature of his rule to the world. A trial, for him, would mark the end of Western penetration, expurgate past sins, and provide funds for development purposes.

A number of other senior and junior clergymen also expressed dismay, anger, and criticism against the clergy leaders of the IRP. In some cases, the criticism was merely implied, as, for example, when Ayatullah Taliqani actually boycotted the meetings of the RC in the months preceding his death, despite his incumbency as its chairman.<sup>47</sup>

In other instances, even relatives of Ayatullah Khumayni have lashed out at what they termed excesses of the hardline group. Thus, Khumayni's brother, Ayatullah Murtaza Pasandidah, objected to balloting irregularities in the parliamentary elections in the spring of 1980. In riposte, the IRP Speaker of Parliament accused him of conspiring with the United States against the Islamic Republic.<sup>48</sup> Earlier, Khumayni's son, Hujjat al-Islam Ahamd Khu-

<sup>43</sup> *IT*, 30 Azar 1358 H. Sh./21 December 1979.

<sup>44</sup> *IT*, 14 Shahriyar 1359 H. Sh./5 September 1980; *IT*, 14 Farvardin 1360 H. Sh./3 April 1981; *IT*, 25 Urdibehisht 1360 H. Sh./15 May 1981.

<sup>45</sup> *IT*, 23 Azar 1358 H. Sh./14 December 1979. Suggesting that these individuals are patriots, Shari'atmadari again took issue with Ayatullah Khumayni's rejection of nationalist sentiment when he declared, "Love of one's homeland is a sound idea—a person's homeland is like his house." *Ittila'at*, 20 Khurdad 1358 H. Sh./10 June 1979.

<sup>46</sup> *IT*, 30 Azar 1358 H. Sh./21 December 1979.

<sup>47</sup> *IT*, 27 Mihr 1358 H. Sh./19 October 1979.

<sup>48</sup> *IT*, 15 Farvardin 1359 H. Sh./4 April 1980.

mayni, had spoken against the principle of *vilayat-i faqih* during the deliberations on the draft constitution by the Council of Experts.<sup>49</sup>

A more direct challenge came from Ayatullah Khumayni's grandson, Hujjat al-Islam Husayn Khumayni, who openly declared that 90 percent of the Iranian clergy rejected the IRP faction and were in support of the then President Bani Sadr against it. Warning against the possibility of a "Chile-type dictatorship," he delivered the charge that the members of this faction had "proven themselves fascists whose actions had brought the state to the verge of collapse."<sup>50</sup>

But more serious are the defections from the IRP line which have occurred among highly influential and respected *mujtahids* with records of activities against the shah. In Mashhad, the country's second holy city, Ayatullah Hasan Taba'taba'i Qummi accused the IRP '*ulama*' (clergy) of having "lost their way from the true Islam." In his view, ignorant, corrupt, and merciless officials controlled the revolutionary courts, and unless a purge of state institutions were undertaken to eliminate the IRP's role there, matters would continue to worsen. Ayatullah Khumayni indirectly rebutted Qummi's statements by linking anti-IRP clergy in Qumm and Mashhad to the shah's counterrevolutionary activities and threatening them with action by revolutionary tribunals. Undeterred, Qummi angrily judged the constitution to be in violation of Islamic law and held articles 107-112, relating to the powers of the *faqih* and other '*ulama*', to be mutually contradictory.<sup>51</sup>

Comments from other senior *mujtahids* have been equally negative, although in some cases the tone has been milder than in others. The popular teacher of Qumm's *madrasahs*, Ayatullah Nasir Makarim Shirazi, early criticized the concept of *vilayat-i faqih* in deliberations within the Council of Experts. Attempting to reject the principle without condemning Ayatullah Khumayni, Shirazi warned against the concentration of power and autocracy. Recalling that essentially unarmed masses had successfully made the revolution, Makarim subtly argued that making the *faqih* commander-in-chief of the armed forces would be a violation of the trust accruing to the Iranian people. After all, if armed might were a legitimate means of maintaining a political system, then the shah would still be in power.<sup>52</sup>

In blunter language, Ayatullah Abu al-Fazl Musavi Zanjani condemned the "despotic power" vested in the *faqih*.<sup>53</sup> His brother, Ayatullah Riza Musavi

<sup>49</sup> *IT*, 4 Aban 1358 H. Sh./26 October 1979. It is true he did so on technical, not substantive, grounds. If, as was possible, the *faqih* were not an Iranian, what would he do in case of war between Iran and his home country, given that he would be commander-in-chief of the armed forces? If he were to order Iranian mobilization, he would be warring against his own country; if he demurred, he would be a traitor to Iran.

<sup>50</sup> *IT*, 14 Farvardin 1360 H. Sh./3 April 1981; *IT*, 4 Urdibihisht 1360 H. Sh./24 April 1981.

<sup>51</sup> *IT*, 1 Farvardin 1360 H. Sh./21 March 1981.

<sup>52</sup> *Khalq-i Musalman*, 22 Mihr 1358/14 October 1979.

<sup>53</sup> Voice of America, Persian language broadcast, 22 March 1981.

Zanjani, a supporter of former Prime Minister Musaddiq and having close ties to the then late Ayatullah Taliqani, denounced the “murders committed in the name of Islam” during the revolution. Referring to the visit by Ayatullahs Mahallati and Qummi to the home of Ayatullah Khumayni to submit a list of clergy grievances to the latter, he ironically concluded, “but they left without results.”<sup>54</sup>

A second distinguished member of the Mashhad *‘ulama’* who has been vocal in his criticism of the IRP is Hujjat al-Islam ‘Ali Tihrani; despite his evident standing within the religious institution in the country, Tihrani has repeatedly forbidden his followers to call him Ayatullah. To his mind, Ayatullah Khumayni had “trampled upon Islam” and ignored his own *fatwas* in what Tihrani saw to be calculated moves to retain power. Tihrani rebuked Khumayni for suggesting that the Qur’an contained an exhaustive discussion of the Islamic law of retaliation, noting that even were that true, it would be “obscene” to have parliament enact those provisions, as though the Qur’an required ratification by positive law. Tihrani also joined the issue of the extent of popular clerical support for the IRP, declaring:

This group is merely a small minority under the leadership of Ayatullah Bihishti. They are not the real clergymen of the Shi’i rite of Islam. I am conversant with their past and know that they have not even acquired a sound religious education. . . . All genuine clergymen oppose them and have kept silent only out of respect for Ayatullah Khumayni. . . . [The IRP’s] supporters in reality are a group of fourteen persons who teach in Qumm. Most of them are not real teachers and cannot even be considered specialists in Islamic sciences. Qumm’s real teachers, who number more than three hundred, oppose the IRP. . . . Even the group of fourteen has split and some of them have now joined the circle of Ayatullah [Muhammad Riza] Gulpaygani [one of the country’s eminent *mujtahids*].<sup>55</sup>

Criticisms of the IRP by senior clergymen have not been localized. Mashhad, Tabriz, and Shiraz appear as main centers of contention against the behavior of that faction’s members. This is bound to be worrisome for the regime, given the historic importance of those three cities in the political history of the country.<sup>56</sup>

In Mashhad, Ayatullah Abu al-Hasan Shirazi has blamed the various revolutionary organs for “directly or indirectly causing convulsions,” maintaining that “circumstances have slowly become worse than before. People have become desperate and are asking each other: ‘Where can we turn to?’”<sup>57</sup>

In a similar vein, the pro-Shari’atmadari *mujtahid* of Tabriz, Ayatullah Yusuf Hashimi Hukmabadi, remonstrated: “With the things that people are

<sup>54</sup> *IT*, 2 Murdad 1360 H. Sh./24 July 1981.

<sup>55</sup> *IT*, 26 Tir 1360 H. Sh./17 July 1981; *IT*, 9 Murdad 1360 H. Sh./31 July 1981.

<sup>56</sup> Denouncing the concentration of power in Qumm, Ayatullah Abu al-Hasan Shirazi of Mashhad reminded his audience that his city was the site of the tomb of the eighth Imam, a claim no other Iranian city could make. *IT*, 28 Farvardin 1360 H. Sh./17 April 1981.

<sup>57</sup> *IT*, 25 Urdibihisht 1360 H. Sh./15 May 1981.

doing, not only will infidels not become Muslims, but Muslims will flee Islam."<sup>58</sup> In Shiraz, Ayatullah Baha' al-Din Mahallati, an old ally of Khomeini during the 1963 disturbances, broadly condemned the regime elite, saying, "Right now, in the Islamic country of Iran, demagoguery, idolatry, severe repression, fraud, flattery, tampering with [others'] ideas, statements and writings, bribery, obscenities, mendacity and recriminations are wildly circulating."<sup>59</sup>

And within the regime itself, factional rifts have emerged among the clergy. 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. An early action, therefore, by Ayatullah Khomeini, was to appoint six *mujtahids* directly to a new revolutionary institution, the Council of Guardians of the Constitution, and to approve the nomination of six others by his colleagues. Among his own nominees was his old colleague and ally from the period of antishah activities, Ayatullah Rabani Shirazi. The Council of Guardians has in fact repeatedly rejected IRP land reform legislation on the grounds that Islamic law categorically protects private ownership of property. After many months of deadlock, the IRP leadership prevailed on Ayatullah Khomeini to intervene, and he has vested parliament with certain of his powers as *faqih*, empowering the legislature to override the objections of the Council of Guardians. This has caused significant deepening in the cleavages within the IRP faction itself, as certain IRP stalwarts have become disenchanted with the party's basic policy on land tenure.<sup>60</sup>

Despite these defections from the IRP line, members of the IRP faction have continued to dominate political power. The leaders of the IRP clergy have included Ayatullah Husayn 'Ali Muntaziri (Khomeini's designated successor), Ayatullah Bihishti (killed in June 1981), Ayatullah Yahya Nuri, Ayatullah 'Ali Qudusi (revolutionary prosecutor-general until his assassination in September 1981), Ayatullah 'Abd al-Karim Ardabili (chairman of the State Supreme Court), and Ayatullah Kani.

Below this tier of senior clergymen have been Hujjat al-Islam Rafsanjani, Hujjat al-Islam Javad Bahonar (prime minister), Hujjat al-Islam Muhammad 'Ali Khamanah'i (president). In the third echelon are the preachers, influential mobilizers of mass opinion and social action: Hujjat al-Islam Sadiq Khalkhali, leader of the militant fundamentalist movement, the Fida'iyan-i Islam, with its connection to the *lutis* (street toughs) and activists known as the *hizbullahi* (those of the Party of God); and Hujjat al-Islam Hadi Ghafari, now deceased,

<sup>58</sup> *Khalq-i Musalman*, 22 Mihr 1358 H. Sh./14 October 1979.

<sup>59</sup> *IT*, 25 Urdibihisht 1360 H. Sh./15 May 1981.

<sup>60</sup> *IT*, 1 Aban 1360 H. Sh./23 October 1981.



who had threatened anti-IRP members of parliament with assassination and acquired a certain following. Two other tertiary clerical leaders may be mentioned: Hujjat al-Islam Muhammad Taqi Falsafi, a strongly anti-Musaddiq preacher having close ties to clerical circles identified with the late Ayatullah Abu al-Qasim Kashani (d. 1962), himself a militant activist in the late 1940s and early 1950s; and finally, Hujjat al-Islam Muhammad Khu'ayniha, spiritual guide of the "students of the Imam's line," that is, of those who captured the American diplomats and the embassy in November 1979. His importance is reflected in the rapid rise of his clients to positions of importance in the revolutionary regime, especially in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the intelligence service.<sup>61</sup>

Organizationally, the IRP was the instrument of Ayatullah Bihishti. He utilized his supporters in the IRP in a pragmatic manner to establish the party as the most powerful institution outside the state. Withal, Bihishti was not able consistently to control IRP members, especially individuals such as Khalkhali, who had their own independent base of support. His organizational talents apparently overrode any suspicions that may have existed among his colleagues about the loose nature of his ideological commitments. Such suspicions had derived from his contacts with the shah's clients before the revolution, his contacts with officials of the American State Department, and his meeting with General Robert Huyser, whom President Jimmy Carter had dispatched to Iran in December 1978.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, he seemed to be inconsistent on the issue of the hostages, speaking of the need to free them, trying to prevent their transfer into government custody (in an attempt to embarrass Bani Sadr), and finally urging that they be tried.<sup>63</sup>

Bihishti's calculations for the organization of power were predicated on his beliefs that the clergy would not long maintain the unquestioned loyalty of the masses; the clergy should rapidly establish a theocracy; the 'ulama' ought to cast the "liberals" (that is, Bani Sadr, Bazargan, Yazdi, Nazih, and others) as the scapegoats for regime failures; and the Soviet Union would avoid entanglement in Iran because of the Afghan and Polish crises. In the last analysis, Bihishti remained a non-doctrinaire leader, whereas his successors are more sectarian and dogmatic while lacking his organizational abilities.<sup>64</sup>

In Bihishti's absence, the IRP has proceeded in a somewhat rudderless fashion. Conflicts between so-called Maktabi and Hujjati factions have split the party since his death. As already noted, disagreements have divided the IRP over land reform. Beyond this conflict may be mentioned the growing

<sup>61</sup> *IT*, 2 Bahman 1360 H. Sh./22 January 1982.

<sup>62</sup> *IT*, 10 Isfand 1358 H. Sh./29 February 1980; *IT*, 4 Mitr 1359 H. Sh./26 September 1980; *IT*, 20 Tir 1359 H. Sh./11 July 1980.

<sup>63</sup> *IT*, 13 Tir 1359 H. Sh./4 July 1980; *IT*, 14 Shahrivar 1359 H. Sh./5 September 1980; *IT*, 1 Farvardin 1359 H. Sh./21 March 1980.

<sup>64</sup> *IT*, 19 Tir 1360 H. Sh./10 July 1981.

disenchantment of the parliamentary IRP members with the cabinet IRP figures over the nonimplementation of legislation. Such enactments as the laws on allowable activities of political parties, on doctor-patient relations, and on purges of *ancien régime* officials in the state apparatus have gone without implementation. Demands for a government report on the action of the Foundation for the Deprived in its administration of corporations and factories have gone unheeded.<sup>65</sup> While it would be inappropriate to label this conflict one of "left" (the parliamentary IRP) against "right" (the cabinet IRP), it does appear as though revolutionary militance is reflected in the legislature's praxis while the government strives for a breathing spell of relaxation in revolutionary zeal.<sup>66</sup>

#### CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined both the ideology and praxis of Shi'ism in the revolution which produced the Islamic Republic of Iran. It has suggested that the revolution was the product of three factors: (1) certain doctrinal trends that have permitted great involvement of the religious leadership in politics, (2) popular and dramaturgical elements of Shi'ism which relate to the social integration of the community, and (3) political expression and social action by individuals and organizations in reaction to structural changes in society, in a context where the respective interpretations of Shi'ism, corporate interests, and the public good have varied widely.

Born out of protest against the Pahlavi corporatist state, the revolution has provided grounds for confrontation and controversy among those who actively brought it about. The new theocratic state certainly reversed the trend, prominent in the post-1963 period, toward increasing bureaucratization of power. The new state structure differs from the old in a double sense: it is, so far, weaker than its predecessor, but its leaders also aspire to have it penetrate the lives of the people more extensively than its counterpart under the shah. In any revolution, of course, the state is at least originally weakened, and whether or not the theocratic state order of the Islamic Republic will be able to organize the lives of Iranians according to desired patterns of equality, capacity, solidarity, and stability cannot yet be determined.

What is clear is that the clergy have acted in a manner unprecedented in Iran's history. While doctrine provided sanction to the clergy's role as mem-

<sup>65</sup> *IT*, 18 Day 1360 H. Sh./8 January 1982.

<sup>66</sup> Since the original draft of this article was written, the situation has reversed. The more militant IRP faction is now dominant in the cabinet and party organs (Politburo, General Secretariat, Central Committee). The less militant appear in significant numbers in the parliament and judiciary. See Shahrouh Akhavi, "Clerical Politics in Iran since 1979" in *The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic: New Assessments*, Nikki Keddie and Kathleen Manalo, eds. (Washington, D.C.: The Middle East Institute, forthcoming). This essay was originally presented as a paper to the Conference on the Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic, Smithsonian Institution, Woodrow Wilson Center, 22-23 May 1982.

bers of the general agency (*al-wikalah al-'ammah*), social action by the clergy since 1978 has, by going as far as the assumption of executive leadership positions in the state administration, transcended the limits the '*ulama*' set for themselves in earlier times. In the process, much controversy has emerged over doctrinal principles and the uses to which such principles have been put in practice.

Paralleling these disputes has been the clergy's stimulation, by word and deed, of the messianic expectations of Iranian Shi'ites. The passion play has played a central role in the dynamics of the Iranian revolution. Its message is unambiguous, unlike the difficult and in a sense stylized intellectual discourse of the *mujtahids* over the Imamate, *vilayat*, and impious rule. The principles at the center of these concepts furnished the clergy with the tactical power needed to mobilize the masses. But the messianic elements and themes provided the operational mechanism of the mobilization.

The very high degree of factionalism exhibited by social actors in the Iranian revolution is complicated, furthermore, by the tendency of individuals to have differing orientations within a particular ("leftist," "moderate," or "rightist") perspective. Thus, on a variety of issues, including communal relations, due process, civil rights, constitutionalism, autocracy, corruption, and inraelite relations, a high level of conflict has been characteristic of the last five years.

This essay may have conveyed the impression that the Iranian revolution has been somehow principally about Shi'ism. Such a conclusion is inaccurate. There is no attempt here to say or imply that Shi'ism "caused" the revolution. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber wrote,

We have no intention whatever of maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism . . . could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation. . . . [W]e only wish to ascertain whether and to what extent religious forces have taken part in the qualitative formation and the quantitative expansion of that spirit over the world.<sup>67</sup>

The same thought applies, *mutatis mutandis*, in the present essay. The only intent is to determine the nature of the clergy's role in the revolution and to account for their mutual relations during its course.

Shi'ism has proven a difficult concept and practice for the sociologist of religion to grasp. Like the proverbial blind men trying to fathom the identity of the elephant they are touching, the social actors in the Iranian revolution also appear to be reaching different conclusions. In the process, they seem to be altering their discourse, as well. Simultaneously, shifting and even unprincipled coalitions, which have characterized the social reality of the revolution since its inception, continue to appear. The analyst of the Iranian revolution,

<sup>67</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 91.

therefore, can only try to record the variations and seek explanation of their meaning in the cultural and social contexts of Iranian history. What remains certain is that the social actors have not only attributed widely differing meanings to a corpus of doctrine that has evolved over the centuries, but, just as important, their modes of behavior have been so divergent that it often comes as a surprise to recall that Shi'ism is, after all, their common point of reference.