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**NATIONNESS AND REVOLUTION:
A GRAMSCIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION**

by

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, B.C.

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
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of
Communication

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is an exploration of the articulation and communication of identity in connection to the nation and the ideological, cultural and political spheres. Communication here is understood as the construction and circulation of social/cultural meaning.

The Iranian revolution of 1979, is used as a case study to investigate how nationness is constructed as a strategic political ideology and what meanings are associated to an Iranianness thus articulated.

The majority of works on the Iranian revolution identify Islam as the **only** ideological force involved in the mobilization and unification of the diverse groups who participated in the revolution. This thesis acknowledges the immense role played by Islam but argues against reducing the ideological field of determinations to a single level. An examination of the specific culture, history and politics of Iran in conjuncture with oppositional discourse generated in the two years leading to the 1979 revolution reveal that nationness is another recurring powerful ideological configuration which commands a profound emotional and political legitimacy.

The thesis draws from and builds upon a critical review of the literature. The work of Edward Said, Antonio Gramsci and Stuart Hall set the basic theoretical framework for the study. Following an interdisciplinary approach, this exploration stands at an intersection between Cultural Studies branch of Communication theory and Middle-Eastern Studies.

Various concepts are used to explore the construction of the nation, particularly the way in which its official version articulated by the pre-revolutionary alliance of indigenous dictatorship and foreign imperialism clashed with the popular interpretations of national identity. This crisis in communication of identity was a major source of discontent for the

vast majority of the population and the revolutionary leaders did not fail to realize its immense strategic value for mass mobilization. They constructed a different version of Iranianess which resonated within the structures of popular culture and consciousness and served as a central ideological axis around which the diverse social and political factions articulated.

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I am very fortunate to have a most loving and supportive family. In particular I thank those who have been directly involved in the research and ongoing discussions about many of the issues raised here. This thesis owes its inspiration to my sister and best friend, Afarin Radjai B., whose passion for Iran and Iranianness, strong and soulful art, and sensitive intelligence moved me to explore nationness in the first place. Her help in gathering research

material, her unwavering faith in me and her spirited love have seen me through to the end. My brothers Saeed and Masoud Radjai B., have been instrumental in sharing their political contacts with me as well as imparting their own considerable knowledge of, and experience in Iranian history and oppositional politics. Special thanks are also due to Fariba Radjai B., and Arash Riahi for the loan of their private collection of otherwise unavailable Iranian material. Their endless encouragement and enthusiasm for my work is also most appreciated.

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INTRODUCTION

The Iranian Revolution happened over a decade ago and since then an overwhelming amount of scholarly as well as journalistic material has been produced in an effort to explain (or explain away), inform (or misinform), categorize (or contain), and grapple with the political, intellectual and ideological challenges raised by this startling and important event. Indeed, if the sheer volume of words was to be equated with comprehensive knowledge, one could rest assured that everything that can be said about the Iranian revolution has already been said. But despite the impressive number of interpretations and commentary on the revolution, there seems to be little change in the framework or conceptual approaches used to analyze it. Explorations concerning the revolution's ideological dimensions seem particularly impoverished. With a few notable exceptions, theorizing about the revolution, to my knowledge, has been primarily focused on the role played by Islam as the political and ideological force behind mass mobilization of the people and the genuinely popular support for the revolution. There is of course a diverse series of studies and reports which consider "Islam" as the central unifying thread from which many a different cloth can be woven.

The first two chapters of the thesis offer a critical review of these studies. Chapter one deals with the explanations and predominant treatments of the revolution in the works of American foreign policy advisors, academic area-experts and the U.S. mainstream media. The great majority of this literature exhibit a highly pejorative approach which assumes that where Islam exists, people's capacity for rational thought and emancipatory political action atrophies. Edward Said's work is extensively drawn upon here to argue that taken together, these accounts set an essentially reductive, ahistorical, and ethnocentric framework for

discussion which is best described as "orientalist" in character. The second chapter moves beyond orientalism to examine a different set of texts which do not treat Islam and Iran with the prejudicial hostility and inaccuracy encountered in the orientalist discourse. However, they continue to consider the revolution as purely Islamic without paying much attention to other possible ideological constructs which may have played a cohesive role in revolutionary mobilization.

I suggest that an equally important ideological and cultural dimension of the revolution, which includes yet transcends the religious domain, is centred around the articulation of the nation and its ability to unify diverse social/political forces. Given the centrality which Antonio Gramsci gives to the cultural factors in social development, and especially the "national-popular" dimension of ideological/political struggles which have a "mixed" class character, his work offered a particularly useful perspective from which to explore my specific interests in the revolution.

Chapter three lays out the Gramscian concepts which together with Stuart Hall's elaboration and expansion of Gramsci's work constitute the theoretical framework needed for an exploration of "nationness" as a strategy of alliance. The last chapter draws on this theoretical map to examine the relevance of the concept of nationness for the processes of formation and transformation of popular consciousness, cultural identity, political and ideological struggle and practice. It offers a brief look at the historical relationship between nationalism and imperialism in Iran. The analysis then moves on to compare and contrast the pre-revolutionary "royal" articulation of **Iranianness** with the revolutionaries' "popular" re-articulation of national identity. Particular attention is paid to how connections between Shi'ism and Iranianness are drawn and how ideological, political, and social differences are

minimized with the appeal to nationness.

It should be said at the outset that like all interpretive work, arriving at this particular portrait of the revolution has involved what Said has called, "an act of will and the imposition of judgement." My judgement is certainly neither value-free nor completely dispassionate. I am an Iranian and while I firmly believe that nationality, in and of itself, cannot and must not be used as an authenticating device or cultural credential, I am also fully aware that for me Iran is not an inert object of study. In a similar vein, while I am not a religious person, I can understand and am moved by the sentiments of my compatriots where Islam is concerned. In other words, being an Iranian, certainly does not make me into an "expert" on Iran or Islam, but it brings with it a whole set of past experiences, personal and national feelings and affiliations that needed to be held in awareness throughout this study. My findings were arrived at by an application of concepts in communication theory to the research material in the most exploratory manner. It is certainly in the same spirit that I offer them.

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTALIZING THE REVOLUTION

No interpretation is without precedent or without some connection to other interpretations. Thus anyone writing about Islam, or Shakespeare, or Marx, must in some way take account of what has been said about these subjects, if only because he or she wishes not to be redundant.

Edward W. Said

Broadly speaking, the accounts of the revolution can be divided into three categories based on their methodological and thematic approach. I shall call these: Conspiratorial, Orientalist, and Socio-Islamic. It should be noted however, that the lines of division between these categories are, at best, dotted ones with assumptions, ideas and conclusions seeping from one category to others. Therefore, it is worth reiterating that I have characterized and labelled them according to their most predominant elements and the most prevalent routes taken to explain these elements. The examples that are used throughout this exploration, however, are representative rather than atypical, of the particular body of work under consideration. This chapter will provide an overview of the numerous sources which fall under the Orientalist banner and the next shall explore those analyses which move beyond orientalism.

The Conspiratorial view, most common among the exiled Iranian royalists and the regime's apologists but not limited to them, is a striking ahistorical and narrow depiction of events. Sources as ideologically opposed as the American extreme-Right and some of the Iranian factions on the Left of the political spectrum have often substituted incredible conspiracy stories in place of solid sociopolitical analysis. All of them consider the revolution as the outcome of machinations by the West at the expense of political aspirations

and activities of the Iranian people. They differ only in the level of "complexity" and the choice of particular individuals or countries allegedly involved in the process. Regardless of which foreign power is accredited, these theories do not stand up to rigorous examination. There is no doubt that there is a very real and long history of direct and indirect foreign domination during which conspiracies and coup d'états did indeed determine the course of events in Iran.

American imperialism was certainly a major cause for resentment and discontent in Iran after the Second World War and increasingly so after the 1953 CIA led coup of the popular government of Mossadeq¹. However, what most conspiracy theorists fail to grasp is that imperialism and its onslaught on Iranian economy, culture and government consolidated Iranian nationalism, which as early as 1890 to 1892 in the riots over the tobacco monopoly by the British, had displayed its enormous ideological power in mobilising people against foreign domination. In 1978-79, nationalism once again played a major role in Iranian politics and as future chapters of this thesis will argue, a focus on Iranian identity would yield much more interesting results than an erasure of that identity in favour of constructing groundless conspiracy stories.

Having said that, one should note that there is a disturbing similarity between the "key cause" of the revolution identified in most of the conspiratorial discourse and the underlying assumption of the orientalist approach to the study of the revolution. Most conspiracy theories perceive the revolution in terms of a confrontation between the agents of a "Dark Ages" faction symbolised by the Iranian clergy and the "enlightened" forces of modernity and progress represented either by the "civilized" West or the westernized Shah

¹ See: Roosevelt, Kermit. Counter Coup: The Struggle for the control of Iran. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1979.

of Iran. The battle of "good" versus "evil" portrayed here in raw terms gains much refinement and sophistication in the Orientalist discourse, but the basic dichotomy remains unchanged.

The Orientalist Discourse

Orientalism is not a crude conspiratorial perspective which can be easily detected and dismissed. Its smooth polish and authoritative posture make it that much more difficult to see its ideological underpinnings. Orientalism is a complex system of ideas and knowledge and not mere fantasy. It is also the main grid through which the Iranian revolution was filtered to the majority of the North American population, and it is that grid which I want now to discuss in more detail.

The orientalist discourse gains its widest currency in the discourse generated by the U.S Middle East area studies and the N. American mainstream media. Generally speaking, those analyses which fall under this category deliver a two-punch knock out to the Iranian revolution. First, they reduce all aspects of the Iranian society, its people and their revolution to one unchanging thing called "Islam"; then they denigrate, demonize and dismiss "it" as irrational, archaic, inferior and hence deserving of domination by the "West" as the self-appointed guardian of supreme "civilization."

It should be said at the outset that my purpose in this section is not to duplicate the object of my criticism in reverse order. In other words, I do not intend to reduce all Western discourse or images of Islam (and Iran) to negative and unchanging conceptions and then claim "absolute Truth" or cultural superiority with reference to the "East" or Iranian interpretations of Islam. As Edward Said takes great pains to point out, "Islam is not a natural fact but a composite structure" which changes according to cultural, political,

historical, social and economic specificities of the diverse "world of Islam."² In short, Islam means different things to different people at different times and in different places. At the same time, certain sectors of society (such as the "experts" and the media) have the power to propagate a certain definition or a particular image of Islam, thereby making it more prevalent than other available interpretations. This is particularly important in the N. American context where direct contact with, or experiences of Islam and Islamic cultures have not been as close as, for example, those encountered by the Europeans. Before the specifics of how the "experts" and the media analyzed and "covered" the revolution can be examined to see if the evidence fits the charge, a brief discussion of what is meant by "orientalism" is essential.

The term "orientalism" as used by its progenitor, Edward Said, is much more than an academic tradition which has "the Orient" as its object of study. In his brilliant book which bears this title, he offers a powerful critique of imperialism through a discussion of the interaction between colonising powers in the West and the nature of western scholarship on the Orient, particularly the Muslim East, since the eighteenth century³. Said draws on and modifies Michel Foucault's notion of "discourse" ⁴ and Antonio Gramsci's concept of

² Said, Edward W. Covering Islam, Pantheon Books, New York, 1981. pp. xv-xvi, pp. 8-10, pp. 132-140.

³ Obviously neither space nor my specific focus allow me to do justice to this intricate idea. For a full elaboration see: Said, Edward W. Orientalism, Vintage Books edition, New York, 1979. The publication of this book was met with some criticism, particularly by the orientalist themselves. For example see: "The Question of Orientalism," by Bernard Lewis in The New York Review, June 24, 1982. For Said's response to such criticisms see: "Orientalism Reconsidered," in Race & Class, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, 1985.

⁴ Very briefly stated, the accumulation of texts to which "expertise" is attributed through support by institutions, academics, governments, etc. produces a "tradition" which then carries enough weight to define the substance of new texts, As

hegemony⁵, to argue that orientalism is " a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'"⁶ It is "a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient -- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it."⁷ Orientalism

is, rather than expresses, a certain **will** or **intention** to understand, in some cases control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power...⁸

While before the Second World War orientalism was mainly, if not exclusively, a British and French cultural enterprise, since then the U.S has dominated the Orient and approaches it as Britain and France once did⁹. In the post-war era, the U.S became the major imperial power but it lacked an indigenous tradition of orientalism needed to "service and rationalize the new empire."¹⁰ Consequently, old world scholars were imported to quickly set up Centres and train area experts with the required funding provided by

such, it is not the creativity or originality of any given author which is responsible for the texts produced, but the "material presence" of that "tradition" which is what Foucault calls a "discourse." For a full discussion of this process see Foucault's Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith and Rupert Sawyer., Pantheon Books, 1972.

⁵ See chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁶ Orientalism, p.2.

⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸ Ibid, p. 12.

⁹ Ibid, p. 284-328

¹⁰ Schaar, Stuart, "Orientalism at the Service of Imperialism," in **Race & Class**, XXI,1 (1979), p. 73.

government agencies, corporations, foundations, universities and rulers of client states who benefited from their special relationship with the United States. Superficial training and the absence of the long traditions of European imperial system, meant that the depth, stability, consistency and language ability of classical orientalist scholars could not be instantly injected into their American heirs. As a result, U.S Middle East area studies inherited all the dogmas of orientalism and none of its strengths. Said has summarized the principal dogmas of orientalism as follows:

One is the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, underdeveloped, inferior. Another dogma is that abstractions about the Orient...are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. A third dogma is that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically "objective." A fourth dogma is that the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared...or to be controlled...¹¹

As will be presently demonstrated, all of the above dogmas found their purest expression in the "expert" discourse on Iran's "Islamic revolution." They were then further reduced, sensationalized and mass disseminated by the N. American mainstream news media.¹²

The Expert Discourse

By the term "expert," I mean several intertwined institutions and individuals. The

¹¹ Orientalism, pp. 300-301.

¹² Although my examples are drawn from US news media, there is little reason to believe that Canadians received a different picture of events from their media. A comparative analysis of US vs Canadian media's coverage of Iran may well require another thesis. Some of the possible reasons for such similarity can only be listed here: the use of the same wire services, and often the same US "on-the-spot" reporter, similar news gathering practices and organizational constraints, reliance on "official" or "expert" authorities with same or similar interests in the region and trained in the orientalist tradition, frequent direct "feeds" from the US news programmes, etc.

status quo academics working out of established Middle East Centres, the policymakers, diplomats, administrators and other government officials, as well as advisers to business corporations, etc. can all be included in this particular community of interpretation. Needless to say, this is a highly transient community and the individuals within it move freely, and frequently, from one sector to another¹³. What seems to remain static is the interpretive framework or the ideological baggage they carry within which "the East" in general and the "Islamic revolution" in particular, have been neatly packed.

One of the most common features of the expert discourse is the disregard or denial of the very existence of the empire which they, willingly or unwillingly, serve¹⁴. The history and political ramifications of over a quarter of century of interference with and violation of Iranian sovereignty, the unmitigated support and encouragement of an excessively oppressive regime reinstated to power by the U.S and dependent on it at a variety of levels,

¹³It should also be noted that there are tensions and contradictions within the orientalist expert community. Some orientalists are more liberal (for example James Bill) and others more conservative (for example George Lenczowski). My broad strokes which seem to paint all orientalist scholars with the same brush are intended to point out the strength of the "discourse" of Orientalism. The tradition is so powerful that even the so called "dissenting" or liberal orientalists find themselves trapped within its dogmas, perhaps in spite of themselves. My discussion does not include the tensions and nuances within orientalism because what I provide is a general overview of the literature and there is simply no room here to engage in a more detailed debate on various issues or points of contention within orientalism.

¹⁴ For a critical elaboration of this point see Stuart Schaar's article cited previously. For a rare and reluctant admission of the existence of the American empire, see: Campbell, John C., "The Middle East: The Burdens of Empire," in Foreign Affairs, Extra Issue: America and the World 1978. Vol.57. No. 3, 1979. pp. 613-633. The author is the former director of studies at the New York Council on Foreign Relations.

are either absent or dismissed as "ancient history."¹⁵ Consequently, the legitimate and very serious grievances of Iranians against the Pahlavi regime and the U.S, as well as all the internal political processes of resistance and revolutionary upheaval are reduced to and displaced by abstractions about the resurgence of "reactionary Islam," and proclamations about the "Persian national character" or the "Persian psyche." The Islam that is discussed in this discourse is not only a monolithic thing out there, but also somehow perfectly insulated from influences of imperialism or even ordinary politics. It is presented as **inherently** anti-American, hence **naturally** anti-modern, and incapable of even conceiving, much less exercising, democracy or reason. It is on the basis of these assumptions that James Bill, a professor of Government and Associate director of the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, when considering the oppositional activities of Iran's religious leaders **insists**, that "Although they **deny** this...there is little doubt that they feel threatened by the forces of modernization."(emphasis added).¹⁶ Evidently, it really doesn't matter **what** the Iranians say, as an "expert" Bill knows better. What he also knows "beyond doubt" is that Islam (or its representatives) in its allegedly timeless backwardness is neither capable of bringing "progressive change" nor a "democratic system based on Western models."¹⁷ The thought that Iranian (or Islamic) systems might have the potential to be "democratic" or "progressive," seems to be ruled out simply because they are not Western. One of Bill's colleagues George Lenczowski, professor of Political Science at the

¹⁵ This phrase was President Carter's favorite ground for refusing to discuss US-Iran past dealings during the hostage crisis.

¹⁶ Bill, James A., "Iran and the Crisis of '78," **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 57, No. 2., Winter 1978/79. p. 332.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 340.

University of California at Berkeley, and Chairman of the Committee for the Middle East at Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford, is even more blunt in his hostility towards "Muslim fundamentalists" in general and Khomeini in particular. The latter's "anti-American syndrome," the reader is told, "may be based **not** on a **rational** view of the United States...but rather on a broader religious-cultural foundation on which his dislike of what is foreign, secular, and modern is built." (emphasis added).¹⁸ The narrowing of focus on Khomeini as the embodiment of the revolution, and Islam as its only dimension - - as well as the tendency to shuffle between discussions of Khomeini as a person and sweeping generalizations -- is typical of Lenczowski's entire argument.

However Lenczowski's argument merits a closer inspection. First, we are told that hostility toward America is an abnormal condition from which Khomeini personally suffers. It is a psychological and abstract "syndrome," related to paranoia and xenophobia and **not** to an historical, sociopolitical opposition to U.S domination of Iran and exploitation of its resources. Then he goes on to suggest that the self-evident **irrationality** of disliking America is of course not limited to Khomeini, but must be blamed on Islam and Iran which are the abstract "broader religious-cultural foundations" to which he is referring. The final link to the "anti-progressive" and "anti-modern" nature of both Islam and Iran is then established, once again, by reverting to the **personal** (and not political)" dislike" of all things civilized or modern or rational by Khomeini.

Bill's and Lenczowski's preference for abstractions and opinions about motivations do not occur without some consideration of American foreign policy and the U.S. involvement in Iran. The point is, they consider the U.S to be **entitled** to do as it pleases

¹⁸ Lenczowski, George. "The Arc of Crisis: Its Central Sector," in **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 57, No. 4, Spring 1979. p. 815.

in places which come under the "American protective umbrella."¹⁹ This license is of course also granted to regional "friendly allies," such as the Shah who in the "turbulent world of Middle East" has "long been admired," for the "sturdy consistency" with which he has maintained Iran's "orderly existence."²⁰ Despite their recognition of the Pahlavi regime's corruption and tyranny, and in spite of open acknowledgement, for example, of the role played by the CIA in overthrowing a **democratically** elected nationalist and popular government in 1953,²¹ the work of these American "experts" is a paean of praise lauding the Shah's "intelligent appraisals," "ingenious approaches," "benevolent modernizing efforts," etc. Even the Shah's notorious secret police, SAVAK, is noted as "necessary under the circumstances."²² As such it is hardly surprising that Bill's top recommendation of possible U.S policy options for dealing with "the crisis of '78," was that "the shah should be encouraged to continue to open the system up."²³ In other words, as Edward Said commenting on the same article by Bill has put it, "even a supposedly dissenting expert voice was still committed to maintaining a regime against which, at the very moment he spoke, literally millions of its people had risen in one of the most massive insurrections in modern history."²⁴ Obviously, maintaining a "sturdy consistency" is justification enough and if

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 814.

²⁰ "Iran and the Crisis of '78," p. 323.

²¹ Lenczowski, in typical Cold War approach, misleadingly identifies it as a communist coup and takes it upon himself to define "true nationalism" which is attributed to the shah instead of Mossadeq.

²² "The Arc of Crisis," p. 807.

²³ "The Crisis of '78," p. 341.

²⁴ Covering Islam, p.21.

"stability" in the empire requires a little tyranny, so be it.²⁵ The contradictions between the "democratic intentions" with which the experts justified and rationalized U.S intervention and presence in Iran, and the dictatorial measures taken by their favorite policeman of the region were reconciled by theories about the "Persian character" and its "Islamic mentality."

The stereotypes and assumptions about the Persians, so frequently appealed to by the experts, did not spring up simply in reaction to the revolution of 1979. They were part of the longstanding Orientalist tradition which was one of the British colonial legacies to their American successors in Iran. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, government reports, travelogues, popular literature, and other books on "Persia and the Persian Question,"²⁶ had constructed an image of "the Persian" composed of a fairly standard set of features. The Persians were regarded as childlike and dishonest, vain and oversensitive, irrational, unorganized, and dependent on strong, authoritarian leadership. They required a firm hand, desired an autocrat, and had to be treated with distrust.²⁷ It is remarkable, if not necessarily admirable, that the very same set of assumptions and estimation of the "nature" of Iran and its people have remained the same in current literature.

²⁵ One cannot help but be reminded of the outrage and moral posturing of American official discourse a decade later over the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, where there was no hesitation to use words such as "massacre," "savage murder," "brutal and bloody suppression," etc. to describe the same (if smaller in numbers) horrifying realities, which during the revolutionary struggle alone, had cost upward of 20,000 Iranian lives. The American empire of course had no interest in seeing a "sturdy consistency" or an "orderly existence" in China, and euphemisms such as "necessary measures" were saved for actions taken by the shah of Iran.

²⁶ This is the title of a book by one of the most respected orientalists, George Curzon, written in 1892.

²⁷ See: Benard, Cheryl and Khalilzad, Zalmay. "The Government of God--Iran's Islamic Republic, Columbia University Press, New York, 1984. pp. 74-86.

In his 17 Days in Tehran, the Canadian author Robin Carlsen, for example, identifies as "a salient feature" of his "experience with Persia" that

Something about these people...prevented them from understanding the linear, progressive, concentrated focus of the Western consciousness, and thus there was a certain haphazardness, an energy that did not gather into disciplined and intensified purposefulness.²⁸

Astonishingly, he had arrived at this conclusion even before he set foot in Iran while getting his visa at the Iranian embassy in Ottawa! One wonders if the same can not be said of almost any bureaucratic institution, or more specifically of any embassy whose new staff are in a limbo situation between the old state structure and policies swept away by the revolution in their country, and the emerging government still very much provisional and vied for by multiple competing forces. None of this matters to Carlsen who, once inside the country, in the spirit of "scientific discovery" is not satisfied with finding confirmation for his previous predictions, even if he takes every opportunity to congratulate himself for having been right all along. On his "openness" to making "new discoveries" about the Persians he writes:

I was to learn something else about the Persians as opposed to the Occidental character and that was the tolerance threshold for dirt was very different. For the average Iranian, dust and grime was a part of his life, and the kind of cleanliness I was used to would have seemed antiseptic.²⁹

This judgement is based on his stay in a hotel in central Tehran, in the immediate aftermath of the revolution (March 11 - 28, 1980) which by his own admission was only functioning at about one-twentieth of its capacity. Good housekeeping was obviously not among the priorities of the Iranians in revolt, especially in unused hotels formerly occupied

²⁸ Carlsen, Robin W. Seventeen Days in Tehran: Revolution, Evolution, and Ignorance, The Snow Man Press, Victoria , 1980. p. 16.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

by foreign dignitaries, investors and journalists. Leaving the more practical reasons aside, it is one thing to make observations about a dirty hotel room, but to then leap from this particular case to general abstractions about the nature of "the Persian character as opposed to the Occidental" bears the unmistakable stamp of Orientalism. In keeping with the same tradition, Carlsen while criticizing himself for having "naively" imagined **all** Iranians to be in **constant** demonstration mode, is shocked to see people going about the more mundane routines of life out on the streets of Tehran. So he offers the following correction to his admittedly absurd view of the Persians:

They just moved around -- much like children conditioned to their playground games, oblivious to the larger movements of time and history.³⁰

Over thirty years before Carlsen made such "new discoveries,"³¹ the U.S ambassador to Iran had composed similar homilies on the "Persian character." "In our dealings with the Medes and the Persians," Ambassador Wiley advised the State Department, "we must always recall that we have to do with a people for whom the intrigues of the day suffice."³² In the same correspondence, the Shah himself is portrayed as a kind of child; sometimes it was best to appease him with a few concessions, at other times the U.S ambassador diagnosed the need for some "gentle harpoon therapy."³³ He might have been their friendly ally but he

³⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

³¹ In all fairness to Carlsen, it must be noted that he makes these statements in the context of a book which, according to the stated intention of the author, is largely sympathetic to the Iranian revolution. It is perhaps a good example of the strength of the tradition or discourse of Orientalism, that these statements and his general line of argument which holds the revolution to be a "cosmic" event determined by the "spirit of Islam," are made, in spite of his intentions.

³² As cited by Benard and Khalilzad, p. 82.

³³ Ibid., p. 82.

was nonetheless a "Persian" and as such in possession of the same "psyche" as the rest of Iranians and supposedly subject to the same observation made by Wiley: "There is in Iran an underlying psych-political factor of great significance; the Iranian people from top to bottom much prefer to be governed by a strong hand, even if wrong, than by a weak one, even if right."³⁴ Lest one is tempted to think that such pronouncements on the Persian character only belonged to "ancient history" as far as U.S diplomats and policymakers are concerned, let's consider the more recent evidence.

The U.S ambassador, William Sullivan, in a blend of orientalist fascination with the "exotic"³⁵ and condescending amusement, saw the Shah in 1977 as a "wounded sovereign **sulking** on his orange-scented terrace, in his black pajamas, above the bright-blue Caspian Sea." (emphasis added).³⁶ Or in 1979, asked by Sullivan whether he should inquire on his behalf if the U.S might grant asylum, the Shah is described as "leaning forward, almost like a small boy, and saying 'Oh, would you?'"³⁷ There are numerous other references to the Shah's "childish excitement" over military purchases, his "devious oriental reasoning," his "paranoid sense of reality," etc..

The point I am trying to make is not that the Shah's character was beyond reproach. There were certainly much worse adjectives that can more accurately be assigned to him (oppressive, brutal, corrupt, etc. immediately come to my mind). The point is that at the

³⁴ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³⁵ Such fascination with the "exotic" has been identified by Roland Barthes as an important ingredient in the colonial mentality in Mythologies, as well as by Said in both Orientalism, and Covering Islam.

³⁶ Sullivan, William H., Mission to Iran, Norton, New York, 1981. p. 117.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

time, and for many years prior, the Shah was equated with Iran in U.S academic and diplomatic discourse. Therefore, most of what characterized him also characterized Iran and Iranians by association. Even if one does not want to make this easily identified link, the **constant** appeals to the Persian character which are made explicitly throughout the expert discourse provide ample proof that these stereotypes apply to an entire nation and not just one odd ruler. In fact as far as **this** particular monarch was concerned, his subscription to the ideology of "modernization" and "the American way of life" seems to have cured him from the more disturbing qualities of the "Persian psyche," reserved for describing his successors.³⁸ As a "modern" ruler he is repeatedly showered with praise for his "courageous efforts" to drag his ungrateful subjects into modernity and to "turn Iranians into something which they were not."³⁹ What separates them from their "enlightened" ruler is their "medieval fanaticism and religiosity," otherwise known as Islam, which finally overthrew the Shah's regime.

If the "Persian psyche" is the constant in the "expert" discourse to which all dimensions of Iranian society and its politics are reduced, "Islam" is presented as that psyche's only content or concern. In both Orientalism, and Covering Islam, Said has argued that "Islam," itself insofar as it has always been seen by the "experts" as "belonging to the Orient" has had a "particular fate within the general structure of Orientalism," and that is "to

³⁸ For further critical discussion of "the Persian psyche" and its function with reference to the "Islamic revolution," see Said's analysis of the confidential cable sent by Bruce Laingen, the Tehran embassy's Charge d'affaires and the US senior diplomat in Iran, to Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, on August 13, 1979. Covering Islam, p. xxxvii - xxx.

³⁹ The phrase belongs to the British ambassador to Iran, Anthony Parsons, a close friend and frequent adviser of William Sullivan.

be looked at first of all as if it were one **monolithic** thing, and then with a very special hostility and fear."⁴⁰ He goes on to posit

It is as if discrimination between religious passion, a struggle for a just cause, ordinary human weakness, political competition, and the history of men, women, and societies cannot be made when "Islam," or the Islam now at work in Iran and in other parts of the Muslim world, is dealt with by novelists, reporters, policy-makers, "experts." "Islam" seems to engulf all aspects of the diverse Muslim world, reducing them all to a special malevolent and unthinking essence. Instead of analysis and understanding as a result, there can be for the most part only the crudest form of us-versus-them.⁴¹

Furthermore, the "us" end of the above formulation is always referred to as the West (and not Christianity) against which Islam or the "Muslim hordes" are pitted.⁴² Lenczowski, for example, starts the article referred to above by contrasting the "intrusion of religious passions" in conflict with "Western modernization."⁴³ Later on in the article, he dismisses that "corruption and coercion...publicized by liberal dissenters at home and abroad" would even contribute to "revolutionary ferment." This argument is based on his observation (about not only Iran but all of its Muslim neighbours) that "In fact, secret police supervision, jailing on mere suspicion, long imprisonment without a court sentence and execution after summary trials -- acts that sharply contrasted with due process of law in the West -- were not uncommon"⁴⁴ in these regions of the world. Indeed, Lenczowski suggests that in these

⁴⁰ Covering Islam, p. 4.

⁴¹ Covering Islam, p. 7-8.

⁴² For a full discussion of this point and the reasons for it see Ibid., p. 10.

⁴³ It would be interesting to ask Lenczowski and his like-minded colleagues whether the same "passions" cannot be considered "intrusive" with reference to President Reagan's or President Bush's Christian brand of fundamentalism, in "modern" America?

⁴⁴ Lenczowski, p. 807.

regions "one or another form of authoritarianism has prevailed since time immemorial."⁴⁵

It is not very difficult to identify the series of confrontational dichotomies based on an unspoken orientalist code in this text. Islam is clearly held to be inherently anti-West and anti-modernity. The West is characterized by the "due process of the law" in sharp contrast to what anyone with even minimum claim on humane tendencies, can only understand as barbarism.⁴⁶ In other words, Iran and its Islamic neighbours are backward and unlawful, while the West is humane and advanced. Even more disturbing is his hidden suggestion that because Iranians have always been tortured and killed by their authoritarian regimes, they are unlikely to revolt against tyranny. Such a statement can only make sense if one recalls the longstanding orientalist discourse on "the Persian psyche" and its supposed desire for domination, or the "Islamic mind" and its "archaic fanaticism." From this perspective it would indeed be a betrayal of their nature if Iranians objected to torture or "summary executions." Given such hostile and reductive accounts of Iran and its people, it is hardly surprising that Lenczowski concludes by borrowing a phrase from his colleague, George Ball of the Atlantic Council's Special Working Group on the Middle East, to suggest that "the dilemma for Washington and its allies will be how to save Iran in spite of herself."⁴⁷

There are numerous other examples in the expert discourses of the late 1970's and 80's which debate "who lost Iran" and how it can be "saved." The very idea of a

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 798.

⁴⁶ I am not denying the fact that the courts and the legal system (even if their following of "due process" at all times is debatable) exist in western liberal democracies and that their operations are nothing like those performed under dictatorships. It is the emphasis on binary oppositions and the connection to previously discussed characteristics of Islam and the Persians that I am trying to point out.

⁴⁷ Lenczowski, p. 820.

superpower "losing" a client state to a popular revolution is certainly a legacy of colonial attitude which considers "the natives" incapable of controlling their own destiny and sees itself as the supreme authority on what changes can or cannot be allowed or set in motion. The "child-like" Iranians were clearly incapable of seeing the rationality of this line of argument and, ruled as they were by Islam, they failed to behave in a "civilized" manner and ask for permission before "destabalising" a region over which the U.S claimed ownership. There must have been, so the experts argue, something that the U.S could have done if only it knew what these unruly children were up to, behind its back so to speak. In other words, the revolution occurred not because of Iranian political aspirations and struggle but due to U.S "intelligence failure."

For example, Gary Sick⁴⁸, in his book, All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran, ranks Iran as a foreign policy disaster for the U.S, second only to Vietnam. He suggests that an "enormous failure of intelligence" kept Washington from taking the necessary steps to head off the debacle. He further discusses how the "loss of Iran" might have been averted or contained and the Shah kept in power, if the CIA and the U.S embassy in Teheran had done a better job. To his credit, in a rare burst of self-criticism in a discourse which generally sees America as guilty only of excessive benevolence, Sick raises

⁴⁸ During the years of Carter presidency (as well as Ford's and Reagan's), Sick was the principal White House aide for Iran on the National Security Council staff, serving as a point of contact between the White House and various agencies of the government. He was both the adviser and policy analyst, and also prepared the official records of government meetings throughout the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis. As such, he had an unsurpassed vantage point from which to observe and compile every element of the policy process, from academic expert consultations to the personalities and politics of the White House as well as internal government records and policy disputes within the State Department. He holds a Ph.D in political Science from Columbia University and is adjunct professor of Middle East politics at the same institution.

the question of why U.S policy had failed to recognize the warning signs that in retrospect one could see had existed long before the revolution. He answers the question by admitting that the warnings had not been seen because they involved problems one did not **want** to be aware of and would have required revisions one did not want to make.⁴⁹ Insights such as this are rare and most of them were made once the Shah was ousted and the new regime had consolidated its power. Another expert, Marvin Zonis of the University of Chicago, for example, had previously downplayed the importance of politics in Iran and praised the Shah's secret police for "doing a good job" and the shah himself as a "benevolent modernizer." He later became overtly critical of the Shah's regime, advocated the termination of U.S support for his regime and began to praise the opposition once the revolution was a fait accompli.⁵⁰

More disturbing however, are accounts which recommended a more militant measure for correcting the unfortunate failure of formal U.S intelligence operations. In "The purpose of American Power,"⁵¹ Robert W. Tucker, placing the debate firmly in cold war terminology and oriental dichotomies, considers "frank interventionism" to be the best approach in places such as the Persian Gulf Islamic States which are ready for American military occupation.⁵² Such recommendations for the exercise of brute force are indeed

⁴⁹ See: Sick, Gary. All Fall Down, Random House, New York, 1985.

⁵⁰ See: Zonis Marvin, "Iran, a theory of revolution from accounts of revolution," in **World Politics**, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1983. pp. 586-606. for his revisionist article. For Zonis' previous views see his The Political Elite of Iran, Princeton, 1971.

⁵¹ Foreign Affairs, Winter 1980-81.

⁵² This option was also the source of much heated debate between Zbigniew Brezezinski (the National Security adviser), Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and President Carter. The latter two did not support a military takeover much to Brezezinski's chagrin. See: Brezezinski, Zbigniew. Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981, Farrar, Strans and

frightening but hardly unexpected given that they represent the result of pushing the orientalist logic to its extreme end. I have already discussed the series of assumptions upon which such recommendations are made. To sum up, as Said argues, the experts are "all in concert [that] Islam is a threat to Western civilization;" ⁵³ and that there is "little inclination to accept the revolution itself as much more than a defeat for the U.S. or a victory of dark over light;" ⁵⁴. Additionally according to the orientalist logic, whatever Muslim Iranians say about their history of oppression or their sense of justice can be discounted as a "syndrome" of their irrational "Persian psyche." And if one considers that all these pronouncements construct the East as a mirror in which is reflected, by virtue of the contrast, the West's own level of greatness and superiority; then it matters little what steps are taken in order to "keep America strong." Iran and its "Islamic" revolution can therefore be viewed as aberrations in Western civilization's march to "progress" and "modernity" and as such deserve at best unreserved contempt, and at worst sheer annihilation.

The Media Discourse

The bridge between the "expert" discourse and the general population is provided by the mainstream media. Before the revolution attracted the attention of N. American media in early 1978, and the seizure of Teheran U.S embassy on Nov. 4, 1979 made "the Iran story" a daily assault on N. American consciousness, public knowledge about Iran was very

Giroux, New York, 1983. Also, Vance, Cyrus. Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1983. And Carter, Jimmy. Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President, Bantam Books, New York, 1982. Gary Sick and William Sullivan also discuss the series of disagreements and angry exchanges between these three men and their respective academic consultants. Their works have already been cited.

⁵³ Covering Islam, p. 136.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

limited. Many people vaguely knew that Iran was somewhere in the Middle East, although more often than not it was mistaken as an Arab nation and identified by many of the same stereotypes (Sheiks, camels, harems, belly dancing, feudal governments, cruel punishments, etc.). Most certainly knew that the country held vast amounts of "the West's" oil reserves. Some also knew that it was ruled by a strong-handed yet modern king who led a lavish and exotic lifestyle. But beyond these rudimentary, often inaccurate and reductive bits of information, Iran and its people remained a mystery. It is not surprising therefore, that when the revolution elevated Iran from the state of relative obscurity to the status of "news," there was no significant segment of the population ready to explain or correctly identify what appeared to be a sudden and unexpected event.

Taking their cues from foreign policy elites and academic area specialists whose judgement was laden with an orientalist perspective, the journalists engaged in a "dangerous exercise in circular delusion."⁵⁵ Instead of independent situational reports and political analysis which could have provided an alternative understanding of one of the most massive insurrections in modern history, the N. American mainstream mass media accepted the Pahlavi regime's and Washington's contention that the Iranian upheaval was entirely the work of Islamic fanaticism and leftist trouble-making. The policymakers in turn relied on the media's coverage of the events to bring themselves up-to-date on the fast-paced tumult of the revolution and cited the accounts in the more prestigious outlets (e.g. the New York Times, the Washington Post or the MacNeil/Lehrer Report) as evidence for the truth of their judgments. And with each spin round this vicious circle, the complex forces of the

⁵⁵ Dorman, William A. and Farhang, Mansur. The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference, University of California Press, Berkeley. 1987. p.153.

revolution contracted, while the restraint on what labels could be used to describe Iranians relaxed beyond any recognizable shape or form.

It can be argued that some experts had hedged their proclamations on Iran and what they took to be the single force behind the revolution (i.e. Islam) with, at times, qualifying explanations or brief discussions of these topics, albeit in an orientalist fashion. There may have been, as I argued in the previous section, a great lag between the academic or expert discourse on an unchanging notion of Islam and the actual dynamic social, historical, cultural and political realities to be found within the Islamic worlds in general or Iran in particular, but at least there **was** discussion. The media however, with very few exceptions, took an already truncated, ideologically skewed and ahistorical discourse and turned it into a handful of essentialist and reductive caricatures through which Islam, and Iran could supposedly be characterized.

It should be reiterated here that I am not suggesting a direct collusion between the official or expert sources and the media in order to conspire against Iran or Islam. In the same way as the expert discourse on the revolution is influenced by multiple factors (e.g. the context within which the scholars produce their work, their direct or indirect connections with the government, corporations, geopolitical strategy and national interests, received academic traditions, etc.) and is not simply an expression of "power in the raw," the media in western liberal democracies do not simply function as the mouthpiece for government propaganda. The link between the media and official policy is indeed enormously complex and subtle and certainly not indicative of an automatic cause-and-effect relationship⁵⁶. Nevertheless, as numerous communication theorists have successfully argued, the media are

⁵⁶ For a full analysis of this relationship with specific reference to Iran see Ibid.

profit seeking corporations which operate within a political context and, like all modes of communication, function according to culturally shared and professionally established rules and conventions⁵⁷.

These journalistic codes of conduct and the tacitly agreed upon practices are used in selecting and constructing easily digestible re-presentations of an otherwise unmanageable reality, which itself is neither singular, nor a "natural" phenomenon directly available to the senses. The individual reporter's conscious and unconscious biases, an awareness of the target audience which the report is to address, the medium through which it is to be delivered, the political economy as well as the ideological dimensions of the institutions involved in gathering, producing and disseminating the "news," are all important elements in constructing and promoting certain images of reality over others. Together, they constitute a central consensus which, to use Raymond Williams' phrase, "set limits and maintain pressures" on the process of news making. This is not to say that the content of the news is completely determined or dictated by these constraints and/or interests. Rather it is to recognize that the media mediate and reconstruct reality under conditions which make the "news" (or any other media product for that matter), far from "value-free," "independent" and "objective," despite their often-made claims to the contrary.

Furthermore, there is a wide variety of alternative media outlets and publications which operate outside of the status quo "limits and pressures," and as such can offer different, unconventional and even unpopular points of view. These organizations however,

⁵⁷See for example, Hartley, John. Understanding News, London:Routledge.1982. Bennett, Lance W. News:The Politics of Illusion, New York:Longman.1988. Gans, Herbert. Deciding What's News, New York:Vintage.1979. Bennett, Tony. The Mass Media as Definers of Social Reality, Milton Keynes:Open University. 1982.

do not enjoy the wealth and power of the giant media corporations which enable the latter to have the widest distribution and hence the strongest impact on the general population. It is important to point out that some dissenting views or alternative images can also be found in mainstream media, even if they are often buried under the sheer mass and frequency of conventional/consensual ones. As such it is far too simplistic to equate media's performance with propaganda or conspiracy⁵⁸. All of the above factors are at work when the news media are offering interpretations of domestic events. When the "news" is to be constructed about a far away land, with unfamiliar social/cultural/religious/political elements, unknown languages spoken by a people about whose identity and history little beyond stereotypes is familiar, exclusive reliance on standard journalistic practices seems that much more inevitable. As far as covering the Iranian revolution is concerned, one particular aspect of such routine practices, namely, dependence on official sources, led to an uncritical acceptance of the orientalist premise and assumptions. Add to this their general knack for molding events of extreme complexity into readily assimilable shape, and an internalized cold-war mentality and other sets of "limits and pressures," and the end result becomes nothing short of a media disaster.

In their year-long study of hundreds of press clippings, William Dorman and Eshan Omeed, could find no mainstream news medium that viewed the events in Iran from even a slightly different perspective⁵⁹. In a much more comprehensive study which examines the

⁵⁸The more sophisticated perspectives, such as Chomsky's "propaganda model" are not the object of my easy dismissal here. There may be problems with his model but they are of a different order from the crude equations of media with state propaganda to which I am referring.

⁵⁹ Dorman, William and Omeed Eshan (Mansour Farhang), "Reporting Iran the Shah's way," Columbia Journalism Review, Jan-Feb. 1979.

U.S press coverage of Iran over the twenty five years of increasingly intimate association between the two countries (1951-1978), Dorman and Farhang compare what the press said about Iran with what was reasonably knowable at the time. In short, their standard for judging the media's performance in Iran asks no more of the journalists than they already say they achieve⁶⁰.

Dorman and Farhang pay close attention to the relationship between the mainstream media and the foreign policy establishment, the uses made of available scholarly evidence (particularly those provided by non-status quo scholars), and the kind of media frames and language used to report the events in Iran⁶¹. They found that the American press coverage of Iran consistently ignored the **politics** of the country. While the Pahlavi monarch was in power, the press assumed that Iranian politics was simply the sum total of his will. And even long after he was ousted, the media refused to grant any legitimate political basis to the opposition. In fact, the press did not even use the term "revolution" to describe what was taking place in Iran until well over a year of massive upheaval had passed. Initially the term "revolution" was used with much hesitation and it was by no means a regular event until after the fall of Bakhtiar's government. Having been hand-picked by the Shah as a last resort

⁶⁰Dorman, William A. and Farhang, Mansur. The U.S. press and Iran, University of California Press, Berkeley. 1978. pp. 11-12.

⁶¹ Their sample consists of everything printed about Iran from 1951 to 1978 in the New York Times, everything published from 1953 to 1978 in the Christian Science Monitor, Newsweek, Time and all magazine articles indexed in Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature. They also sampled the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal as well as various other newspapers over the period of study to provide a profile of coverage by the two major wire services, United Press International and Associated Press. For 1953 and 1978 which are particularly critical years in contemporary Iranian history, their sample grows to include a whole host of other major American daily newspapers including the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times. See: *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

to keep the monarchy going in his absence, Bakhtiar's government was considered by the Iranian people not simply as illegitimate but of utterly no consequence -- a fact of which the mainstream press took no notice. As Dorman and Farhang explain

The **Christian Science Monitor** had raised the question of terminology earlier in an editorial (11 December 1978), all the while hedging its bets, when it told its readers: "But if the eyewitness report of events by Dr. James Bill on today's Opinion and Commentary page is accurate, Iran is in a state of revolution." The **New York Times** began using the term on 25 January 1979, or a week before Bakhtiar was forced to flee and the struggle was ended. The **Washington Post** followed suit in early February on the return of the Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran. Much of the rest, including the wire services, did not make regular use of "revolution" until after the Bakhtiar government fell on 11 February.⁶²

Instead of paying attention to the political aspirations and activities of the people in revolt, the media uncritically repeated the Shah's claims about the success and popularity of his modernization programmes, land reforms, emancipation of women , etc. and never questioned his characterization of the nature of the opposition to his rule as "fanatically religious" and "anti-democratic." With the orientalist mind-set and dichotomies firmly in place, the interpretation of Iranian realities clustered around two poles: what the Iranians in revolt were against constituted the first point of focus, and the second concentrated on what they were for⁶³. The media, often without giving any evidence, authoritatively asserted that the Iranians were against modernization and for religious fanaticism.

A UPI dispatch filed in August 1978 is a clear example of what dominated news stories, analyses and commentary in all mainstream media outlets: "Iran clamped martial law on three more towns yesterday to halt rioting by religious extremists opposed to the shah's

⁶² Ibid., p. 163.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 159.

liberalization of the Moslem nation."⁶⁴ Another representative example can be found in the Los Angeles Times (12 September 1978) which offers this typical analysis:

The turbulence sweeping Iran dates back to 1963 when Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi began an ambitious program of reforms. These were designed to put social developments of the oil-rich country on an equal footing with industrial production. The corner-stone of the program, which was described as a "white Revolution" was land reform, but it also promoted women's suffrage, a revolutionary step in a predominantly Moslem country.⁶⁵

The Washington Post (12 November 1978), is even more wistful as it informs the readers that the ungrateful mobs were overthrowing "the shah -- the man who had provided land, much of it his own, to his people, unshackled women and was portrayed by many, including himself, as the great modernizer of a backward land."⁶⁶

Later, I shall discuss the dubious notion that economic development, political liberalization and gender equity flourished in the Shah's Iran. For now suffice it to say that the Post's view of the Shah is based more on wish-fulfillment than concrete analysis. There are numerous other examples from a wide range of mainstream media sources but the themes and approach remain reductively the same. Modernity and civilization is pitted against Islam and the "barbarian mobs." As Dorman and Farhang argue, "whether it was the **New York Times** or the **Washington Post**, **Newsweek** or **Time**, the wire services or the television networks, the American mainstream news media tended routinely to characterize the Iranian uprising as more the work of turbanned religious zealots than the reaction of people outraged

⁶⁴ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶⁵ Cited in Dorman, William A. "Iranian People vs US news media: a case of libel," in **Race & Class**, Vol. XXI., No. 1., Summer 1979, p. 58.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

by a repressive regime."⁶⁷ To be sure, there were some brief mentions of the Shah's "iron fisted" or "stern willed" or "determined" style (envisioned as a "necessary measure" in bringing his people out of the Dark Ages). But as far as the media were concerned it was simply a question of **style** and not the **substance** of the man. In their study of the entire year of revolution, Dorman and Farhang only found "a single instance in which the mainstream media used the term "dictator" to describe the Shah, and that came in a positive context. According to a November 1978 Washington Post editorial, it was a curious matter that "the shah -- a dictator, after all -- has not been using the full power available to him to take the situation in hand."⁶⁸

By contrast the U.S. mainstream media showed no such mercy towards the people of Iran or their revolutionary leadership summed up in the label "Islam." The range of headlines which indicate the daily media diet during the revolution ranged from "Iranian Mobs Riot," "Anti-shah Rampage," "The Darker Forces of Islam," "Breaking the Link with Modernity," "The Barbarians are loose in Iran," to the more routine labels such as "The Islam Explosion," and "Frenzy and Self-flagellation." In true orientalist fashion, and in line with their appetite for highly dramatic images, the media were not content with reducing everything to a single dimension of "Islam."

The media narrowed the focus further by concentrating on the most "exotic" aspects of the holy month of Muharram, ignoring its profound political, moral and symbolic significance in favour of portraying it either as "the month of collective Muslim indulgence

⁶⁷ The U.S. Press and Iran, p. 166.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

in masochism," or as an expression of "the Shi'ites' persecution complex."⁶⁹ There was scarcely a mention of the fact that for Muslim people throughout the world the month of Muharram and its special days of worship, Tasua and Ashura, symbolize Islam's injunction against and the followers' obligation to resist tyranny and illegitimate government. It commemorates the martyrdom of Prophet Mohammed's grandsons -- the Imams Hossain and Hasan and their entire families -- who refused to give the oath of allegiance and fought against an illegitimate tyrant named Yazid. The point that the Shah, in the eyes of most Iranians, had come to personify Yazid and the rituals and their symbolism served as a mobilizing force against the tyranny of the regime, was lost on mainstream reporters and editorialists. Instead, in what Dorman calls a "Kiplingesque style," *Time* for example, told its readers: "These days marked the climax of the holy month of Muharram, on which Iran's devout Shi'ite Muslims traditionally take to the streets in a frenzy of reproach and self-flagellation."⁷⁰ Newsweek's account evoked a similar mood by saying

All week, the chants echoed cross Iran...In the alleyways of Teheran's ramshackle bazaar, street toughs ripped open their shirts, pounded their chests and chanted...Iran was revving up for the annual holy day of Ashura, when perfervid Shiite Muslims -- the shah's fiercest foes -- literally whip themselves into a frenzy.⁷¹

There was no explanation of which "tradition" they were referring to or why such demonstrations were taking place. The print as well as the electronic media did not bother to move outside ethnocentric frameworks and failed to inform their audience that in fact, self-flagellation is strongly discouraged and even rejected as sacrilegious by many religious

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 167-170. See also Covering Islam, p. 82.

⁷⁰ **Time**, 25 December, 1978, p. 32. Cited in The Us Press and Iran, p. 168.

⁷¹ **Newsweek**, (18, December, 1978), Cited in Ibid., p. 167.

leaders in Iran or that its practice is limited to a microscopic segment of the population. Dorman and Farhang point out the absurdity of the media's coverage through a simple comparison. "It was as if French reporters, say, were to observe a Pentecostal snake-handling ceremony in the American South and then to conclude that such behaviour characterized typical American Christianity."⁷²

The fascination with the "exotic" can also be seen in the mainstream media's incessant references to black robes, veils, turbans and a host of other seemingly strange behaviours. Given the media's penchant to explain politics in terms of personalities and equating Islam with almost any Muslim⁷³, Khomeini received the most detailed attacks. The reporters persisted in describing him as "bearded," "turbanned," "sitting cross-legged," etc. as if these details had great bearing on his thoughts or goals. Furthermore, these descriptions were routinely linked to phrases such as "clerical Fascists" or "fundamentalist fanatic."⁷⁴

Once Khomeini as the embodiment of the revolution was characterized in this manner, most reports saw their way clear to arrive at typically orientalist dichotomous conclusions centring on the battle of "good" vs "evil." For example, based on the fact that Flora Lewis, foreign correspondent for the New York Times, was asked to cover her hair, remove her shoes and sit on the floor with Khomeini while interviewing him; the San Francisco Chronicle's editorial concluded that "It would be hard to convince us that any modern state...could conceivably be ruled successfully or for long by the kind of fanatic priesthood

⁷² Ibid., p. 169.

⁷³ See: Covering Islam, p. 39.

⁷⁴ "The Iranian people vs U.S. news media," p. 61.

that Khomeini symbolizes.⁷⁵ If the choice of the words "fanatic priesthood" is not enough to conjure up images of dark cultist underworld, one can find ample clarification in the analysis provided by a senior New York Post reporter, George Carpozi Jr.. His analysis of Khomeini's book Islamic Government entitled Ayatollah Khomeini's Mein Kampf, (published by Manor Books), begins as follows:

Like Adolph Hitler in another time, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is a tyrant, a hater, a baiter, a threat to world order and peace. The principal difference between the author of Mein Kampf and the compiler of the vapid Islamic Government is that one was an atheist while the other pretends to be a man of God.⁷⁶

What is perhaps even more disturbing than characterizing Khomeini--the personification of "Islam"-- as evil incarnate is the line of argument which usually followed such statements. If millions of Iranian people were revolting in Khomeini's name, and keeping in mind the orientalist assumptions about the "Persian character" and its incapability to desire freedom or engage in politics in the absence of a dictator, then the Washington Post's writer, Stephen S. Rosenfeld, can assert that

the suspicion is unavoidable that Khomeini is popular precisely because Iranians know he harbours such [reactionary] views and because, in their current disposition anyway, they share them. This is a dismal thought for us of the democratic West, who usually regard "the people" as basically a progressive entity whose will, if followed, will produce a good society, but it is not easily dismissed.⁷⁷

Rosenfeld's analysis aptly illustrates how strongly the mainstream media discourse is rooted in the orientalist thesis. The people in the "democratic West" can be inherently progressive,

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 62. Dorman goes on to wonder if the same journalist would have been equally similarly incensed at the sight of someone kissing the Papal ring.

⁷⁶ Cited in Covering Islam, p.40.

⁷⁷ Washington Post, 5 January 1979. Cited in The U.S. Press and Iran, p.175.

the "reactionary" Iranians cannot. "We" are a good society, "they" are not. The Iranians gave their popular support to Khomeini, not because of any sociopolitical process but due to their "disposition" to support reactionary views. In other words, popular support is depicted as "fanaticism."

There are numerous other examples in which ahistorical, racist and essentialist portrayals of the Iranian revolution in the media, echo and enlarge the central dogmas of orientalism evidenced in the "expert" discourse discussed earlier. To reiterate, the common explanations in the mainstream North American news media centred on a monolithic notion of Islam embodied in a uniformly fanatic clergy who, stripped of mosque lands during the "White Revolution," and inherently opposed to the very idea of progress or civilization, whipped a childish, fickle, volatile and easily manipulated mass into a frenzy of eagerness to return to a sort of Dark Ages ⁷⁸. Again it must be noted that there were a few accounts which paid some attention to Iranian contemporary history and society but they existed more as the exceptions which proved the rule. The overwhelming majority of what claimed to be fair, balanced and responsible coverage of Iran and Islam amounted to little more than orientalist expressions of "unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred, deep

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 176-182., and Covering Islam, pp. 98-115.

yet paradoxically free-floating hostility."⁷⁹ All of this had taken place despite the fact that there was no lack of evidence or information about the country, its people, or the sources of their discontent⁸⁰. It is the discourses which made different uses of such knowledge that will be reviewed in the next chapter.

⁷⁹ Covering Islam, p. xi.

⁸⁰ Dorman and Farhang offer numerous examples to demonstrate what was knowable about Iran throughout their book. Edward Said, whose focus is more closely on Islam but uses the "Iran story" as his case study, also furnishes ample proof for this point in Covering Islam.

CHAPTER TWO

BEYOND ORIENTALISM: SOCIOECONOMIC AND ISLAMIC APPROACHES

There is a substantial body of literature that also recognizes the undeniable importance of Islam as a fundamental ideological element of the Iranian revolution without collapsing into the cliches of Orientalism. This work ranges from interpretations that underplay the role of Islam in favour of an emphasis on socioeconomic elements, to accounts which overexaggerate the Islamic dimension of the revolution. But, no matter which end of the spectrum is searched, one would be hard pressed to find the kind of inaccuracy, hostility and fear used by the orientalists to deprive Islam and Iran of history, specificity, politics and dignity. Instead, most of the authors who adopt what I call "Socioeconomic" and "Islamic" approaches recognize that "Islam is a political culture: it often provides the form and the vocabulary of political action. It can greatly strengthen personal commitment to a cause. But it is not in itself a sufficient explanation for the commitment, or a sufficient content for the cause."⁸¹

As such, with the understandable exception of the accounts produced by the most fundamentalist followers of Khomeini, none of the analysts in this highly diversified camp of writers confuse hindsight with insight. In other words, they do not consider the post-revolutionary establishment of an ultraconservative theocratic dictatorship as the longstanding desire of some regressive "Persian psyche" prone to suffer martyrdom for the cause of an Islamic resurgence. They are fully capable of distinguishing between pre-revolutionary hopes and aspirations of an oppressed people whose legitimate social, political, economic and

⁸¹ Mortimer, Edward. Faith & Power: The politics of Islam, Vintage Books, New York, 1982. p. 407.

cultural grievances drove them to rise against a non-responsive, autocratic and brutal regime; and the betrayal of those hopes and dreams for a more equitable and just society in post-revolutionary Iran.

Most of the authors I shall discuss are at pains to point out, for example, that the clergy were relative latecomers to the 1979 revolutionary movement which had already been set in motion by the secular forces in 1977. They also point to the undisputable role played by the clergy in previous political upheavals in Iranian history, but they never forget that the clergy **always** operated in conjunction with other opposition groups. With reference to the latest theocratic triumph in Iran, these analysts do not fail to mention that immediately after the victory over the old regime, there was over one full year of open and intense struggle between the various religious and secular forces involved in the revolution under a short-lived moderate leadership. The fundamentalists eventually consolidated their political power in the form of an "Islamic Republic," but this was the **effect** and not the **cause** of the revolution. The English, French, and Russian revolutions are often noted to demonstrate how moderate forces can lose ground in the immediate post-revolutionary period in any society and that this is not a "strange" feature of the Iranian case. This is not to say that the differences between the Iranian culture or historical specificity of the Iranian revolution and its western counterparts are leveled in such discussions. Nor are the more negative or disturbing aspects of Iranian or Islamic traditions left untouched by due critique in some (problematic) attempt at absolute cultural relativism.

The authors discussed below do not have privileged access to secrets or well-hidden sources beyond the reach of anyone interested in something more than a recitation of worn-out cliches and the "official" **idees recus**. Rather, their analyses simply take Iranian (and/or

Islamic) sociopolitical history and processes seriously and they do not compartmentalize the Iranian experience as a world apart in need of different categories of analysis than other parts of the world. Having said that, and without having any pretensions to be exhaustive in my treatment of these intricate and complex accounts, it is possible to divide non-orientalist approaches into two very broad categories based on their most predominant **emphasis**: The Socioeconomic interpretations and The Islamic ones.

The Socioeconomic Focus

All the studies which fall under this heading have one thing in common: a refusal to uncritically accept the much publicized central myth of the Pahlavi regime's success with regards to "modernization." In critically appraising the Iranian development experience under the Pahlavis, the authors who approach the revolution from this perspective suggest that the shah's efforts were only "make-believe" or "pseudodevelopments." Most agree that the latest series of reform programmes, the so called "White Revolution" was essentially a political attempt by the shah to blunt challenges to his move towards absolute power. These modernization plans were tirelessly promoted by the shah and his regime's propagandists at home and abroad. Their discourse managed to seduce world opinion and the U.S administration who were only too eager to congratulate themselves in turning Iran into a "modernization success story" and reap the benefits associated with it. However the seduction failed as far as the Iranians who had to endure the disastrous economic and social consequences of such plans were concerned.

Some of the socioeconomic analyses offered to explain the long-term causes of the revolution argue that the pace of modernization was too rapid. Although this sounds

suspiciously similar to the orientalist's claims that the shah's modernization rate was too fast and too advanced for his backward-looking people, it is not the same line of reasoning which is employed here. They point to more concrete elements such as the need to develop the infrastructural components, skilled labour, etc. which are difficult to achieve in haste ⁸². It should also be noted that not all authors who pay attention to socioeconomic factors do so from a critical perspective. Those who offer a socioeconomic analysis of the revolution from an uncritical or conservative perspective include the apologists of the Pahlavi regime and supporters of American "modernization" theory and in most of their contributions orientalism and modernization theory dovetail quite nicely ⁸³. Another set of studies suggest that modernization was not rapid enough ⁸⁴.

A third line of argument, and in my opinion the most comprehensive one, contends that the revolution happened not because modernization came too quickly or too slowly, but due to "uneven development." While the shah modernized (albeit with limited success) on the economic level, so this group of analysts argue, he failed to do the same at the political level; and consequently the links between the government and the social structure were eroded beyond repair. By 1977, the chasm between the developing socioeconomic system and

⁸² See for example: Halliday, Fred. Iran: Dictatorship and Development, Penguin Books, 2nd edition, 1979. Or Halliday's resume of this book in "The Genesis of the Iranian Revolution," in **Third World Quarterly**, October 1979, pp. 1-16. See also, Katouzian, Homa. The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-modernism: 1926-1979., New York University Press, 1980. As well as, Pesaran, Mohamad Hashem. "Economic Development and Revolutionary Upheaval in Iran," in Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil, edited by Haleh Afshar, Macmillan, London, 1985. pp. 15-50.

⁸³ See for example: Hoveyda, Fereydoun. The Fall of The Shah, translated by Roger Liddell, Wyndham Books, New York, 1979.

⁸⁴ See for example: Kamrava, Mehran. Revolution in Iran: The Roots of Turmoil, Routledge, London & New York, 1990.

the underdeveloped political system was so wide that the long brewing economic crisis was able to bring down the whole regime⁸⁵.

It is well beyond the scope of this review to discuss all the intricate details of each division within the socioeconomic framework. What follows is a composite of the general recurring themes and events discussed in the accounts with a discernable emphasis on the socioeconomic factors that led to the revolution. They differ in the theoretical mode of analysis employed (e.g. class analysis, development theory, etc.), the rate of speed attributed to modernization and the extent to which the economic consequences are given primacy over the sociopolitical dimensions or vice versa. However, most accounts are in general agreement about the significance and sequence of events as they are briefly summarized in the following pages.

The Socioeconomic Foundations of Revolution

The early 1920s mark the beginning of a series of attempts at industrialization and modernization in Iran. However, it wasn't until the military occupation of the country by the Allied forces had ended (1941-45) that modernization efforts were tied to a "planning framework" and the implementation of Western, or more precisely U.S., "Development" programmes began. The First Seven-Year Development Plan was approved by the Iranian parliament in 1949 but its collection of "high prestige" projects had to wait until 1954 for their implementation. This delay was mainly due to the 1951-53 uprising mobilized around

⁸⁵ See for example, Abrahamian, Ervand. Iran Between Two Revolutions, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1982. As well as, Amjad, Mohammed. Iran: From Royal Dictatorship to Theocracy, Greenwood Press, New York, 1989. Or, Keddie, Nikki R. Roots of Revolution, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1981.

the "oil nationalisation crisis" under the popular leadership of Mohammad Mossadeq, and the subsequent dwindling of oil revenues which resulted from the British embargo on the purchase of Iranian oil and the pro-British stance taken by the U.S⁸⁶. The CIA coup of Mossadeq's government in August 1953 reinstated the shah, and by 1954 U.S technical assistance, better known as the Point IV Programme, was well underway. The Point IV programme initiated a small number of prestigious infrastructural development projects without the benefit of a coherent, comprehensive strategy.

The Second Seven-Year Plan (1955-62) continued the same trend in which most of the budget was spent on building three large dams and a few large, capital intensive factories⁸⁷. The emphasis throughout these Plans was placed on spectacular projects which more often than not failed to serve the needs of the very sectors they were supposed to "modernize⁸⁸." However, the resumption of oil production and export after the overthrow of Mossadeq, combined with the influx of foreign loans and aid which encouraged private investment as well as increased government expenditure, produced Iran's first major economic boom in the post WWII period during the 1957-60. But this monetary boom soon turned into a deep recession due to the combination of deficit financing, the depletion of foreign exchange reserves and a very poor harvest during 1959-60. This forced the regime to seek emergency foreign aid from the U.S and embark upon an "Economic Stabilization

⁸⁶ Pesaran, pp. 18-20, Keddie, pp.113-132.

⁸⁷ Amjad, pp. 24-26.

⁸⁸ See for example Keddie's discussion of how the construction of dams contributed to a later agribusiness disaster. pp. 145-150. She also discusses the unbalanced nature of these Plans in terms of their concentration on the modern sectors of the economy at the expense of more traditional sectors such as agriculture, construction and domestic trade (the bazaar).

Programme" prescribed by the International Monetary Fund. The latter included what Pesaran calls "a set of standard IMF 'medicines' such as direct control of private sector credits, raising of interest rates, restrictions of imports and cuts in government expenditure."⁸⁹ In simpler terms, reduction of budget expenditure included freezing wages and halting most of the infrastructural projects. Such "medicines" were extremely hard to swallow for the vast majority of poor urban-dwellers as well as the bazaar merchants who took a direct hit by the import, credit and interest rate restrictions. Consequently, social tension and economic problems were mounting and massive discontent was not a surprising result.

Under pressure from the newly-elected Kennedy administration⁹⁰, the Shah's response to such dire conditions, was to further aggravate the situation by the introduction of his six-point reform programme known as the "White Revolution." In addition to land reform, the programme called for nationalisation of forests, sale of state-owned factories to private enterprise, profit-sharing for industrial workers, extension of the vote to women, and establishment of rural literacy corps (later other points were added to these and the title changed to "The Revolution of the Shah and the people"). To legitimize the royal "revolution from above," the Shah organized a national referendum and claimed that 99.9

⁸⁹ Pesaran, p. 21.

⁹⁰ See for example, Halliday (1979) p. 252. Also Keddie has an excellent discussion of the interaction between internal political opposition (namely the National Front), American shift in policy from unconditional support of the shah to ensure Iran stayed on the American side of the cold war during the 1950s, to granting loans and aid later, on the condition that the reforms be carried out to broaden the regime's internal base and increase efficiency because that would better serve the American strategic and economic interests in the region now that some moves towards a detente with the Soviet Union were made. See, Keddie, pp. 150-160.

percent of the voters in January 1963 endorsed the reform programme⁹¹.

As many observers have noted, the most important of these reforms in practice -- land reforms and the sale of state-owned factories to a small wealthy group of Pahlavi family members and friends -- only increased the economic, social and cultural gaps between the rich and poor. The absurdity of the regime's claims regarding the results of the nationwide referendum became massively apparent in June 1963, when thousands of people (from mixed socioeconomic backgrounds) poured into the streets to denounce the Shah. The deteriorating socioeconomic conditions had revived an old alliance between the bazaar and the Ulama⁹²(with their notable new figure in opposition, Ayatollah Khomeini), joined in much smaller numbers, by the secular National Front who had demonstrated their political abilities during the Mossadeq era.

This widespread uprising failed to overthrow the regime because the Shah exercised brute force to crush the riots⁹³, and let the SAVAK loose on the organizers and leaders of the movement to arrest, imprison, torture and kill them in large numbers. Those who escaped capture were driven underground or into exile. In addition, the Shah embarked on a series of Five-Year Plans which, for a time, appeared to have substance. Partly because the IMF "Stabilization Programme" had ended in 1961 resulting in some visible signs of economic

⁹¹ Abrahamian, pp. 424-425, Keddie, p. 156. See also: Nima, Ramy. The Wrath of Allah: Islamic Revolution and Reaction in Iran, Pluto Press, London and Sydney, 1983. pp. 38-43.

⁹² As Keddie points out this is a much more accurate way of referring to Iranian religious leaders "inadequately rendered by 'clergy,' as their role is not to intercede between people and God, but to carry out Muslim law, education, charity, and so forth--a broader role than that of the Western clergy." p. 12.

⁹³ An estimated 3000 demonstrators were murdered by the army on the streets of Teheran alone. See for example, Rubin, Barry. Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1981. p. 109.

recovery by late 1963, and partly for "cyclical" reasons, the immediate economic problems were overcome and Iran entered a new phase of "sustained growth and industrialization" (1963-72). This made the Shah appear justified in his unwavering faith in "modernization" programmes, a small number of which had actually produced limited positive results.

However, just under the surface of this facade of a seemingly "flourishing and prosperous economy," there was a whole range of problems which remained untouched leading to predictably disastrous consequences. For one thing, unlike other developing countries who, at least in part, rely on promotion of their own manufacturing exports to pay for their imports of capital and goods, Iran continued to depend, almost exclusively, on oil exports⁹⁴. As such, little or no attention was paid to the development of the agricultural sector and the domestic trade, in spite of the claims made about the "success" of land reforms which in reality were an additional factor in destroying agriculture and rural life in Iran. The peasants did not become landowners, or at least, not owners of enough land for subsistence⁹⁵. Deprived of their livelihood, the rural peasants began a massive migration into overcrowded urban centres in search of jobs, thereby intensifying the already acute problems of housing, health care, education, water and electricity shortages, etc. Most peasants ended up along with the urban poor in shanty towns on the outskirts of urban centres without any services whatsoever.

⁹⁴ In this period, the apparent "prosperity" necessary to sustain the shah's Plans, was brought about by excessively rapid rate of reserve depletion and **not** higher oil prices. See for example, Pesaran, pp. 24-27.

⁹⁵ There are numerous and complex reasons for the failure of land reforms. For a full discussion of these reasons, in addition to the sources already cited, see: Afshar, Haleh. "An Assessment of Agricultural Development Policies in Iran," in Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil, pp. 58-80. And, Hooglund, Eric. Land and Revolution in Iran: 1960-1980, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1982.

In addition, large scale corruption by the royal family and their friends, massive capital transfers abroad, a growing accumulation of deficit produced by a series of "balance-of-payment" problems⁹⁶, all made it abundantly clear that the benefits of "modernization" and reforms were not "trickling down." On the contrary, income distribution both in rural and urban areas became increasingly unequal⁹⁷, and Iran was headed for yet another deep recession had it not been for the great OPEC oil price increase of 1973, of which the Shah was the "chief architect."⁹⁸ The quadrupling of oil prices in 1973-74 solved the deficit and foreign exchange problems overnight. It also provided the government with what Pesaran has called, a "golden opportunity" to redress the economic and social grievances and inequities which the "White Revolution" had caused.

The fast rate of extraction of Iran's dwindling oil reserves (an industry which had always been at the heart of Iranian political struggles), could have been reduced without damaging the country's "growth potential" or causing an economic crisis. But, these and many other beneficial options for spending the oil revenue after the OPEC price hike, were passed over by the Shah in favour of doubling the Five-Year Plan budget in 1974. The warnings and advice by economists and planners who dared to suggest that the revised plan

⁹⁶ The accumulated deficit over the 1963-70 period amounted to \$2170m which was 70% higher than the country's total oil revenues in 1970. See: Pesaran, p. 31, and his note on p.45.

⁹⁷ For a detailed discussion of income distribution see: Jabbari, Ahmad. "Economic Factors in Iran's Revolution: Poverty, Inequality, and Inflation," in Iran: Essays on a Revolution in the Making, edited by Ahmad Jabbari and Robert Olson. Mazda Publishers, Kentucky, 1981. pp. 163-214.

⁹⁸ Keddie, Nikkie R. & Hooglund, Eric. (eds), The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic, New edition, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1986. p. 2.

would create more infrastructural problems were discounted with contempt by the regime⁹⁹. The Shah, consumed by his dream of a "Great Civilization,"¹⁰⁰ was more willing to listen to the American administration. Needless to say, the U.S government had its own "national interest" in mind and the advice offered was anything but free. Following the so called "Nixon Doctrine," the U.S was prepared to sell Iran as much military arsenal (with the exception of nuclear weapons) as the Shah's insatiable desire demanded. It also benefited greatly from the expansion of the export market for American consumer goods and "expert/technical" services, and was thus assured of a cheap and plentiful oil supply exported to finance the reviving of the new "Persian Empire."¹⁰¹

Not surprisingly, the Shah's insistence on "modernization" at whatever cost, led to serious economic problems. Shortages of skilled labour and needed materials, bottlenecks at roads and ports, rising inflation, unprecedented corruption, inflow of foreign workers and "imported advisers" -- in short, "all the signs of a greatly heated economy"¹⁰² -- elevated the people's discontent and resentment to new heights. Instead of taking any meaningful steps to reduce public sector expenditure and wastage or curtailing the expansion of private sector credits which would have upset the royal family and the handful of their associates, an ineffective and disruptive "anti-profiteering campaign" was initiated by the regime.

⁹⁹ See: Graham, Robert. Iran: The Illusion of Power, Croom Helm, London, 1979., ch.5.

¹⁰⁰ The "Great Civilization" was the Shah's grand design to restore the past glory of the ancient Persian Empire, and simultaneously make Iran the "Japan of the Middle East" ready to compete with the most advanced industrialized countries of the world by the late 1980s.

¹⁰¹ See: Halliday, F. Iran: Dictatorship and Development, pp. 95-96.

¹⁰² Keddie & Hooglund, p. 3., Pesaran, pp. 32-34.

The resentment of government by the target group of this campaign the bazaar, grew. When it became clear that this type of stop-gap measure was more disruptive than useful, the regime adopted a tighter fiscal policy in 1975-76. On the one hand, the cutbacks which were a part of this move, suddenly deprived the already struggling rural/urban migrants of jobs in the construction industry. On the other hand, the complete lifting of restrictions on foreign exchange transactions, enabled the wealthy industrialists, who were unhappy about other parts of the policy or the state of the economy in general, to send even more massive amounts abroad. This signalled not only their loss of faith in the regime, but also furnished the opposition groups with an additional mobilizing instrument. The sharp reduction of funds to the Ulama gave a further push to discontent and once again the historical alliance of the Ulama and the bazaar was revived¹⁰³.

The general disillusionment and discontent brought about by the economic crisis was further reinforced by a prolonged and brutal political suppression which the Shah depended upon to consolidate his dictatorship in the post-Mossadeq era. People were becoming increasingly aware of SAVAK's activities as well as the growing presence of U.S military personnel, technical experts, business consultants and investors, who were incredibly well-paid and could do whatever they pleased in Iran with impunity. The slight relaxation of police controls which allowed a gradual "liberalization" to release some of the sociopolitical tensions, presumably implemented within the framework of Carter's Human Rights policy¹⁰⁴, enabled the opposition forces to step up their activities and embark on

¹⁰³ See: Zabih, Sepehr. Iran's Revolutionary Upheaval: An Interpretive Essay, Alchemy Books, San Francisco, 1979.pp. 31-32. And Amjad, pp. 85-91.

¹⁰⁴ Accounts vary on the significance of these policies or the extent of pressure from the Carter administration on the shah. However, what is agreed upon in most sources is that both the shah

revolutionary mobilization.

Divergent Frames of Analysis

Up to this point, one can find a similar account in almost any of the various texts used to put together this truncated summary of socioeconomic factors which by 1977 led to unbearable inequities and injustices in Iran. However, once this background is established, the authors employ various theoretical models of analysis and differ on which aspects of the Iranian socioeconomic/political conditions were mainly responsible for the translation of people's discontent and disillusion into a successful revolution.

Some choose to concentrate on the psychological trauma and disorientation as well as social dislocation and "anomie" suffered as a result of rapid industrialization-cum-urbanization. Davies' "J-curve" formulation is used to explain a situation typical of revolutions in which "when a long period of rising expectations and gratifications is followed by a short period during which expectations continue to rise while gratifications fall off sharply, the probability of civil violence against the government rises rapidly."¹⁰⁵ Thus the period of sustained growth (1963-72) and the implementation of the revised Plan financed by post OPEC rise in oil revenue "raised expectations" without offering much gratification to the majority of the population. The 1975-76 cutbacks worsened the situation by causing a sharp decline in both "economic growth" and public satisfaction¹⁰⁶. By 1977, massive

and the opposition **believed** that the U.S **might** act for human rights, even if Carter's election speeches on this topic were not really reflected in his deeds.

¹⁰⁵ See: Davies, James C. "The J-curve Theory," American Political Science Review, Vol.72. No. 4, Dec. 1978. pp. 1357-58.

¹⁰⁶ See for example, Kamrava, Mehran. Revolution in Iran: The Roots of Turmoil, 1990.

public uprising set the wheels of the revolution in motion. Durkheim's notion of "normative disorientation" is then used to explain the role of religion as restoring traditional ties severed, and curing the resulting anomie.

Others employ a "crisis of the state" model to argue that not only had economic mismanagement, haphazard development, and reform policies made the situation intolerable for the people, but also by late 1976, the regime had become incapable of running the state as before. They point to the mistakes made in handling the revolutionary crisis by an indecisive and vacillating shah whose strategy for dealing with the crisis was a deadly combination of intermittent concession and terror¹⁰⁷. The Shah would for example, offer an olive branch to the opposition by releasing some political prisoners, and then send in specially created SAVAK commando units to beat up the opposition leadership and bomb their homes and offices¹⁰⁸. While this strategy seemed to work for a short period of time, in the long run it only served to fan the revolutionary fire.

Those theorists who follow an orthodox Marxist approach attribute this persistence and the resulting success of the revolution to the fulfillment of their "historic mission" by the industrial workers and/or the "lumpen proletariat." The truly impressive and highly effective waves of strikes by oil workers in particular, and other much smaller number of industrial workers in general, are focused upon within the framework of "class conflict" analysis. They also point to the international economic recession and the failure of Iran's dependent capitalism as the major causes of the revolution¹⁰⁹. These accounts do pay a little uneasy

¹⁰⁷ See for example, Amjad, Mohammed. Iran: From Royal Dictatorship to Theocracy, 1989.

¹⁰⁸ See for example, Nima, Ramy. Wrath of Allah, p. 60-62.

¹⁰⁹ See: Bayat, Assef. Workers & Revolution in Iran, 1978. As well as the chapters on the strikes in Nima's book already cited.

attention to the Islamic or other ideological (i.e., superstructural) dimensions of the revolution, but generally whatever does not fit the theoretical model of analysis is left out of the discussion or downplayed in terms of its significance.

If these interpretations run the risk of disregarding Islam as an important factor in revolutionary leadership and mass mobilization, the pendulum swings to the other extreme in the numerous series of analyses which exaggerate Islam in varying degrees.

The Islamic Focus

In stressing the centrality of Islam in the Iranian revolutionary upheaval, three broad sets of interpretations have emerged in the reviewed literature: The Doctrinal, the Pragmatic and the Communication network approach.

The doctrinal explanations of the revolution can be further divided into two variations. The fundamentalist Islamic groups see Islam as an end in itself and the revolution as the struggle of the Muslim people of Iran against the anti-Islamic nature of the Shah's regime. The proponents of this view interpret historical/social/political change in terms of innate religious doctrine and downplay the impact of cultural and economic factors in favour of insisting that the revolution was a divine miracle and people were simply fulfilling God's Will. Thus Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, whose lectures and writings came second only to those of Khomeini himself in forming the foundation for post-revolutionary ideological trends embodied in the Islamic Republic, asserts that "Islam imbues its followers with a feeling of protest, of struggle and of rejection of any undestined situation."¹¹⁰

A variation on this theme is provided by the analyses which tighten the focus

¹¹⁰ Motaharri, Morteza. "The Nature of the Islamic Revolution," in Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil, pp. 201- 220.

specifically around the "Twelver" sect of Shi'ite Islam and consider this Shiism to be inherently revolutionary ¹¹¹. A few words should be said here about how this particular sect, which finds its greatest concentration of followers in Iran, is different from Sunni Islam which is the religion of over 80% of Muslims in other parts of the world.

Islam, regardless of sectarian differences, recognizes no separation between spiritual and temporal authority. Unlike the role Jesus plays in Christianity, the birth of the Prophet Mohammed does not mark the beginning of the Islamic era. Rather, it is his "hijra" or exodus (in 622) from Mecca to Medina along with a small group of his disciples, that is celebrated as such. The establishment of an ideal "Community of Believers" in Medina from the time of this exodus to the death of the prophet ten years later is believed in by all Muslims. However, whereas the Sunnis extend their conception of this ideal Islamic state to the period of rule by the four "Caliphes" who were considered the "Rightly-Guided Successors" of Mohammed, the Shi'ites maintain that succession of leadership of the Muslim community should pass in the house of Prophet via his cousin and son-in-law Ali (thus the first Shi'ite "Imam" as opposed to the fourth Sunni "Caliphe"), and his direct descendents. The doctrine of "Imamat" in various Shi'ite sects contains different beliefs about the transference of Ali's temporal as well as spiritual authority. The "Twelvers," consider the transfer of power to have ceased with the occultation of Mahdi, the infant son of the eleventh Imam, in 878. Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, is believed to make a messianic return at the "End of Time," to save the world from injustice and oppression¹¹². Until then, the Ulama hold

¹¹¹ See: Algar, Hamid. The Roots of Islamic Revolution, Open Press, London, 1983.

¹¹² Despite his own objections which were strategically not well-publicized, Khomeini was the returned Mahdi in the minds of a great number of Iranians, as frequent references to him as the Imam attest.

his power and all temporal rule is considered illegitimate unless the Ulama judge it to be in accordance with the "Shari'a" (i.e. the Sacred Law) and hence tolerable. Thus, Shi'ite doctrine puts the Ulama in a position of great strength with considerable veto power over the temporal authorities¹¹³.

However, as Keddie aptly argues, Shi'ism can be quietist as well as rebellious depending on sociohistorical circumstances¹¹⁴. She draws on numerous examples in Iranian history (as well as other Muslim countries) to demonstrate that Shi'ism can provide "special elements for revolutionary syntheses, but like many religions can as well be adapted to conservative causes."¹¹⁵ Even if a much shorter time period than considered by Keddie is taken and one only looks at the 1977-79 period in Iran, the shortcomings of the doctrinal approach are easily identifiable. First, the timeless nature of analysis is unable to explain why this innate rebelliousness produced a revolution in 1979 and not in some other year. By disregarding the entire range of social/cultural/economic and political conditions, conflicts and dynamics, this perspective fails to admit that there were significant portions of the population who were neither pious nor even remotely interested in seeing a fundamentalist Islamic government. Proponents of this view also forget that throughout 1977 the group who organized the anti-regime uprising and participated in demonstrations and other oppositional activities were the intellectuals (both liberals and leftists) and the salaried middle class with an expressedly secular outlook. It was certainly through an alliance with the religious groups,

¹¹³ For a fuller discussion of the complexities of these issues see: Arjomand, Said Amir. (ed). Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism, Suny Press, Albany, 1988.

¹¹⁴ Keddie, Nikki R. "Is Shi'ism Revolutionary?" in The Iranian Revolution & The Islamic Republic, pp. 113-124.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 124.

who entered the scene in late 1977, that the revolution was finally won. But, it is far too reductive to make the circular argument that the revolution was due to Shi'ism because Shi'ism is revolutionary.

The "pragmatic" set of interpretations also assigns to Islam an excessively central place, **but** focuses on the relatively autonomous position of Ulama within the state -- a condition maintained primarily by their independent sources of income from religious endowments and taxes. Proponents of this view envision the "Islamic revolution" as an "inter-elite conflict" between the Ulama (and their sets of material interests) and the secular state. They often point to the highly pragmatic political behaviour of the Ulama, which sometimes became clearly opportunistic, as reflected in the shifting alliances and tactics that they employed in their relationship with the Pahlavis, the central authority and sectors of the Iranian elite¹¹⁶. Some even go so far as calling the revolution a "clerical coup d'etat."¹¹⁷ These accounts do pay attention to socioeconomic factors and specific historical conditions in Iran. But their efforts are directed towards demonstrating how "modernization" programmes encroached on areas which traditionally fell under the control of the Ulama (for example, judicial and educational institutions), and the gradual differentiation and separation of religious and political powers which as early as 1970 was virtually complete.

If the Ulama were disengaging from the state, they were certainly reaffirming their engagement with people. And the third set of explanations emphasize the strength and extent of the religious organizational and communication networks as the most readily available and

¹¹⁶ In 1953 for example the Ulama abandoned Mossadeq and the National Front for the Shah.

¹¹⁷ See: Arjomand, Said Amir. The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988. pp. 137-147.

effective means for articulating political discontent and mass mobilization. According to this perspective, Islam provided familiar concepts, rituals and words to be used for the expression of political grievances and demands. Also, since religion was one of the fundamentals of the legitimacy claims of the state, it made possible a direct challenge to authority. As previously discussed, the martyrdom of Ali's son Imam Hossain for example, was used successfully as a metaphor to draw a perfectly obvious parallel between the ruthless tyranny of the Shah and the most hated figure of the Umayyad caliphate, Yazid, who killed Hossain and his family in a battle for leadership of the Muslim Community.

During the revolution, Hossain's role as a courageous fighter leading a battle against odds in order to establish justice was to be emulated. The commemoration of his martyrdom by special readings, passion plays and processions served as a very effective medium for organising mass demonstrations and articulating protest. Michael Fisher for example, refers to the Shi'ite "Karbala paradigm" (the battle occurred in Karbala), as a "device for heightening political consciousness of the moral failings of the government" and for providing "multiple levels of channelling feelings of solidarity and conflict, of which the overt political metaphor of oppression by tyrannical kings is only the most obvious."¹¹⁸

Furthermore, the destruction of all political organizations and the long period of brutal repression had prevented the growth of all other outlets of freedom (for example, the press, student organizations, independent political parties, etc.). Consequently, the vast network of mosques and religious institutions (approx. 80,000), and the well-organized cadres of

¹¹⁸ Fischer, Michael. Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1980. p.191.

mullahs¹¹⁹ (approx. 180,000), provided a formidable communication network which reached into every village and town across Iran. The regime's repressive machinery found it very difficult to label normal mosque activity as anti-government agitation. Additionally, giving private sermons in religious gatherings inside people's homes was also a normal tradition in Iran and even harder to control¹²⁰. Writers who make these arguments conclude that such an impressive and powerful network of communication which could (and did) mobilize vast numbers of people when a unifying issue arose, made the Ulama into the de facto leaders of the revolution and gave it a religious colouring. In other words, in some ways the "Islamic" form triumphed over all other content and that makes Islam **the** overarching, central element of the revolution.

Each of these frameworks offers, in varying degrees, some valid and important points for understanding the complex dynamics and causes of the Iranian revolution. For example, an examination of the relationship between Shi'ism and political order in the wider context of Iranian history is essential and indispensable even for the most rudimentary understanding of the revolution. Similarly, it would be foolish to claim complete comprehension without an analysis of Iranian economy and class structure or global geopolitics and international configuration of interests and pressures. It would indeed be a near impossible task to put together a coherent and exhaustive account of all the intricate details and multifaceted religious, political, socioeconomic and cultural processes and organizations which are needed for a full analysis of the Iranian revolution. There are a few scholars who have attempted to

¹¹⁹Mullahs are the more junior members of the religious hieracrazy and the most numerous.

¹²⁰ See: Amjad, Mohammed. Iran from Dictatorship to Theocracy, chapter 3.

do this with much care. Their work, upon which I shall draw throughout this thesis, does not lend itself to strict methodological and/or ideological classification, even though I have cited some of it under such headings¹²¹.

However, even these groups of multi-dimensional scholars who consider other ideological factors in their analyses, do not spend a great deal of attention and space on fully developing them. They have produced an impressive number of texts in which sometimes a paragraph, more rarely a chapter, is devoted to "other," "non-Islamic" ideological constructs that may have been important to the revolution, but I have found no source which offers a sustained analysis of these factors. This is particularly limiting for analyzing another, and in my opinion, equally powerful and unifying ideological/cultural dimension of the revolution, namely the issue of "nationness" and its profound significance in, and contribution to this unprecedentedly popular revolution. The following chapters take a different theoretical approach from what has been considered thus far, to explore this relatively neglected dimension of the Iranian revolution.

¹²¹ For example, Keddie, Abrahamian, Halliday, Jabbari, Fisher, and Katouzian have certainly made major contributions most of which defies rigid labelling.

CHAPTER THREE

MAPPING OUT A DIFFERENT THEORETICAL TERRAIN

A shift in theoretical paradigms and interpretive schemes seems essential if such critical strategic questions as the importance of "nationness" and its role in the cultural, ideological and political struggles involved in the making of the Iranian revolution, are to be seriously considered. In my opinion, the work of Antonio Gramsci is precisely the kind of theoretical grounding which has an enormous amount to offer with regards to these otherwise unexamined questions. His work brings into play concepts needed to tackle the complex and multi-layered constellation of social, political, ideological and cultural forces and formations which characterize contemporary struggles -- whether in Iran or elsewhere -- but which traditional social theory paradigms cannot adequately explain.

At first sight, Gramsci may not appear to be the most suitable theorist nor his ideas the most applicable to the Iranian situation. After all, a quick glance through his writings and/or the Gramscian analyses which abound under the general rubric of Cultural Studies would give the impression that there is little relation between Gramsci's work and what goes on in the non-western world. There would also be some evidence to support such a position. Those who hold it are usually quick to point out that Gramsci has no in-depth analysis of imperialism or the colonial experience, without which an accurate analysis of the personal, social/cultural and political struggles, relationships and experiences of the non-western world can not possibly be carried out. Furthermore, the ruling regimes in "the East," or "the South," as the case may be, are more often than not, considered to be non-democratic, highly oppressive, and certainly in the case of Iran, identified as a dictatorship. Gramsci's ideas, for the most part, have been applied to questions concerning ideology, power, politics, the

state and civil society, etc. in the context of western, liberal democracies where, unlike in a dictatorship, the leaders **must** gain the consent of the led and do so in "open" competition with all other groups who vie for leadership and dominance.

However, as Stuart Hall has pointed out, to read Gramsci in this manner would be "to commit the error of literalism."¹²² A less "literal" reading of Gramsci's work would reveal that his work in the context of Italian history is not limited to periods or political regimes categorized as "social democracies." In general, he deals with questions of power in the form of a political sociology which is acutely sensitive to context and genuinely open to theoretical modification and/or experimentation.

Furthermore, while it is true that Gramsci does not specifically write about colonialism, for example, one only has to pay attention to his personal and political experiences and formation, as reflected in the recurring themes of his work, to realize his acute awareness of, and preoccupation with strategies and forms of political action and organization which characterize many of what is today thought of as "North/South" as well as "East/West" questions¹²³. Gramsci's birth place, Sardinia, a poverty stricken, dependent peasant culture in the South, stood in a "colonial" relation to the "modern," "industrialized" North of Italy. His first contacts with, and contributions to the socialist movement and radical regional politics were in the context of Sardinian nationalism reflected upon and incorporated in many passages of his work under the title of "the Southern Question" .

Although later on he immersed himself in questions concerning class struggle,

¹²² Hall, Stuart. "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," in Journal of Communication Inquiry, Vol.10, Number 2, Summer 1986. p.8.

¹²³ For a fuller discussion of this point see Ibid. pp.9-11.

Gramsci never completely abandoned reflecting on how class relations were compounded or intersected by other relations and layers of the social formation. Relations of and struggles over, regional, cultural, national and ideological concerns, are some of the dimensions which do not have an exclusively class character. Nonetheless, they are particularly important in the case of developing societies which, as Hall observes, "have not passed through the 'classic' path of development to capitalism which Marx took as his paradigm case in **Capital** (i.e., the English example)"¹²⁴. In such societies, and Iran is certainly one of them, the industrial proletariat is relatively insignificant and rarely well-organized into a "unified" revolutionary class. As such the forms of political struggle have a wider, mixed social character and the key question becomes one based on a "system of alliances." On these issues some of Gramsci's core conceptions furnish us with the most useful tools of analysis.

Gramsci does not provide a grand systematized theory or a "general social science."¹²⁵ As such it is possible to take his concepts and experiment with them in new directions which Gramsci himself did not venture. It is important to keep in mind that his formulations are historically specific and always derived from an application of theory to concrete, delimited social and political situations. Therefore in adapting his concepts to contemporary sociopolitical phenomena, one has to also adopt his careful attitude towards time and context-bound analysis. In other words, mechanically transferring Gramsci's ideas

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 15.

¹²⁵ There are numerous reasons for the fragmentary character of Gramsci's work and while they are extremely important in situating his contributions in their historical, political and theoretical context, there is no room here to discuss them. The excellent Introduction to The Prison Notebooks by G. Nowell Smith and Q. Hoare, 1971, as well as almost any of the secondary sources on Gramsci, listed in my bibliography devote many pages to this issue.

in their entirety to contexts and questions which fall outside his immediate and specific concerns would be a mistake. It is much more true to the spirit of Gramsci's "sophisticating" and "conjunctural" theorizing, to approach contemporary analyses from a Gramscian **perspective** instead. As Hall insightfully warns:

"We mustn't use Gramsci (as we have for long abused Marx) like an Old Testament prophet who, at the correct moment, will offer us the consoling and appropriate quotation."¹²⁶ Rather, we can look to Gramsci to offer us "the means with which to ask the right kinds of questions."¹²⁷

The remainder of this chapter is an attempt to explain "the means" which are most directly relevant to the kinds of questions that this thesis sets out to explore in relation to the Iranian revolution and the role played by nationness as a strategy of alliance.

A Coincidence of Interests: Gramsci's National-Popular

In the **Prison Notebooks**, the central notion in which all of Gramsci's concepts cohere is the concept of hegemony. Any short definition of this intricate and complex concept is inadequate. At the same time it is almost impossible to approach the most relevant of Gramsci's concepts as far as this thesis is concerned -- the **national-popular** -- without at least a brief consideration of **hegemony**.

Essentially, hegemony refers to the sum total of the processes and elements necessary for a "fundamental social group" (composed of alliances of various class strata and not of a monolithic "ruling class") to extend their dominance in the economic realm into a moment

¹²⁶ Hall, Stuart. Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left, Verso, 1988. p.161.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 162.

of leadership at all levels of a social formation (cultural, social, political and ideological). Hegemony is a "formative and connective" moment which marks "the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the superstructures."¹²⁸ Hegemonic power however, is a relation not of domination by force alone. Rather, it is an exercise of power by means of a combination of "coercion and consent."¹²⁹ Although Gramsci writes that the institutions of hegemony are located in "civil society," whereas the "State" is the arena of force, he also stresses the overlaps between the two spheres.

Gramsci's keen attention to the role of "national-popular" consciousness as a major element in securing a hegemonic leadership at **all** levels of the social complex, as well as the discussion of the "intellectuals" and the importance of an "ideological and moral reform," point to his desire to restore the possibility of conscious, ideological and creative human activity in the historical process. Indeed, his emphasis on these "superstructural" elements was a necessity given the theoretical position of the majority of his contemporaries¹³⁰ which is labelled by Gramsci as "vulgar materialism" or "economism." This perspective holds that political, ideological or cultural developments are the expression of economic developments; the line of causation proceeds from the economy to politics which tends to be deprived of its

¹²⁸ Selections from the Prison Notebooks, London:Lawrence and Wishart, 1971. p. 181. Referred to as **SPN** hereafter.

¹²⁹ In a dictatorship, the "coercion" aspect is more obvious and brutal but even dictatorships need a certain degree of consent if a revolution against the state is to be avoided.

¹³⁰ Bukharin is the specific target of Gramsci's attack but he is far from being alone. The Socialist Party leaders adhering to the Second International's mechanistic thinkers such as Plekhanov, Kautsky etc. were among some of the deterministic Marxists under Gramsci's attack. See Anderson, Perry. "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci." New Left Review, 100, Nov.1976-Jan 77, pp.15-17., as well as, Bottomore, Tom (ed.) A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, Harvard University Press, 1983. pp.235-236.

own autonomy. In other words, the significant developments are taken to be those happening in the "structure," whereas political and cultural/social and ideological struggles and popular passions or ideas are considered only part of the "superstructure" emanating from this base. People who took these surface reflections as reality did not have a true consciousness of the world and their place in it. In order to be cured of their false consciousness, the intellectuals working in the vanguard of the party, had to show them the light. For the self-proclaimed rational and scientific Marxists, the "national-popular" struggles and ideas of people were at best marginal and at worst, discounted as effects of false consciousness and therefore worthy of little or no attention.

For Gramsci, who exercised a genuinely open marxism or as Hall has put it a "marxism without guarantees," such a reductive interpretation of Marx tended to promote a passive attitude of waiting for the happy hour when capitalism is going to collapse under the weight of its internal contradictions between the "forces and relations of production." In this scenario, history possesses a necessary movement derived from the continual growth of the productive forces. History, in other words, is independent of the aspirations, struggles and will of the people who were, curiously enough, identified by Marx as its makers¹³¹.

Gramsci's view of history, of the structure/superstructure complex and of revolutionary strategy by contrast, is emphatically anti-reductionist. The "national-popular"

¹³¹ Gramsci, in arguing against such "reductive" approach to Marxism repeatedly alludes to Engels' letter to Bloch and to Starkenburg which offer a corrective to this position. Engels writes: "According to the materialist conception of history the determining moment in history is **ultimately** the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic moment is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase." (*SPN*, p. 427n. and p.472.)

like all the other concepts in the **Notebooks** cuts across the deterministic model of economism which by treating a **metaphor** as if it was a **formula**, severed the base from the superstructures. Instead, Gramsci presents the national-popular as an **historic bloc** to describe the complex ways in which classes and fractions of classes are related in society and the complicated relationship between the economic, political and cultural/ideological aspects of social realities. An historical bloc is specific to a national context in which a different historical bloc may be created under the leadership of a revolutionary class(es). The hegemony of a class is the "glue" which binds together the various parts of an historical bloc. The question of the nation and of specific national traditions, and the needs of people at large are thus essential to the working class (or any other class or groups engaged in a struggle for leadership) rather than marginal. Revolutionary transformation is redefined to indicate a change in which a variety of groups participate under the hegemony of a class which is able to forge a new historical bloc and go beyond its own narrow sectional interests. Given the significance of the notion of the historical bloc for an understanding of the "national-popular," particularly as it relates to the structure/superstructure complex, a closer look, albeit a quick one, at Gramsci's treatment of both themes is in order.

The Historical Bloc

For Gramsci, the historical bloc is not to be reduced to a mere political alliance of classes which are homogeneous in their ideology or economic status. Instead, it assumes a complex construction within which there can be many sub-blocs, for example, a peasant bloc with its own complex formation, and an industrial bloc, each of these containing different elements and contradictions. In other words, it is possible for an historical bloc to contain

a multiplicity of political blocs made up of different combinations of political allies which nonetheless maintain the general configuration of the fundamental historical bloc. As such, the political representations of a concrete historical bloc vary, in different hegemonic moments, so that there is never a complete reflection of the forces that make up the historical bloc. For example, as Gramsci explains in **Some Aspects of the Southern Question**¹³², there can be a variety of government coalitions and indeed a variety of State forms (e.g., parliamentary democracy or fascism as the historical case may be), as there were in Italy from the Risorgimento until the 1930s, in a society which the fundamental historic bloc remains the same (i.e. a new political formation comes to power without a fundamental reordering of social relations).

However, while the historic bloc remains basically the same, it **does** change as new elements develop, and others disappear or diminish or are articulated differently. So for example, what "leads" in a period of bourgeois hegemony may be a fraction of the dominant economic class such as industrial capital, which has won over a strata of the dominated classes such as the industrial working class and the peasantry, thus forging the "expansive, universalizing alliances" which cement the historical bloc under its leadership. In a different historical situation, the leading fraction may be the landed bourgeoisie and associated with it, within the "bloc," are a different combination of the subaltern classes and other exploited groups.

In either example, the historical bloc has remained the same in that it can be identified as "bourgeois hegemony," **but** it has also changed significantly because it has its own specific social composition and configuration, requiring its own strategies of alliances, and

¹³² See, Forgacs, David (ed.). An Antonio Gramsci Reader, New York: Schocken Books, 1988. pp.171-85.

arrived at through making different sets of specific "concessions and compromises" to those who form part of the "bloc" albeit in a subordinate role. The important point is that changes in the political bloc do not necessarily and indeed hardly ever correspond, in a one to one way, to changes in the historical bloc as a whole. In this manner, what is allowed for in Gramsci's scheme is the disjuncture between the dominance on the economic level of one mode of production and the dominance at the political level of one or a combination of forces which may or may not directly reflect this economic dominance. Gramsci's notion of the historical bloc, retains the crucial reference to "class" as one level of determination, but as Hall has observed, "it does **not** translate whole classes directly on to the political-ideological stage as unified historical actors."¹³³ In other words, Gramsci's conceptualization is quite unlike the formulations of orthodox marxism which posits a static and rather passive conception of the ruling class imposing their domination "from above" without accounting for the necessity of gaining consent "from below."

What is thus far explained with reference to the concrete levels of the social formation has its theoretical parallel in Gramsci's approach to Marx's metaphor of structure and superstructure. In Gramsci's view, "structure and superstructure form an historical bloc. That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant **ensemble** of the superstructure is the reflection of the **ensemble** of the social relations of production."¹³⁴ As such, the discordant whole of the superstructures is the reflection of the **contradictory** nature of the social relations of production. In other words, the superstructures are not the single expression of a single contradiction in the economic base. Rather than stressing the area of superstructures

¹³³ Hall, Stuart. "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity." p.15.

¹³⁴ **SPN**, p.366.

at the expense of the structure, Gramsci's confirmation that ideologies have the "same energy as material forces"¹³⁵ reinforces

the conception of **historical bloc** in which precisely material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideological would be individual fancies without the material forces.¹³⁶

As such, ideologies have a material existence in the sense that they are embodied in the institutions and organizations within which these social practices take place¹³⁷. Furthermore, as the concept of an "historical bloc" suggests, an ideology is not to be judged by its truth or falsity but by its efficacy in binding together a bloc of diverse social elements, and in acting as "glue" or "cement" for the construction of the "national-popular." As Hall et al. point out, this is a very different understanding of ideology and political leadership than a simple equation of "ruling ideas" with "ruling class."¹³⁸

Gramsci defines the complex nature of hegemony as both "economic" (i.e., structural) and as "ethical-political" (i.e., superstructural):

Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that accounts be taken of the interests and tendencies of the group over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed -- in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot

¹³⁵ **SPN**, p.377.

¹³⁶ **SPN**, p.377.

¹³⁷ For a fuller discussion of the importance of the materiality of superstructures or "ideologies" see Mouffe, Chantal. "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in Culture, Ideology and Social process, Edited by Tony Bennett, 1981. pp.226-228. See also, Simon, Roger. Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction, London:Lawrence and Wishart, 1982. pp.58-66.

¹³⁸ Hall, Stuart; Lumley, Bob; McLennon, Gregor. "Politics and Ideology:Gramsci," Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 10: On Ideology, London:Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1977. p.48.

touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity.¹³⁹

According to Gramsci then, a subordinate class (or rather an alliance of class strata) can only become hegemonic if it learns to go beyond "sectarian" or "economic corporate" activities. This means that hegemony must have a **national-popular** dimension as well as a class dimension. As such, it cannot narrowly focus on its own immediate interests and must take into account the interests of other classes and class fractions. For example, the relation between the "fundamental classes" (i.e. capitalists and workers) has never been a simple one of opposition, but a complex network of relations involving other classes, groups and social forces.

In his key passages on the "relations of forces,"¹⁴⁰ Gramsci starts out by giving the classical Marxist definition of a class. This is the observation that the level of development of the material forces of production furnishes the basis for the emergence of the various social classes, each of which occupies a specific position within production itself. It is with the addition of his analysis of the relations of political force that Gramsci makes his innovative mark. Here, he distinguishes between three phases in the development of "collective political consciousness" and organization. The first two levels of opposition are "economic-corporate" while the third is "hegemonic" and "national-popular."

The first and most elementary phase occurs where professional solidarity is felt due to recognition of basic shared interests within the same professional groups but not with other categories of the same class. In the second and more sophisticated moment, class

¹³⁹ **SPN**, p.161.

¹⁴⁰ **SPN**, p.181.

consciousness is developed but only in the economic domain. Finally, the rare and unstable moment of hegemony is constructed

... in which one becomes aware that one's own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too. This is the most purely political phase, and marks the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures; it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies become "party," come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society--bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a "universal" plane, thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups.¹⁴¹

This passage clearly demonstrates Gramsci's emphasis on the "national-popular" character of ideological struggle--on intellectual and moral reform--in order to achieve a transformation of the outlook of the workers and also of the members of other classes and groups whose allegiances are needed in order to build up the hegemony of the leading bloc, whether it is the working class or any other configuration of classes. Hence, as mentioned earlier, ideology acts as the "glue" or "cement" which binds together a bloc of diverse classes and strata. In Gramsci's formulation, ideology is understood as the "terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle."¹⁴²

It must be noted however, that Gramsci's analysis of these "moments" is not based on an evolutionary model in which one phase has to be completed so that graduation to the next stage of consciousness becomes automatically possible. Certain historical, political, ideological and economic contexts and practices may **produce** conditions "favourable or

¹⁴¹ **SPN**, pp.181-2

¹⁴² **SPN**, p.377.

unfavourable to this or that tendency." For Gramsci, nothing as far as the "unity" of classes is concerned is ever assumed apriori¹⁴³.

This is a particularly important point for analyses which deal with the developing world where, as mentioned previously, class consciousness may not be the precondition and class struggle not the central axis to which alliances are articulated for the formation of a revolutionary, counter-hegemonic "bloc."

Awakening the Collective Will

Any formation of a national-popular collective will is impossible, unless the great mass of peasant farmers burst **simultaneously** into political life. That was Machiavelli's intention through the reform of the militia, and it was achieved by the Jacobinism that is the (more or less fertile) germ of his conception of national revolution. All history from 1815 onwards shows the efforts of the traditional classes to prevent the formation of a collective will of this kind, and to maintain "economic-corporate" power in an international system of passive equilibrium.¹⁴⁴

One of Gramsci's central conclusions in his considerations of Italian history throughout the **Prison Notebooks** is that "nation" and "people" (or the national and the popular) did not coincide in Italian history. He recognizes that a major foundation for the construction of a popular collective will was lacking in the Italian case due to the absence of a genuine popular culture. He explores many potential arenas in Italian society (e.g. popular literature, operatic taste, oratory, literary criticism, folklore, religion, etc.) in search of a basis for such a construction. Popular Catholicism is an area to which he pays special attention because of the significant way it has made itself a truly "popular force," active in the construction of the traditional conceptions of the popular classes. Later in this thesis, I

¹⁴³ Hall, Stuart. "Gramsci's Relevance...", p. 14.

¹⁴⁴ SPN, p.132.

argue for the unique importance of Islam, in the Iranian case, in much the same way.

In order to understand why a popular collective will had not been successfully produced, and to formulate a political/cultural strategy for unification of Italy as a nation, Gramsci chooses Machiavelli as his theoretical guide and the French Revolution as an historical one. The latter provided him with the concept of "Jacobinism" while the former offered him the rudiments of a "programme" which could be developed within a marxist framework and adopted to the task of forging the worker-peasant alliance (i.e., the construction of the national-popular).

According to Gramsci, the Jacobins strove with determination to ensure a bond between town and country, and they succeeded triumphantly. They made the demands of the popular masses their own and did not concern themselves solely with the immediate and narrow corporate interests of the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic group of all the popular forces. They represented not only the needs and aspirations of the individuals who constituted the French bourgeoisie, but the needs of "all the national groups which had to be assimilated" to it. This means identifying the interests and requirements common to all the national forces, in order to set these forces in motion and lead them into struggle. Clearly then, the national-popular concept is intimately connected with that of Jacobinism. In the French Revolution, the radical bourgeoisie, as one of the two fundamental classes which can become hegemonic did so in the phase of Jacobin domination by "universalizing" and expanding its class interests to incorporate those of the urban artisans and peasantry. A similar process must be repeated in Italy, thought Gramsci, by the proletariat in a socialist revolution. The working class must gain hegemony over the peasants and other intermediate social strata by making them conscious of a shared interest.

This way of conceptualizing hegemony changes in Gramsci's later work. Hegemony expands as a concept and becomes a general analytical term applicable to the strategy of **all** classes or **all** leading historical blocs and not exclusively to the strategy of the proletariat. Hegemony becomes much more complex and involves "intellectual and moral" or ideological **leadership** and not just political **domination**. "Raising of popular thought," or to use Forgas' words "a coming to consciousness of a coincidence of interests" becomes part and parcel of the process by which a collective will is constructed, and this requires extensive organizational and ideological work. It is at this point that the role of "intellectuals" and the "party," as the "mediators" and "organizers" of the collective will which is national-popular becomes apparent.

By "intellectuals" must be understood not those strata commonly described by this term, but in general the entire social stratum which exercise an organizational function in the wide sense-- whether in the field of production, or in that of culture, or in that of political administration. They correspond to the NCOs and junior officers in the army who have risen from the ranks.¹⁴⁵

As such, the intellectuals have a role in all levels of society not merely in the realm of culture, but also in the economic base as well as in the whole complex of social formation. For Gramsci, the intellectuals are not "a new kind of State aristocracy"¹⁴⁶ as the traditional idealist view exemplified by Croce proposed. As far as Gramsci is concerned, we are all intellectuals because "thinking" is common to all people, and not the exclusive forte of the "philosophers, men of letters, and artists" as Croce believed. However, not all people "have the function of intellectuals,"¹⁴⁷ Gramsci argues. This means that the intellectuals have to

¹⁴⁵ **SPN**, p. 97.

¹⁴⁶ **SPN**, p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ **SPN**, p. 9.

be identified by the tasks they perform. To this end Gramsci makes a distinction between **organic** intellectuals and **traditional** intellectuals. The latter's function derives from an earlier historical period (e.g., priests) but they continue to exist. The former perform tasks (economic, social, political) closely tied to the class to which they belong. In other words, organic intellectuals are the "thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental class"¹⁴⁸ and they perform an essential function in the struggle of class forces. According to Gramsci:

One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer "ideologically" the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals.¹⁴⁹

The political party's task, at least partially, is to carry out this "elaboration" of its organic intellectuals who are in turn the party's "principal cohesive, centralizing element." The organic intellectuals of the party are articulated to its mass or popular base through an intermediate element which maintains contact between the other two "not only physically but also morally and intellectually."¹⁵⁰

Gramsci holds that a revolutionary party must play a key role as an organic intellectual of the "bloc" seeking hegemonic power. It must be a "Jacobin force," organizing and expressing a national-popular collective will, which would bind the various classes and class fractions beneath the hegemony of the leading segment. "A party might have a greater or lesser proportion of members in the higher grades or in the lower, but this is not the

¹⁴⁸ **SPN**, p.10.

¹⁴⁹ **SPN**, p.10.

¹⁵⁰ **SPN**, p.153.

point. What matters is the function, which is directive and organizational, i.e. educative, i.e. intellectual."¹⁵¹ This certainly does not mean that the revolutionary party should be the only "organic intellectual" of the bloc. Gramsci proposes that every member of the party should be regarded as an "organic intellectual," not that every organic intellectual of the bloc should be a member of the party. What is crucial for the concept of the national-popular is the nature of the intellectuals' relationship with people. If they remain in a separate "world" of their own, they are not likely to contribute to the democratic or revolutionary moment. We would be back to the elitist version of the party intellectuals as the bearers of the "light" or the only possessors of "true" consciousness. As Gramsci points out:

The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned...that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated--i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relation between intellectuals and people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order, the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood...¹⁵²

Although this passage starts by speaking of intellectuals as individuals, Gramsci's use of the term "bureaucracy" seems to suggest that he is not solely considering the importance of popular beliefs and of "common sense" in the work of individual intellectuals. He is also writing of relations between a revolutionary party and the people. Additionally, he is pointing out the danger involved in the party, or a ruling bloc which may lose touch with the masses

¹⁵¹ **SPN**, p.16.

¹⁵² **SPN**, p.418.

of people and become "bureaucratic;" that is, elitist and ossified.

Hence the **intellectual and moral leadership** and the national-popular collective will cannot simply be imposed mechanically "from above," but must enter at the level of "common sense." It is through "common sense" that people have organized their practical, everyday experiences. Common sense is the site on which the "dominant ideology" is constructed and exercised, but it is also the site of "resistance" and challenges to this ideology. In other words, Gramsci refuses any notion of a single, unified and coherent "dominant ideology" into which everything and everyone has been absorbed for all time. He has respect for the ability of all people to think and rethink their conception of the world within specific historical, social, political and ideological structures and positions. They may consent to the hegemony of this or that power bloc under different conditions, but what is secured is an **active** consent, not a passive submission. It is not imposed; rather it is **negotiated** by unequal forces in a complex process through which the subordination and the resistance of people are created and recreated, articulated and re-articulated to different social and political positions. In Gramsci's words:

It is a matter therefore of starting with a philosophy which already enjoys, or could enjoy, a certain diffusion, because it is connected to and implicit in practical life, and elaborating it so that it becomes a renewed common sense possessing the coherence and the sinew of individual philosophies. But this can only happen if the demands of cultural contact with the "simple" are continually felt.¹⁵³

Thus, the connections between the concepts of "common sense," "intellectuals" (in the broad sense), the "party" and the "national-popular" become apparent. **Intellectual and moral leadership** requires a dialectical relationship between the leaders and the led, if an alternative to the **naturalized** existing social order is to become hegemonic. As such, one

¹⁵³ SPN, p.330.

function of the revolutionary party is to constantly explore the political/cultural terrain mapped out by the existing ruling bloc within which "men move, acquire consciousness of their position and struggle." Then a strategy must be worked out which takes its starting point from the "active man-in-the-mass" and works to open up a gap between their "superficial explicit or verbal consciousness" and the consciousness "implicit in activity." Due to its fragmentary and disjointed characteristics, common sense can construct a combination of "knowledges" that are remainders from earlier ideologies and from a mix of social classes. Common sense

is strangely composite; it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of the human race united the world over.¹⁵⁴

As Hall has observed, Gramsci identifies "the absence of a 'consciousness of history' and hence of self-knowledge as the principal feature that condemns common sense thinking to a position of dependence and subordination."¹⁵⁵ As such, the crucial role of the "organic intellectuals" of the historic bloc which is trying to establish a new hegemony, is to purge "common sense" from its "extraneous contradictions" which have been "inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed."¹⁵⁶ This will result in a "coherent and systematic" understanding of the world and one's place in it. Such critical, progressive understanding of self allows one to identify and unite with the multiplicity of "hegemonic forces" to which one belongs. In other words, it is the development of active political consciousness through which one realizes one's position in the social formation and possible affiliations, and by extension

¹⁵⁴ **SPN**, p.324.

¹⁵⁵ Hall et al., 1977. p.50.

¹⁵⁶ **SPN**, p.333.

one's "enemy." Such social and historical consciousness of the world brings about the possibility of change.

Gramsci asserts that "the relation between common sense and the upper levels of philosophy is assured by politics."¹⁵⁷ The forging of hegemony is a struggle which takes the form of "a struggle of political hegemonies and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper."¹⁵⁸ The leadership involved in such politics, if it is to successfully bring about a shift in the hegemonic rule, must recognize that hegemony is based on voluntary and "spontaneous" consent. Gramsci defines "spontaneous" as the feelings and ideas which have been formed through everyday experience illuminated by common sense, i.e., by the traditional popular conceptions of the world¹⁵⁹. This element of "spontaneity" cannot be neglected or despised by leadership seeking national-popular success. As explained earlier, this "spontaneity" has to be "educated, purged of extraneous contamination," if it is to become "the motor of revolution."¹⁶⁰

However, one should not forget that the basis of dominance of the hegemonic bloc does not rest solely on **consent**. Power for Gramsci, is characterized by both "direction" and "dominance." In other words, hegemony is always protected by the armour of coercion. There is no pure case of coercion or consent, but always a combination of the two in varying degrees. Accordingly, he identifies the two major sites of struggle on which the work of political and ideological organization and change is carried out, and consent or coercion is exercised. The State and civil society constitute this terrain for waging a war of the people

¹⁵⁷ **SPN**, p.331.

¹⁵⁸ **SPN**, p.333.

¹⁵⁹ **SPN**, p.198-9.

¹⁶⁰ Hall et al., 1977. p.52.

and the construction of the national-popular collective will.

State and Civil Society

What we can do for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural "levels": the one that can be called "civil society," that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called "private," and that of "political society" or "the State." These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of "hegemony" which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the State and "judicial" government.¹⁶¹

While most Gramscian scholars agree that the relationship between State and civil society is a "vital" one for understanding hegemony, the exact definition and relations between these two concepts have been a source of confusion and debate¹⁶². However, given the somewhat related but different focus of this chapter, I will only provide a brief explanation of these concepts and then will attempt to locate the connections between State, civil society and the national-popular.

The main proposition advanced by Gramsci is that State cannot be understood without a thorough understanding of civil society. Overall, Gramsci seems to have first distinguished the State from civil society, the State being defined as the source of coercive power in

¹⁶¹ SPN, p.12.

¹⁶² Perry Anderson in his seminal article on the **Prison Notebooks** for example, identifies three different models of the relationship between hegemony, civil society and the State. He argues that none of these models were entirely satisfactory from either a political or analytical point of view. He criticises Gramsci's conception of the State as "weak" due to Gramsci's alleged lack of concern for the coercive powers of the State. A number of theorists, such as Bocoock, Showstack Sassoon, and Buci-Gluckmann take issue with Anderson's "culturalist/idealist" reading of Gramsci. Of course, these debates include a variety of other themes and concerns but a full consideration of them is well beyond the scope of this chapter. All these texts are cited in the bibliography.

society and civil society as the site of hegemonic leadership. He then goes on to link these concepts together to define what he has termed the **integral State** as the combination of hegemony armoured with coercive power¹⁶³. In Gramsci's words:

...It should be remarked that the general notion of State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of the civil society (in the sense that one might say State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion).¹⁶⁴

The State consists of the means of force and violence (the police and army) in a given territory, together with State-funded bureaucracies (legal, educational, etc.).¹⁶⁵ Civil society comprises the other organizations in a social formation, the "so-called private" ones which are distinct from the process of production and from the coercive apparatus of the State (churches, family, trade unions, etc.). Civil society, in Gramsci's words "Stands between the economic structure and the State." Therefore, as Hall et al. suggest, "civil society is the terrain in which classes contest for power (economic, political, ideological). It is here that hegemony is exercised, and where the terms of relations of structure and superstructure are fought out."¹⁶⁶ It is in this sphere that national-popular identities and aspirations are formed and transformed. For example, it is within the institution of family that people are born and acquire their "native" or "national" language, get their first exposure to the "norms" of behaviour and customs and traditions (both familial and cultural). The educational system, should they go through it, then further constitutes us as "a people" of a particular "nation" through lessons in "our" history, "our" geography, "our" literature, "our" system of

¹⁶³ Bocoock, Robert. Hegemony, Tavistock Publications, 1986. p.32-3.

¹⁶⁴ **SPN**, p.262-3.

¹⁶⁵ Bocoock, R. p.33.

¹⁶⁶ Hall et al., 1977, p.47.

government, etc.¹⁶⁷ The church, the media, trade unions, social clubs, etc., each offer yet another field of ideologies and practices through which we come to define **our** personal, national and cultural identities. This is of course not a passive, one-way process of being "hailed" by these elements and absorbing all that we encounter. We can, and do, refuse to consent to some of the cultural, social, popular and political "texts" that "hail" us. In other words, our national-popular identities are constituted in a dialectical tension between "agency" and "determinations." But the field of choices and the range of possible articulations are not limitless. There are certainly limits and pressures set by the economic structure (not to mention those set by gender, race, etc.) and our positioning in relation to it, and there is also the other half of Machiavelli's Centaur which restricts our movements in this field. It is the armour which guards hegemony and the maintenance of the status quo.

Gramsci uses the term "political society" for the coercive relations which are materialised in various institutions of the State --for instance, law courts, prisons, police, and the army -- which depend in the last resort for their effectiveness on the State's monopoly of coercion. In this realm, the State constitutes "a people" by making them subject to laws and regulations which define the "rights" granted to us by virtue of "our" national identity and citizenship in the State, and punishes us when we don't play by the "rules."¹⁶⁸

However, for Gramsci the function of the State is not limited to coercion. It also plays a major ethical and formative role in the organization of consent. The importance of linking of structure and superstructure to Gramsci's thought becomes very explicit in his discussion of the State as **educator**:

¹⁶⁷ Bocoock, R. p.36 .

¹⁶⁸ Bocoock, R. p.36 .

In reality the State must be conceived of as an "educator," in as much as it tends precisely to create a new type or level of civilization. Because one is acting on economic forces, reorganizing and developing the apparatus of economic production, creating a new structure, the conclusion must not be drawn that superstructural factors should be left to themselves, to develop spontaneously, to a haphazard and sporadic germination.¹⁶⁹

Here Gramsci reveals a view of the uneven development of areas of the superstructure which do not develop automatically and spontaneously from changes in the economic structure. What is at issue here, in Hall's words, "is question of the ethical State": the ceaseless work required to construct a social authority, throughout all levels of social activity, such that a 'moment of economic, political, intellectual and moral unity' may be secured, sufficient to 'raise the level of the State to a more general plane'.¹⁷⁰

Of course for Gramsci, hegemony is never a permanent state of affairs and never uncontested, as mentioned before. In one of the most cited passages of the **Notebooks** Gramsci says:

In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks...¹⁷¹

The sociohistorical context of Gramsci's thought is crucial to understanding this passage. Power was highly concentrated in the State in Tsarist Russia and the capture of power in a single historical moment of the October Revolution of 1917 was possible. At that point a "frontal attack" which Gramsci calls a **war of manoeuvre** succeeded. However, in

¹⁶⁹ **SPN**, p.247.

¹⁷⁰ Hall, S. "Popular Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism," in Hunt, Alan (ed.). Marxism and Democracy, London:Lawrence and Wishart, 1980. p.167.

¹⁷¹ **SPN**, p.238.

countries where civil society is well developed and complex, a **war of position** would be a better strategy. Italy and the rise of fascism were a case in point as mentioned before. This war of position does not exclude the possibility of a very sharp struggle, even violent ones, against the coercive organs of the State which would be mobilised when parts of its hegemonic bloc begin to crumble. What it means is that the decisive struggle for State power can only be won on the basis of the decisive shift in the balance of forces in the social formation. As such the intellectuals and the party working towards transcending the narrow economic interests of a class and building a "national-popular" collective will, must at all times be engaged in a war of position at all levels of the civil and political society. The field of struggle, as Hall points out "is defined conjuncturally by **all** those strategies and interventions designed to 'put a new hegemony together'." ¹⁷²

The key question then, for a Gramscian analysis of a particular historical conjuncture or a specific "hegemonic moment," is the way in which the various ideological and social forces or formations become connected or fractured along certain lines. How are "new" historic blocs constructed or re-constructed out of the rubble created by the de-construction of the previous hegemonic bloc (i.e., what Gramsci calls "revolution/restoration)? What is the principal ideological "glue" which seeps into the cracks and holds together the contradictory elements of a differentiated composition of a social formation engaged in a struggle for hegemony?

These and many similar questions would not be conceivable if ideological/political change was approached in the classical marxist fashion in terms of imposition of a "dominant ideology" or its complete substitution by a confronting unified class outlook. As the notion

¹⁷² In Hunt, p.168.

of the national-popular and all the other concepts that are tied to it suggest, **connections** between ideas and social forces are not "given" in the origins of class or social formations. As such, ideological change has to be thought of in terms of how ideas, cultural and social processes, national and popular traditions and symbols are attached to one set of historical/political associations and how can they become disentangled and re-attached to a different set.

This is the crucial point which Hall elaborates into a "theory of articulation"¹⁷³ to further expand on Gramsci's contributions to studies of ideology and ideological struggle. He employs the word "articulation" in its specifically "English" usage which carries a double meaning. It is used not only in the North American sense of "expressing" or "uttering," but also to refer to "the form of the connection that **can** make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time."¹⁷⁴ What is important then, with reference to how ideologies and social forces become "unified," is not the necessary "belongingness" of a discourse to a group on a one to one and permanent basis. What matters is the **linkage** which under specific conditions holds the two together. Thus, as Hall explains:

A theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific junctures, to certain political subjects. [...] the theory of articulation asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks

¹⁷³ As Hall himself points out the theory of articulation has been developed by Ernesto Laclau, in his book **Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory**. However, I prefer Hall's elaboration of Laclau's contribution because the field of possible articulations for Hall is neither limitless nor purely discursive.

¹⁷⁴ "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall," Edited by Lawrence Grossberg. In **Journal of Communication Inquiry**, Vol.10, No.2, Summer 1986. p.53.

the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it; it enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position.¹⁷⁵

It is my contention that one of the most important and least explored aspects of the Iranian revolution is precisely the kind of ideological and discursive struggle that took place over the meanings, values, symbols and associations articulated to the definition of nationhood. Struggle over what the nation **means** is crucial at "hegemonic moments," if a wide variety of people from different social and political positions are to become "unified" against the "old collective will" and give their **active consent** to the formation of a new configuration of the **national-popular**. The "nation" assumes such a crucial site of struggle not only because of its immense emotional and moral impact, but because everybody regardless of class, sex, race, religious beliefs, age, etc., has some stake in its definition and future. As Hall points out:

...nation is an interpellation that directly crosscuts and neutralizes the interpellations of class. The way to construct the notion of the nation as composed of people linked into an organic unity is to say that what people share as a nation is larger and more inclusive than what divides them into classes.[...] And it has exactly that capacity to draw people together from different sectors of the population to suppress class differences and differences of class interest, etc., in order to unify them around shared common characteristics on a national basis...¹⁷⁶

Such a powerful "ideological cement" was not ignored as a "strategy of alliance" by the leaders of the Iranian revolution in their struggle to unify and mobilize millions of people. Nor did their predecessors, the Pahlavis, fail to invoke the discourse of the nation in order to win the consent of the people throughout their rule and until the last possible

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.53.

¹⁷⁶ Hall, S. "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists," p. 67.

moment. There was of course, a world of difference in how the nation was constructed in each instance and what ingredients were mixed and re-mixed to make the cement necessary to link the various elements in each historic bloc. The disarticulation of certain sets of associations and their rearticulation in a different direction to construct a counter-definition of **Iranianness**, widened the "cracks" in the old royal "cement" and a "crisis in hegemony" soon made the ruling bloc crumble .

The next chapter will draw on the theoretical map laid out in the preceding pages, in order to compare and contrast the Pahlavis' "imperial" construction of the national-popular with the revolutionaries' "popular" reconstruction of it.

CHAPTER FOUR

(RE)CONSTRUCTING NATIONNESS

Wherever you find popular struggles, the nation is always at issue. The field of national interpellations doesn't simply disappear because time and again one finds it inserted into a dominant discourse that is very reactionary.

Stuart Hall

The nation has been at the heart of Iranian struggles against foreign as well as domestic oppression since the turn of the century. Indeed I would argue that, the 1979 revolution can be interpreted as the latest phase in the recurrent manifestation of the centrality of nationness at moments of hegemonic crisis and political/ideological transformations. However, the revolutionary construction and deployment of nationness as an effective mobilization and unification strategy cannot be fully understood without a consideration of what Iranian national identity had come to mean under the Pahlavis.

It is my contention that the regime's version of Iranianness failed to become hegemonic and perform its ideological function in cementing together a unified social base of support for the monarchy. This dissonance between the "national" and the "popular" continued to increase despite major efforts by both Pahlavi shahs to win the consent of the people on nationalist grounds and invoking the discourse of the nation at every turn. In contrast to the role played by the revolutionary (re)construction of nationness as a strategy of alliance, the royal construct led to a profound chasm in the cultural/national identity and historical consciousness of the Iranian people.

This chapter seeks to explore the sets of meanings, symbols and associations articulated to nationness within the historic bloc constructed by the Pahlavis, as well as the

crisis in communication of identity which their failed construction of the "national-popular" created. The resulting cracks in the royal historic bloc opened up a space of contestation in the field of ideological struggle. The revolutionary forces intervened into, and engaged with that space to forge a new historic bloc. This new bloc was held together by a counterhegemonic rearticulation of nationness to a different series of connections and connotations which enjoyed massive popular support.

Of course, it is impossible to understand either construction of nationness without looking at the historical and political factors which informed and structured the field of contestation. After all, the terms, symbols and associations used to construct identity (be it national or otherwise) do not exist in an historical vacuum, nor are they available for endless or haphazard construction of any articulation that one may fancy. As such, the specific historical background which furnishes the frames of reference for the construction of meanings associated to Iranianness has to be considered. Obviously, there is no room here for a detailed account of Iranian history which as one of the world's oldest, spans over many thousands of years. Nor would this writer be equipped to tackle such a task even if space was unlimited. Consequently, a more modest and highly abbreviated selection of the most relevant aspects of Iran's modern history in relation to nationness will have to suffice.

One of the most important factors that must be considered in any discussion of Iranian national identity and its powerful ideological force is the historical relationship between nationalism and imperialism. Most sources mark the beginning of the penetration of imperialism into Iran with the 1872 de Reuter concession in which the Qajar monarch

practically handed over the entire resources of Iran to the British.¹⁷⁷ This was not the only concession, nor were the British the only imperial power dominating Iran and plundering its resources. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain and Tsarist Russia competed for dominance and increased their level of influence and intervention in Iranian affairs. This imperialist rivalry prevented direct colonization of Iran by either power, but their intense competition for concessions and controls also fed the corruption of the ruling monarchy and doubled the speed and extent of economic, political and cultural domination of Iran. Indeed, it was the spate of Qajar concessions to foreign powers that united the bazaar classes, the Ulama and intellectuals to challenge imperialism and the government on nationalist grounds. The 1890 Tobacco Concession which awarded a British company a 50-year monopoly over production, sale and export of the entire tobacco crop of Iran (a very profitable trade at the time) was a major turning point in modern Iranian history. From the events of 1872 up to this time, Iran's agricultural crops, communication systems (telegraph, railways, waterways and roads), and land resources were leased, loaned or sold to European capitalists for European and monarchical interests. What had begun as concessions, conventions, and cash-crop exports in 1872 on the part of the Qajar government, ended with the people's first nationalist uprising in the form of protests and widespread rioting from 1890 to 1892.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷This is one of the most famous concessions in Iranian history and almost every secondary source in my bibliography mentions it. For a detailed discussion in the context of nationalism see: Ricks, Thomas. "Background to the Iranian Revolution: Imperialism, Dictatorship, and Nationalism, 1872 to 1979." in Iran: Essays on A Revolution in the Making, Ahmad Jabbari & Robert Olson (eds), Mazda Publishers, 1981. pp. 15-42

¹⁷⁸Ibid, p.22. See also, Nima Ramy. The Wrath of Allah: Islamic Revolution and Reaction in Iran, Pluto Press:London & Sydney, 1983. pp.4-6

This uprising was successful in bringing about the cancellation of the Tobacco Concession in 1892 but perhaps more importantly for my purposes, it demonstrated the ideological force of nationalist strategies which culminated in Iran's first major popular twentieth century revolution. The Constitutional Revolution of 1905 to 1911, which according to Ricks was "the clearest expression of nationalist aspirations of the merchant, religious and intellectual classes," had its roots in these nineteenth century struggles for financial, political, cultural and intellectual independence. The revolution was the result of an alliance between the bazaar bourgeoisie, the Ulama, the modern intelligentsia and some landed nobles and tribal chiefs. They demanded the imposition of legal controls over the power of the court to grant concessions and over Iran's resources, as well as asking for widespread reform of the existing political system.

Iran was granted a constitution (adapted from the 1830 Belgian constitution) and a parliament on August 5, 1906. The Ulama, who had emerged as the proponents of the rising indigenous nationalism in face of western imperialism¹⁷⁹, obtained a significant prerogative here. A parliamentary committee of five Mojtaheds¹⁸⁰ was to be formed in order to ensure the conformity of legislation with Islamic law. The constitutional system also gave rise to a new Iranian social formation in which there was a significant growth of the civil society. Political parties and factionalism, struggles to create autonomous republics based upon

¹⁷⁹It was the nationalistic issues which formed the Ulama's major oppositional platform, rather than any doctrinal dispute.

¹⁸⁰Mojtaheds (doctor of religious jurisprudence) are at the top of Islamic hierarchy of religious ranks. They are given the lofty title of Ayatollah after making significant interpretations of Islamic law and gaining years of experience and substantial number of followers. Very few Ayatollahs are given the designation of "grand Ayatollah" who are the most powerful, prestigious and respected figures of the hierarchy. Khomeini was a "grand Ayatollah" for quite a number of years before the 1979 revolution.

nationalism (ethnicity, language, and religion), and radical religious and socialist movements characterized the period from 1915 to 1921.

Despite the goals of the Constitutional Revolution which was to establish a liberal regime, the complex interplay of a number of factors led to the emergence of a military authoritarian regime in the 1920s. The weakening of the central administration and their inability to control local rebellions; the suspension of the parliament; Britain's emergence as the dominant power¹⁸¹ due to the newly created Soviet government's withdrawal from interventionary policies after the October Revolution --- all contributed to a transfer of power in 1921.¹⁸²

The Qajars were ineffective in establishing a centralized government supported by a national military force and Britain needed such a government to counter the expansion of Soviet influence and further fragmentation of Iran into republics. So, the British chose Sayyed Zia al-Din Tabatabai, a young Anglophile journalist with strong British connections as the first strongman, assuming the role of the Prime minister, and an obscure Colonel in the Cossack Brigade named Reza Khan to provide military backing in the coup d'etat against the already weakened Qajar king¹⁸³.

The Coup of February 21, 1921 was carried out successfully and Reza Khan gained more military power first by becoming the commander of the Cossack Brigade, and then as

¹⁸¹Many argue that the 1919 Anglo-Iranian Treaty not only established a military and administrative advisory programme, but also a de facto protectorship of Britain over Iran. See:Ricks, T. pp.28-30

¹⁸²Bashiriyeh, Hossein. The State and Revolution in Iran 1962-1982, Croom Helm:London & Canberra. 1984. pp.10-11

¹⁸³Arjomand, Said Amir. The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran, Oxford University Press:New York & Oxford, 1988. p.60

the minister of war. Late in May 1921, after less than a hundred days in office, Sayyed Zia was ousted by Reza Khan. In December 1925, Reza Khan's Kingship was approved by the ineffectual parliament and in April 1926 he assumed a new surname and was crowned Reza shah Pahlavi, the founder of a brand new dynasty.

The Pahlavi Historical Bloc: The National-Imperial

This section explores the construction of nationness during the Pahlavi era. I will briefly consider Reza shah's approach which identified the sets of associations and central elements of the Pahlavis' cultural/ideological policy which were then carried further by his son. More time will be spent on the latter's regime as it provides the immediate preconditions of the revolution.

Although the governing style of the two shahs was very different, their attitudes with regards to what Iranianness should mean are strikingly alike. Reza shah was simple, direct and often crudely brutal. During his reign (1925-1941) coercion outweighed consent in the hegemonic consolidation of power. His son's approach was much more complex, sophisticated and subtle. While brutality and strongly repressive (and reprehensible) practices were by no means absent in his regime, neither were various attempts at gaining consent. In their efforts to win consent, both shahs sought to project to the Iranian people a credible image as a nationalist. But given that they both constructed the nation by articulating it to the themes of empire, dynasty, modernity and the West, they were unable to cement the "national" with the "popular." For the great majority of Iranians, these themes had little or no currency in popular historical memory, made very little common sense and bore no connections to the actual context of their everyday life or what they considered to be the

salient features of their identity. Thus, the Pahlavis' construction of Iranianness lacked a popular content and instead of unifying the historic bloc around the axis of nationness, it divided Iran into two nations -- one for the elites and another for the rest¹⁸⁴. In the remainder of this section I want to take a closer look at the specific ingredients of the Pahlavis' unsuccessful articulation of nationness. Only then can the revolutionary rearticulation of it be fully explored.

Reza Shah

Reza shah's choice in naming the brand new dynasty "Pahlavi," after Iran's dominant pre-Islamic language, is of great symbolic value and a clear sign of what was to become a major part of the regime's ideological repertoire for the construction of Iranianness. If one recalls the goals behind the coup which brought Reza shah to power, the reasons for forging the links between his new nation and the ideology-mythology of Iran's pre-Islamic imperial glory are not hard to grasp.

As mentioned earlier, the formation of a strong centralized state to prevent the spread of revolutionary bolshevism in Iran and keeping the country from breaking up into autonomous republics was required to protect the interests of British imperialism. Centralization entailed the creation of a modern army and the expansion of the state's coercive apparati in order to crush local popular uprisings and eliminate all political opposition. Modernization at the level of the state was matched with massive overhaul of civil society's institutions in the image of their "modern" Western counterparts. This meant

¹⁸⁴Before the Pahlavis there was a gradation between the two ends of the hierarchy but no sharp break. For a fuller discussion of the "two-culture phenomenon" see: Tehranian, Majid. "Iran: Communication, Alienation, Revolution," in INTERMEDIA, Vol.7, No.2, March 1979. pp.6-12. See also, Keddi, Nikki R. Roots of Revolution, Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 1981. p.183

the uprooting of Iran's indigenous cultural, social, political and legal institutions which was bound to create a few cracks in the cohesion of the existing bloc and the coherence of Iranian historical consciousness. In order to fill these cracks an ideology was required which had its roots in ancient memories of a Persian identity but whose virtues were essentially secular and, perhaps more importantly, Western. The new myth of the pre-Islamic Persian empire was well-suited to this task.

To this end, Reza shah set out to expunge any traces of over a thousand years of the Islamic identity of Iran, often through ruthless means. This would not only secularize civil society which suited the interests of the imperialists as well as the dictator-cum-imperialist, but also suppress the Ulama who had been a powerful sub-bloc in opposition from the early nineteenth century onwards.

The attacks on Islam in the interest of propagating the official ideology of statist nationalism were both discursive and institutional reaching into every sphere of civil society. The old Persian names of the months were revived to replace the Arabic and Turkish ones, and the Arabic lunar calender was replaced by the Iranian solar one in 1925.¹⁸⁵ In 1928, Reza shah imposed a law which banned robes and turbans and standardized a western code of dress, styles of furnishing, architecture and means of locomotion¹⁸⁶. This law and the later banning of the veil (in 1935) were brutally enforced. For example, soldiers on horseback would roam the streets lifting women's veils with enough vigour to knock them down, and men's turbans were removed by batons and bayonets without much concern over inflicting bodily harm. The undermining of the Islamic ingredient of Iranian identity in favour

¹⁸⁵Arjomand, S.A. The Turban for the Crown, p.68

¹⁸⁶Cottom, Richard W. Nationalism in Iran:Updated through 1978, University of Pittsburgh Press:Pittsburgh, 1979. pp.149-150

of the imperial one was of course not limited to these spheres. The state continued its "war of position" by taking over areas traditionally considered firmly within the religious domain and replacing them with those which would ceaselessly work towards detaching Iranianness from its Islamic entanglements and re-articulating it to more ancient historical associations.

The establishment of modern educational institutions destroyed the clergy-dominated madrasa (school) system¹⁸⁷. New branches of learning such as the history of pre-Islamic Iran, Ferdowsi's Shahnameh (Epic of Kings)¹⁸⁸, and the secular nationalist ideology of the Pahlavi state were propagated by this new system of national education in the 1930s.

The secularization of the legal system was also a direct attack on the dominance of Islamic law and the jurisdiction of religious powers. The Ulama were denied their constitutional right of appointing a parliamentary commission to supervise legislation and by 1940 the entire judiciary system was incorporated into the centralized state as the Ministry of Justice¹⁸⁹. Law became codified and the substance of the new code was largely borrowed from the continental European legal material with very few provisions of the Shi'ite Sacred Law. The creation of a Ministry of Endowments severely curtailed not only the role of the

¹⁸⁷Nima, R. The Wrath of Allah, p.29

¹⁸⁸Ferdowsi is one of the greatest and most nationalist poets of Iran who after thirty years of writing finished his grand epic in twelve volumes around 876 A.D. The Pahlavis' selective use of Ferdowsi completely suppressed the fact that Ferdowsi's poetry was composed to stir nationalist pride and passion of the Iranians to resist and rebel against foreign domination and the monarchy's collaboration with the oppressors, and **not** to glorify dynastic power. He was one of the very few poets of his time who refused to sell his talents to the court because it would entail writing poems in praise of the kings. To this day there are doubts and debates about whether he committed suicide as a result of indignation with the court or whether the court had him killed because of the subversively dangerous capacity of his work to move Iranians on the basis of nationalism.

¹⁸⁹Arjomand, S.A. The Turban for the Crown, p.66

Ulama in the administration of religious charitable properties, but it also deprived them of a major source of revenue. The establishment of social services (hospitals, public libraries, orphanages) further diminished the social role of the mosque and the banning of various forms of folk theatre (better known in the West as "passion plays") and other aspects of popular/folk culture aimed at the complete destruction of religious influence in the cultural realm¹⁹⁰.

The completion of all these processes¹⁹¹ was stopped due to the abrupt downfall of Reza shah. The Allies, apprehensive about his flirtations with Nazi Germany and the pro-German sympathies of his army officers, as well as the alarming increase in imports of Nazi Germany's trade, technicians or intelligence officers, invaded Iran in August 1941. In September, Reza shah was removed from the throne (and banished to South Africa) and left Iran on a British ship¹⁹². His twenty-year old son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was declared the new monarch and a new occupier of Iranian territory (the United States) began its all-encompassing domination of Iranian economy, culture and identity.

The Shah

Reza shah's abdication ushered in a period in which power was decentralized and intense political regrouping, readjustment and struggle ensued. A multitude of organizations, associations and societies, ranging from the militant to the conservative burst onto the political scene, almost overnight, after sixteen years of repression. As one fragment among

¹⁹⁰Keddie, N.R. Roots of Revolution, pp.183-185

¹⁹¹It should be noted that Reza shah took equally destructive measures to silence other groups in opposition. I have not included them in this discussion because my focus is on Shi'ite Islam as a distinctively Iranian component of national identity.

¹⁹²Arjomand, S.A. The Turban for the Crown, p.68

the political forces vying for hegemonic power, the Shah tried to hold his place against challenges from all classes and class fractions in the period 1941 to 1962.

Much like his father, the Shah's efforts to consolidate his power began with the reorganization and expansion of the army. In a position of weakness under Allied occupation -- and in accordance with the needs of his new imperial master -- the Shah opened the flood-gate to seemingly endless waves of American advisors. The extent of their penetration into every aspect of Iranian life is perhaps best reflected in the conclusion reached, in August 1942, by Wallace Murray, the advisor on political Relations to the Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs: "We shall soon be in the position of actually running Iran through an impressive body of American advisors eagerly sought by the Iranian Government and urgently recommended by the British Government¹⁹³."

The task of the expanding modern military and police forces was not to defend Iran from any foreign enemies but to put an end to the activities of the radical, secular nationalists who, given the relative demise of the Ulama, emerged in the midst of WWII in two different counter hegemonic groupings. The national republican parties in Azarbayjan and Kurdestan which had actually succeeded in setting up two autonomous communist regimes formed one of these groupings and the Tudeh Party (or the Communist Party of Iran) which was openly engaged in rapid mobilization of the urban populations constituted the other major threat to the Pahlavi dynasty. Both groups were supported by the Soviet Union and as such their destruction was of utmost importance to U.S interests. In 1946, with the help of the U.S., the army under the Shah defeated both forces of opposition and began suppressing the Tudeh Party. This event greatly enhanced the influence and the confidence of the new monarch. In

¹⁹³Cited by Thomas Ricks in "Background to the Iranian Revolution...", p.36

1949, a failed assassination attempt provided the Shah with a perfect pretext to outlaw the Tudeh Party, declare martial law, arrest opposition leaders, ban many newspapers and make major changes in the constitution which gave him the right to dismiss the parliament at will¹⁹⁴.

However, none of these measures managed to wipe out the opposition completely. In a matter of months, the National Front was formed through an alliance between various segments of the radical and liberal constitutionalists and nationalist politicians headed by Mossadeq, a small religious group led by Ayatollah Kashani, the Tudeh Party and some social democratic organizations. This alliance was based on the issues of constitutionalism and nationalism and opposed imperialism as well as the Shah's moves towards unlimited authoritarian power. The Front demanded electoral reforms including the enfranchisement of women, new liberal press laws, economic reforms, reinterpretation of the Shah's revisions to the constitution in order to curb his power, changes to martial law which would prevent the interference of the army in politics, and an end to foreign domination symbolized by the nationalization of the oil industry¹⁹⁵.

As discussed in earlier chapters, the enormously popular government of Mossadeq which had successfully stripped the Shah of power and forced him to flee from the country was overthrown by a CIA backed coup d'etat in 1953. It is important to note however that the coup would not have been successful had it not been accompanied by infighting within and defections from the coalition of forces which had formed the National Front government. The Shah and the royalist forces whose economic interests were seriously threatened by

¹⁹⁴Nima, R. The Wrath of Allah, pp.31-35

¹⁹⁵Bashiriye, H. The State and Revolution in Iran, p.17

Mossadeq's policies played each faction of the coalition against the others (at an estimated cost of \$19 million). As each faction placed greater and greater emphasis on articulating its own interest and the economic conditions became intolerable (due to US backing of Britain in the oil dispute), mobilizing against the fragile democracy was not very difficult. The major split was created between the secular parties of the modern intelligentsia and the bazaar clerical parties led by the Ulama. In particular, the CIA had won over Ayatollah Kashani and his bazaar-based Mojahedin Party thereby neutralizing the forces of the traditional petty bourgeoisie¹⁹⁶.

The overthrow of Mossadeq's liberal nationalist government was followed by a reign of terror during which all opposition was brutally crushed and new organs of power and repression based wholly within the military structure were built. In 1957, the CIA and the FBI provided technical assistance and advisors to establish the National Information and Security Organization (SAVAK is the Persian acronym) with generous help from Mossad (the Israeli intelligence service)¹⁹⁷.

Having established a stable political climate and internal security by relying heavily on the strong coercive apparatus of the state and foreign support, the Shah set out to create a social base of support for his regime. After almost twenty years of attempting to secure his hegemony over the various political forces by coercion alone and not succeeding in creating stability for more than a few months at a time, the need for winning some degree of popular consent to his rule became exceedingly apparent. The resurgence of large-scale political opposition and activism by the middle-class groups and parties in early 1960s and the

¹⁹⁶Nima, R. The Wrath of Allah, p.36

¹⁹⁷Ibid, pp.36-37

expressed discontent of the popular sector as a result of an economic crisis (1957-1961) provided further proof that hegemony, even of the dictatorial kind, could not be secured by pure coercion.

Furthermore, the United States' interest in Iran and in the institution of monarchy went far beyond strengthening the regime's coercive apparatus in order to protect western interests in Iran at the height of the Cold War. There were massive profits to be made by the incorporation of Iran into the central capitalist economy through "modernization" and "development" plans. In order for these plans to be carried out without intermittent challenges from the dominated groups within the post-Mossadeq historical bloc, subordinated interests had to be taken into account. Given the combination of the internal and external pressures, the Shah embarked on mass mobilization or a "revolution from above" in order to consolidate his power.

The "revolution from above" entailed work at the economic, political and ideological level of the Iranian social formation. Clearly these levels are intertwined in practice, but given the specific concerns of this thesis I shall concentrate on the ideological field and the centrality of nationness to the Shah's efforts in forging a unified historic bloc under his leadership.

The specific historical context within which the Shah set out to construct his version of Iranianness differed considerably from those under which his father had operated. Following the overthrow of Mossadeq, the leading elements of the historical bloc consisted of the court, the military elite, the landed upper-bourgeoisie and the conservative high Ulama (i.e. the coalition of forces which brought Mossadeq down). The subaltern or dominated fractions of the bloc included the professional middle-class (modern intelligentsia,

technocrats, merchants, etc.), the radical Ulama, the workers and peasants.

Accordingly, unlike his father, the Shah originally avoided alienating the Ulama. He frequently paid lip-service to Islam, visited Islamic holy shrines and high-ranking Ayatollahs, lifted the ban on religious rituals (for a limited time), as well as Islamic gear, and insisted that not only was he deeply religious but a self-proclaimed mystic who feels the personal presence of God at his side. He frequently pointed to his miraculous survival after four assassination attempts as proof of the divine protection of monarchy. But his efforts at gaining the sanction of Shi'ite Islam for his rule barely went beyond lip-service and consequently yielded meagre results at best. While there were a great number of religious leaders who were not only willing but anxious to sanctify the regime (mainly those with official appointments), most of the oppositional Ulama were only further offended by the Shah's superficial religious pretensions.

The Shah's feigned religiosity was in direct contrast to the two major axes around which the Pahlavi's national-popular was being constructed with renewed zeal. The overwhelming reliance on the two contradictory poles of modernity and pre-Islamic antiquity in this construction continued to demonstrate the flagrant disregard and serious devaluation of the Islamic components of Iranian identity, history and popular consciousness. As the centrepiece of the Shah's efforts to organize consent, "modernization" and its attending symbols and associations were keenly promoted as the defining feature of the nation and drawn upon frequently as the state endeavoured to perform its "ethical" function.

It is important to recall that according to Gramsci "every state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the

productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes¹⁹⁸." In this case the Shah coopted many of the progressive and nationalist policies, plans and personnel of the Mossadeq's short-lived government in order to gain the consent of the dominated classes and class fractions (i.e. the professional middle-class, workers and peasants). To create the appearance of democracy and further take the steam out of the radical reformist opposition, the Shah established a two-party system, and recruited men like Dr. Arsanjani (a socialist and an advocate of land reforms), Dr. Darakhshesh (leader of the Teachers' Association), and Nuroddin Alamuti (one of the original founders of the Tudeh Party) to form a strong reform cabinet¹⁹⁹. Furthermore, the Shah recruited the most competent of Iran's educated and trained (usually abroad) youth to fill positions within the Plan Organization, and other government bureaucracies, regardless of their past oppositional activities. Their consent was secured through an appeal to patriotism (i.e. their skills were needed by Iran) and the reassurance that as the "organic intellectuals" of the regime, they can play an early role in shaping Iran's future identity. Of course, generous wages and other material incentives were not insignificant factors in this regard.

The rhetoric of the White Revolution or the "Shah and people Revolution" as the monarch later preferred to call it, found its way into virtually every newspaper, school book, and radio programme. The Shah himself travelled around the country handing over title deeds to the peasants and delivering speeches to factory workers about profit-sharing and modernized mass production. Along with the workers and peasants, the Shah also undertook to raise women to the new "cultural and moral level" by amending the Electoral law and

¹⁹⁸SPN, p.258

¹⁹⁹Bashiriye, H. The State and Revolution in Iran, pp.20-21

granting them the right to vote²⁰⁰. All of these essentially symbolic acts were of course fully documented on film and in photographs distributed to the growing number of movie theatres and plastered on every available wall.

These efforts managed to establish a broad enough base of support that when in early 1963 the religious opposition took to the streets to riot against the regime's reforms (and in particular women's suffrage as contrary to Islamic law) it was unable to rally support from government employees or other sectors of the rising secular middle-class, the workers or the peasants. The army ruthlessly crushed the riots and SAVAK took care of eliminating whoever was left.

Clearly the moment of hegemony, albeit a hegemony where consent was heavily armoured by coercion, was at hand and the Shah stepped up his construction of an Iranian identity suited to the demands of American imperialism and the monarchy, as well as the interests of the rising industrial and finance bourgeoisie. He disposed of the radical intellectual reform cabinet and replaced them with staunch royalists, turned one of the two existing political parties into the official ruling party called the "New Iran Party" at first, and eventually abolished all parties in favour of the "Resurgence Party" (Rastakhiz). Any one not willing to join the Resurgence Party was branded "un-Iranian," denied employment and all other national rights, and asked to leave the country²⁰¹.

Modernization became more and more identified with westernization in general and

²⁰⁰In a system where elections were controlled by the regime these electoral changes were insignificant at best. The Shah who had on many occasions said "nothing great had ever come from women," and whose private life was a testimony to his oppressive patriarchal treatment of women, cannot be considered an emancipator of women by any stretch of the imagination.

²⁰¹Green, Jerrold D. Revolution in Iran: The Politics of Counter-mobilization, Praeger Publishers:New York, 1982. pp.54-55

Americanization in particular. Elsewhere I have discussed the devastating impact of economic domination of Iran by the U.S and the virtual destruction of its indigenous crafts and industry. The consequences of cultural and ideological imperialism were no less devastating. As imported radio, stereo and television sets brought imported programmes into homes built and furnished in American style, Iran's rich cultural, folk and artistic traditions were pushed to the periphery. Despite Iran's long history of excellence in literature, poetry and the visual arts, American textbooks were translated for extensive use in all levels of the educational system. The lessons in the Iranian way of life, Iranian values and Iranian traditions became based on American social/cultural realities according to which the new generation of Iranians were encouraged to construct their identities. This was of course not limited to the educational system. The Americanization of Iran left no aspect of the social formation untouched. But it did not continue un-noticed or unopposed either.

Radical intellectuals and the oppositional Ulama did not fail to write, speak and protest against "Westoxication"²⁰² and the imperialist cultural domination of Iran. They were either in exile (e.g. Khomeini), imprisoned or killed by the state's coercive organs and hence their efforts rarely reached the majority of the population. However, the court was fully aware of the dangers that such knowledge could present to its rule given the history and importance of a nationalist image in Iranian politics.

As was the case with his father, the Shah drew upon the powerful ideological currency of the mythologized "Persian Empire" to counter, on nationalist grounds, the threat posed by modernization-cum-Americanization of Iranian culture and identity. In his attempts

²⁰²This is the title of the book by Jalal Al-e-Ahmad. He was one of the most important intellectual influences for the 1979 revolution and will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

to glorify the monarchy and present it as the sole guardian of national sovereignty and Iranian heritage since antiquity, the Shah carried the Pahlavi's cultural policy of historical vivisection to hitherto unimagined extremes. A glance at any legally published newspaper or at the text of any official speech during the period 1964-1977, is sufficient to discover the favoured symbols and sets of associations which were used to construct Iranianness.

The various titles taken by the Shah are indicative of his efforts to present himself as the latest and one of the greatest of a twenty-five hundred years old lineage of Iranian kings. The traditional title "Shahanshah" (King of Kings)²⁰³ was supplemented by a whole range of historically glorious terms intended to conjure up the image of a monarch who rules by divine ordination and guidance, and a monarch totally devoted to the Aryan people (Iran means "the land of Aryans") and the Iranian nation²⁰⁴. Titles such as "His Imperial Majesty, Shahanshah, Aryamehr (Light of the Aryans), Khodayegan (Leader approaching the divine)," for example, were meant to promote a cult of personality which equated patriotism with the glorification of the Shah. The state sponsored street marches, grand celebrations and parades to salute his portrait, all reiterated and reinforced the same idea²⁰⁵. Two major occasions provide the best examples of the Shah's efforts to underscore and advertise the themes, symbols and associations to which Iranianness in the "Pahlavi era" was to be articulated.

In 1967, on his birthday, the Shah conducted his own spectacular Coronation

²⁰³The title "Shahanshah," first assumed by Cyrus the Great, derives from the fact that the ancient Persian monarchs had sovereignty over the four kings of Afghanistan, Georgia, Kurdistan and Khuzestan.

²⁰⁴Cottom, R. Nationalism in Iran: Updated through 1978, p.328

²⁰⁵Kamrava, Mehran. Revolution in Iran: the Roots of Turmoil, Rotledge: London & New York, 1990. pp.54-55

ceremony with much pomp and splendour. Throughout the ceremony glittering emphasis was placed on the "eternal" and "sacred tradition of Kingship" as the defining feature of the nation. Despite the Shah's lack of any real royal lineage (made very visible by the fact that he had to crown himself), there was no shortage of symbolic connections forged to prop-up his claim to be in the glorious tradition of his favourite predecessor, the very first emperor of Persia Cyrus the Great. Assumption of the title invented and used by Cyrus (Shahanshah), and wrapping the whole event in dynastic symbols and imperial language made his intentions very clear in this regard. In addition, the Shah attempted to erase from popular memory all the reasons or events which had delayed his Coronation by twenty six years and had furnished Iranians with competing definitions of nationness. The Shah added the rhetoric of the supposed success of the White Revolution to his imperial discourse in order to explain the delay. The vision promoted was of a selfless man who has put the interests of the nation ahead of his own, a patient monarch who is committed to social progress and hence willing to forego his rightful place until he had achieved well-being for his people.

The Shah staged an even more ostentatious display of dynastic splendour four years after his Coronation. In October 1971, he put together -- to use his own phrase "the greatest show the world has ever seen" -- to celebrate a mythical 2500-year anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire and the establishment of the monarchy by Cyrus the Great, as well as the 50th anniversary of the Pahlavi dynasty. Not surprisingly, the two major **pre-Islamic** dynasties: the Achaemenian (559-330 BC) and the Sasanian (A.D. 224-651) were mined carefully and selectively for legends, symbols, traditions and themes which would link the nation, supposedly embodied in the person of the Shah, with dynastic or imperial greatness. The fact that many of those twenty five centuries, such as the period between the

Muslim conquest (A.D. 640) and 1501, and again between 1722 and 1796, were not ruled by any kind of "shah," was suppressed in the interest of presenting the monarchical tradition as an uninterrupted and fixed aspect of Iranianness²⁰⁶.

At an estimated cost of \$100 million, a city of fifty "tents"²⁰⁷ was erected in Persepolis (once the imperial capital before it was sacked by Alexander the Great) as the centre of festivities. Thousands of specially planted evergreens surrounded the sparkling fantasy land crawling with royalty, dignitaries and media from around the world. The lush greenery also hid the barbed wire and well-armed soldiers on the outside perimeter which kept out "potential trouble makers," -- that is, ordinary Iranians -- who were not invited to the ball. Inside the encampment, soldiers from the "Imperial Guard" (copied after Cyrus the Great's Ten Thousand Immortals), dressed like Achaemenian and Sasanian guards, marched past the guests saluting the new King of Kings. As condensed symbols of military might and pre-Islamic imperial grandeur, they signified the protection of the Pahlavi's consent-gaining strategy (merger of nation with Empire) by the armour of coercion. The soldiers inside the Sherazade dream world of the revived Persepolis may be interpreted as walking metaphors, but there was nothing metaphorical about the coercive measures the Shah was prepared to take beyond the confines of that mirage. Massive "preventative arrests" of students, intellectuals and other secular opposition members who had struck in protest months before

²⁰⁶Keddie, N.R. Roots of Revolution, p.241

²⁰⁷Made out of canvas and plywood, each Parisian designed air-conditioned "tent" had twin bedrooms, two baths, kitchenettes, and servants' quarters. The royal couple occupied a special tent, larger than all others and equipped with marble baths and gilded fixtures and adjacent to a scarlet reception hall and dining halls, where all food served was flown in from Paris and prepared by chefs from Maxim's. See: Dorman, W.A. and Farhang, M. The U.S. Press and Iran, University of California Press:Berkeley, 1987. p.118

the wasteful celebration, were perhaps the more obvious manifestations of these measures. From abroad, Khomeini denounced the celebration and monarchy itself as "un-Islamic."

The articulation of nationness to imperial themes and associations and the promotion of the monarchist ideology as the only terrain upon which Iranian national consciousness was to be formed, entailed the disarticulation of those alignments which opposed or contradicted this particular configuration. Chief among them was the Islamic connections to Iranianness which had to be dismantled.

In late 1960s and the 1970s, the Shah ruthlessly attacked those institutions of civil society within which the Shi'ite ideological connections to Iranian identity were sustained in their materiality. The series of severely repressive measures included assaults on the main theological college of Qom and the bulldozing of most of the theological seminaries around the shrine of the eighth Imam in the holy city of Mashad under the pretext of creating green space and aesthetic improvement. Furthermore, he expanded the invasion of the religious sphere by dispatching a Religious Corp (composed of conscripted high school graduates) throughout the country to teach the "true meaning of Islam," organizing an imperial Inspectorate to scrutinize the accounts of the mosques' charitable organizations and those of religious endowments, and giving the right to publish theological material to the state-controlled Organization of Endowments²⁰⁸.

In addition, the imposition of a new Imperial calendar (in 1976) dating from the coronation of Cyrus the Great 2535 years ago instead of the Islamic calendar based on Mohammed's hijra, convinced many that the Shah was out to annihilate Shi'ism

²⁰⁵Arjomand, S.A. The Turban for the Crown, p.86. See also, Nima, R. The Wrath of Allah, p.45

altogether²⁰⁹. In the same year, the Resurgence Party declared the Shah as "the spiritual leader of Iran" and "the crowned father of the nation" while denouncing the clergy as "black reactionaries²¹⁰."

The Shah, buying into his own publicity hype and believing that he was now securely ensconced on the Peacock Throne, felt he could dispense not only with the Islamic components, but with anything which might define Iranian identity outside of the imperial monarchic frame of reference. In his own words

No profound change can come about in our country outside the framework of the monarchic order...The monarchic regime as soul, essence, existence, source of energy, and foundation of the national sovereignty and unity constitutes the solid basis of the great civilization and the strong custodian of all its values, its progress and its material and moral gains. This regime will guide and protect the destiny of the Iranian people in the most brilliant period of their history²¹¹.

Another passage further clarifies the Shah's preferred meaning of Iranianness as follows

Iranian civilization, of which the **great civilization** will be the most accomplished form, is an outstanding manifestation of Aryan civilization...Its progress towards perfection has never ceased...If our race had constantly sought its way in the Aryan civilization, it is because its creative genius is indissolubly linked to its fundamental principles. Darius the Great, by describing himself as Aryan and the son of an Aryan, Iranian and the son of an Iranian, in fact refers to the numerous qualities which reflect the adjectives Aryan and Iranian²¹².

Statements such as these which exemplified the whole construction of the national-popular according to the curious blend of the imperial past glory with modernity, best

²⁰⁹Keddie, N.R. Roots of Revolution, p.241

²¹⁰Nima, R. The Wrath of Allah, p.45

²¹¹ As quoted from the Shah's Towards the Great Civilization, by Fereyeoun Hoveyda The Fall of The Shah Wyndham Books, New York. 1979, p. 10.

²¹² Ibid, p. 86.

resonated with the leading segments of the Pahlavi bloc. The military elite, the big industrial and finance bourgeoisie, the landed aristocracy (which was basically composed of the large Pahlavi family) whose position in the economic realm had created a terrain favourable to the dissemination of this particular ideological configuration of nationness, had come to see themselves as "hailed" or "authored" by these statements.

The West (and particularly the U.S) also found the Shah's construction beneficial as well as entertaining. While the image of the Shah as "a real-life Hollywood emperor complete with a Cecil B. DeMille court"²¹³ nourished and entertained the orientalist fantasies about ancient exotic Persia, the essentially secular and western virtues and values associated with this construction suited the economic goals of American imperialism.

However, the vast majority of Iranians could not locate themselves inside the Pahlavis' national-popular. There are of course economic reasons for this lack of identification with the glory and the grandeur which was the Shah's and not Iran's. Given my concerns with the ideological level of the social formation I shall focus on two aspects of this domain to speculate about the reasons for the failure of the Pahlavis' version of Iranianness to fulfil its ideological function.

The creation of a new national-popular requires entry into and engagement with the terrain of "common sense," the ordinary, contradictory, episodic practical consciousness of the people as Gramsci defined it. For the rich educated segments of the population the imperial history of the Persian empire was not only known but kept at the forefront of their

²¹³Welch, Anthony. "The State and Post-Modern Cultural Policies," Conference paper. The Calgary Institute for the Humanities, University of Calgary, 1988. p.14

consciousness through their participation in the cultural policies and practices of the elite²¹⁴. For those who neither had the privilege of being indoctrinated by the Pahlavis' "new branches of learning," nor the means (or the invitation) to participate in grand cultural festivals, the discourse of the empire was an alien, remote, external conception which had very little if anything to do with their identity or consciousness.

That is not to say that the same thing that formed them as a class also formed their ideology and hence it would have been impossible to mobilize the subordinated social groups behind the slogans and ideologies associated with Iran's dynastic past. On the contrary, the antiquity of Iranian civilization and culture and its imperial legends have been a source of national pride and highly charged with emotional sentiments for Iranians from all walks of life. In fact, recitations and performances based on Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and other sources, as well as ancient folk tales learned and passed on through the oral tradition used to be a regular feature of Iranian popular culture. These cultural practices took place on street corners, tea houses and similar informal places widely accessible to and mostly frequented by the popular, non-privileged classes. However, the Pahlavis' relentless march towards "modernity" trampled upon such things which smacked of "backward traditional culture" and unwittingly replaced them with western (i.e. American) cultural organizations and products (films, TV, plays, concerts, etc.). Ironically, the only avenues which could keep the "traces and sediments" of the Persian empire from fading in the popular historical memory and practical, everyday consciousness were closed by the same regime whose articulation of nationness depended upon the excavation and revival of those very "sediments." This failure

²¹⁴It should be noted that even among this group the Shah's attempt to legitimize the brief Pahlavi rule by placing it on par with the genuine Achaemenian and Sasanian dynasties was met with quiet resentment at best.

to enter popular consciousness at the level of "common sense" meant that the Pahlavis' conception remained an exclusive, distant and "inorganic" ideology which was "imposed from above" and hence became incapable of organizing consent on a massive scale.

Furthermore, as Hall has suggested "nothing can become popular which does not negotiate the experiences, the codes, etc., of the popular masses...²¹⁵" For most Iranians, those "experiences, codes, etc.," have historically been "languaged" by the discourse of Shi'ite Islam. For over a thousand years, Shi'ism has been articulated to Iranian national identity through powerful "lines of tendential force" which are very difficult to disrupt. While the Shah had initially engaged the religious terrain (albeit superficially), he attempted to make a virtue of attacking it once he thought that hegemony was a permanent affair. His attacks may have displaced Islam from a variety of positions within the institutions of the state and civil society but they failed to dislodge it from its historical and ideological embeddedness in popular consciousness. Nor did he succeed in removing the clergy from their everyday, close contact with masses of the population who found the discourse of Shi'ism, couched in the language of the oppressed, more intimately connected to their experience than the imperial one which belonged to the oppressors. Moreover, it was Shi'ism and not imperial glory which had given Iran a distinctive national identity initially against the Arab conquerors who brought Islam to Iran, and thereafter against the rest of the Muslim world who are predominantly Sunnis. The fact that for many years and at every popular uprising in modern Iranian history Shi'ism and Iranism were two sides of the same coin had furnished ample proof of this point.

²¹⁵Hall, Stuart. "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall," in Journal of Communication inquiry, Vol.10, No.2. Summer 1986. p.52

As the next section will demonstrate in more detail, the revolutionary re-construction of the national-popular took this aspect of the nature of popular historical memory as its central articulating aspect. Iranianness as a strategy of alliance not only made the links between the ideologically diverse oppositional groups possible, it also cemented the various sectors of the historic bloc to each other as well as to the leaders of the revolution.

The Revolutionary National-Popular

The leading coalition of forces which along with the massive crowds of their supporters made up the revolutionary historic bloc were incredibly diverse in terms of their ideological, political, social and economic position in the Iranian social formation. Yet despite all these differences they managed to construct and maintain an alliance and solidarity which most scholars of the revolution find not simply worthy of notice, but quite astounding. As I have discussed elsewhere, to attribute the remarkable cooperation and unity of the widely different groups within the oppositional pole to a sudden and all-encompassing rise in piety is insufficient and inaccurate.

Undoubtedly Islam played a major role and Khomeini eventually became the indisputable and charismatic leader of the revolution. However, the revolution did not start as a religious movement and the Ulama were certainly not the only oppositional group. In fact it is possible to identify three broad factions which together constituted the revolutionary leading bloc: the Ulama, the Left, and the Liberal Constitutionalists. Given previous political betrayals (for example, the Ulama's breach of alliance with the National Front in favour of the royalist forces which toppled Mossadeq), and suspicions generated by years of being subjected to the Shah's divide-and-conquer strategies and underground competition, all these

groups were distrustful of one another. Moreover, these groups were not homogeneous in their composition, ideologies or aims.

The Ulama for example, can be subdivided into three camps. The moderate wing was represented by figures such as Ayatollah Shariatmadari and Ayatollah Shirazi who called for the return to, and implementation of the 1906 constitution with strengthened Islamic provisions. The left-leaning radical Ulama such as Ayatollah Taleqani favoured an Islamic democratic republic which was so similar to the Mojahedin-e Khalq's vision of a classless monotheistic society that the leftist guerrilla organization adopted Taleqani as their "spiritual father." Last but not least was the radical fundamentalist faction under Khomeini's leadership from exile and represented by Ayatollahs Beheshti, Nouri and Mottahari inside Iran. The call for the complete destruction of the monarchy and the establishment of an "Islamic republic" in its place came from this particular faction of the Ulama²¹⁶.

While it can be safely argued that the ideological unity of these three camps was assured by their obvious devotion to Islam as members of the Ulama, the alliance with and the ultimate acceptance of the leadership of the Ulama by the other two groups who had been openly contemptuous of Islam and organized religion can not be accounted for by invoking the same argument.

The secular liberal opposition was composed of nationalist intellectuals, academics, lawyers and other professional groups from Iran's middle-upper classes. Although numerically small, politically they had been the most active class among the oppositional

²¹⁶ It should be noted that even Khomeini's thoughts about this issue are not consistent over time. While he had always attacked the person of the Shah and called upon him to alter various aspects of his rule, Khomeini had not always denounced the monarchical order. In his revolutionary speeches in particular, the establishment of a theocracy is down played or even negated at times.

forces in Iran. Their voices were the first to be raised in protest against the Shah's regime in the form of a series of open letters to the royal court in early 1977. The intelligentsia's initial oppositional demands were essentially reformist in nature. Pointing out the regime's ruining of the economy (especially agriculture), brutal abuses of human rights and the violation of the 1906 constitution, they asked for the abolition of the one party system, the release of political prisoners, freedom of speech, of the press and of assembly, restoration of basic personal liberties -- in short, constitutional government. As the protest of the intelligentsia gathered momentum some of the former political groups and parties such as the National Front (now under the new title of Union of National Front Forces), the Freedom Movement, the Writers' Association and the Lawyers' Association were revived. Others, such as the Radical Movement, the Social Democratic Party, the Iranian Committee for the Defence of Freedom and Human Rights, the Association of Iranian Jurists, the Group for Free Books and Thought, and so on were newly formed.

The third pole of opposition collectively referred to as the Left, was composed of numerous factions and groupings. Their individual take on marxism varied according to whether they were Stalinist (Tudeh Party), Maoist (Tufan), Trotskyist (the Party of Socialist workers), Leninist (Fadaiyan-e Khalq, Paykar), or believed in a hybrid mix of socialism and radical progressive shiism (Mojadedin-e Khalq). While the specific plans of each group for the form the post-revolutionary state should take and how one would arrive there were different, they were quite similar in their immediate revolutionary demands. Ending U.S. imperialism in Iran, condemning the accumulation of wealth and capital, nationalization of industries and banks, political decentralization and autonomy rights for ethnic groups, constituted the major points of the left's oppositional platform. Given their adherence to

marxism, these groups were anti-clerical almost by definition and even the Islamic faction of the Mojahedin openly opposed the establishment of a theocratic state from the start.

Even this cursory look at the composition of the revolution's leadership and their diverse ideological, social and political positioning raises the question of whether Islam could be considered the only ideology which unified these groups. How could one account for the remarkable degree of cooperation and solidarity between groups whose interests were clearly not served by Islam and who had historically been vehemently opposed to it?

The National Front's leadership for example, had clearly expressed zero tolerance for any association with the religious forces when two months before the 1963 uprising against the Shah it informed the American Embassy in Tehran that "On the possibility of religious agitation during Moharram (June)...the National Front would **under no circumstances** cooperate with the clergy should there be disturbances...Since the ultimate aims of the Front were **diametrically opposed** to those of the mullahs, the Front would **never** combine their forces with them against the government²¹⁷."

Given such an emphatically anti-clerical position, how can one explain the Front's following of the exactly opposite strategy in 1978 when it not only forged a strong alliance with the religious forces but fully endorsed Khomeini as the leader of the revolution²¹⁸?

²¹⁷ As cited in Milani, Mohsen M., The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic, Westview Press: Boulder and London, 1988.p. 97. Emphasis added.

²¹⁸In November 1978, approximately one year after the intelligentsia's protest had started, Karim Sanjabi (leader of the NF), and Mehdi Bazargan (leader of the Freedom Movement), met with Khomeini in Paris and finally accepted him as the leader of the revolution and adopted a policy of no compromise with the Shah. On November 5th, Khomeini and Sanjabi signed a declaration agreeing that the form of government after the Shah would be determined by a popular referendum. Khomeini assured everyone that the post-revolutionary government would "safeguard independence and democracy." This was the first time since early 1950s that the

The same question can be asked with regards to the active consent given to an alliance with and surrender to Khomeini's leadership by the left. How is an alliance struck between a group who believes religion to be the "opiate of the masses" and another who advocates it as the only possible personal and political salvation? How does Islam become the central articulating axis around which Stalinist communists and liberal nationalists alike cluster? How would Khomeini himself, who had repeatedly expressed his contempt for the left in particular and all non-Islamic groups in general²¹⁹, seek such "unholy" alliances?

If it seems ironic and puzzling to attribute the alliances forged at the level of leadership to Islam as the **only** unifying ideology in the revolution, such one dimensional explanation becomes almost incomprehensible once the crowds of followers are considered. The massive participation of women, especially the middle-class students and educated professionals, in the revolution and the often enormous risks these women were willing to take in confrontation with the police or army could hardly be reconciled with the view which holds Islam as the only motivating ideological force. Why would women put their lives on the line for an oppressive system of belief which takes away their very basic rights and removes them from the public domain of political activity completely? Why would such distinguished feminist writers and intellectuals as Simin Daneshvar, Homa Nateq and Simin Behbahani actively support an Islamic revolution or Khomeini who had written violently against women's emancipation from traditional bondage? How can one explain the ironic phenomenon of some Iranian women attending European and American universities in 1978

secular and religious coalition agreed on anything. For a fuller discussion see: Abrahamian, E. Iran Between Two Revolutions, p.520.

²¹⁹Khomeini referred to them as "monafegin," (a derogatory term which means hypocrites who claim to be muslims but are not), as well as a whole range of other insulting labels.

who had never put on a veil before, suddenly adopting muslim modes of dress? Better still, if Islam was the sole cohesive and mobilizing ideology of the revolution, how would it compel religious minorities (e.g. Armenians) to participate in an **Islamic** movement which would persecute them for their non-adherence?

It is in trying to respond to these kinds of questions that a focus on the 'national-popular' dimension of the revolution becomes very useful. Those who were not moved to action by the religious appeal of Islam nonetheless identified with it symbolically because of the way it had been articulated to their national cultural identity. In the words of a participant in the massive demonstration in December of 1978, who was identified as a "middle-class feminist" by the French reporter covering the event, "Khomeini was making her rediscover her Iranianness²²⁰."

The turn to nationness as a strategy of alliance is evident if one takes a careful look at the revolutionary discourse generated by the diverse oppositional leaders in the two years of mobilization leading up to the revolution. However, while in order to identify the points of convergence, as well as divergences, it was necessary to adopt as wide a research scope as possible, tightening the focus on one particular leader, namely Khomeini, is more than sufficient for furnishing the argument with ample evidence. There are a number of reasons for doing so.

From a research point of view, Khomeini's oppositional output is the most comprehensively documented²²¹, while other groups' texts are not as readily available in

²²⁰Briere, C., and Blanchet, P. Iran: La Revolution au Nom de Dieu, Paris:Seuil, 1979. p.107. Also cited in Arjomand, S.A., The Turban for the Crown, p.110.

²²¹The 15 volumes of Sahife-ye-Nour (Pages of Light), produced by the Islamic government in celebration of the fourth anniversary of the revolution contains everything Khomeini had uttered since a

a complete form. But perhaps more importantly, Khomeini is the leader who won the consent of other revolutionary groups because his discourse contains the common themes and associations identified by all forces of opposition as central to the revolutionary platform and its re-articulation of nationness. This is hardly surprising given that from late 1977 onwards and particularly after he was forced to move from Iraq to France in October 1978, Khomeini's circle of contacts grew much wider than the customary theological students and clerical figures to include a large assortment of non-religious political visitors.

It can be safely argued that the progressive, democratic and nationalist tone of many of Khomeini's speeches, pronouncements or statements from France was largely due to synthesizing his ideas with the advice, questions and issues provided by his secular, primarily western-educated, politically differentiated entourage²²². Many revolutionaries knew **only** the statements coming out of France and **not** Khomeini's theocratic ideas expressed in his earlier book Islamic Government²²³. In addition to these factors, Khomeini's role as the "organic intellectual" of the revolutionary historic bloc also justifies an exclusive focus on his discourse. By performing the task of organizing and expressing a national-popular collective will which bound the various revolutionary forces beneath the hegemony of the Ulama as the leading segment, Khomeini was functioning as an organic intellectual in the

few years before his exile in 1964. While this is the source on which I have based my long-range analysis, Algar's annotated anthology of Khomeini's writings and declarations (in English) which goes further back to 1941 is used for citations.

²²²Abdol Hassan Bani-Sadr, Saddeq Qotbzadeh and Ebrahim Yazdi, all of whom held important government posts immediately after the revolution and were forced out of them once the fundamentalist faction consolidated its power, were the main figures of this entourage.

²²³Keddie, N.R. Roots of Revolution, p.252.

Gramscian sense of the term. Furthermore, as the acknowledged supreme authority on Iran's genuine national culture (i.e. Shi'ism), upon which the traditional conception of the popular classes were formed, Khomeini was uniquely positioned in his relationship to the masses.

However, it is important to note that building a revolutionary ideological construct with Shi'ite Islam as its form and nationalism as its content, had started long before Khomeini took notice of its mobilizing and unifying potential in the 1977-1979 period. The "intellectual and moral" leadership which set its sight on reading Shi'ism through the lens of nationness manifested itself among a segment of the modern intelligentsia from the late 1960s onwards. This new ideological trend placed selective emphasis on some Islamic themes. These elements did not in themselves have any necessary political connotations nor were they inherently revolutionary. But when reorganized into a new discursive formation which took nationness as its central articulating axis -- and connected with a deeper groundwork of emotional loyalties and moral sentiments -- it turned into an immensely powerful revolutionary ideology. This particular configuration of political nationalist Shi'ite ideology functioned so as to harness or draw to it massive sectors of the population who had never been inside nor seen themselves reflected as a unified force in the national-imperial bloc which was supposed to constitute their identity in the Pahlavi era.

As discussed earlier, Shi'ism was historically embedded in the depth of Iranian national consciousness and cultural/political heritage. It had formed the traditional conceptions of the popular classes or their "common sense." According to Gramsci, one should recall, the crucial role of the organic intellectuals of an historic bloc which is seeking to establish a new hegemony is to purge "common sense" from its "extraneous contradictions," which have been "uncritically absorbed." This would release common sense

thinking from the subordinate and dependent position to which it has been condemned by an absence of a "consciousness of history" or self-knowledge. None of these tasks can be carried out if the intellectuals do not maintain a close connection with the people and "feel the elementary passions of the people."

It is precisely in this respect that the role of the modern intelligentsia of the late 60s and 70s assumes paramount significance. A "return to self," purging Shi'ism of its traditional conservative elements which had been inherited from the past without criticism, closing the gap between intellectuals and the people and so on, were all among the major themes developed by two of the most influential intellectuals of this period: Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-69), and Ali Shariati (1933-77).

Born into a religious family, Jalal Al-e Ahmad joined the Tudeh Party at the age of twenty. He became disillusioned with Stalinism after witnessing Soviet Union's attempt to gain the oil concession in northern Iran and becoming aware of Stalin's political repressions at home. Al-e Ahmad concluded that the Soviet experience indicated the failure of marxism to provide answers to human problems in the twentieth century²²⁴. Driven by a sense of national pride and engrossed in a quest for authentic, native identity, Al-e Ahmad opted for a fusion of Shi'ism and Iranian nationalism to create an alternative ideology to that of the elite westernized culture of the monarchy.²²⁵

Al-e Ahmad's main argument centres on opposition to western economic, political,

²²⁴Dorraaj, Manochehr. From Zarathustra to Khomeini: Populism and Dissent in Iran, Lynne Rienner Publishers:Boulder and London, 1990. p.132.

²²⁵The roots of such popular slogans of the revolution as "Neither East, Nor West, Islamic Republic" can be traced to Al-e Ahmad's contributions in this regard.

and cultural domination of Iran. His celebrated book Gharbzadegi (Westoxication)²²⁶, provides a critical analysis of Iran's failure to industrialize and develop alongside western countries in the 18th and 19th centuries. He points to the devastating effects of imperialism as the root cause of this failure. According to Al-e Ahmad, westoxication had plagued Iranian society like a cancer since the encroachment of western powers. The malignancy which had gradually eaten away at the body in which it grew was threatening to destroy it completely as American imperialism spread to every organ, thanks to the Pahlavis' undermining of Iran's national culture and economy in favour of Americanization.

In On Services and Treasons of Intellectuals, Al-e Ahmad, who was heavily inspired by Gramsci and Sartre, wrote the prescription for curing Iranian society. He argued that the politically committed intelligentsia must realize that they live in a semi-colonial society and stop looking at Iran as if it were a western country where an appropriate economic, political and social context for the functioning of western ideologies may exist. The consciousness of self as an "Easterner" as opposed to a westernized person is necessary if Iranian intellectuals are to "understand and feel" Iranian problems. Deep in the repressed sediments of this Iranian Eastern consciousness lay Shi'ism and Al-e Ahmad hoped that through its reinterpretation or "decontamination" a viable cure to westoxication could be found. To him, Shi'ite Islam is an indigenous, non-western part of Iranian culture and definitely inseparable from Iranian national identity. He asserted that the historical defeats of the past revolutions were due to the intelligentsia's alienation from their own roots and disconnection from the culture of the laity, that is, Shi'ism. He noted that the clergy had deep roots among the people and the key to any successful uprising against the monarchy was to be found in

²²⁶Despite being forbidden by the censors, westoxication became the most discussed theme in political circles in the 1960s and 70s.

bridging the deep division between intellectuals and the clergy.

Al-e Ahmad criticized the conservative clergy and set out to purge traditional interpretations of Shi'ite Islam from its uncritical and passive elements. For example, he attacked the received orthodox notion of waiting for the Hidden Imam which promotes inaction and a quiet acceptance of present injustices. Instead, he regarded the Hidden Imam more as a symbol of resistance and search for justice by asserting that "there is a hidden Imam in each of us²²⁷."

Al-e Ahmad's Shi'ite Islam was highly symbolic and nationalistic and his ideas bridged the gap between the anti-imperialist progressive aspirations of the educated Iranians and the cultural nationalism of the population at large. By playing a transitional role between the secular and religious poles, and in part due to the eclectic nature of his thought which synthesized Iranian nationalism, progressive Shi'ism, marxism, humanism and existentialism into an anti-monarchical political ideology, Al-e Ahmad's broad appeal cut across political and class lines. He was highly respected among nationalists, the left and the religious groups. There were very few intellectuals who did not come directly or indirectly under the influence of this leading social critic and novelist of the 1960s.

Of equal influence to Al-e Ahmad in directing the climate of oppositional intellectual opinion towards Islamic nationalism was Ali Shariati. He was also raised in a clerical family with a background of anti-Pahlavi activism²²⁸. After graduating from Teachers' College in Mashad in 1953, he began a teaching career. He was jailed in the mid-fifties for his pro

²²⁷Bashiriyeh, H. The State and Revolution in Iran, pp.71-72.

²²⁸His father who was a non-traditional preacher was active in the National Front in the 1950s and exerted a major influence on Shariati's intellectual development. See: Dorraj, M. From Zarathustra to Khomeini, pp.140-150.

Mossadeq political activities. In 1960, he went to France and earned a doctorate in sociology at the Sorbonne. It was during this period that he familiarized himself with various western schools of thought such as marxism and existentialism. The Algerian and Cuban revolutions and such Third world scholars and activists as Franz Fanon had a profound impact on him. He returned to Iran in 1965. From then on his teaching career and political activism was interrupted periodically by arrests and imprisonments until 1974 when he was banned from lecturing altogether and placed under virtual house arrest by the SAVAK. He was allowed to leave Iran in 1977 and died shortly thereafter in London.

Much like Al-e Ahmad, Shariati sought to provide a distinctly Iranian response to the problems of cultural colonization and its politico-economic consequences by reformulating some of the traditional concepts of Shi'ism. Islam for him was the religion of anti-imperialist combat only and as long as it was connected to the movement of the oppressed. Shi'ite Islam could be reinterpreted as a revolutionary ideology as long as it was articulated to a movement of the people and was consonant with Iranian culture and history. As soon as it turned into an "institution" instead of a "movement," it became reified like all other institutions²²⁹. In Shariati's words "True Islam is the Islam of the people, of the exploited, and the poor." Thus he joins his voice to Al-e Ahmad's in considering the indigenous culture and ideological foundation of the great masses of Iranians as the best base from which to fight the West and the Pahlavis.

Shariati also considered the most urgent task in Iran to be bridging the gap between

²²⁹To this end Shariati distinguishes between "Safavi Shiism" (Safavid dynasty made shiism the national religion of Iran in 1501) as an institution, and "Alavi Shiism" (following the rebellious leadership of Imam Ali who said no to the status quo) as a movement. See: Ibid. pp.144-145. See also, Bashiriyeh, H. The State and Revolution in Iran, pp.69-72.

intellectuals and the masses. Intellectuals, according to Shariati, must inject a sense of self-awareness into their society and lead its people in the direction of touhid (unity). In their task, they must embrace the principle of a "return to self" and refrain from all "isms" by seeking shelter in their religion and nationality if they are to counter western cultural imperialism successfully ²³⁰. Western ideologies, whether liberalism or marxism, had paralysed the indigenous reactions of the people whose "fire and enthusiasm" could be revived if the intellectuals engaged with, developed and clarified what was believed by and familiar to the oppressed masses of Iran.

Like Al-e Ahmad, Shariati's Islam was also symbolic and deeply intertwined with a search for national identity. He attacked the "establishment" Ulama who, like a "priesthood" or "traditional intellectuals" in Gramscian terminology, had historically formed a segment of the ruling class and had been the bastion of conservatism and inaction. They are to blame for the loss of the young and the educated to ideologies which are alien and irrelevant to the objective realities of modern Iran²³¹. Shariati stated that "I support religion in a way that even a non-religious intellectual can join me ²³²."

Shariati's influence on pre-revolutionary Iran was enormous, particularly on the college campuses and among the young but certainly not limited to them. From the summer of 1977 onwards, Shariati's books were sold everywhere by the hundreds of thousands and

²³⁰Kamrava, Mehran. Revolution in Iran: The Roots of Turmoil, Rotledge:London and New York, 1990. p.74.

²³¹Amini, Soheyl. "A Critical Assessment of Ali Shari'ati's Theory of Revolution," pp.80-81. In Iran: Essays on A Revolution in the Making, edited by A. Jabbari and R. Olson, Mazda Publishers:Kentucky, 1981. pp.77-103.

²³²Shariati, Ali. Bazgasht beh Khishtan (Return to Self), p.17. No date or publisher given.

during mass demonstrations his pictures were carried alongside Khomeini's by clergy as well as non-clerical participants. The consent to (and alliance with) Khomeini by anti-clerical leaders of the revolution becomes much less puzzling if the contributions of Shariati and Al-e Ahmad and their reverberations in Khomeini's speeches are taken into account. They had already initiated the struggle in the "ethical field" to build a new national-popular whose diverse blocs were to be glued together by the re-defined conception of Iranianness. Their ideological and political work produced the conditions favourable to the acceptance of the Islamic aspects of the revolution. A significant part of the secular opposition were won over to Khomeini's side because they believed that the Islamic revolution under his leadership would be a "progressive and nationalistic" one of the kind that Shariati had envisaged. While Khomeini has never mentioned Shariati's name (and there are very few instances where the latter refers to Khomeini), in his pre or post-revolutionary statements, he said very little to disabuse them of this notion.

A long-range view of Khomeini's oppositional work reveals an interesting shift in emphasis which, in my opinion, points to the centrality of nationness as a strategy of alliance. For example, anti-imperialism is a long-standing and recurrent theme in Khomeini's speeches. Until early to mid 1970s, Khomeini presents anti-imperialism as a religious duty of all muslims who must ward-off the infidel aliens engaged in dividing the Community of believers. Iran is just one Islamic country among many others which has to be freed from domination by western infidels. This does not mean that Iran is completely absent from Khomeini's discussions, but that it consistently occupies a much less significant, or more subordinate position compared to Islam. In these earlier years, Khomeini's appeals were repeatedly made to the "nation of Islam," "muslim people," and "pious brothers," to defend

the "culture of Quran," the "land of Islam," and so on. From early 1970s onwards however, there is a cumulative and qualitative change in Khomeini's terminology and tone. The discursive elements of his revolutionary messages are rearranged to give more relative weight and primacy to **Iran** as opposed to an undifferentiated **land of Islam**.

Anti-imperialism gradually changes from an **Islamic** duty into a **national**, or more specifically a Shi'ite Iranian characteristic and responsibility. Now the emphasis is on "patriotic" people of the "great and noble nation of Iran," "compatriots," who must join forces for the "salvation of Iran," "our homeland," "our nation," etc. Of course, Khomeini did not stop being a grand Ayatollah and his pronouncements were still couched in a religious idiom, but he made little reference to religion per se as the 70s continued. By 1978, what was once a reactionary ayatollah who had attacked women's rights, religious and ethnic minorities, socialists and liberal nationalists alike, had become a progressive and idealist all-inclusive hero engaged in a struggle to liberate all segments of the Iranian nation from domination and oppression.

The nation that he called upon was not constructed by looking to the West, nor did it assume that its only cultural resource or authentic identity lay in the glorification of an imperial past. In trying to disarticulate the "imperial" from the "national," and rearticulate the latter to the more "popular" dimension of Shi'ite Islam, Khomeini pointed out the absurdity of spending staggering amounts of money on festivals, celebrations and parades "for the sake of kings who in every age crushed the people beneath the boots of their soldiers, who always opposed true religion, who were the bitter enemies of Islam..." He goes on to further widen the cracks between the culture of the elite and that of ordinary Iranians by urging to "Let the world know that these festivals and celebrations have nothing to do

with the noble moslem people of Iran, and that all who organize and participate in these festivals are traitors to the people of Iran and to Islam²³³."

In the struggle to make the nation into a popular nation rather than a nation of kings and elites as constructed and promoted by the Pahlavis, Khomeini stressed those parts of Islam that appealed to the deprived against the rich, and to the oppressed against the oppressors. In this respect, the central position in the revolutionary rhetoric given to the Qoranic term "mostaz'afin" (the disinherited) used to refer to the oppressed masses, is of particular significance. Shariati had revived this powerful term to render Fanon's The Disinherited of the Earth in translation. It thus resonated well with the assortment of leftist groups who had long positioned themselves as the vanguard in charge of championing the cause of the disinherited masses. Others who had also answered Shariati's call to join him in supporting religion "in a way that even a non-religious person can," found Khomeini's terminology reassuringly familiar.

In speeches by Khomeini, one also finds echoes of other socialist ideas such as widespread adoption of nationalization measures, communal nature of property as well as Third-Worldist and nationalist emphasis on the greatest possible self-sufficiency. In addition to the incorporation of many features of constitutionalism, nationalism and socialism within the general Shi'ite ideological configuration of identity, Khomeini repeatedly appealed to all strata of Iranian society to put aside their differences in the name of the nation. For example, in his declaration issued from Neauphe-le-Chateau on November 23, 1978, after calling on everyone from "young people at the centres of religious learning and the universities," to "journalists, workers and peasants, militant and enlightened bazaar merchants, proud nomadic

²³³Algar, H. Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini, Mizan Press: Berkeley, 1981. p.198.

tribes and the deprived dwellers in slums and tents," to "advance together, with a single voice" to abolish the cruel Pahlavi dynasty and establish an "Islamic republic based on the dictates of Islam," Khomeini goes on to say

Today great nation, you have come to a fork in the road: one way leads to eternal dignity and splendour, and the other (God Forbid), to perpetual humiliation and degradation. There is no excuse for any class of people in the nation to remain inactive today; silence and apathy means suicide, or even aid to tyrannical regime. To abandon the straightforward path of the nation and Islam would be treason to Islam and the nation, and support for the enemies of Islam and the nation.²³⁴

He was clearly trying to speak in the language of the secular opposition, especially the militants from the National Front, the Freedom Movement and the various leftist/student organizations by substituting the term **Islamic republic** for his earlier notion of **Islamic government**. It is highly significant that in Khomeini's book, Islamic Government, which unlike the revolutionary speeches from Paris was not familiar to all those who contributed to the downfall of the Pahlavis, there is no mention of an Islamic republic. Nor is term **progressive** Islam a characteristic of Khomeini's work before the years immediately preceding the revolution. He deliberately left these notions unclarified and rather vague so as to leave as much room as possible for multiple interpretations. Earlier in September of 1978, Khomeini asserted

Most importantly, it must be stated that after this tyrannical regime has been abolished, we will announce our fundamental programme, which will be inspired by the **progressive** ideas of Islam. Then it will be seen that all the claims made by the traitors concerning Islam -- concerning the rights of women and religious minorities, as well as other matters -- are nothing but cheap lies and poisonous propaganda trumpeted over the Shah's propaganda loudspeakers at home and abroad in order to confuse people and in the hope of arresting or defeating our movement. It is to be hoped that all that we propose will become clear very soon, once the tyrannical regime has been

²³⁴Ibid., pp.244-245

swept away.²³⁵

In the same speech he not only identified the aim of the massive demonstrations as "saving the nation," but raised questions which are almost indistinguishable from those of the National Front and the constitutionalist oppositional platform. After urging the nation not to pay any attention to "the Shah's empty speeches about freedom at a time when their jails still overflow with religious leaders and university students, with merchants and politicians, with workers and peasants," Khomeini goes on to ask

How can one speak of freedom when the press is still subject to censorship, when the discussion of fundamental matters vital to the country is forbidden, and a semi-military government is in force all across Iran?²³⁶

It is hardly surprising then that the leader of the National Front, Karim Sanjabi (who was soon to discover his "Islamic identity" and sign the alliance declaration with Khomeini a month later), was moved to remark that during massive demonstrations in September "there was no longer an I but only a we²³⁷."

Similarly, given that Khomeini's rearticulation of Iranianness also forged connections with the major themes in the ideological repertoire of the left (e.g. through its emphasis on anti-imperialism, progressive Islamic republic, self-sufficiency, etc.), the pledge of allegiance by Iraj Eskandari, the Secretary general of the Tudeh Party becomes much less puzzling. He is on the record as saying that

As far as the religious aspects of the present movement is concerned, it should be emphasized that the shiite clergy cannot be viewed as a force demanding a return to the past or the Middle Ages. To a significant extent the position of the clergy reflects popular feelings. And the fact that the religious

²³⁵Ibid., p.236. Emphasis added.

²³⁶Ibid., p.234

²³⁷As cited by S.A. Arjomand in The Turban for the Crown, p.109

movement is now playing an important role in the mobilization of democratic nationalist forces against the dictatorial anti-nationalist and pro-imperialist regime of the Shah can only be welcomed. We are all in favour of a union with democratic forces, including the religious ones.²³⁸

Eskandari was later replaced by Nureddin Kianouri who also stated support for Khomeini's position by saying that "The Party's programme is quite compatible with Khomeini's action programme²³⁹." Other leftist groups expressed the same or similar sentiments with regards to the active consent they gave to Khomeini's hegemony. They are almost unanimous in referring to the powerful ideological and emotional pull of a renewed sense of national authentic identity as a major factor in negotiating this consent and their subsequent alliances²⁴⁰.

It should be evident from the discussion thus far that the basis for the remarkable unity among the revolutionary forces was a system of alliance. Iranianness served as the central articulating axis for this alliance as a result of specific historical, political, social, intellectual and ideological factors whose origins and development have been discussed throughout this thesis.

In the fourteen years since the revolution, the Islamic Republic has betrayed the hopes and aspiration of the people of Iran by basing itself solely on religion and resorting to

²³⁸The New Yorker, December 18, 1978, p.150.

²³⁹As cited by S. Zabih in Iran's Revolutionary Upheaval, Alchemy Books:San Francisco, 1979, p.43.

²⁴⁰My impression is based on surveying the two national Iranian newspapers, Keyhan and Etela'at, during the 1977-79 period. While the papers went on strike for a few crucial months before the revolution there was enough of the public exchanges between the various forces of opposition to give a sense of the context and direction of events. I also conducted phone interviews with members of Paykar and Tufan living in New York city. Their comments confirmed my conclusions regarding the centrality of nationness to forging alliances. Unfortunately I have to respect their wish to remain anonymous.

excessively brutal measures to suppress all opposition to its rule. The historic articulation of Iranianness and Shi'ism has been dissolved in the interest of building a theocratic state. By concerning themselves solely with the immediate and narrow ideological interests of the state, the new regime has lost its national-popular dimension and once again coercion far outweighs consent in the Iranian social formation.

This unintended outcome however, should not obliterate the truly emancipatory aims of the revolution and its remarkable achievements. The awesome display of mass power by an unarmed people who paralysed a highly trained sophisticated army and overthrew a powerful monarchy is perhaps the most impressive legacy of the revolution. The significance of the idea of the nation in defeating imperialism and dictatorship and the resulting rediscovery of potential power in the midst of powerlessness are also among the crucial lessons of the Iranian revolution.

CONCLUSION

The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.

Benedict Anderson

All endeavours to trace the roots of the Iranian revolution to a single cause, group, or ideology are misleading. When the object of analysis is a social formation, be it Iranian or otherwise, one is dealing with an ensemble of practices and relations which are constructed and transformed by many determinations. The ideological level of determination, itself not a simple monolithic totality, operates within the play of other determinations and has social, historical, political and economic conditions of existence. I have chosen to cut into this field from a particular angle, namely that of the nation, neither to prioritize it to the exclusion of all other factors, nor to suggest a leap from error to truth in comparison to what has already been written on the topic. Rather, by analyzing an additional layer of the ideological field, this exploration hopes to have contributed to the existing body of work on the Iranian revolution in two respects.

First, throughout this study I have attempted to argue against a reductionist understanding of the ideological dimension of the revolution. Undoubtedly, Shi'ite Islam as a valorized ideological domain in the Iranian social formation played a central role in furnishing the struggle with extraordinary cultural and ideological vitality. As my brief excursions into modern Iranian history demonstrated, no political movement in Iran could become popular without negotiating the religious terrain. However, this does not mean that Islam, in and of itself, engulfed all aspects of Iranian political, social, cultural and ideological processes and practices.

At worst, an exclusive focus on Islam as the **only** "motor of the revolution" denies the existence of Iranian politics and culture and deprives Iranians of their dignity. The Orientalist discourse provided ample evidence of such treatments of the revolution which confuse the fundamental commitment of the Iranian people to revolt against internal as well as external oppressors with reactionary "fundamentalism." At best, the narrowing of the ideological level of determination to Islam alone, produces analyses which either fall silent or offer partial responses when confronted with questions concerning the astounding degree of solidarity among the diverse revolutionary forces, their mobilization and unification strategies, and the massive participation of those Iranians with no desire to replace the monarchy with a theocracy.

The work undertaken in this thesis has hopefully shed some light on these shortcomings by considering the immense impact of nationness as a cohesive ideological force. I have argued that the political and ideological meanings of Shi'ite Islam itself come from its position within the historically specific Iranian social formation and depend upon what else is articulated to it. In the history of oppositional movements in Iran and particularly in the 1979 revolution, it has been the articulation to nationness which has transformed the meaning of Islam from a religious discourse into a powerful ideology of resistance and rebellion. When ideologies are in conflict, as they would be when a wide mix of people from diverse socioeconomic positions participate in a massively popular revolution, the appeal to the nation appears to defeat all challengers. As an "interpellation which cuts across and neutralizes" sectarian differences based on class, political and religious beliefs, or sex, Iranianness proved to be a powerful ideological strategy of alliance capable of cementing together a highly differentiated historical bloc.

It should be apparent from the discussions in preceding chapters that the construction of what the nation means must take account of the nature of popular historical memory, symbolic identifications and the codes and experiences of popular masses if it is to perform its ideological function successfully. People can and do refuse to consent to a construction of their identity which does not resonate within the structures and layers of popular consciousness and knowledge. The dialectical tension between agency and determinations shapes the contours of national identity.

A second potential contribution of the thesis to theorizing about the Iranian revolution in particular and political/ ideological struggles in the non-western world in general, is perhaps more of interest to those engaged in theoretical experimentation with Gramscian concepts. The application of a Gramscian perspective to the Iranian experience has proved very useful in exploring the ideological dimensions of the revolution in a non-reductive manner. The concepts of the "national-popular," "historical bloc," and "intellectual and moral leadership," as well as the emphasis placed on the structures of popular thought and consciousness, the nature of historical memory and the importance of self-knowledge lend themselves quite nicely to such an analysis. This opens up interesting avenues for future theoretical explorations as far as the trans-societal or cross-cultural application of some key concepts in communication theory and cultural studies to the non-western world is concerned. Gramsci's contributions to the analysis of popular culture, the politics of resistance and social movements in the western liberal democracies have already produced a significant and substantial body of work. It is hoped that the thesis stands as evidence that the social, political and ideological processes and practices which occur in the non-western world do not require completely different categories of analysis. This does not necessarily mean that

historical or cultural specificities have to be sacrificed, nor that all differences have to be levelled. What it does make possible is an expansion of the spheres and means of analysis with which the right kind of questions can be asked in specific contexts.

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