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The Iranian Revolution: The Multiple Contexts of the Iranian Revolution

M. P. Amineh^a and S. N. Eisenstadt^b

^a) Senior Research Fellow, International Institute for Asian Studies
and Adjunct Professor of International Relations, Webster University
m.p.amineh@uva.nl

^b) The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute
miriamb@vanleer.org.il

Abstract

The Iranian Islamic Revolution, the only continual regime constituted by a modern fundamentalist movement, shares many of the characteristics of the Great revolutions. The causes of the Iranian Revolution are indeed very similar to those of the classical ones—namely the breakdown of a modernizing autocracy torn by internal contradictions between various processes of economic and social modernization that gave rise to many new modernized economic and professional classes, but denying them any political autonomy, any autonomous access to the political center, at the same time uprooting them from wider sectors of peasant and urban population—very much in a rather typical third world way, pushing them into the slums of the cities. The Khomeini Revolution also developed in the context of the expansion of modernity, and it built on many of the structural and organizational aspects of modernity—especially of course in the use of the media and modern organizational methods for the mobilization of the masses. It was also fully imbued by some of the institutional and ideological premises of modernity. Not only did it adapt such modern political institutions as parliament or presidency—to which there is no reference in any pristine Islamic vision—but it did also emphasize in modern ways such themes as equality and political participation far beyond what could be found in such vision or visions. At the same time the Iranian *ulama* felt utterly alienated from the Shah's secular regime, and modernizing ideology. Their basic cosmological orientations were radically anti-modern, or rather more exactly anti-Enlightenment and anti-Western. It was this distinct combination of modern and anti-Enlightenment and anti-Western cosmological visions; as developed in the framework of new globalizing and inter-civilizational visions; that distinguished the Iranian Islamic revolution from the classical ones, bringing out some of its paradoxical similarities within the different post-modern movements. Thus, indeed, the modern fundamentalist movements, in a way most fully epitomized in the Iranian revolution, as well as in somewhat different mode the communal religious movements, entail an important, even radical, shift in the discourse about the confrontation with modernity and in the conceptualization of the relation between the Western and non-Western civilizations, religions or societies—thus, paradoxically sharing many characteristics with the various “post-modern” movements.

Keywords

Iranian Islamic Revolution, modernization, fundamentalism, Jacobinism, sectarian and renovative tendencies, inter-civilizational relations

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Introduction

Revolutions are complex phenomena. They are structured in the societies that give birth to them. They are characterized by unexpected changes in the revolutionary process itself. Their long-term consequences can possibly only be understood in their totality after generations. In the following, the focus will be on the rise of new Islamic “nationalist”-based political ideology with related social forces as a result of structural changes under the modern authoritarian regime of the Pahlavi Shahs (1941-1979).

The Iranian Islamic Revolution was one of the most complex revolutions of the twentieth century. Never before had a modern revolution of such depth taken place since the disintegration of the Islamic Empires of Ottoman, Persia and Mughal-India.

The movement, under the leadership of the *ulama* (Islamic clergy) and their Islamic ideology and traditional religious institutions such as mosques, allowed the leaders to assert themselves against one of the strongest regimes of the Third World with a distinguished but repressive state apparatus (military and secret service). In 1978, millions of Iranians demonstrated to put an end to the secular authoritarian state of the Shah.

A comprehensive literature exists on the causes and nature of the Iranian Islamic revolution. Still, a number of controversial issues have not yet been clarified completely. Also the theorizing of the revolution has still to be regenerated.

The specific characteristics of the Iranian revolution are, of course, to be explained first of all in terms of the background of Iranian history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, its political traditions, social and economic development, especially under the impact of Western capitalism and imperialism, and the mode of its incorporation into the emerging world capitalist system.

Mohammad Reza Shah came to power in Iran, after the forced abdication of his father Reza Shah in 1941 by the Allied forces, Britain and Russia, because of his friendly relationship with the Germans. Although Iran had declared its neutrality in World War II, the Allied forces occupied the country. The removal of Reza Shah set free many social forces that had been repressed during his reign. Social and political affairs became highly confused due to class and religious antagonism and because it was unclear what political institutions—the *majlis* (parliament established by the 1906 constitution), the cabinet, the court or other social groups or movements—had effective political power. Nevertheless, the occupation by the Allied forces and the Shah's removal led to a break with the authoritarian regime and a semi-restoration of the constitutional order. A free press was reintroduced and many new political

parties were established. But political freedom was not the only outcome of the occupation of Iran and the regime change. World War II and the occupation resulted in an economic and social crisis in Iran. Socioeconomic unrest contributed to an intensification of political activities and a political crisis, which was the characteristic feature of the period between 1941 and 1953. This period ended with the United States (US)-backed military coup in 1953 against the nationalist government of Mohammad Mosaddeq and with the suppression of oppositional social forces.¹ After the coup another authoritarian state with state-led industrialization was established under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah with economic and financial support of the US.

At the beginning, the Shah tried to consolidate his power through an alliance with the big landowners and the *ulama*. From a strategic point of view the state had no need of the traditional social forces. The process of modernization threatened the needs of the traditional social forces and ultimately would bring about a confrontation between the Shah and these groups. The stabilization of the regime and the comprehensive modernization from above—known as the “White Revolution” and later as the “Revolution of the Shah and the people”²—which was supported by the US and was accompanied by an intensive secular nationalist, anti-Islamic propaganda, resulted in an antagonism between the *ulama* and the state.

Different social forces reacted to the doctrine of the White revolution, particularly the landlord class, the *ulama*, the *bazaar* and a segments of the secular oppositional parties. The latter were organized in the National Front. The land reform and the policies of the White Revolution constituted a threat to landlordism. The *ulama* saw their influence undermined by the modernization program and by the voting right for women. For the traditional economic sector—the *bazaaris*—the reforms were a sign of intervention into their commercial activities, threatening the autonomy of the *bazaar*³ (see Keddie 1995: 116-17).

¹ For the role of the US in the coup of 1953, see the US-National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No.28; “The Secrete CIA History of the Iran Coup, 1953.” George Washington University [<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/iran/>]; see also Gasiorowski, M. J. and M. Byrne (eds.) 2004 Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

² Approved in 1963 through an almost unanimous referendum, the White Revolution originally consisted of a six-point program to break up the old landlordism structure and create the foundations for a modern industrial society. The land reform was the cornerstone for industrialization.

³ From the Safavid Empire (1501-1722) the *bazaar* has played a key role in the urban economy. The *bazaar* includes the urban production of small goods, traditional artisans, the traditional bank and trade system, and the wholesale trade. The *bazaar* was not only the center of

The discontent of the religious community and the economic and political crisis led in June 1963 to a revolt, which had been proclaimed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989). The revolt was brutally suppressed by the military. The leaders of the National Front were arrested and Ayatollah Khomeini was banished to Turkey. Later he went to Iraq (Katouzian 1981).

The Historical Background of the Iranian Revolution—The Gradual Expansion of European Capitalism and its Impact on Iran

The Making of Islam as Political Ideology—The State and the Ulama

The origins of Islam as a political ideology and praxis can be traced back to the gradual expansion of European capitalism and its corresponding civilization from the nineteenth century in the Islamic lands of the Ottomans, Persians, and Indians. Proclaiming an Islamic order by a segment of Islamic intellectuals, *ulama*, and traditional economic forces was a response to the marginalization or subordination of these traditional social forces in the industrialized-based social order.

The expansion of European capitalism and civilization had two dialectical effects in the Iranian social structures. First, it resulted in a gradual convergence of the Iranian social structures and European capitalism and civilization. This convergence manifested itself during the rule of the Qajar Empire (1786-1921) in socio-political and economic modernization and reforms of the military, bureaucracy, tax system, the consolidation of private property, the emergence of a modern intelligentsia, and in a gradual process of transition of the empire to a modern nation state, which started with the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) in the early twentieth century. Second, it resulted in a gradual divergence at the cultural level. That means that the expansion of European capitalism and its ideological and cultural consequences caused not only an economic but also a cultural and/or religious reaction. It was especially the traditional, urban economic sector of the *bazaar* that felt threatened by Western economic penetration. In other words, the reassertion of the *ulama*, who were threatened by the rising Western influence was accompanied with the reaction of the *bazaar* to Western economic penetration. The *ulama* were representatives of traditional culture and received important power positions as a result of this conjuncture of interaction. Maintaining Islam in this conjuncture was an eruption of nationalism.

economic transactions but also the center of the community. The *bazaar* areas had mosques, public baths, religious schools and many teahouses.

The *ulama* supported this development, and therewith strengthened the domestic culture and the national consciousness: "Nationalism manifested itself in terms of Islam and Islam in terms of nationalism." In general, early Iranian nationalism emerged in the time of rapid socio-political and economic changes. It was the result of the "limited" reforms from above carried out under the Qajar Empire as a response to European expansion. Socially, it was founded on the traditional economic sector around the *bazaar*, which was subordinated by Western economic penetration. Culturally, it was upheld by the religious institutions, which assumed a new power position. The result was the strengthening of local culture and national consciousness formulated in terms of Islam. Thus, it was a combination of traditional economic (*bazaar*) and ideological (*ulama*) forces,⁴ and the modern intelligentsia that created the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) in the early twentieth century as a nationalist, anti-absolutist movement, and as response to foreign intervention in Iran.

The introduction of a parliamentary-based constitution in 1906 following the Western model (particularly the 1830 Belgian constitution) destroyed the traditional absolutist power of the Shah and resulted in the recognition of the position of the *ulama* as the sovereigns of Islamic law. The *ulama* became representatives of a segment of the domestic nationalist movement (see Amineh 1999; Browne 1910; Enayat 1982; Keddie 1981). Although internal discord and especially an Anglo-Russian invasion ended this experiment in 1911, the constitution remained until a new regime replaced it in 1979. At the same time, the lack of modern material conditions for the making of a liberal and constitutional based social order after the Constitutional revolution created the main background for the rise of the modern authoritarian regime of Reza Shah with its state-led modernization strategy.

Nationalist and democratic feelings grew during the great destruction of World War I, when Iran was used as a battlefield by several powers. A number of local social movements right after the war expressed these feelings. Reza Shah, who entered the government after a coup in 1921 and became Shah by support of the Islamic and secular nationalist forces in 1925 and created the Pahlavi dynasty, inaugurated 50 years of intensive and rapid state-led modernization in a traditional and fragmented society within a mainly rural

⁴ The *bazaar* depended on the *ulama* for political support while the *ulama* depended on the *bazaar* for financial support to finance their mosques, seminars and other religious institutions. The *bazaaris* and the *ulama* were also connected through family ties. This interdependence was crucial for the political developments in Iran at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

or nomadic-tribal country. Culturally, the Pahlavi shahs stressed the nationalism that admired pre-Islamic Iran, which was a way of bringing in Western-style modernization.

But, what were the socio-political and economic conditions for the development of a new type of *ulama* and a revolutionary Islam as dominant political ideology that ultimately developed to the determining force of the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1978/79?

With the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini as irreconcilable opponent of the Shah regime and initiator of the revolt of 1963, developed gradually a new type of Khomeini inspired *ulama* and a new type of *tulab* (religious students). The members of this new group formed the nucleus of the militant *ulama*, who would later become the leaders of the Islamic revolution and the initiators of the Islamic state under the leadership of Khomeini. The reformulation of the Shi'i political doctrine as revolutionary doctrine was a gradual process starting after the coup of 1953 and reaching its height in the 1960s and 1970s. This process, which came to be known as *ehyay-e fekr-e dini* (the revival of religious thought), was the intellectual origin of the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1978/79.

It is interesting to note that the so called "Islamic fundamentalist" movement made use of the cultural, political and scientific values of modern Iran, that had been the product of the long-term Western-style process of modernization. In fact, the influence of the modern Iranian secular political culture and language on the thinking of the religious reformers was remarkable in this period. Part of the project "revival of religious thought" was the reform of traditional, religious thought and of the value system as well as the adaptation to the modern Iranian politics and culture. Some social scientists and the media who consider the Iranian Islamic revolution and the Islamic movement to be "Islamic fundamentalist" or "traditionalist" know little about the mechanisms how Khomeini's theory of the *velayat-e faqih* (the guardianship of the jurist) and the *hokumat-e islami* (Islamic state / government) and the radical Islamic political ideology of the laymen and intelligentsia came about. Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic theory actually was a revision and renewal of Shi'i political thought and has to be seen as a new phenomenon—the roots of this theory have to be found in the combination of the context of the social, political, economic, and cultural history of modern Iran analyzed above—with the dynamics that developed in the Islamic civilizations.

The Civilizational Background of the Iranian Revolution

In order to understand fully the Iranian Islamic revolution's place in world history and on the contemporary world scene, it is necessary to put it in sev-

eral comparative contexts—namely those of the Great revolutions (Eisenstadt 1978 and 2006), of the dynamics of Axial civilizations and above all, of course, of the Islamic civilization (Eisenstadt 1986; Amason, Eisenstadt and Wittrock 2005), and of the vicissitudes of the expansion of modernity, above all in the contemporary era (Eisenstadt 2006: chs. 16 and 17).

The Iranian revolution shared with the Great modern revolutions—the English-puritan (Cromwell); the American, French, Russian, Chinese, and Vietnamese—as well as to a large extent also with the Kemalist one—several basic characteristics—namely the combination of downfall changes of regimes, new principles of political legitimation, changes in class structures, closely connected within new modes of political economy, the promulgation of a distinct cosmology, and the concomitant establishment of its “modern” institutional regime. It is this last characteristic, which distinguishes it from some of the changes that occurred in earlier times which have been often designated as revolutions—especially indeed from the Abbasid takeover of the Caliphate—often called the Abbasid revolution (Sharon 1983; Shaban 1990). It shared also with those revolutions—again in contrast to the Abbasid case—some of their basic “causes” and historical frameworks. It shared with them the constellations of inter-elite and inter-class struggles, development of new social groups and economic forces, which are blocked from access to power, economic turbulences and the impact of international forces—all of which weaken the preceding regimes. It shared with them (and in this respect also with the Abbasid revolution) specific civilizational frameworks—namely those of Axial civilizations, with very strong—although certainly not exclusive—this-worldly orientation, i.e. Axial civilizations in which the political realm was conceived as a major arena for the implementation of the predominant transcendental vision of utopian reconstruction, and in which accordingly the sectarian and heterodox tendencies which are inherent in Axial civilizations, focus to a major extent on the reconstitution of the political realm. It shared also with these revolutions the specific historical circumstances in which they developed, namely those of early modernity—conceived in typological and not chronological terms—characterized by the development of the contradictions inherent in their own legitimation of modernizing autocratic regimes, especially the contradiction between the development of many new modernized economic and professional classes, but denying them any political autonomy, any autonomous access to the political center—access which is inherent or implicate in the ideologies promulgated by these regimes; at the same time uprooting wide sectors of peasant and urban population—in the Iranian scene in a rather typical Third World way, pushing them into the slums of the cities. It shared also with the other revolutions, but in contrast to the Abbasid revolution, the transformation of the “traditional” sectarian orientations and

activities into modern revolutionary ones—above all Jacobin tendencies.⁵ As in the other revolutions the central place in that of intellectual, religious groups—the Shi'i clergy—played a crucial role in their revolutionary process seemingly very similar to the role played by Puritans in the English Civil war. Just like these movements it developed many—but rather distinctive “fundamentalist” analytical characteristics—the most important of which have been the attempt to bringing the Kingdom of God to the Kingdom of Earth by political means, by the transformation of man and society according to their respective pristine visions which were often promulgated in scriptural terms; to transform the mundane through political means—thus sanctifying the political arena and making it more autonomous—far beyond what existed in the historical setting. While these visions necessarily differ in their concrete definitions according to their religious premises and visions of collective identity of different movements—they vary among different Islamist movements and between them and other such movement, yet they all share these basic characteristics—their Iranian Jacobin orientations.

Paradoxically enough the fundamentalist and the “secular” Jacobin movements alike have deep roots, as Besançon (1981) and Voegelin (1987) have shown, in the extreme often gnostic heterodoxies of their respective religious traditions. The Great revolutions constituted the culmination and concretization of the sectarian heterodox potentialities, which developed in these Axial civilizations, especially in those in which the political arena was defined as at least one of the arenas of implementation of their transcendental vision. The first Great revolutions constituted the first or at least the most dramatic, and possibly the most successful attempt in the history of mankind to implement on a macro-societal scale the heterodox visions with strong gnostic components which sought to bring the Kingdom of God to earth, and which were often promulgated in medieval and early modern European Christianity by different heterodox sects. In all these revolutions such sectarian activities were taken out from marginal or segregated sectors of society and became interwoven not only with rebellions, popular uprisings and movements of protest, but also with the political struggle at the center. They were transposed into the central political arenas and the centers thereof. Themes and symbols of protest became a basic component of the central social and political symbolism of the new regimes.

⁵ On the Jacobin component of modern revolutions and its religious roots see Besançon, A. 1981 *The Intellectual Origins of Leninism*, translated by Sarah Matthews. Oxford: B. Blackwell; Eisenstadt, S.N. 1999 *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimensions of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Voegelin, E. 1987 *The New Science of Politics*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

At the same time it has, of course, to be taken into account that the Iranian revolution—just like the Kemalist and the Chinese or Vietnamese revolutions, developed in a non-Christian setting—but unlike the latter revolutions it promulgated a distinctive anti-Enlightenment seemingly anti-modern ideology—the central core of it being an Islamic vision rooted in the dynamics and themes of Islamic civilizations, but at the same time transforming them into radical modern fundamentalist Jacobin ones.

Like the late Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and the Kemalist revolutions, the Iranian revolution also developed in the context of the expansion of modernity of the modern capitalist system and Imperial capitalism. It built on many of the structural and organizational aspects of modernity—especially of course in the use of the media and modern organizational methods for the mobilization of the masses. It was also fully imbued with some of the institutional and ideological premises of modernity. Not only did it adapt such modern political institutions as parliament or presidency—to which there is no reference in any pristine Islamic vision—but it did also emphasize such themes as equality and political participation in distinctly modern Jacobin terms far beyond of what could be found in the traditional heterodox visions.

Civilizational Dynamics and the Renovative Tendencies in Islamic Civilization

We shall start with the analysis of the specific dynamics of the Islamic civilization, especially the place of sectarian or heterodox, above all renovative movements within them.

The pattern of political dynamics that developed in Islam was closely related to its basic drive to create a civilization with its own specific premises, a crucial aspect of which was the conflation of the political and religious communities (in which military conquests constitute an important component) as expressed in the ideal of the *ummah* (Islamic community). Indeed, it was the ideal of the *ummah* to be the major arena for the implementation of the transcendental and moral vision of Islam, of the strong universalistic component in the definition of the Islamic community, and the closely connected emphasis on the principled political equality of all believers. This pristine vision of the *ummah*, probably implicit only in the very formative period of Islam, entailed a complete fusion of political and religious collectivities, the complete convergence or conflation of the socio-political and religious communities. Indeed, the very conceptual distinction between these two dimensions, rooted in the Western historical experience, is basically not applicable to the concept of the *ummah*.

The continual confrontation of this ideal with the political realities attendant of the expansion of Islam constituted a most important factor in the development of political dynamics in Islamic societies. Thus, already early in the formation and expansion of Islam the possibility of attaining the ideal fusion between the political and the religious community, of constructing the *ummah* as a basic tenet of Islam, was actually abandoned. Instead the mainstream of Islamic (Sunni) religious thought stressed the legitimacy of any ruler who assures the peaceful existence of the Muslim community and of this community (Nafissi 2005; Hodgson 1974).

In this vision strong tensions developed from the very beginning of Islam's history between on the one hand the particularistic primordial Arab elements or components, seemingly naturally embodied in the initial carriers of the Islamic vision and the universalistic orientation. These tensions became more important with the continual expansion of Islamic conquest and incorporation of new territorial entities and ethnic groups. The final crystallization of this universalistic ideology took place with the so-called Abbasid revolution. Paradoxically, also in this period—indeed, in close relation to the institutionalization of this universalistic vision—developed, especially within Sunni Islam, a de facto (and to a much smaller extent and in a different mode in Shi'i Islam especially in Iran) separation between the religious community and the rulers, a separation between the *khalifa* (successor of the prophet, head of the *ummah*) and the actual ruler, the sultan, heralding de facto separation between the rulers and the religious establishment (*ulama*)—but not of the religious from the political arenas. This separation, partially legitimized by the religious leadership, was continually reinforced above all by the ongoing military and missionary expansion of Islam, far beyond the ability of any single regime to sustain a process, which culminated in the eleventh century and became further reinforced under the impact of the Mongol invasions.

In the various (especially Sunni) Muslim regimes that developed under the impact of the continual expansion of Islam, the *khalifa* often became de facto powerless yet continued to serve as an ideal figure. The *khalifa* was seen as the presumed embodiment of the pristine Islamic vision of the *ummah* and the major source of legitimation of the sultan, even if de facto he and the *ulama* legitimized any person or group that was able to seize power. Such separation between the *khalifa* and the sultan was reinforced by the crystallization (in close relation to the mode of expansion of Islam, especially Sunni Islam) of a unique type of ruling group, namely, the military-religious rulers, who emerged from tribal and sectarian elements. It also produced the system of military slavery, which created special channels of mobility, such as the *ghulam* system in general and the *mameluks* systems and Ottoman *derushisme* in particular,

through which the ruling groups could be recruited from alien elements (Ayalon 1996; Crone 1980; Pipes 1981). Even when some imperial components developed—as was the case in Iran, which became a stronghold of Shi'i Islam—a complete fusion between the political ruler and the religious elites and establishment did not ensue.

Despite these vicissitudes, the possibility of implementing such pristine vision of Islam, of achieving that ideal fusion between the political and the religious community, of constructing the *ummah*, was actually given up relatively early in the formation and expansion of Islam. The fact that political issues constituted a central focus of Muslim theology was to no small extent rooted in this disjunction between the ideal of the Islamic ruler as the upholder of the pristine transcendental vision of Islam and the reality of rulership in Islamic religion (Rosenthal 1958; Crone 2004). Yet although never fully attained, it was continually promulgated, as Al Azmeh (1996) has shown, with very strong utopian orientations in the later periods by various scholars and religious leaders.

The impact of the fact that the ideal of the *ummah* was never fully given up, and that it was never fully implemented became evident in specific characteristics of the political dynamism of Islamic regimes and sects, and in the strong chiliastic and utopian components thereof. These dynamics were very often imbued with a strong religious vision, as could especially be seen in the potentially strong “semi-revolutionary” sectarian activities oriented to religious-political change—activities which were reinforced by initial patterns of expansion of Islam and the constitution of its international system.

Sectarianism and Political Dynamics in Islamic Civilizations

Despite the potential autonomous standing of members of the *ulam*, there did not develop in these societies fully institutionalized effective checks on the decision-making of the rulers. There was no machinery other than rebellion through which to enforce any far-reaching “radical” political demands. And yet in contrast to other, for instance, South East Asian or Meso American patrimonial regimes, the potential not just for rebellion but also for principled revolt and possible regime changes was endemic in Muslim societies. True, as Bernard Lewis (1973) has shown, a concept of revolution never developed within Islam. But at the same time, as Ernest Gellner (1981) indicated in his interpretation of Ibn Khaldoun's work, a less direct yet “very” forceful pattern of indirect ruler accountability and the possibility of regime changes did arise. This pattern was closely connected with a second type of ruler legitimation

and accountability in Muslim societies that saw the ruler as the upholder of the pristine, transcendental Islamist vision, a conception promulgated above all by the different sectarian activities that constituted a continual component of the Islamic scene. These sectarian activities were connected with the enduring utopian vision of the original Islamic era, of the fact that this vision was neither fully implemented nor ever fully given up. Such sectarian-like tendencies with strong renovative tendencies have indeed existed in the recurring social movements in Muslim societies.

Such renovative orientations were embodied in the different versions of the tradition of reform, the *mujaddid* tradition (Landau-Tasseran 1989: 79-118). They could be focused on the person of a *mahdi* (savior figure in Islam) and/or be promulgated by a Sufi order in a tribal group such as the Wahabites or in a school of law. Such political and/or renovative orientations could be directed toward active participation in the political center, its destruction or transformation, or toward a conscious withdrawal from it. But even such withdrawal, which often developed in both Shi'ism and Sufism, often harbored tendencies to pristine renovation, leading potentially to political action.

These tendencies were related to some basic characteristics of Islamic sects and heterodoxies, which played such an important role in the history of Islamic societies, and to the place of such sectarianism in the expansion of Islam. One of their distinctive characteristics has been the importance within them of the political dimensions, frequently oriented toward the restoration of that pristine vision of Islam, which, has never been given up. This dimension could be oriented towards active participation in the center, its destruction or transformation, or towards a conscious withdrawal from it—yet a withdrawal which, as in the case of some Sufi groups and of Shi'ism, often harbored potential political reactivation. This potential political orientation or dimension generated some of the major movements, political divisions, and problems in Islam, starting with the Shi'a. A very important characteristic aspect of Islamic societies was, as has been indicated above, that the internal sectarian political impact was often connected with the processes of the expansion of Islam, and especially with the continuous impingement on Islamic societies of tribal elements, that presented themselves as the carriers of the original ideal Islamic vision and of the pristine Islamic polity.

Renovative Tendencies and the Ibn Khaldounian Cycle

The fullest development of the political potential of such renovative tendencies took place in Islamic societies when such tendencies became connected

with the resurgence of tribal revival against “corrupt” or weak regimes. In these cases the political impact of such movements became connected with processes attendant on the expansion of Islam and especially with the continuous impingement on the core Islamic polities of relatively newly converted tribal elements, who presented themselves as the carriers of the original ideal Islamic vision, and of the pristine Islamic polity. Many tribes (e.g. some of the Mongols), after being converted to Islam, transformed their own “typical” tribal structures to accord with Islamic religious-political visions and presented themselves as the symbol of pristine Islam, with strong renovative tendencies oriented to the restoration of pristine Islam. These tendencies became closely related to the famous cycle depicted by Ibn Khaldoun (1958), namely, the cycle of tribal conquest, based on tribal solidarity and religious devotion, giving rise to the conquest of cities and settlement in them, followed by the degeneration of the ruling (often the former tribal) elite and then by its subsequent regeneration by new tribal elements from the vast—old or new—tribal reservoirs. The Abbasid revolution can in many ways be seen as one point in the Khaldounian cycles of political dynamics of Islam. Ibn Khaldoun emphasized above all the possibility of such renovation from within the original, especially Arab, tribal reservoir, and not from reservoirs acquired as it were through the expansion of Islam. Moreover, he focused more on the dilution of internal tribal cohesion as an important factor in the decline of Muslim dynasties and paid less attention to the “dogmatic” dimensions of Islam. But the overall strength of Ibn Khaldoun’s approach is that it provides an important analytical tool for understanding the dynamics of Islamic societies beyond the geographical scope of his own vision. Such new “converts”, along with the seemingly dormant tribes of the Arabian peninsula, of which the Wahabites constituted probably the latest and most forceful illustration, became a central dynamic political force in Islamic civilization.

By virtue of the combination of this mode of Islamic expansion with such sectarian, renovative orientations, Islam was probably the only Axial civilization in which sectarian-like movements—together with tribal leadership and groups—often led not only to the overthrow or downfall of existing regimes but also to the establishment of new political regimes oriented, at least initially, to the implementation of the original pristine, primordial Islamic utopia. But significantly enough once these regimes became institutionalized they gave rise to patrimonial or Imperial regimes within which the “old” Ibn Khaldoun cycle tended to develop anew. But, in which however also the pristine ideal of the unusual, of its renovation, constituted a continual component of political symbolism and dynamics.

Sectarianism and Political Dynamics in Shi'i Islam

Within this broad framework of the dynamics of Islamic civilizations there developed an innovating interpretation of the relation between temporal and religious power by a segment of the Shi'i *ulama*, which constitute a more distinct background to the Iranian revolution.

Historically, there is no distinction between state power and religious thought in Islam. Islam does not make a fundamental distinction between politics in its temporal meaning and spiritual power (Lambton 1980: 404). As a spiritual power prophet Mohammad laid down the essential principles of Islam. As temporal leader he created the basis for Islamic political power. After the death of the prophet Muhammad the role of political power and the legitimacy of the religious or temporal ruler became an important central problem and a source of polemics within Islam. In Shi'ism this was an even more complicated problem. After the death of Imam Hossein, the third Shi'i Imam, who had carried out several failed military actions to gain control of the Islamic community, the following imams distanced themselves from politics. The depolarization of the Shi'i imams reached its height with the occultation of the twelfth or Hidden Imam (873-874). Theoretically, all temporal power was illegitimate and legitimate authority belonged to the imams starting with Ali (the first Shi'i Imam). Since the occultation of the last Imam, Mahdi in AD 874, the *ulama* were considered to be the "general agency" of the Absent Imam (see Algar 1979: ch. 1). The doctrine of occultation authorized the Shi'i leaders to take a break from their claim to political power. This phenomenon supported the idea, that temporal rule is no necessary task of the imam. Thus, the temporal and religious function of the imam became even more separated. That means, in Shi'ism there is a fundamental agreement that there is no leadership of the *ulama* but the leadership of the Twelfth Imam. At the same time, Shi'ism recognizes the necessity of some type of leader during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, though there is no general definition of what are the tasks and praxis of this leader, or how the *ulama* should carry out political power in the Islamic community.

The historical scholastic conflict between different Shi'i schools was an indicator for the continuous separation of the Shi'i clergy from their political role in the Islamic community (Fadr, Fani and Khorramshahi 1988). The lack of agreement on the question of the leader lead to confusion and a power vacuum, which historically seemed to open the door for the *ulama* to carry out spiritual and political power during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam. The two most important thinkers among the *ulama* who developed a Shi'i definition of political power in the twentieth century were Ayatollah Shaykh Mohammad Hossein Naini (1860-1936) and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

(1901-1989). In his famous book *tanbih al-umma van tanzih al mella* (the leadership and the cunning of man) Naini accepted the constitutional monarchy from the point of view of Shi'i jurisdiction.⁶ Khomeini developed his political ideas by a radical shift from the Shi'i interpretation of the Western-style constitution to what he called the *velayat-e faqih* and the *hokumat-e islami*.

Khomeini radically criticized the Constitutional revolution and the pro-constitutional *ulama*. As has been discussed above, Shi'ism considered all temporal and political power during the time of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam as illegitimate. The *ulama* were the mediators of the Twelfth Imam, and their allegedly descent from the prophet legitimated their rule. With his concept of the *velayat-e faqih* Khomeini radically broke with the traditional Shi'i dogma over political power. Khomeini's interpretation of the relation between temporal and spiritual issues in the context of the theory of the *velayat-e faqih* provides the *ummah* with a certain basis, which is almost equal to that of the prophet and the imam, covering the monitoring of the executive and juridical power. The movement, that started with the revolt against the Shah's modernization program, in 1963, further developed theoretically and practically in the 1960s and 1970s. The public protest of Ayatollah Khomeini against the state legitimized his role as undisputed leader among the Shi'i *ulama*.

Shi'ism and Political Power—The new Type of Shi'i Ulama Relations

In the 1960s and 1970s a segment of the *ulama*, which were inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini, started to organize themselves. They established a national network that propagated Khomeini's ideas and programs.⁷ It was no coincidence that there was a prepared and organized leadership around Ayatollah

⁶ From 1990 developed in Iran within the Islamic lay intellectual movement and among some members of the *ulama* a new trend. This trend is one of the most important domestic intellectual counter movements, that criticizes the ruling *ulama* and the dominant political ideology of the *velayat-e faqih* (the state theory of Ayatollah Khomeini) and the interpretation of Islam as ideology. The most prominent elements within this movement are Abdulkarim Soroush, Mujtahed-Shabistari, Akbar Ganji, and Mohsen Kadivar, see e.g. Soroush, A. 1999 *Expansion of the Prophetic Experience*, in Persian. Tehran: Sirat; Mujtahed-Shabistari, M. 1996 *Hermeneutics: The Book and Tradition*, in Persian. Tehran: Tarh-i Naw; Ganji, A. 2000 *The Fascist Interpretation of Religion and Government: Pathology of Transition to the Democracy and Development-oriented State*, in Persian. Tehran: Tarh-e Naw; Kadivar, M. 1998 *Theocratic Government*, in Persian. Tehran: Nashr-I Nay.

⁷ In his long years as teacher Khomeini taught more than 500 *mujtaheds* (persons qualified to engage in *ijtihad* [right to interpretation]) and more than 12,000 *talabeh* (religious students).

Khomeini, which was able to mobilize different social classes and groups against the regime of the Shah. The most important successors of the reformist *ulama* and supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini were young clergy who had a positive view of modern sciences. A segment of these *ulama* were member of the philosophy department of the faculty of theology of the University of Tehran. They combined traditional with modern education and were therefore able to get in contact with non-religious intellectuals. Different discussion groups in the 1960s discussed new ideas in seminars and lectures on the Islamic state, and they also published them as articles. Central to these publications was the attempt to develop an ideology that would resist the expansion of secular cultural values and the influence of the West—manifesting itself in the modernization program of the Shah—and that would offer a social alternative. The language and style of these publications were very modern, literate and professional, and were influenced by secular thought, which became apparent in the choice of subjects in these publications, such as the rights of women, polemics on Marxism, new science and the new world.

The “resurrection of Islam” depended on in how far Islam was able find answers to social problems. The redefinition of religion and Islam were characterized by a modern ideologization of religion; an attempt to project the new ideas and implications on the Islamic norms, values and also symbols to contribute to the creation of a dynamic, self-conscious system of social, political, and Islamic values.

Together with the emergence of the militant and reformist *ulama* developed a new generation of modern Islamic intelligentsia that made a great contribution to the development and propagation of revolutionary political Islam. They were able to mobilize the traditional part of society as well as the modern social classes, and groups, such as the urban middle class, students, and women. In contrast to the earlier intelligentsia that had defended secular nationalism, liberalism, and socialism, the new intelligentsia strove for Islam as a revolutionary political ideology and as a social and political project.

Islam and the Modern Intelligentsia

These general characteristics of Shi'i history and civilization constitute the basic framework of the Iranian revolution. It was within this framework and under the impact of the process of modernization and its expansion, that the more specific background of the Iranian revolution could develop.

The modern intellectual history of Iran is characterized by two opposite periods with two different dominant political cultures: the dominant ideas of the first period created the intellectual background for the Constitutional

revolution and could generally be conceptualized as secular, inspired by the Western culture and civilization and modern ideas, such as economic liberalism, rationalism and constitutionalism. The second period was characterized by a radical critique on Western culture and civilization. In this period the intellectuals referred back to traditional domestic values (Islam), manifesting itself in concepts such as *qarbzadegi* (westoxication) and *bazgasht beh khishtan* (back to oneself) to confront western "cultural imperialism." These intellectual trends created the background for the development of the ideology of the Iranian Islamic revolution.

The most important features of all intellectual movements and their related political organizations since the Constitutional revolution in Iran until the coup of 1953 were their secular ideas and programs. Secularism was the dominant political culture of different social movements in Iran namely liberalism, socialism, or Marxism. Even Khomeini himself was a defender of the Iranian constitution until the late 1960s.

Despite the heterogeneity of the Islamic movement and its different ideologies with different social backgrounds, interests and political programs, what all these groups had in common was the development of Islam as revolutionary political ideology or as a social project against the common enemy (the regime of the Shah), but also as alternative to competing ideologies such as liberalism, and Marxism. But, why was the secular intellectual thinking and praxis (liberal or socialist) replaced by the Islamic social project and ideology?

The thinking and activities of the Iranian intelligentsia of the 1960s and 1970s was connected to a number of structural factors. From the fall of the strong and authoritarian regime of Reza Shah in 1941 by an Anglo-Russian military intervention in 1941 until the Anglo-American supported coup in 1953 against the nationalist government of Mosaddeq, from a political point of view, Iran experienced a period of proto-democracy. It manifested itself by the rise and development of democratic institutions such as political parties, trade unions, associations, and the freedom of the press. In the period after the coup of 1953, all democratic institutions, especially political parties (among others, the National Front and the communist Tudeh Party), trade unions, and different independent civil institutions were suppressed. With the help of the military and financial support from the United States (US) emerged a repressive authoritarian state.

The rapid and comprehensive state-led Western-style socioeconomic modernization and capitalist development of the 1960s and 1970s lead to a drastic change of the Iranian social structures.⁸ Mohammad Reza Shah's aggressive

⁸ Despite an enormous economic progress and a rising gross domestic product per capita,

and rapid state-led modernization had little interest in the needs of the modern middle class and the necessity to create an independent and efficient bourgeois class or entrepreneurs. The huge oil income gave the state a great autonomy from the social forces. The state became more and more distant from the people's cultural identity and unpreparedness for these rapid changes. For the majority of the Iranian population cultural identity, national independence and authoritarian regime were more important than the class conflict. It is not surprising therefore that the *ulama*, the guardians of Iran's cultural heritage, who had been weakened but not eliminated during the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah, became the leaders of the revolution. They represented not a single class but the whole nation. The *ulama* were able to attract both the traditional urban groups, as well as the modern middle classes who had sympathy for the *ulama's* new ideology. The Iranian policymakers were incapable of creating modern political institutions that would integrate into the political system the modern classes that came to the forefront with the state-led modernization. This led to an alienation of these modern social classes with respect to the state. Furthermore, the modernization process and the radical socioeconomic transformation in the 1960s and 1970s were not able to break with traditional society and its related social forces, causing a contradiction in both the economic as well as the cultural arenas. The power of the modern sector of the economy grew stronger without eliminating or incorporating the powers of the traditional economic sector (the *bazaar*). The Iranian modernization experiment created a fundamental contradiction in the mid-1970s. This caused unbalanced economic and political development: the economic structure was modernized without fundamental changes in the nature of the political system.

In the words of Abrahamian (1982) "economic development versus political underdevelopment()." At the same time the secularization process had little influence on the power of the *ulama* as a potential organic ally of the *bazaar* economic sector. Finally, the modernization process lacked a coherent ideology. The Shah's attempts to legitimize his rule through associations with

there were great differences in the level of income (Kazemi 1980; Azimi 1990). Rapid economic development increased the gap between rich and poor. In Iran the gap between the very rich and the middle class was very large. Between 1959 and 1977, the share of the urban total income of the poorest 40 percent of the urban population declined from 13.8 percent to 11.5 percent. The share of the middle 40 percent of the urban population declined from 27.6 to 25.6 percent. The share of the upper 20 percent of the urban population of the total income to the contrast rose from 52.1 to 57.1 percent. These numbers only give a relative picture of poverty in Iran at that time. They are no exact report of the standard of living of the lowest urban and rural population.

pre-Islamic Iranian history only further alienated the *ulama*, which formed a strong alliance with the other frustrated social classes. The main result of economic development, especially in the 1960s and 1970s was rapid social mobilization. The index of social and economic development showed a dynamic and rapid social transformation. The Iranian policy-makers did not succeed in creating an alternative, lasting ideology to what was destroyed by socio-economic and cultural transformation. Paradoxically though, the state created a vacuum that could be filled and propelled by a revolutionary Islamic political ideology. The charismatic leader Khomeini provided a "national myth" around which the revolution could crystallize. "Understanding the crucial importance of religion in Iran's political culture, Khomeini's national myth linked the shah's opposition with Western imperialism and secularism and called for the simultaneous expulsion of all three" (Ghods 1989: 228).

Rapid urbanization, as a consequence of modernization, was without doubt the most important change in the 1960s and 1970s. The enlargement of cities led to a new composition of the urban population, and unequal development had a direct influence on urban life and the structures of urbanization in Iran. On the one side stood the rich and new urban groups that distinguished themselves from the majority of the Iranian population in their language, their behavior, and their way of life. They were alienated from the daily problems of the majority of the population. On the other side stood the lower urban classes and groups that were confronted with a primitive daily life and were not able to integrate into the dynamic and rapidly changing new social circumstances. Urban life, thus, became the domain of great contradictions. The urban poor mirrored the duality of Iranian social life and were a characteristic feature of the cultural problems and contradictions of a society in transition, a society that continuously stood under tension. The *ulama*, the traditional part of society and the migrants from the rural areas, experienced their social life or cultural and religious identity as an antagonism to their daily reality. A great segment of the intellectuals considered themselves to be politically misled. The emerging modern urban classes as result of industrialization had no access to politics and were excluded from participating in political processes.

It therefore is not surprising, that the rising urban forces kept their own values by creating institutions that were a reflection of their own worldview. The most important mechanisms to mobilize the urban poor were traditional religious values and customs, which the *ulama* conveyed in mosques, religious foundations and other institutions. The religious institutions constituted a meeting place for migrants, the traditional urban forces and the *ulama*. The urban poor and the traditional social forces were connected to each other via religious institutions that were controlled by the emerging militant *ulama*.

This connection strengthened the opposition of the Islamic forces against the modern and repressive state.

But the social value crisis was not only a problem of the urban poor. The other urban social forces and groups such as the youth, women, the middle class and especially the intelligentsia and the artists also had to cope with individual and social alienation. The Iranian modern intelligentsia, who saw themselves as the pioneers of modernity and modernism after the coup of 1953 felt as victims of the repressive state, and were not able to legitimize and accept the modernization by the regime of the Shah, who had come to power by a US-backed coup against the nationalist government of Mosaddeq. Furthermore, capitalist development and modernization did not take place without socio-economic and cultural contradictions in Iran.⁹

Uneven and rapid socio-economic modernization, changes, and transformation were at this time the most important themes of the intellectual critical literature. The Iranian intelligentsia wrote mostly about the disintegration of the pre-capitalist agrarian structures and the confrontation between the traditional society and the modern culture. This led to a radical critique of modernity and westernization. Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969) and Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977), two of the most influential intellectuals in this period, both took great pains to analyze the intelligentsia's estrangement from Iranian society and its adverse results for cultural and social life. By introducing concepts such as "Westernization" and "back to Islam," they romanticized the traditions of Islam to confront modernization and modernity. This new generation of the intelligentsia condemned not only the repressive state of the Shah but also his socio-economic modernization program. They represented a new political culture and a new value system. Not surprising, in the period under consideration developed a new type of secular intelligentsia with a new political ideology and new ideas. This ideology has to be set into the context of the comprehensive populist ideology of Third Worldism.¹⁰ Politically this group as well as the Islamic intellectuals emphasized concepts such as neo-colonialism, the anti-imperialist battle and the Third World. They published many articles on the revolutions in Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, China, and in African coun-

⁹ Annual migration to the cities varied during 1966 and 1978 between 300,000 and 320,000 people. A great number of the migrants was incorporated into the construction industry, which expanded between 1972 and 1977 annually by an average of 6.7 percent.

¹⁰ Third Worldism became also influential among the Islamic forces (the conservatives, the party of the Muslim Mujahedin, the Party of Islamic Nation [Hezb-e Mellal-e Islami] and the progressive stream Jama and the Mujahedin-e Khalq-e Iran [People's Mujahedin of Iran]). They all were influenced by Third Worldism though they had different standpoints.

tries, and translated many works of critical Western intellectuals and authors. The works of René Guénon were particularly popular among the Iranian intelligentsia. He contrasted the eastern world with the western world. He believed that the disintegration of the western civilization was not the end of the world but that a world, which was only based on material values, would eventually come to an end. Guénon's followers considered the west to be the source of evil forces and the east as the place of light and the blossom of the people. They also contrasted scientism and rationalism with the traditional eastern values and western sciences with eastern insight. Many Iranian authors of the 1960s and 1970s wrote books and essays on these issues. In the Iranian society, these ideas had many followers. Within parts of the intelligentsia, the works of Martin Heidegger became very popular in their intellectual battle against modernity and urban life. Although this new intelligentsia had different political and social standpoints, what they had in common was their criticism on the West and the potential role of Islam as cultural identity. In contrast to the old generation of intelligentsia that had proclaimed modernism, futurism, and optimism, the new generation of the intelligentsia had a radical critique on modern life. This new saw the expansion of western culture as a threat and romanticized the former simple life in the form of a nostalgic "back" to the Iranian-Islamic culture and "back to oneself." The universal ideas of the old generation of the intelligentsia were replaced with the critique on *qarbzadegi* and the nostalgic Islamic Iran as well as the *jedal-e sharq va qarb* (East-West conflict) (Shaigan 1992).

The Modern Iranian Fundamentalist Jacobin Regime—Modern Jacobinism with Distinct Characteristics

The Iranian revolution constituted a definite break from an Ibn-Khaldunian cycle. It gave rise to a new modern Jacobin regime (Eisenstadt 1999) promulgated by a new modern fundamentalist movement which can be defined as "fundamentalism in the sense specified above.

The fundamentalist and communal-religious movements, which have indeed gained in the contemporary era a very prominent place on the national and international scenes, share with other modern Jacobin movements—above all indeed paradoxically enough with the Communist—the tendency to promulgate a very strong salvationist vision or gospel. They show some very interesting paradoxical combination of promulgating highly elaborate seemingly anti-modern, or rather anti-Enlightenment themes with many modern Jacobin revolutionary ideologies, movements and regimes—which they share sometimes in a sort of mirror image way—with the Communist

ones (Besançon 1981), the carriers of the most extreme alternative model of classical Enlightenment models of modernity.

The new revolutionary Islamic ideology played a key role in the making of the revolution. Islam as revolutionary political ideology was developed by different groups and ideologues. Despite their fundamental ideological differences these streams of thought were able to reformulate Islam as a new revolutionary political ideology. The most important characteristic of all these movements was the development of Islam in revolutionary terms as well as in the terminology of a populist political ideology. By means of a modern language and science, with progressive, revolutionary and militant features these streams of thought represented the face of Islam. They propagated Islam as a political ideology with an own policy, a legal system and an own economic and political model; an Islam, that was able to eliminate the class differences and create an equal society, an Islam that could put an end to suppression and despotism and guarantee freedom, freedom of opinion, social justice and human rights; an Islam that was able to obstruct the penetration of capitalism and imperialism into Iran and would create an independent Iran. With this populist picture and their Islamic political ideology the emerging Islamic forces were able to mobilize the different social classes and groups from the poor urban classes to the working class, and from the traditional to the modern classes, and made the Iranian Islamic revolution.

The visions promulgated by these movements and regimes entailed a strong tendency to combine different themes of protest with the constitution of a new ontological definition of reality, with a total worldview rooted in the respective salvationist vision, and to the emphasis that the implementation of this vision was to take place in this world, in the present. Instead of the—basically unfathomable—future, the implementation of this vision was, as that of all the Great revolutions, to be achieved in the present. Present and future became in many ways conflated.

The fundamentalist movements and regimes share also with the Communist ones the attempts to establish by political action a new social order, rooted in the revolutionary universalistic ideological tenets, in principle transcending any primordial, national or ethnic units and new socio-political collectivities. They share also the conception of politics as the great transformers of society. Indeed above all, many of the fundamentalist movements share with the Great revolutions the belief in the primacy of politics, albeit in their case, religious politics—or at least of organized political action—guided by a totalistic religious vision to reconstruct society, or sectors thereof.

These visions entailed the transformation both of man and of society and of the constitution of new personal and collective identities. It was in the name

of such salvation that these movements and regimes demanded total submergence of the individual in the general totalistic community, the total reconstruction of personality and of individual and collective identity.

Thus these movements are political not only in the instrumental or technical sense but rather in their attempts, to implement an overall moral vision, to construct through modern political means, a new collective identity, and to appropriate modernity in their own terms. It is indeed the ideological and political heritage of the revolutions, which epitomized the victory of gnostic heterodox tendencies to bring the Kingdom of God on Earth, of an attempt to reconstruct the world that constitutes the crucial link between the cultural and political program of modernity and fundamental movements.

In both cases, the institutionalization of such vision gave rise to regimes characterized by strong political mobilizational orientations and policies aiming at changing and transforming the structure of society in general and of center-periphery relations in particular. Both types of movements and regimes promulgated such efforts at transformation and mobilization, in combination with the sanctification of violence and terror against internal and external evil forces and enemies, especially those rooted in the internal dynamics of modern Western “bourgeois” society.

Both the communist and the modern fundamentalist movements have been international, transnational ones, activated by very intensive networks, which facilitated the expansion of the social and cultural visions promulgated by them, their universalistic messages and at the same time continually confronting them with other competing visions. These movements and regimes shared also several basic characteristics of utopian sectarian groups, namely, the tendency to constitute sharp boundaries between the “pure” inside and the polluted outside and the continual constitution of an image of an ontological enemy—the world capitalism for the communists, America in the Iranian case, Israel and Zionism, an enemy who is the epitome of the evil of modernity and who can also pollute groups and against whom one should be on constant alert. The enemy is often the same as that of communist regimes, or very similar: the West, above all, the US, and even Zionists, usually other “universalisms”. But the grounding of such enmity differed greatly between these two movements or regimes. In the Soviet case, it is the non-completion or perversion of the original vision of modernity, of the Enlightenment. In the fundamentalist case, it is the adherence to the project of the Enlightenment that constitutes the basis of such enmity.

The attitude in political institutions, of course, is one of the most interesting and paradoxical manifestations of this combination of modern Jacobin mobilizational dimension of modern fundamentalist movements and regimes

with their “anti-modern” or at least anti-liberal or anti-Enlightenment ideology, such as their attitude towards women. On the one hand most of these movements, as Martin Riesebrodt (1993) has shown in his incisive analysis, promulgate a strong patriarchal, anti-feminist attitude, which tends to segregate women and impose far-reaching restrictions on them—seemingly, but only seemingly, of a type which can be found in many of the Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia, the roots of which were traditional proto-fundamentalist ones, or in such contemporary traditionalistic, proto-fundamentalist movements like the Taliban, where one of the first acts (in October 1996) of the new Taliban government was to force out women from the public sphere from schools and even from work. As against this, in stark contrast to such traditionalistic regimes, the modern fundamentalist ones mobilize women—even if in segregation from men, into the public sphere—be it in demonstrations, paramilitary organizations or the like. Indeed the reshaping of the social and cultural construction of women, and the construction of a new public identity of women rooted in Islamist vision, constituted a very important component in the fundamentalist programs in Iran and in Islamist movements in Turkey, and were very often promulgated by educated and professional women who felt alienated in the preceding secular public space. In the 1996 elections in Iran women not only voted, stood as candidates to the parliament and were elected—one of them (Ms Rafsanjani; the daughter of the then President) claimed that there is nothing in Islamic law which forbids women to take public office.

The Ambivalent Attitude to Tradition

Tradition as a Modern Jacobin Ideology—It is the combination of these different components of fundamentalist visions with very strong Jacobin orientations that explains also the very paradoxical attitude of these movements to tradition. The anti-modern, or to be yet again more precise, anti-Enlightenment attitude and the specific way of promulgation of tradition that developed within the fundamentalist visions are not just a reaction of traditional groups to the encroachment of new ways of life, but a militant ideology which is basically couched in highly modern idiom and is oriented to mobilization of wide masses. Fundamentalist traditionalism is not to be confused with a “simple” or “natural” upkeep of a given living tradition or defense thereof. Rather, it denotes an ideological mode and stance oriented not only against new developments, against different manifestations of modern life, but also against the continually changing and diversified tradition. This attitude to tra-

dition is manifest in two very closely connected facts: first, the existing religious, often conservative, religious establishment of their respective societies that constitutes one of the major foci of criticism of these movements—up to the point where these establishments are even seen as one of their major enemies; second, and closely related, is the fact that the younger sectors, especially within the cities, be it in Turkey or in the Muslim diasporas in the West, which are drawn to the fundamentalist movement, distance themselves from their traditionalist parents. They see the traditionalist way of life of their parents or grandparents as not pure enough, as a simple-minded compromise with the secular society (Gule 1996).

Thus, although seemingly traditional, in fact, these movements are in some paradoxical way anti-traditional. They are anti-traditional in the sense that they negate the living traditions, with their complexity and heterogeneity, of their respective societies or religions, and instead they uphold a highly ideological and essentialistic conception of tradition as an overarching principle of cognitive and social organization. Most fundamentalist groups tend to espouse a principled denial of continued unfolding of tradition and its interpretation or stance, which does, of course, in itself constitute a very distinct new and innovative mode of interpretation. This rather paradoxical attitude of these movements towards tradition indicates one of their major aims: to appropriate modernity on their own terms according to their distinct sectarian and utopian vision combined with strong political orientations.

The Modern Characteristics of the Iranian Islamic Regime

The strong modern components and indeed premises of many of the fundamentalist movements can also be seen in some aspects of their institutionalization as regimes. The Islamic revolution's triumph in Iran did not abolish most of the modern institutions—basically without any roots in Islam—such as a constitution, the parliament, the *majlis* and elections to it, and even to the presidency of the republic. The basic mode of legitimation of this regime as promulgated in the constitution contained some very important modern components. It declared, without attempting to reconcile, two different sources of sovereignty—God and the people, or the *ummah*. This regime promulgated a new constitution, something which some of the earlier traditionalists opposed vehemently. Both the *majlis* and the mode of election to it were reconstructed with some very strong Jacobin components and clothed in an Islamic *garb*. Interestingly enough, one of these Islamic *garbs*—the institutionalization of a special Islamic court or chamber to supervise “secular”

legislation—was not so far removed from the special place of juridical institution of the principle of judicial revision, which is characteristic of modern constitutional regimes.

The importance of elections was demonstrated in May 1997, when—even if implicit—against the advice or recommendation of the clerical establishment, a more “open-minded” candidate, Mohammad Khatami, was elected by the vote of women and younger people. In the following elections the Conservatives attempted to crush the Reformists, and since then there is a contestation between different Reformist groups and the conservative establishment while its repressive tendencies constituted a continual component of the Iranian scene. These fundamentalist movements and regimes, and above all, of course, the Iranian one, faced, as did the communist ones, at least some rather parallel problems or challenges attendant on their institutionalization. Among these were the growing contradictions between the salvational vision and the exigencies of maintaining some type of orderly modern political regime and economic system; between their tendencies of totalization and the necessity to face, even to some degree promote, the processes of structural differentiation of economic development, against which they were oriented; the problems attendant on the potential corruption of their elites and the general, even if partial, “regression” from the universalistic-missionary vision to the primacy of concrete demands of statehood. But above all these regimes faced also the tensions inherent in the relations between their Jacobin tendencies on the one hand, and on the other, their acceptance and adoption of some of the basic potentially pluralistic—even if highly regulated or controlled ones—institutional frameworks of modern constitutional regimes, as well as growing demands for some autonomy and autonomous private spheres among many sectors of society, especially women, youth, and professional groups.

The Iranian Revolution and the new Inter-Civilizational Situation— Reinterpretation and Appropriation of Modernity

The Islamic fundamentalist revolution as promulgated in Iran, which in terms of its causes and even processes is closest to the classical revolutions, signals an entirely new civilizational orientation, a new phase in the development of modernity. It was this distinct combination of modern and anti-Enlightenment and anti-Western cosmological visions—as developed in the framework of new globalizing processes and inter-civilizational visions—that distinguished the Iranian Islamic revolution from the classical ones, even while bringing out some of its paradoxical similarities. Thus indeed the modern

fundamentalist movements, which are most fully epitomized in the Iranian Revolution, though in somewhat different mode, the communal religious movements that developed in other Asian countries, entail an important, even radical, shift in the discourse about modernity and in the conceptualization of the relation between the Western and non-Western civilizations, religions, or societies.

The crucial differences between the fundamentalist movements and the other Jacobin movements, especially the Communist one, indeed stand out above all with respect to their attitude towards the premises of the cultural and political program of modernity and to the West. As against the seeming acceptance of the premises of these programs, or at least a highly ambivalent attitude towards them, combined with the continual reinterpretation thereof, that was characteristic of the earlier revolutions and revolutionary movements—such as the various socialist and communist regimes—the contemporary fundamentalist and most communal religious movements promulgate a seeming negation of at least some of these premises, as well as a markedly confrontational attitude towards the West.

In contrast to communist and socialist movements, including the earlier Muslim or African socialists, the contemporary fundamentalist and religious communal movements promulgate a radically negative attitude towards some of the central Enlightenment—and even Romantic—components of the cultural and political program of modernity, especially towards the emphasis on the autonomy and sovereignty of reason and of the individual. The fundamentalist movement promulgate a totalistic ideological denial of these “Enlightenment” premises, and a basically confrontational attitude not only towards Western hegemony, but also towards the West as such and to what was defined by them as Western civilization and usually conceived by them in totalistic and essentialist ways. These fundamentalist movements often grounded their denial of the premises of the Enlightenment or their opposition to it in the universalistic premises of their respective religions or civilizations, as newly interpreted by them. The communal-national movements built on the earlier “nativistic,” “Slavophile”-like movements, but reinterpreted them in radical political modern communal national ways. Significantly enough, in all these movements, socialist or communist themes or symbols were no longer strongly emphasized. In this context, it is very interesting to note that the activists, especially in various Arab countries who were drawn to different socialist themes and movements, became very active in the fundamentalist and also in some of the communal movements of the 1980s and 1990s.

Above all, the fundamentalist movements and regimes promulgate a markedly confrontational attitude towards the West, towards what is conceived as

Western, and the attempts to appropriate modernity and the global system on their own non-Western, often anti-Western, terms, but to a large extent formulated in the terms of the discourse of modernity. They attempt to dissociate completely Westernization from modernity; they deny the monopoly or hegemony of Western modernity, and the acceptance of the Western cultural program as the epitome of modernity. The confrontation with the West does not take with them the form of searching to become incorporated into the modern hegemonic civilization on its own terms, but rather to appropriate the new international global scene and modernity for themselves, for their traditions or “civilizations,” as they are continually promulgated and reconstructed under the impact of their continual encounter with the West.

Above all they promulgate de-Westernization, the decoupling of modernity from its “Western” pattern, of depriving, as it were, the West from the monopoly of modernity. In this broad context that European or Western modernity or modernities are seen not as the only real modernity but as one of multiple modernities, even if of course it has played a special role not only in the origins of modernity but also in the continual expansion and reinterpretation of modernities. These movements and regimes constitute a part of a set of much wider developments which have been taking place throughout the world, in Muslim, Indian, and Buddhist societies, seemingly continuing, yet indeed in a markedly transformed way, the contestations between different earlier reformist and traditional religious movements that developed throughout non-Western societies. At the same time these movements constitute transformation of many of the earlier criticism of modernity that developed in the West. In these movements the basic tensions inherent in the modern program, especially those between the pluralistic and totalistic tendencies, between utopian or more open and pragmatic attitudes, between multifaceted as against closed identities between some collective distinctive and universal reason, are played out more in terms of their own traditions grounded in their respective Axial religions rather than in those of European Enlightenment—although they are greatly influenced by the latter and especially by the participatory and indeed Jacobin traditions of the Great revolutions. This highly confrontational attitude to the West, to what is conceived as Western, is in these movements closely related to their attempts to appropriate modernity and the global system on their own non-Western, often anti-modern terms. In these movements the basic tensions inherent in the modern program, especially those between the pluralistic and totalistic one, between utopian or more open and pragmatic attitudes, between multifaceted between some as against closed identities, as well as the relations to the West, the perception of the relations between the West and modernity, are continually played out in new ways, in new terms

the core of which are attempts of those movements to appropriate modernity, to define it on their own terms, to decouple radically modernity from Westernization, and to take away from the West the monopoly of modernity.

Within all these movements the aggressive and destructive potentialities—manifest in very strong aggressive and exclusivist tendencies and orientations—in the designation or naming of groups as the “enemies,” often to be excluded from the respective collectivities, even to their dehumanization, in strong anti-rational orientations and symbolism, and in the concomitant tendencies to the sanctification of violence, have become closely interwoven with the processes of dislocation, of contestation between interpretations of modernity, and with geopolitical struggles, making them more dangerous.

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