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AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI AND THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN IRAN

by

Dustin John Byrd

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts  
Department of Comparative Religion

Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
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Dustin John Byrd



# AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI AND THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN IRAN

Dustin John Byrd, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2006

This thesis examines the events leading up to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the role of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in bringing about that revolution. It attempts to demonstrate the social, psychological, political, and religious factors that led to the rise of Khomeini as the leader of the revolution. It furthermore focuses on Khomeini's strategy to oppose, destabilize, and eventually overthrow the Shah of Iran through various means. This thesis is limited to the study of Khomeini as a revolutionary figure, not as a head of state, and therefore I do not examine Khomeini after the overthrow of the Shah.

This thesis revisits the later half of 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran, beginning with Khomeini's political awakening in 1941, and ending with his triumph as the supreme authority in Iran. The social and political context of Iran is essential in understanding the success of Khomeini. A key component to Khomeini's rise to power is his "Prophetic Charisma." Based on the works of Max Weber and Erich Fromm as well as the Islamic tradition, I develop this category and demonstrate how it applies to Khomeini. "Charismic Authority," from which Khomeini drew legitimacy, is also thoroughly examined because of the major role it played in deposing the Shah. The research sheds new light into a period of Middle Eastern history that still has an impact ruler.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In the West, the image of Ayatollah Khomeini denouncing America as the “Great Satan” conjures up visions of terrorist attacks, irrational religious mobs burning the U.S. flag, blind-folded hostages being led from a battle scared embassy, and an oppressive government which has stripped away the human rights of women and minorities. But before these images were permanently burned into the minds of many Americans and Westerners, Khomeini had been resisting foreign cultural and political influence in Iran for decades. Before he was effectively the head of state of the Islamic Republic of Iran, he was a religious revolutionary who led a popular revolt against a very unpopular monarch. Although Khomeini was not loved by the West, who often portrayed him as a reactionary religious zealot, he had mass support by Iranians of every sort. Leading a “coalition of dissent” made of leftist intellectuals, communists, socialist, modernist Muslims, clerics, and commoners, he was able to overcome a well-entrenched and foreign supported dictator, i.e. Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, the “Shah of Iran.” This successful revolution ushered in a new era in geo-politics, one that would see the rise of Islamic militancy, a renewal of Islam as a guiding political and religious philosophy, and new tensions between the Western secular world and the religious world of Islam - which some even claim to be a new “world war.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the goal of this work is to examine the personal role of Khomeini

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<sup>1</sup> See Bacevich, Andrew J. The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

in the Islamic *Revolution* of Iran, not the Islamic *Republic* of Iran. I shall be analyzing Ayatollah Khomeini as a revolutionary, not as a statesman. Therefore my inquiry will be limited to Khomeini's political life prior to the successful overthrow of the Shah in January of 1979.

First, I shall review the political life of Khomeini, beginning in the 1940's when he first became interested in political issue, through 1960's when he first began to publicly oppose the Shah and subsequently was exiled to Turkey, Iraq, and France, and finally his return as the "supreme leader" of Iran. Secondly, in examining how Khomeini so successfully led the nation in a revolution, I shall provide a "theory of prophetic charisma," primarily based on the works of the sociologist Max Weber, and or the critical theory of society developed by the social-psychologist Erich Fromm. Next, I shall demonstrate how the theory of "prophetic charisma" is applicable to Khomeini, and how such charisma is partially responsible for his success. Then, I shall analyze the very important issue of "charismatic" and "prophetic" authority, and how and where Khomeini came to "possess" both. Lastly, I shall discuss the very important "coalition of dissent" that Khomeini led during the revolution - more specifically how Khomeini was influenced by Marxist-Leninist philosophy through political parties, guerilla groups, and philosophers, how militant Shi'a Islam was radicalized by such philosophy, and how Khomeini acted as a conduit for Marxist-Leninist philosophy to spread from the urban educated middle-class to the religiously inclined under-classes.

In putting forward the theory of “prophetic charisma” and the examining of the connection between Khomeini and the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, I want to shed light on how Khomeini was able to succeed in leading the revolution against the Shah and his foreign benefactors. Through my research I have found that Khomeini’s success as a revolutionary is based on two central themes. I will argue that the first essential component was his ability to attract followers through his “prophetic charisma.” The second concerns the convergence of established Shi’a models of resistance, and the proliferation of radical Western ideology throughout Iran. This convergence, led by Khomeini, was the key to the success of the revolution.

I hope this work will provide some basis for understanding past revolutions and potential revolutions in the Islamic context.

## CHAPTER II

In order to fully understand the charismatic nature of Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership in the Iranian Revolution, it is imperative to be familiar with a basic historical timeline which led up to the revolution in 1978 - 1979. Although he rose to international notoriety in 1979 with the success of the revolution, he was known in Iran in many circles for years prior to this date. I shall give a brief overview of his political career, from when he first began to involve himself in the national politics of Iran to the successful removal of the Shah from his seat of power. I shall not focus on the Islamic Republic of Iran post-revolution because that goes beyond the scope of my inquiry. Throughout this paper I am dealing with Imam Khomeini as a revolutionary figure, not Imam Khomeini as a head of state.



## IMAM KHOMEINI'S POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

### 1941 - 1960: Political Awakening: Reform the Shah in order to Resist the Shah

The genesis of Khomeini's political activity began in 1941 after the forced abdication of Riza Shah. In his place was a secular Iranian Nationalist government that, much like the previous government, didn't hold clerics in high regard. Prior to this period, Khomeini had spent much of his time teaching at the Fayziya madrasa in the holy city of Qum on various facets of the Islamic sciences ('*Ulum al-Din*'). There he attracted large crowds of students and fellow clerics who were drawn to his charismatic teachings, especially concerning current socio-political events. However, he was still a student of Ayatollah Burujirdi, who did not approve of clerics actively engaging themselves in politics. For Burujirdi, it was sufficient for the 'ulama (scholars) to comment on and criticize government policies and government officials, but they were not to become part of the governing apparatus.<sup>1</sup> Because of Khomeini's dedication to Burujirdi, he obeyed his demand to stay out of politics. Yet, as the popularity of Khomeini's anti-government speeches grew among many disaffected students and politically alienated clerics, he was viewed as a potential problem for the Pahlavi regime.

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<sup>1</sup> This position is not peculiar to Ayatollah Burujirdi, but belongs to the Quietist School of Shi'a political thought.

Although he did not advocate open revolt, he was consequently removed from his position at the Fayziya Madrasa and forced to teach at the Mulla Sadiq madrasa, which was unable to accommodate the large crowds that gathered to hear his speeches.<sup>2</sup> However, after Riza Shah was deposed in 1941, Khomeini returned to his students and his teaching position at the Fayziya madrasa.<sup>3</sup>

In a response to anti-religious literature that had been flourishing under Riza Shah and the new nationalist government, Khomeini joined the political-religious debate in 1943 by writing the book *Kashf al-Asrar* (Secrets Unveiled) at the behest of Ayatollah Burujiridi, in an attempt to refute the allegations against religion and the clerics.<sup>4</sup> Although this work represents Khomeini's first substantial political declaration, he does not openly advocate an Islamic state or the overthrow of the current regime. He uses this opportunity to criticize the secular government, especially the monarchy, for not living up to the standard of government set out by "God's law." He says, "we do not say that government must be in the hands of the *faqih* (Jurist); rather we say that government must be run in accordance with God's law, for the welfare of the

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<sup>2</sup> Hamid Algar, Brief Biography of Imam Khomeini [www.wandea.org.pl/ayatullah-wahhabism.html](http://www.wandea.org.pl/ayatullah-wahhabism.html) Retrieved 4/7/2004, Section

3.5 The Fayziya madrasa is a theological law school founded in 1533 and named after its most famous scholar, Mahsin Feyz Kashani. Khomeini would expand the original building complex of the Fayziya after the revolution. Heinz Halm Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1999) 128 - 129.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Hamid Algar, trans. and annotated, Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981) 169.

country...”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, he also criticizes the Shah’s admiration for the Third Reich and their doctrine of Aryan superiority. He says, “This Hitlerite mentality you idiotically praise from afar, which says, ‘I will occupy Poland by tank and bayonet, even though a hundred thousand families may perish,’ is one of the most poisonous and heinous products of the human mind.”<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Khomeini disagreed with the “aristocratic law of nature” which was an integral part of Hitler’s racial theory and was deployed in order to legitimate Nazi aggression and dominance in Europe. Khomeini also used *Kashf al-Asrar* to attack those reform-minded clerics who openly supported the monarchy, such as Shariat Sangalaji.<sup>7</sup> In fact, many believe that Khomeini was responding to a pamphlet called *Asrar-i Hezar Saleh* (Secrets of a Thousand Years) written by Hakamizadeh, the editor of the reform journal *Homayun*. Khomeini called the writer a “mindless twisted person” who is spreading “poisonous” ideas about the clergy.<sup>8</sup> He believed, unlike the reform clerics, that Islam wasn’t in need of a reformation but that the government under the monarchy needed to be reformed by the clerics. He accused the monarchy of destroying public morality in Iran, insulting Islam, and leading the country into cultural chaos with its pro-western orientation. What he proposed

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>7</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993) 9.

<sup>8</sup> Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999) 61 - 62.

was an assembly of senior *mujtahidun* (lit. “those who strive”) that would choose a “just monarch” who would not violate the tenets of Islam, private property, lives and honor, and would furthermore rule for the benefit of the people, not the ruling class or western powers.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the legitimacy of such a monarchy is predicated on the notion that a truly just and legitimate ruler can only become reality with the return of the twelfth Imam. Therefore, this monarchy is only a temporary system which will end with the coming of the now hidden but long awaited Imam, Muhammad Mahdi.<sup>10</sup>

By 1946, Khomeini began teaching *kharij* level classes which had upward to five hundred students.<sup>11</sup> According to Hamid Algar, who interviewed many of Khomeini’s students at this time, *kharij* classes were “distinguished from other classes taught in Qum on the same subject by the critical spirit the Imam instilled in his students, as well as his ability to connect *fiqh* (jurisprudence) with all the other dimension of Islam - ethical, mystic, philosophical, political, and social.”<sup>12</sup> It is clear that Khomeini had the ability to present his followers with a comprehensive worldview in which they could relate their daily lives, history, world events, and national politics to their understanding of the Shi’a Islamic tradition. This ability would have a great impact on Khomeini’s leadership of the revolution because it

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<sup>9</sup> Algar, Brief Biography Section 3.13

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 3.13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 3.15. “Kharij” is a title for the most advanced clerics in the religious hierarchy.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 3.15.

allowed him to draw together various political and religious factions throughout Iran in a common effort of removing the Shah from power. If he would not have had such an ability, he would not have been able to muster the kind of broad support it took to depose the Shah. Furthermore, these years of intensive teaching served to produce a large base of support among younger clerics who would, although not monolithically, support his actions against the monarchy because they themselves had been exposed and educated in Imam Khomeini's critical thought.

Even though 1953 saw the restoration of the Pahlavi monarchy by a CIA-supported coup, the 1950's remained a relatively peaceful period between the state and clergy.<sup>13</sup> In fact, many clerics secretly applauded the return of the Shah because of fears that the secular-socialist regime of Dr. Mossadeq represented a turn toward the Soviet Russia and its atheism. For them, a quasi-religious ruler, though unjust, was better than an atheism that attacked the very existence of a divine being. The Shah could be tolerated as long as he respected the role of religion and religious belief in national and personal life. Despite the lull in tension, in 1955 the Shah established *Sazman-i Amniyat Va Ittilaat-i Keshvar* (Organization of National Security and Intelligence), better known as SAVAK. This paramilitary police force, who's responsible for collecting intelligence and

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<sup>13</sup> Moin, p. 69. The CIA, under President Eisenhower, was worried about the growing influence of Communism in Iran. Fearing that Mossadeq would be overthrown and a communist dictator would take his place, Eisenhower authorized a coup d'état against the regime in order to place the pro-American, anti-communist Shah in power. See Kinzer, Stephen. All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror. Hoboken NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003.

suppression of opposition, was directed by the prime minister's office, and would come to be a powerful tool against all forms of political opposition against the regime.<sup>14</sup>

### **1961 - 1964: Political Activism: Contra Dictatura Coronada**

After the apolitical quietist Ayatollah Burujirdi's death in 1961, Khomeini vigorously reentered politics when the monarchy adopted its "White Revolution" in 1962 - 63. This so-called "revolution" was viewed by many clerics as a serious threat to traditional Shi'a culture due to its proposed land reforms and voting rights for women.<sup>15</sup> Khomeini immediately denounced such actions as an attempt to destroy Islam. First, the land reforms did not exempt religious endowments (*waqf*) from being seized and redistributed. Secondly, the enfranchisement of women threatened the traditional structure of the Islamic family by giving the woman political autonomy thus undermining her husband as the ultimate family authority.<sup>16</sup> And thirdly, these land reforms were not in the best interest of average Iranians, but were designed to benefit the Pahlavi family, foreign companies,

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<sup>14</sup> Dilip Hiro, Iran Under the Ayatollahs (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) 41

<sup>15</sup> Ayatollah Burujirdi was Khomeini's teacher whom he swore obedience to. Burujirdi believed that the clergy should have a voice in the national discourse but should formally stay out of politics and national government. However, after his death, Khomeini was released from this vow and pursued what he thought was the correct path of clerical engagement in politics.

<sup>16</sup> Though Khomeini criticized the Shah for this reform, women would later gain the right to vote in the Islamic Republic. Abrahamian, Khomeinism pp. 33 - 34.

especially American agribusiness.<sup>17</sup> According to Hamid Algar, a distinguished scholar on Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution, foreign agribusiness cultivated crops completely alien to the traditional Iranian diet, and ultimately destined for foreign markets. When the best Iranian land is used for export crops, Khomeini would argue, it is not used to feed the native people. Furthermore, native products such as Iranian butter were becoming scarce and the people were forced to buy foreign-made products, which made Iran more dependent on Western countries for basic survival.<sup>18</sup> The little bit of land that was distributed to the peasants was often not cultivatable and was not free. They had to make payments on the land to banks owned by the Pahlavi family and most of the best land was simply seized by the royal family and leased to the multi-national corporation in order to grow asparagus and other unfamiliar crops.<sup>19</sup>

These types of “land reforms” were also criticized by leftist-leaning intellectuals and communists of Iran as proof of capitalism’s perpetual need for natural resources and markets. They would point to the hypocritical nature of the “white revolution”: that in the name of social and economic progress for the masses, only the few would really benefit, ultimately leaving more Iranians impoverished than before and a society on the verge of cultural collapse.

Khomeini, forever the student and strategist, would frequently study these leftist

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<sup>17</sup> Eliz Sanasarian, “Ayatollah Khomeini and the Institutionalization of Charismatic Rule in Iran, 1979 - 1989,” *Journal of Developing Societies* 11 (1995): 190.

<sup>18</sup> Hamid Algar *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2001) 55.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

argument and would later employ this kind of language to denounce such reforms made by the Shah.

Khomeini also believed that the Shah's sudden concern for Iranian women was principally based on his desire to be seen in the west as "enlightened" and "progressive." By championing "women's rights" he would secure his place as a benevolent and compassionate ruler. Unfortunately for the Shah, according to Hamid Algar, more Iranian women found their liberation not in the Shah's reforms, but in their opposition to them.<sup>20</sup> Khomeini would actively encourage women to resist such westernization by retaining their traditional Islamic identity through wearing chador, preserving the traditional roles in the Muslim family, and rejecting the western notion of a modern i.e. western "liberated woman." Although the pressure to westernize was vast, it was mostly the elites and their children who adopted western ways of life, while the sons and daughters of the working class and poor maintained their traditional culture.

Although Khomeini's willingness to engage in open conflict with the regime which appealed to many in the general public, he had difficulty mustering support from among his closest clerics. According to the Khomeini biographer Baqer Moin, Khomeini confided to one of his students that:

These gentlemen are not ready for a struggle, I'm afraid. Shari'atmadari says: "If we go too far they will put a policeman on our doorstep." What can I do with this gentlemen who says if they put policemen at our doors we will be dishonoured, we will be insulted? I tell them that the path of prison, torture and martyrdom is the right path. But he says we will be

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 56.



insulted.<sup>21</sup>

He further added:

If I protest against their political stance, they say: "I am a mojtahed and I know my religious duties." I cannot tell someone who says: "This is my religious duty" that they are wrong. I know that they are not the men for the battlefield.<sup>22</sup>

Khomeini's willingness to take action while the rest of the clerics worried about their well-being and honor would prove to be a decisive reason for his rise to prominence in the revolution against the Shah. The Iranian masses were used to clerics *vocally* protesting against what they saw as corruption and immorality, but they were not accustomed to seeing senior clerics *act* on their conviction - especially not engaging in open revolt.

Despite Khomeini's lack of support from his peers, his unrelenting attacks on the Shah and the widespread discontent felt among the masses due to the land reforms, anti-government protests and revolts spread throughout the country. In June 1963, the Muharrum religious processions commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein broke into violent protest. During 'Ashura, the tenth day of Muharrum (June 3), Khomeini gave a fiery speech at the Fayziya madrasa comparing the Shah of Iran to the Ummayyad caliph Yazid, the murderer of Hussein and the Son of

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<sup>21</sup> Moin, p. 83. Even though conservative clerics, like Grand Ayatollah Hakim and Ayatollah Kho'i, were willing to criticize the Shah, they were not willing to call for an open rebellion against him. Moin, p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

Mu'awiyah, the murderer of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib.<sup>23</sup> To give such an inflammatory speech at the height of the emotional festival of 'Ashura was to fan the fire of revolt against an unpopular and oppressive ruler. He further warned the Shah about not learning the lessons of his father, Riza Shah, who, as he became more oppressive, was eventually deposed by the Iranian people.<sup>24</sup> In his speech, Khomeini was able to blur the lines between the murderer Yazid and the new murderer Muhammad Reza Pahlavi in a future-oriented remembrance of past injustice in an attempt to remedy the injustice of today. The memory of past injustice became fuel for those seeking to end the tyranny of the new Yazid - Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. The Shah, like Yazid, was an illegitimate ruler given power over the lives of Muslims as a test from the divine. Khomeini put to good use the Shi'a's zeal for martyrdom. The death of Hussein, at the hands of tyrants, was something to be emulated, not feared.<sup>25</sup> Toward the end of his speech, Khomeini makes a rather prophetic statement,

“You don't know whether the situation will change one day nor whether those who surround you will remain your friends. They are the friends of

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<sup>23</sup> Algar, Brief Biography 4.6 Soon after the death of the Prophet, the Umayyad ruler Mu'awiyah and his opponent 'Ali were engaged in a struggle for authority over the young Muslim community. Although 'Ali did battle with the Umayyad powers at Siffin, he was eventually killed in 661CE by Ibn Muljam, a Khawarij assassin. After Hasan, the eldest son of 'Ali, succumbed to pressure and abdicated his claim to authority, for the Shi'a that authority passed to Hussein. By 680, the deceased Mu'awiyah's son Yazid had claimed the throne of Umayyad power that began another cycle of animosity towards to sons of 'Ali. Hussein and his family, traveling through Southern Iraq, were brutally assassinated at Karabala, a small Arab garrison town. This is remembered and reenacted through passion plays and ritual flogging by the Shi'a on the tenth day of Muharrum ('Ashura) The significance of Hussein in Khomeini's leadership will be examined later.

<sup>24</sup> Algar, Religion pp. 177 - 180.

<sup>25</sup> Moin., p. 101.

the dollar. They have no religion, no loyalty. They have hung all the responsibility around your neck. O miserable man.”<sup>26</sup>

For the later followers of Khomeini, this June uprising, or *Qiyam-i Khordad*, marks the beginning of their movement against the Shah. On June 4, just one day after Khomeini’s speech, approximately 100,000 protesters took to the streets in an anti-Shah march - shouting “Death to the dictator, death to the dictator, God save you, Khomeini, Death to your bloodthirsty enemy!”<sup>27</sup> Clearly, Khomeini was quickly becoming the mouthpiece for dissent in the country. In order to silence such a powerful and vocal dissent, and furthermore not to repeat the mistakes of his father, who didn’t attack his opposition early, the Shah had Khomeini and many of his closest companions arrested on June 5, 1963.<sup>28</sup>

Khomeini’s arrest sparked protests and demonstrations throughout Iran. Although there were some demonstrators chanting pro-Mosadeq themes, “Death or Khomeini” was the popular slogan of the majority of protesters.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that the Shah’s government was not prepared for such an uprising; it quickly moved to declare martial law in order to repress the demonstrations that were rapidly turning violent. Despite these measures, it took six days to fully restore order and upward to 15,000 people were killed.<sup>30</sup> Khomeini spent nineteen days in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> Sanasarian., p. 191.

<sup>29</sup> Moin, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> Algar, Roots of Revolution p. 58.

prison and another nine months under house arrest in an attempt to intimidate him into moderating his revolutionary views. However, just three days after his release on April 7, 1964, Khomeini dispelled the rumors that he had made a compromise with the Shah by denouncing the monarchy and its “white revolution” and furthermore vowed that the uprising of 15 Khordad would continue.<sup>31</sup> At no point in his imprisonment or his house arrest did he negate or temper his position against the Shah. Khomeini proved to be as uncompromising as he was charismatic. He and his followers always knew that rebelling against the Shah and his U.S.-supplied paramilitary apparatus could ultimately end in their deaths and the death of many others. However, Khomeini made it very clear, with the precedent of ‘Ali and Hussein in his shadow, that death was a welcomed event when it came from fighting injustice. Martyrdom was a gift for Allah and should be embraced as such. Neither imprisonment, exile, or death intimidated him.

Yet, while he was clearly becoming the figurehead of the resistance movement, attracting not only religious followers, but young secular activists as well, he did not have the full backing of the clerical class. Many Ayatollahs, including Shari’atmadari and Golpayegani, both very important and influential scholars, saw Khomeini’s activism as violating the clerics’ traditional political quietism, as well as threatening their status-quo in Iran.<sup>32</sup> They had a lot to lose by actively backing this resistance. Khomeini countered their timidity by courting

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<sup>31</sup> Algar, Brief Biography 4.9

<sup>32</sup> Moin, p. 121.

secular dissidents, including nationalists, liberals, and Marxists.<sup>33</sup> Although he would disagree with them on many issues, they could work together with a common cause of liberating Iran from the Shah and his foreign benefactors. Solidarity among the anti-shah opponents and the unity of cause overrode the doctrinal and political differences of the various groups. However, although the majority of clerics agreed with Khomeini's critiques of the Shah and his repressive regime, they were unwilling to translate that critique into concrete action. The Iranian people expected this of the clerics: this was their *modus operandi*, words but no action. This disconnect of the theory-praxis dialectic among the clerics would serve to bolster Khomeini's profile as *the* religious leader who was willing to challenge the Shah against all odds.<sup>34</sup>

In the autumn of 1964, the Shah was able to force through parliament (*majlis*) a bill that effectively gave immunity from prosecution under Iranian law to all American forces within Iran.<sup>35</sup> Immediately after this bill was passed, the *majlis* approved a \$200 million dollar loan for the procurement of American-made military equipment.<sup>36</sup> With the weapons came a flood of American military personnel and their families, further augmenting the already sizeable American presence in Iran. These personnel were often called "white-collar mercenaries" due to their ties with the oppressive internal paramilitary group SAVAK - the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 121

<sup>34</sup> I will discuss the importance of the *theory - praxis dialectic* later.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>36</sup> Algar, Brief Biography 4.10

domestic strong arm of the Shah.<sup>37</sup> For Khomeini, this act by a despotic regime and the collaborating majlis was the last insult to sovereignty Iran could take. In one of his most fiery speeches, he denounced the Shah and his co-opted majlis as traitors, saying that “they have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, he said “the government has sold our independence, reduced us to the level of a colony, and made the Muslim nation of Iran appear more backward than savages in the eyes of the world!”<sup>39</sup> Khomeini goes on to express his belief that the Shi’a religious leaders of Iran would not have allowed such a capitulation of sovereignty to a foreign power and the resulting cultural chaos to occur if they had influence. He said,

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit this nation to be the slaves of Britain one day, and America the next.

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit Israel to takeover the Iranian economy; they will not permit Israeli good to be sold in Iran - in fact, to be sold duty-free.

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit the government to impose arbitrarily such a heavy loan on the Iranian nation.

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit such misuse to be made of the public treasury.

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit the Majlis to come to a miserable state like this; they will not permit the Majlis to be formed at bayonet-point, with the scandalous results that we see.

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit girls and boys to wrestle together, as recently happened in Shiraz.

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit people’s innocent daughters to be under young men at school; they will not permit

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<sup>37</sup> David H. Albert. ed., Tell the American People: Perspectives on the Iranian Revolution (Philadelphia, Movement for a New Society, 1980) 45.

<sup>38</sup> Algar, Religion and Revolution 182.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

women to teach at boys' schools and men to teach at girls' schools, with all the resulting corruption.

If the religious leaders have influence, they will strike this government in the mouth, they will strike this Majlis in the mouth and chase these deputies out of both its houses.

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit a handful of individuals to be imposed on the nation as deputies and participate in determining the destiny of the country.

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit some agent of America to carry out these scandalous deeds; they will throw him out of Iran.

So the influence of the religious leaders is harmful to the nation?

No, it is harmful to you, harmful to you traitors, not to the nation!

You know that as long as the religious leaders have influence, you cannot do everything you want to do, commit all the crimes you want, so you wish to destroy their influence.

You thought you could cause dissension among the religious leaders with your intrigues, but you will be dead before your dream can come true.

You will never be able to do it. The religious leaders are united.<sup>40</sup>

For fear of a massive uncontrollable popular uprising, the option to assassinate Khomeini was ruled out. Likewise, in fear of such an uprising, Khomeini could not be jailed in Iran. On November 4, 1964, he was arrested by the Iranian military, and taken directly to the Mehrabad airport in Tehran, and was deported to Turkey in hopes that his physical removal from Iran would lessen his public persona and influence.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Turkey, a secular republic with sympathy for the Shah's "white revolution" agreed to keep watch over Khomeini by restricting his access to the outside world.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 183 - 184.

<sup>41</sup> Algar, Brief Biography 4.11

## 1964 - 1979: Exile and The Return of the Imam

While in Turkey, Khomeini felt the sting of the secularism he hated. For example, he was forbidden to wear his clerical garb, including his turban which identified him as a Shi'a cleric. This by itself was the biggest insult to his Shi'a identity, because his clerical garb signified his deep ties to the Shi'a tradition of scholasticism and righteous suffering. Although the secular ethos of the family he stayed with while in Ankara clashed with his religious sensibilities, he soon grew to like this family and likewise they enjoyed his presence - so much so that it alarmed the SAVAK detail that was perpetually looming over the residence.<sup>42</sup> However, on November 12, he was moved to Bursa where he stayed another eleven months. While in Bursa, Khomeini worked on *Tahrir al-Wasila*, his two-volume compendium of jurisprudence, taking up issues which were relatively new to the Iranian clerical establishment and other issues that had been long abandoned by the clerics. His new developments in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) were probably due to his encounter with secularism in Turkey.<sup>43</sup>

Growing more suspicious of Khomeini's popularity in Turkey, and in an attempt to deal with domestic pressure by Khomeini's supporters in Iran and international human rights agencies, the Shah agreed to have Khomeini transferred

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<sup>42</sup> Moin, pp. 131 - 135. To Khomeini's delight, he was allowed to spend time on the beach which was not an activity a cleric would normally engage in in Iran. However, he was appalled to hear that the women in their bikinis were in fact Muslim women.

<sup>43</sup> Moin, p. 138.



to the holy Shi'a city of Najaf in Iraq. Here, the Shah hoped that Khomeini's prestige and influence would be eclipsed by more influential and moderate Iraqi clerics.

Indeed, Khomeini found a chilly reception in Iraq among the Grand Ayatollahs, who not only saw him as a rival, but also rejected his politicization of Islam. Because of this, Khomeini refrained from engaging in political discourses and forbade his followers from distributing any form of literature dealing with political issues.<sup>44</sup> Although the Shah hoped Khomeini would spend his energy in debates with the 'Ulama of Iraq, and would therefore spend less time agitating the Iranian regime, Khomeini did not fall into this trap. Although he did tactfully engage the 'Ulama in robust dialogue, discourse, and debate, he managed not to avoid being alienated from his fellow Shi'a clerics.<sup>45</sup>

However, in a vigorous debate with the most senior Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim, Khomeini told him that "I have the feeling that you are not being informed of the atrocities of the Iranian regime. Otherwise, you would not have remained silent."<sup>46</sup> From this statement, Khomeini argued the case of militant Islam of Imam Hussein - an Islam that actively engages itself into history. In contrast, Ayatollah Hakim argued for the Islamic pragmatism of Imam Hassan, who rejected armed struggle against the usurper Mu'awiyah.<sup>47</sup> Though the debate

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<sup>44</sup> Moin, p. 141.

<sup>45</sup> Algar, Brief Biography 4.15

<sup>46</sup> Moin, pp. 141 - 142.

<sup>47</sup> Moin, p. 142.

was fruitful, with both parties understanding the position of the other in clearer terms, both agreed that they would have to disagree on the role of the clergy in political affairs. It was clear among Khomeini's followers that, while other ayatollahs complained, he denounced. While other compromised, he resisted.<sup>48</sup>

Once he became settled in Najaf, Khomeini dedicated his time to teaching at the Shaykh Murtaza Ansari madrasa, leaving behind any engagement in Iraqi national politics and the internal politics of Najaf.<sup>49</sup> Khomeini spent a total of thirteen years in Najaf doing what clerics normally do: teaching, writing, lecturing, etc. As in Iran, his classes were very popular among young religious students and advanced clerics who were attracted to his interdisciplinary style of scholarship and his critical *modus operandi*. When it was proposed to him that students from Qum should migrate to Najaf in order to study under his direction, he patently advised against it because it could weaken Qum as a theological center of Shi'a Islam.<sup>50</sup> Some of his most important works were written in the relative calm of Najaf, including *Menasek Haj* (Pilgrimage rituals), and *Kitab-i Bey* (Book of Trade).<sup>51</sup> Consequently, during the thirteen years Khomeini resided in Iraq, he only issued fourteen political pronouncements.<sup>52</sup>

Despite his disengagement in active politics, he gave a series of lectures in

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<sup>48</sup> Abrahamian, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> However, he did denounce the Ba'ath party of Iraq, after it came into power in 1967, when it deported many ethnic Iranian clerics from Iraq.

<sup>50</sup> Algar, *Brief Biography* 4.17

<sup>51</sup> Abrahamian, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

1970 that were later published under the title, *Velayat -i Faqih: Hokumat-i Islami* (Rule of the Jurist: Islamic Government) which was to become the basis of the Islamic Republic after the 1979 revolution. Spoken in Persian, translated into Arabic, these lectures were possibly aimed at Ayatollah Abul-Qasem Khoi, Iraq's leading *mujtahid* (senior jurist, lit. "one who strives") and his advocating of political quietism.<sup>53</sup> Although not widely read before the revolution in Iran, it became the most important work of Khomeini for his supporters. In it, he denounces the apolitical Islam of the Shi'a clergy and the whole institution of monarchy as being an illegitimate system of government.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, he postulates that it is the correct role of the clergy to rule in the place of the twelfth Imam until he returns, and cites relevant ayahs of the Qur'an and prophetic traditions to support his thesis. While emphasizing the Ulama's responsibility as religious leaders and encouraging them to abandon their petty concerns, he says: "Is it the duty of all of us to overthrow the *taughut*, the illegitimate political powers that now rule the entire Islamic world."<sup>55</sup> His lectures and letters to Iranian leaders were smuggled into Iran by his supporters who came to visit him in Najaf, as well as ordinary Iranian Shi'a on pilgrimages to the Imam 'Ali *masjid*

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<sup>53</sup> Moin, p. 158. After some of Khomeini's supporters were killed during street battles with Shah's forces, Ayatollah Abul-Qasem Khoi remarked that "it shows they are donkeys." Khomeini, showing his contempt for such remarks by apolitical clerics replied: "These people, as Imam 'Ali himself has said, devote their entire attention, like animals, to their fodder, their whole life is spent filling their stomachs."

<sup>54</sup> Abrahamian, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Algar, Brief Biography. 4.18

(mosque) and tomb.<sup>56</sup> Many of these lectures and speeches were distributed by cassette tape: Khomeini was recorded and the tape was duplicated by being played at one end of a phone line and recorded at the other. For Hamid Algar, much as the symbol of the Constitutional Revolution earlier in the Twentieth Century was the telegram, “the revolution was a revolution of which the technical symbol was the cassette tape...”<sup>57</sup> As the revolution progressed, the cassette tape would play an increasingly important role in disseminating Khomeini’s words and his calls to action. It was cheap, effective, and, with the help of the Shah’s modern communication systems, easily sent from one side of the country to the other via the telephone lines.

From afar in Iraq, Khomeini continued to criticize and condemn the actions of the Shah and his attempts to “westernize” Iran, including issuing *fatwas* (religious legal rulings) against any financial dealing with Israel after the June 1967 Six Day War. This provocation prompted the Shah to ransack Khomeini’s house in Qum and arrest his second son Hajj Sayyid Ahmed Khomeini.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, many of Khomeini’s unpublished books and writings were destroyed during this destructive rampage through his house. It was becoming clear to the Shah that Khomeini’s presence in Iraq was not silencing him or diminishing his influence; therefore he should be moved to India, where communication with Iran would be

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 4.18

<sup>57</sup> Algar, *Roots of the Revolution*. 126.

<sup>58</sup> Khomeini’s eldest son, Mustapha, was living with him in Najaf and acted as his personal assistant.

much more difficult.<sup>59</sup> This plan, however, never materialized.

One cannot understand the success of the revolution without understanding the apparatus that resisted the revolution. The Shah was not only a powerful monarch, he was a heavily armed ruler thanks to the American military support. According to Michael T. Klare, the director of the Five College Program in Peace and World Security Studies at Hampshire College,

Between 1970 and 1978, the Shah of Iran ordered \$20Billion worth of arms, ammunition, and other military merchandise from the United States in what one member of Congress called “the most rapid buildup of military power under peacetime conditions of any nation in the history of the world.”<sup>60</sup>

This massive militarization of Iran was not only a way of pleasing the “imperial” ego of the Shah and solidifying his rule; the West, especially America, engaged in this massive project in order to strengthen its zone of influence in the Middle East, protecting what was seen to be Western “rights” to Middle Eastern oil, and especially to block the influence of the U.S.S.R.

The American administration was operating under the “heartland” theory. Developed by a Nazi professor and his son during WWII, this theory states that the power that controls the Tigris and Euphrates river valley , i.e. Iraq, Iran, and South East Asia, has a strategic advantage over Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Near East itself. Fearing Marxist-Leninist influence in Iran, in 1967 the Nixon administration, under Henry Kissinger, then head of the National Security Council,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 4.19

<sup>60</sup> Albert, p. 44.

drafted the “surrogate policy” for Iran and the broader Middle East. This plan, which came in response to the British pulling out of Iran as the guardian of western oil interest, was to bolster the Shah’s military power in return for his safeguarding the “interests” of the West in the Middle East.

According to Klare, the Shah’s military buildup was partly responsible for his ultimate downfall. Klare bases his analysis on five principle features; 1) *Volume*: since the early 1970’s, imperial Iran was the largest purchaser of American made military equipment. 25% of all military arms between 1970 to 1978 were sold to the Shah.<sup>61</sup> 2) *Sophistication*: beginning with the Nixon administration, the Shah was allowed to purchase the most advanced military equipment in the U.S. arsenal, despite the fact that many in the Pentagon and Military objected to this deal. Much of this went to the Iranian air force, the pride of the Shah - himself being a pilot.<sup>62</sup> 3) *Technology Transfer*: Iran not only acquired the most advanced weaponry, but also acquired the technological ability to domestically produce it. 4) *Military technical assistance*: because of the massive importation of weaponry and the inability of the Shah to train Iranians on this equipment, thousands of American tech workers were hired for the job - thus alienating local Iranians by giving foreigners the high-paying jobs and by the

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<sup>61</sup> Albert, p. 45.

<sup>62</sup> The notable exception to this was nuclear weapons, which were never sold to Iran.

“western” behavior patterns that were offensive to the Muslim sensibilities.<sup>63</sup> 5)

*Repressive exports:* coupled with the conventional military armaments going to Iran were the paramilitary weapons used by SAVAK, the Shah’s repressive secret police and domestic security force.<sup>64</sup>

Although President Jimmy Carter prided himself on his human rights record, he nevertheless sent “emergency” supplies (tear gas, riot gear, etc.) in order to repress the anti-Shah demonstrations. As these U.S.-made paramilitary weapons and the conventional weapons of tanks and helicopters were being used on unarmed Iranian civilians, America became synonymous with the Shah’s violent and unjust oppression and his fleeting struggle to retain power.<sup>65</sup> Not only did the militarization of Iran feed the Shah’s dreams of reestablishing the great Persian empire, the American military industrial complex, against which President Eisenhower warned the American people, profited greatly at the expense of the Iranian people.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> In 1964, Khomeini denounced the Shah’s decision to extend diplomatic immunity to these military workers. Khomeini compared this to the nineteenth-century Capitulation Agreements with the British. Abrahamian, pp. 10 - 11., Halm, p. 140. Furthermore, he felt the Shah’s actions were further proof of the “enslavement” of Iran. He said the Parliament (majlis) had by its vote “acknowledged that Iran is a colony; it has given America a document attesting that the nation of Muslims is barbarous.” Shaul Bakhash, The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1984) 34.

<sup>64</sup> Albert, p. 45.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>66</sup> On January 17, 1961, the outgoing President Dwight Eisenhower said, “This conjunction of an immense Military Establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American Experience. The total influence - economic, political, even spiritual - is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the Federal Government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications...

In the councils of government we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the

Although American companies bribed Iranian officials in order to gain military production contracts, the millions that were given to secure those deals paled in comparison to the billions made from those contracts.<sup>67</sup> In fact, by the end of the Shah's rule in 1979, he had placed upwards of 20 billion dollars in military orders to U.S. and British companies.<sup>68</sup> However, the revolution in Iran saw the end of this "surrogate policy", because Khomeini and his supporters made it clear that they were not the guardians of the West's strategic and oil interests in the Middle East. For Khomeini the surrogate policy was the loss of Iran's sovereignty - "modernization" through "militarization" had made Iran weak and submissive to the imperial desires of the West, not strong and independent. It not only drained the nation's public wealth, the Shah had made a once self-sufficient country dependent on western goods and services in the name of economic modernization. Furthermore, he had "polluted" Iranian Shi'a Muslim society with his cultural modernization through adoption of western popular culture, and he had turned the imperial seat of an ancient power into a puppet regime for western capitalism and American imperialism. At all costs, Khomeini pledged to resist this

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disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together.

<sup>67</sup> Albert., p. 53.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 45.



assault on Iranian independence and dignity. Furthermore, like Imam Hussein, he would actively fight against this corrupt and illegitimate power who sat in authority over Muslims, while at the same time insulting their faith by political corruption, excessive militarism, repressive secret police, and attacks on Islam and the clergy. In order to save Iran and the Iranian people, the Shah's "westoxification" had to be cancelled, and Khomeini found himself nearly alone among clerics who were prepared to make that sacrifice.<sup>69</sup>

The spark that ignited a chain of events that would ultimately lead to the downfall of the Shah happened on October 23, 1977 in Najaf, with the death of Hajj Sayyid Mustafa Khomeini, the eldest son of the Ayatollah.<sup>70</sup> SAVAK, the Shah's secret police, were immediately suspected of the Mustafa's death, which sparked protests and riots in many major cities in Iran.<sup>71</sup> Khomeini however, faced his son's death very stoically, repeating the Qur'anic ayah "We belong to God and to him we shall return."<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, he depersonalized the issue and integrated it into the larger struggle against the Shah, when at the funeral he said: "We are facing a great calamity and should not mention personal tragedies."<sup>73</sup> For Khomeini, the death of his son was an act of providence; he even referred to it as a "hidden favor" from the Divine.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The term "Westoxification" will be discussed later when dealing with Al-i Ahmed

<sup>70</sup> Algar, Brief Biography. 5.1

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 5.2

<sup>72</sup> Moin, p. 184.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 185.

<sup>74</sup> Algar, Brief Biography. 5.2, Moin. p. 185.

The protest in Iran that followed the death of Mustafa sparked calls for Khomeini's return to Iran. On November 15, 1977, the Shah made a state visit to the United States and President Jimmy Carter in order to demonstrate U.S. - Iranian solidarity. However, outside of the White House, angry Iranian and American demonstrators protested the visit of the Shah. Led by the Confederation of Iranian Students, they demanded that President Carter hold the Shah responsible for his human rights violations and put pressure on him to implement Carter's human rights program. Ultimately, the demonstration was broken up by riot police who inadvertently spilled tear gas on the White House lawn. Images of the Shah crying from exposure to tear-gas were beamed back to Iran to the delight of his opposition.<sup>75</sup> Ironically, it was probably the same U.S. made tear-gas that SAVAK so often used against the Iranian people.

In Tehran on New Year's Eve, 1977, to the disgust of masses of Iranians, President Carter praised the Shah as an "island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world...a great tribute to the respect, admiration and love of your people for you."<sup>76</sup> Needless to say, Khomeini couldn't have disagreed more.

Despite the kind words from the U.S. President, momentum against the Shah's regime increased throughout 1978 with riots and protests in the streets of Qum and other holy cities. On January 7, an article published in the "semi-official" newspaper *Ittila'at*, apparently approved by the Shah, attacked Khomeini as a

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<sup>75</sup> Moin, p. 185.

<sup>76</sup> *New York Times*, January 2, 1978, as quoted in Algar, Brief Biography 5.7, Moin, p. 186.

traitor, a sexual deviant, saying he was originally from India and was collaborating with foreign powers, mainly the British, who wished to destroy Iran. Entitled, “Black and Red Imperialism”, written under the pseudonym Ahmed Rashidi-Motlaq, the article backfired against the Shah.<sup>77</sup> It led to a massive protest in Qum in support of Khomeini and the growing revolutionary movement. Calling for a *coup d’etat* against the Pahlavi regime, the demonstrations were brutally repressed, with the resulting murder of many protesters.<sup>78</sup> The dead were celebrated as martyrs forty days later, with a massive workers’ strike in every major city in Iran.<sup>79</sup> This cycle of violent repression of protesting voices, followed by days of commemoration of martyrs, unleashed an unstoppable chain reaction of massive protest and opposition to the Shah. The Shi’a tradition of respect and glorification of martyrdom was a driving force that undermined the regime. Each murder led to protests, which led to brutal repression and more deaths, which led to greater protests, which led to even more repression. This cycle continued until the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 186., Algar, Roots of Revolution. p. 122.

<sup>78</sup> Algar, Brief Biography. 5.3

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 5.4

eventual fall of the regime.<sup>80</sup>

As the movement against the Shah continued to grow among his religious followers, secular intellectuals, communists, socialists, and Iranian nationalists began to flock to Khomeini's call in ever increasing numbers. It was common not only to hear the slogans of "Islamic Rule" and "Allahu Akbar" in demonstrations, but increasingly secular and leftist slogans such as "Liberty and Independence" where becoming more prevalent with each demonstration.<sup>81</sup> By careful appropriation of leftist language, often adjusted to fit Islamic sensibilities, Khomeini made appeals to the secular left, as well as to intellectuals and Iranian communists. Under threat of a common enemy, many of these groups were more than willing to aid Khomeini in his opposition to the Shah. Furthermore, due to Khomeini's denunciation of America as the "Great Satan", and hoping to gain some influence to its south, the Soviet Union switched sides to support the opposition against the Shah.<sup>82</sup> Despite the internal upheaval and instability, U.S. shipments of arms and supplies continued to flow into Iran in a desperate attempt to salvage the regime. Khomeini himself, seeing the willingness of some to

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<sup>80</sup> In February, over a 100 demonstrators were killed in Tabriz. In March, Yazd and fifty-five other cities were the scenes of major clashes. In May, Tehran was the center of civil strife. On August 17, the Shah's regime open fired on a crowd of protesters in Isfahan, killing hundreds. Just two day later, 410 people were burned alive behind locked doors in Abadan. Algar, Brief Biography 5.5, Algar, Roots of Revolution, p. 131, Moin, p. 187. On September 6, 7, and 8, major demonstrations took place in Tehran. On the 8th, these demonstrations, which were reported to be a half a million strong, were brutally crushed. Moin, 188. On September 8th alone, approximately 4000 Iranians were killed by the Pahlavi regime with weapons supplied by the United States. This day has hence been commemorated as "Black Friday" Algar, Brief Biography, 5.6

<sup>81</sup> Moin, p. 188.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 188.

compromise with the Shah, urged his followers to stand steadfast against the new Yazid.<sup>83</sup> He reminded them that compromise was the mistake that ‘Ali had made at the battle of Siffin; a mistake that would not be made again.

On September 24, 1978, at a meeting in New York, the foreign ministers of Iran and Iraq agreed to remove Khomeini from Najaf. Giving him the option of staying if he would cease his anti-Shah rhetoric, Khomeini prophetically chose to leave over being silenced. First he tried to enter Kuwait, but he was stopped at the border. He would have preferred to go to Algeria, Lebanon, or Syria, but none of these countries was willing to take in the rebelling cleric. In fact, not a single Muslim country was willing to accept Khomeini and he was eventually forced to go to France, where he took up residence near Paris, in the village of Neauphle-le-Chateau, in a house rented for him by Iranian exiles.<sup>84</sup> Although he found himself in the capital of western cultural life, he saw very little of it. He had no intention to do any sightseeing for he was too busy formenting revolution back in Iran. He was determined to leave France and go to any Islamic country; he even issued a decree that he would move to any Muslim country that would guarantee him freedom of speech.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, still no Muslim countries were willing to accept him. For Khomeini, this was a proof of the deepening *fitnah* (divisions) among the Muslims, and a sad day in the history of Islam when no Muslims were willing to help and aid another Muslim who was fighting for the dignity of Islam

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<sup>83</sup> Algar, Brief Biography. 5.7

<sup>84</sup> Moin, p. 189. Algar, Brief Biography. 5.9

<sup>85</sup> Algar, Brief Biography. 5.10

itself. The Muslim world was devoid of Ansar (helpers).<sup>86</sup>

Despite his disappointment, Khomeini continued to denounce the Shah from France. He was constantly bombarded by international media and gave frequent interviews and press conferences. Later he wrote:

To begin with, the French government was a bit cautious. But when they were kind to us and we could publicize our views extensively, much more so than we expected, and the news concerning us and our demands was even reported by the media in America itself...every day groups of Iranians came to see us, and this strengthened and helped to promote our objectives.<sup>87</sup>

His access to Iran while in France was two-fold. First, his appearances in the international press continued to keep him and his struggle against the Shah in the newspapers and broadcast television. Secondly, because of the Shah's "modernization" and his deep-seated desire to keep Iran technologically connected to the west, Iran's telephonic communication systems were used by Khomeini to send messages to Iran, which were then recorded on audio cassettes and distributed throughout the country.<sup>88</sup> Many of these addresses would be

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<sup>86</sup> Hamid Algar goes even further by saying, "The Qur'an order the Muslims to give refuge even to a *mushrik* (polytheist) in order that he might hear the Qur'an and be informed of religion. Yet these contemporary Muslim regimes that send money for the construction of mosques, preferably in prestige places like London, New York, and so on; that hold conferences in Hilton and Sheraton hotels, refuse even the elementary right of security and refuge to one whom any objective Muslim observer must regard as the greatest *mujahid* of the present day." Algar, Roots of Revolution, p. 63.

<sup>87</sup> Moin, p. 190. Many dignitaries visited Khomeini in his little villa outside Paris. However, he didn't allow his fame to influence his humility. He was once late for a press conference because he was cleaning the bathroom. Speaking to his wife, he said, "The people who come to use the lavatory are my guests. It is my duty to help you keep this place clean." Moin, p. 191. Even after the success of the revolution, Khomeini very seldom neglected his home life and his duties as a husband as prescribed by Islamic law.

<sup>88</sup> Algar, Brief Biography, 5.10, Algar, Roots of Revolution pp. 34, 126.

broadcasted from mosques or would be the subject of the *Khutba* (sermons) at Friday prayers. Furthermore, many clerics dressed in civilian clothes would journey to the Iranian countryside distributing these lectures and sermons of Khomeini to rural villagers and peasants. Throughout 1978 and 1979, it became commonplace to see the usually apolitical commoners of the countryside joining in demonstrations, protests, and political marches.<sup>89</sup> This demographic had been known to ignore such political issues; hence Khomeini's success was a new phenomenon in Iranian history. Thus, despite Khomeini's physical absence from Iran, his words and ideas were influencing the masses on a daily basis and furthering the discontent felt by many against the Pahlavi regime.

With the Shah's continuing struggle with cancer, and the growing violent opposition to his rule ever increasing, the Shah attempted to reform his government by establishing a military government under the direction of General Ghulam-Riza Azhari, replacing Sharif-Imami as Prime Minister.<sup>90</sup> This reshuffling of the government, which brought about ineffective curfews and other attempted restrictions, had no substantive influence on the progress of the revolution. However, Khomeini's fear that the revolution would respond to the Shah's reforms by compromising their demands continued to plague him. Therefore, he

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<sup>89</sup> Moin, p. 194. To the delight of Khomeini, leftist groups and Mosadeqist had a greater influence in the Urban and industrialized areas, and were able to turn out large demonstrations and strikes in favor of the revolution. Moin, pp. 194 - 195.

<sup>90</sup> Algar, Brief Biography. 5.11, Moin, p. 195.

advocated to his followers and the Iranian people that they not let the “fire in [their] hearts...be extinguished.” This “wounded snake” must be removed.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, on November 23, one week before the beginning of the Muharram (when the Shi’a emulate the martyrdom of Hussein), Khomeini declared the sacred month to be,

...a divine sword in the hands of the soldiers of Islam, our great religious leaders and respected preachers, and all the followers of the Lord of the Martyrs (peace and blessings be upon them), they must make the maximum use of it. Trusting in the power of God, they must tear out the remaining roots of this tree of oppression and treachery, for the month of Muharram is the month in which the forces of Yazid and the stratagems of Satan are defeated.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, he states that the month of Muharram is,

the month in which blood triumphed over the sword, the month in which truth condemned falsehood for all eternity and branded the mark of disgrace upon the forehead of all oppressors and satanic governments; the month that has taught successive generations throughout history the path of victory over the bayonet; the month that proves the superpowers may be defeated by the word of truth; the month in which the leaders of the Muslims taught us how to struggle against all the tyrants of history, showed us how the clenched fists of those who seek freedom, desire independence, and proclaim the truth may triumph over tanks, machine guns, and the armies of Satan, how the world of truth may obliterate falsehood.<sup>93</sup>

With more intensity than normal, the month of Muharram took on a new meaning.

It was now a future oriented-remembrance of past injustice with a determination to end the present conditions of servitude and oppression. The martyrdom of

Hussein became the new paradigm through which to oppose the Shah; the new

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<sup>91</sup> Bakhsh, p. 45.

<sup>92</sup> Algar, Religion and Revolution, 243.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 242.



Yazid. Across the country, approximately 17 million people joined in the Muharram commemorations, demanding the end of the monarchy.<sup>94</sup> Two to Three million alone demonstrated in Tehran.<sup>95</sup>

Seeing that the Shah's rule was coming to an end, Khomeini was pressured to elaborate on what kind of government would be replacing the monarchy. Although Khomeini had already written a book about Islamic governance or the "Rule of the Jurist" (*Velayat-i-Faqih*), it was not widely read until after the revolution succeeded. Therefore the blueprint for what was to become the Islamic Republic had already been made public but simply ignored. However, at this time, Khomeini could not want to risk alienating those secularists, nationalists, communists, and socialists, etc. who played such an important role in the revolution. He therefore remained ambiguous and vague about specifics of an Islamic Republic, resigned to speak in generalizations concerning a broader vision of what was to come. Speaking about the nature and essential goal of an Islamic regime, he said:

There can be no return [to monarchy], and individuals who say they want such a return are in the minority. The whole notion, throughout Iran, cries out: "We want an Islamic Republic." An Islamic regime and an Islamic Republic rests on the general will and a general referendum. Its constitution is the law of Islam and must be in accordance with the laws of Islam. The law of Islam is the most progressive of laws. That part of the constitution that is in accordance with this progressive law will remain in place, and that part which is contrary to this law is not binding.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Moin, p. 196.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 196.

<sup>96</sup> Bakhash, p. 48.

Furthermore, when being interviewed by an Arab journalist, he was pressured into giving more specific details on the coming “Islamic Republic.” He skillfully replied:

You think there is no program? Not at all. There is a program. Islam has a program. We also have a program. But the program is Islam and it is better and more progressive than the program implemented by the colonists...

When asked to clarify the main guidelines, he replied:

...You must go, study and then grasp the main outlines. We will in the future announce all our political, economic, and cultural policies.<sup>97</sup>

It is clear that Khomeini wanted to refrain from being overly specific about what he planned for the Islamic Republic in order to maintain unity among his followers at the very moment when they seemed to be on the verge of success. Division among the revolutionaries would have been exploited by the regime to the detriment of the future of Iran. Khomeini could not afford this, so, going against his own nature and the nature of Islamic scholarship, he resigned himself to vagaries and generalizations. However, those who were the nearest to him and knew his work on Islamic governance had a much clearer picture of what the Ayatollah had in mind. “Progressive Islam” he called it; an Islam that would ensure “freedom, independence, and social justice.”<sup>98</sup>

For the Shah, adding insult to injury came through President Carter’s statement to the press of December 7. Commenting on the upheaval against the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 48.

<sup>98</sup> Moin, p. 197.

Iranian regime, Carter stated that it was “up to the people of Iran to decide the Shah’s fate”, thus signaling Washington’s unwillingness to intervene in the Shah’s demise.<sup>99</sup>

In a last-ditch attempt to save power, the Shah tried to seduce secular and nationalist politicians by appointing Shahpur Bakhtiyar of the “National Front” (*Jabha-yi Milli*) party to the position of prime minister.<sup>100</sup> The short-lived Bakhtiyar government had little power, if any. Although he did not believe that the Shah’s regime could fall, Bakhtiyar was powerless against the rising tide of the Islamic Revolution. Khomeini countered the Shah’s political ploy by forming the Council of the Islamic Revolution (*Shaura-yi Inqilab-i Islami*) which was a body entrusted with the task of establishing a transitional government that was to replace the collapsing Bakhtiyar administration, and ultimately forever vanquish the monarchy.<sup>101</sup>

To the joy of millions of Iranians, the ailing and rejected Shah forever left Iran on January 16, 1979. He would later die in exile a wanted man. As news was breaking around the world about the Shah’s departure, one of Khomeini’s assistants interrupted him during the dawn prayer (*fajr*) to tell him the news. Again, very stoically, Khomeini only said... “what else.”<sup>102</sup>

After some political and military delays, Khomeini boarded a chartered Air

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<sup>99</sup> Moin, p. 196.

<sup>100</sup> Moin, p. 197., Algar, Brief Biography 5.14

<sup>101</sup> Algar, Brief Biography 5.14

<sup>102</sup> Moin, p. 198.

France jet on the evening of January 31 and arrived in the capital Tehran the following morning. He had by that time been in exile for 14 years. Among the estimated 10 million joyful followers who greeted his return to Iran, he proceeded to the cemetery of Bihisht-i Zahra, south of Tehran, where the revolutionary martyrs were buried. There he proclaimed he would appoint a government that would “punch Bakhtiyar’s government in the mouth”, because Bakhtiyar was nothing but the last remnant of the *Dictatura Coronada*’s illegal rule.<sup>103</sup>

Faced with massive desertion among the military, and complete disregard for Bakhtiyar’s curfews, his government surrendered power to Khomeini on February 12, 1979. All institutions of the Pahlavi regime, political, administrative, and military had collapsed under the weight of the Islamic Revolution.<sup>104</sup> Claiming a triumph for Islam and the Iranian people, Khomeini and his closet followers and advisors began to go about the hardest task, constructing a Islamic Republic that embodied the Iranian Shi’a Islamic identity while organically confronting and adapting to modernity.

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<sup>103</sup> Moin, p. 198., Algar, Brief Biography 5.16

<sup>104</sup> Algar, Brief Biography 5.17

### CHAPTER III

#### A THEORY OF "PROPHETIC CHARISMA"

In an attempt to explain Khomeini's successful leadership of the Iranian Revolution, I have developed a theory of "Prophetic Charisma", using primarily the work of Max Weber and Erich Fromm. However, other will be consulted when they can uniquely contribute to the theory. First, I shall examine Weber's sociological conception of "charisma" and the "charismatic", i.e. the bearer of charisma, as well as Weber's definition of the "prophet", and its connection to charisma. Secondly, I will examine the psychological character of the "prophet" as expressed by Erich Fromm; looking into the important nature of the "theory - praxis" dialectic and his comparison between the "prophet" and the "priest." Furthermore, I shall demonstrate how the Prophet Muhammad serves as the standard bearer for what is "prophetic" in the Islamic tradition. By bringing the "sunnah" (way) of Muhammad and the works of these two scholars together, I will offer a theory of "prophetic charisma" that can best explain how and why Khomeini, over and above all other clerics, was successful in his attempt to overthrow the Shah and his westernization and modernization project.

## Weber's Concept of Charisma

Weber defines "charisma" as:

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a "leader."<sup>1</sup>

Weber's conception of charisma is ambiguous. He doesn't connect *specific* actions, miracles, or feats of genius with the holder of charisma. He prefers to keep his analysis universal, broad, and ambiguous, as opposed to speaking in particulars. Thus it is value-free and equally applicable to the saint and the sinner. The results of such an analysis leads to the conclusion that men and women with a heightened capacity for productiveness and or destructiveness, especially those who seem to have abilities "not accessible to the ordinary person", can both be the bearers of charisma. One need not look far back into human history to witness such "charismatic" leadership. Adolf Hitler, though a necrophile and extremely destructive, easily fits into place with Weber's value-free definition.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, men like Dr. Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, both of whom dedicated

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, Economy and Society (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968) 241. Weber tends to use the terms "prophet" and "charismatic" interchangeably. In order to avoid confusion, I will not do this because the word "prophet" (rasul, nabi) in Islam has a very particular meaning which cannot be universalized the way Weber tends to do.

<sup>2</sup> For a general study of the charismatic nature of sociopaths, see Stout, Martha. The Sociopath Next Door. New York: Broadway Books, 2005. Also See Fromm, Erich. The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973. I use the term "necrophile" as defined by Erich Fromm; one that is enamored by death, destruction, and all that is non-living.

their lives to the resistance of oppression through non-violent means, can likewise fit into Weber's value-free notion of charisma. What they have in common is that all three of these men were seen by their followers as having at minimum, "specifically exceptional powers or qualities"; they were therefore treated as "leaders" because of these powers and qualities that seemed to be out of reach of the "ordinary" person. Ultimately, both authoritarian and revolutionary, good or evil, sinner or saint, can fit into this value-free definition. That brings us to the more important issues of *perception* and *legitimacy*.

When one examines Weber's definition of charisma carefully, one can see that Weber explicitly identifies the *observer* of charisma as being the basis for his definition. He says, "what is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his "followers" or "disciples""<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is the observer of charisma, not the holder of charisma's claims to "extraordinary powers" that legitimates the holder's status as charismatic. It is the observer of charisma who considers the individual to have "supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." Furthermore, it is the observer who legitimates the claims to charisma by identifying and or accepting the claimants leadership based on his "divinely originated or exemplary" powers and qualities. Stemming from this notion of perception is the issue of legitimacy. Does the charismatic "possess" charisma if no one identifies him as being charismatic? For example, a Prophet who was

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

designated by the divine, yet rejected by the people would nonetheless still be a Prophet, because his legitimacy is rooted in his *designation* as a Prophet, stemming from the ultimate authority (the divine), and not the perceptions of the people. Therefore, in this case, perception is not needed, and his legitimacy is ultimately not in question, for “no prophet [charismatic] has ever regarded his quality as dependent on the attitudes of the masses toward him.”<sup>4</sup> However, if perception is needed to legitimate his claim, then the supposed charismatic is dependent on those who identify him as such. The Story of Shabbtai Zvi, the Jewish “heretic Messiah” of the Middle Ages, is a good example. His followers believed him to be the long-awaited Messiah who would gather all the Jews back in Zion. His status as a charismatic was based on his followers’ perceptions that he was designated by the divine for a specific purpose and was endowed by certain “supernatural” and / or “superhuman powers and qualities.” However, when he converted to Islam under pressure from the Ottoman Sultan, he was abandoned by the majority of his followers, who then regarded him as a fraud. Therefore his legitimacy was based on his followers’ perceptions and their willingness to submit to his leadership. Once their perceptions of him changed, due to his own actions, the legitimacy of his charisma was terminated.

As the story of Shabbtai Zvi demonstrates, the claimant to charisma could be a fraud, having no real “superhuman or supernatural gifts or powers.” He could just be a skilled actor with an elaborate scheme to deceive his would-be followers

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 242.



into thinking he has such qualities. He could be a master of “perception management” without having any inherent qualities that mark him above the average person other than being a skilled illusionist. Therefore, if the legitimization of charisma is based in the perception of the claimant by those people who perceive him as charismatic, then legitimacy is endowed to the claimant through their recognizing and subsequent submission to his leadership. If no recognition is given to the claimant, then he is without legitimacy as a charismatic.<sup>5</sup>

Another factor that is important to Weber was the issue of the success of the charismatic. Weber states,

If proof and success elude the leader for long, if he appears deserted by his god or his magical or heroic powers, above all, if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear.<sup>6</sup>

Again, working on the issue of perception, if charismatic leadership fails to bring about the effects desired by those who are subject to the charismatic leader, then support can be withdrawn from that leader, who thereby loses legitimacy - as happened to Shabbtai Zvi. However, if legitimacy is based on something other than perception, such as divine designation, as was the example of the Prophet, legitimacy is not diminished though the goals were not achieved. On the other hand, if the goals are achieved, and the charismatic leadership is instrumental in

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<sup>5</sup> On the issue of “charismatic fraud”, Weber states that Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, may have been a “sophisticated swindler.”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

achieving those goals, and the followers perceive the leadership as being instrumental in achieving those goals, then the legitimacy of the leadership is heightened by the leader's ability to bring about publicly stated goals. Success and failure are key to the survival of charismatic movements.<sup>7</sup> From the perception of the followers, anyone can fail, but only the "chosen", blessed with superhuman, supernatural, or exemplary qualities can succeed against the odds.

If the divine is appealed to by his followers, it is because they believe that the divine power has the ability to change, alter, and / or transform the situation in which they find themselves. The charismatic leader, designated, blessed, or sent by the divine to be his active agent in history, to represent the divine in human affairs, therefore should have the ability to bring about the desired change. However, if this charismatic cannot, for whatever reason, effect the change, and has failed in his given task, it is logically consistent that the followers would skeptically question and or doubt the relationship between the charismatic and the divine and likewise their submission to the charismatic leadership. If failure in the short term, on a given issue, does occur, then it is important for the charismatic to interpret the failure in such a way that it does not interrupt or diminish the perception of the followers of his charismatic authority or designation. For example, in 625 CE, the second battle between the Muslims and the Meccans, called the battle of Uhud, ended in a devastating loss for the Muslims. Muhammad placed a unit of archers

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<sup>7</sup> It is possible that the early Christian movement would not have lasted beyond the first century CE if the followers of Jesus had not turned his execution on the cross (the historical failure) into a resurrected savior (the theological success).

in the rear of his army in order to fend off a surprise attack from behind.

However, this rear guard left their position in order to join their fellow fighters in collecting the spoils of war. Once they moved, they were flanked by the Meccan cavalry and the Muslim army was then attacked both from the front and from the high ground behind them.<sup>8</sup> This loss, which should not have occurred if the divine was actively supporting the Islamic *mujahideen* (soldiers), had to be reinterpreted in such a way that it did not damage Muhammad's charismatic and prophetic authority. What was a devastating defeat was transformed into a vitally important God-given lesson: always adhere to the will and command of the Prophet. And furthermore, greed will get you killed!

As you can see, this short term loss could have had a decisively negative influence on those followers of Muhammad, especially those who were not entirely committed or convinced of Muhammad's Prophethood. By reinterpreting such a loss, Muhammad was able to maintain his status as a divinely designated prophet and carrier of charismatic authority without losing his support. A military failure was transformed into a successful lesson in obedience to the divine will.

However, the battle of Uhud was only a "short-term" loss for Muhammad, who ultimately had a "long-term" success in his establishment of Islam throughout Arabia and beyond. For the early followers, short-term setbacks were minimized because the overall success of Islam and the Prophet were so encompassing.

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<sup>8</sup> Cyril Glasse, The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989) 68 - 69.

Failures were seen as lessons, while successes were seen as overall proof that their mission was divinely supported.

In this particular case, “success” didn’t “elude the leader for long” and “he” didn’t “appear to be deserted by his god.” Ultimately, although many setbacks and failures occurred, the leadership of Muhammad did “benefit his followers”, and he was not deserted.

### **Weberian and Islamic Prophets**

Weber’s “Sociology of Religion” defines a prophet as an “individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.”<sup>9</sup> Although Weber doesn’t clearly define what he means by “religious doctrine” or “divine commandment”, it is obvious from his examples that he doesn’t mean secular political, social, or psychological systems and institutions that serve the “function” of religion, such as a political party, nationhood, race, or community, but rather he implies systems that maintain a superhuman being, a divine being or beings, and or the totally other. Yet, because he doesn’t clearly define “religion”, but seems to assume the reader will understand what he means, his definition of “prophet” is subject to interpretation and can

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<sup>9</sup> Weber, Max. Economy and Society. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968) 439.

imply that any individual possessing, or that is perceived to possess, charismatic qualities can be considered some form of a “prophet.” Therefore one can have political prophets, social prophets, secular prophets, and even prophets of atheism, etc. However, because we are dealing with Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic tradition, which has a clear definition of “prophet”, it is entirely appropriate that we make apparent the meaning of this term, so as not to augment confusion between the sociological understanding of a “prophet”, as expressed by Weber (later on by Fromm’s socio-psychological character type) and the religious concept of “prophet”, as expressed by Khomeini and the Islamic tradition.

In Islam, prophets are divided into two distinct classes. 1) The *Rasul* is the “messenger” who brings a new “revelation” to the people. The Qur’an refers to them as “al-mursalum” or “those who are sent.”<sup>10</sup> Among these prophets are Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad, because each of these men, according to Islam, brought a new revelation, a new scripture, for their communities (ummah). 2) The *Nabi* is the lesser prophet, who doesn’t bring forth a new scripture, but is in a way a “renewer” (mujadid) of an older scripture. These prophets *remind* the people of their obligations to the scriptures, law and commandments that they already possess.<sup>11</sup> Often the missions of these two categories of prophets overlap, such as when the *rasul* reminds this followers of their prior scripture through the use of the new one, or when the *rasul* acts as a “warner” (*nadhir*), a function

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<sup>10</sup> Glasse, p. 318.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

usually associated with lesser prophets. However, Weber refuses to make a clear distinction between these two forms of prophethood. He says,

No radical distinction will be drawn between a “renewer of religion” who preaches an older revelation, actual or supposititious, and a “founder of religion” who claims to bring completely new deliverances. The two types merge into one another.”<sup>12</sup>

Generally, in the history of religion, Weber would be correct in saying that “the two types merge into one another.” However, in the Islamic tradition, a *Nabi*, the lesser prophet, never merges into a *Rasul*, because by his very definition, he does not bring a new revelation, the very issue that defines a *Rasul*. For example, Muhammad is considered a *Rasul* and a *Nabi* because he both brought a new scripture, the Qur’an, and through it reminded Arabs of what they knew about Jesus, Moses, and Abraham. However, Yahya (John the Baptist), was only considered a *Nabi*, not a *Rasul*, because his message was a future-oriented remembrance of prior scripture and hence he did not bring a new revelation. In the case of Yahya, these two categories clearly remain separated.

What distinguishes a prophet in the Islamic context from any charismatic leader is the direct designation by the divine. In Islam, no one can claim to be a prophet unless he has been expressly designated, by the divine himself, for that office. By definition, it is only “those who are sent” that can claim prophethood in Islam. These prophets, because their legitimacy stems from the creator, the

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<sup>12</sup> Weber, p. 439.

ultimate source of all authority, via his direct designation, do not require the acceptance of followers. Even if they are rejected by their people, as so many of the biblical prophets were, it doesn't diminish their legitimacy as prophets or the legitimacy of their assignment. Yet any given charismatic leader can *claim* to be divinely appointed to his mission. However, if this is not the case, and his success rate is dismal and therefore his followers withdraw their support, his legitimacy is null and void because his legitimacy is rooted in his followers' willing submission to his authority. Furthermore, the charismatic leader who does not claim any divine inspiration or divine patronage, such as a secular prophet (in sociological terms), is also dependent on the will of the followers to support and or submit to his leadership. Because he lacks the authorization of the ultimate source of authority, i.e. Allah in the Islamic tradition, Muslims could not call such a person a "prophet." However, if this secular prophet fulfilled some attributes characterized by the genuine religious prophet's *modus operandi*, then that secular prophet could be legitimately called "prophetic" in the eyes of the Islamic tradition. For example, Muslims could not accept Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as being a legitimate prophet because he lacked the direct designation of God as such.<sup>13</sup> However, because his mission was to alleviate oppression by undermining and tearing down the walls of exploitation instituted in the status quo, he was by all means acting in such a way that his actions are congruent with the actions of a prophet. Thus, though he

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<sup>13</sup> Just for the sake of the argument, I'm ignoring the fact that Muslims believe that there will be no other prophets (Nabi or Rasul) after Muhammad; he is the "seal of prophets."

cannot be considered a prophet in Islam, he could be considered “prophetic.”

In sum, the definitive distinction between a prophet and the prophetic is the connection between the agent of action and the divine. If the individual agent has been directly called by the divine to perform a mission, and therefore legitimacy comes from the divine, then he is considered a “prophet.” However, if he has not been directly called by the divine, and therefore legitimacy comes from the consent of the followers, and yet fulfills some of the modus operandi of a prophet, at best he can be called “prophetic.”<sup>14</sup>

The issue of proof and success affects the prophet and the prophetic similarly yet with slight differences. Doubtless that the prophet and the prophetic both need to prove to their followers the correctness of their mission. However, if success doesn’t come to the prophet, it does not affect his status as a prophet unless he is abandoned by the source of his legitimacy and authority, i.e. the divine. Yet the prophetic, whose legitimacy and authority is rooted in the followers’ consent and submission to his leadership, can no longer claim any legitimacy or authority over them if he cannot produce successes and his followers abandon him. Because the authority to lead comes from below, it can be removed through their retraction of support. The prophet’s authority can only be removed from above

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<sup>14</sup> Unlike many Christian denominations who designate figures as “prophets” because of their “prophecies” (predicting the future), or non-religious “prophets” such as Nostradamus and Edgar Cayce, who do likewise, Islam does not designate figures as prophets by these standards. Future telling does not qualify an individual for prophethood.



when the divine retracts his support. However, both are subject to the perceptions of the followers. Neither can maintain support of the people if they cannot provide fruition of stated goals.

### **General Role of the Prophet**

The role of a prophet in the Islamic, Biblical, and secular traditions goes beyond that of simply delivering a message from the divine. The prophetic role is also to stand outside of the dominant culture and political structure, and uncompromisingly speak truth to power. In their attempt to interrogate the mendacity and hypocrisy of given structure and institutions of authority, prophets are not historically “harmonizers.” They universally stir up trouble, discontent, and animosity by exposing the corrupt rulers, cultural practices, class antagonisms, and overall decay of any given society’s cultural norms, values, and principles. By emphasizing what “ought” to be the case, prophets radically negate what “is” the case in a call to reform, transform, or even overthrow existing social, religious, and political orders. It is clear from Biblical, Qur’anic, and even sociological understanding of prophets that they have tended to be a great hindrance and nuisance to the perpetuation and safety of the status quo. Thus, prophets have often found themselves the object of attack, physical and verbal, by the ruling

party, group, and or government. For example, Muhammad was repeatedly the object of assassination plots, bribes, and wars by the ruling Quraysh tribe of Mecca. Because Muhammad's call to social justice and monotheism threatened the religious and business status quo of the ruling class, his existence had to be terminated. Muhammad's attempt to transform the hard-drinking, polytheistic, and hedonistic Arabs into a society of justice, equality, and monotheism, was a direct and potent threat to the status quo. Likewise, Jesus' emphasis of the "Kingdom of God" did not only offer an alternative vision of the future, in contrast with the prevailing thought of the Jewish religious elite, but it also was a political statement against the "Empire of Rome." By proclaiming what "ought" to be the case in opposition to what was the case, Jesus antagonized two powerful groups who had a vital interest in maintaining the status quo. Therefore, like many prophets before him, Jesus found himself the victim of a brutal assassination carried out in the name of preserving the structures of religious and political power.

### **Weberian Roles of the Prophet**

Weber postulates several specific roles for prophets. First, there is the *Prophet as Lawgiver*. This prophet is responsible for "codifying a law systematically or of reconstituting it."<sup>15</sup> This form of prophethood is best seen in the orthopraxis religious tradition of Judaism and Islam who put a premium on

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<sup>15</sup> Weber, p. 442.

adherence to religious law. Secondly, Weber gives us the *prophet as Teacher of Ethics*.<sup>16</sup> This form of prophet is primarily concerned with “ethical order” and is greatly influenced by wisdom traditions in an attempt to establish social reform. Thirdly, Weber identifies what he calls the *Ethical Prophet*.<sup>17</sup> Because this prophet has received a commission directly from the divine, he demands “obedience as an ethical duty.”<sup>18</sup> Lastly, Weber distinguishes what he calls the *Exemplary Prophet*.<sup>19</sup> This prophet does not demand obedience from his followers and those around him, but by personal example he “demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation.”<sup>20</sup> For Weber, the Buddha and other far-East religious figures such as Lao Tzu fit this form of prophethood.

Concerning these forms of prophets and their relations to the broader social-political and religious context, all of them stand outside the given status quo as an testament to how the world or their given society “ought” to be. None of these prophets can be integrated into a society that is not based on prophetic principles. All of these prophets embody visions of the world and the cosmos that serve as indictments of the broader social context and demonstrate how these societies have not lived up to prophetic standards. The evidence for this assertion can be found in what Weber regards as the prophet’s ultimate and predominate role which is to provide the prophet’s followers with a vision of “the world as a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 444.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 447 - 448.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 447.

meaningful ordered totality.”<sup>21</sup> In the face of a prevailing chaos, whether it be religious, political, social, or even linguistic - through the disintegration of meaning, family, community, politics, etc., the prophets bring an alternative view of the world, which at its core, domesticates the chaos of the given society.<sup>22</sup> These alternative visions of the world provide a system of thought and orientation of action which supplies the believer with an internal reference point and intellectual categories from which he can judge behaviors and actions to be in violation with that given “vision of the world.” Therefore, by giving these alternative visions, the charismatic prophet slays the inner chaos and uncertainty the believer has about the world and his existence, and provides for him a sense of agency - that he can become an active player in human history and has a firm sense of where he wants history to go. Furthermore, when an alternative vision of the world gains enough support among the people of a given society, they are able to impose their will, rooted in the alternative vision, on a broader scale. As we will see later, Khomeini first provides a vision of how Iran “ought” to be. Then, when it becomes feasible to implement that vision because it has become the dominant vision amongst the population, the status quo of the Shah is overthrown and replaced with Khomeini’s vision. Thus, the chaos of the Shah is first “domesticated” and then negated. Consequently, what was once alternative, now

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 451.

<sup>22</sup> See Charles F. Keyes, “Charisma: From Social Life to Sacred Biography,” Journal of the American Academy of Religion Studies XLVIII No. 3 & 4 (1982): 1 - 2.

becomes the dominate political and social order.

### **Erich Fromm's Prophet and Priest**

Although Fromm will add many more qualifications onto his concept of the "prophet", he very generally defines it as "those who announce ideas - and not necessarily new ones - and at the same time live them we may call prophets."<sup>23</sup> For Fromm, the very basis of the "prophet" is rooted in the *theory - praxis dialectic*. If praxis is disconnected from theory, then the words of the so-called prophet are hollow and meaningless, and the listener is less inclined to follow such teachings. However, when a prophetic voice expresses universal values and ideas (theory), and embodies those values and ideas in their life (praxis), then they are maintaining what Fromm believes is essential for a prophet. He says,

...ideas do have an effect on man if the idea is lived by the one who teaches it; if it is personified by the teacher, if the idea appears in the flesh.<sup>24</sup>

From Fromm, positivism in religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., which has emphasized the simple rote memorization of ideas and concepts, has robbed those very concepts of their revolutionary meaning, which, if still taught as a "way of living", could potentially be a contributor in the continual perfection and / or advancement

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<sup>23</sup> Erich Fromm, On Disobedience and Other Essays (New York: Seabury Press, 1981) 42.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

of mankind and society. By placing a premium on the semantic (language) material of philosophy and religion, at the detriment of the semiotic (meaning) material, modern man has castrated the power of mankind's collective knowledge which has organically evolved parallel with the biological evolution of man. Philosophy and religion become an exercise in mental and linguistic acrobatics, as opposed to a radical engagement of the world, in the world. Thus, the revolutionary *theories* of philosophy and religion, are divorced from their *praxis* potential. Fromm would agree with Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach that the goal of philosophy is not only to *interpret* the world, but to *change* it. Fromm observes that modern man studies Socrates, but fails to practice the Socratic tradition. He studies Jesus, but fails to implement the social justice called for by the Gospels. For him, this theory - praxis disconnect has led to "unrestricted egoism, which breeds hysterical nationalism, and which is preparing for an insane mass slaughter."<sup>25</sup> The "slaughter-bench of history", with its massive human suffering, is possible because religious, philosophical, and humanistic praxis has been neglected. Although human ethical thought continues to progress, yet praxis of that thought diminishes; a new age of "jahaliyya" (ignorance) is able to grow. This "jahaliyya al-jadid" (new age of ignorance) is furthered by the triumph of *instrumental rationality*; the rationality of tool, machine, domination over nature, and science, over *communicative rationality* of community, family, solidarity, mutual recognition, morality, and love. As Dr. Martin Luther King would say,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

“when scientific power outruns moral power, we end up with guided missiles and misguided men.”<sup>26</sup>

Fromm clearly believes that if mankind, whose knowledge of these religious and philosophical theories has never been greater and more widespread, would only put to action that which they know is intellectually true, then collectively mankind would be in less danger from the destructive forces of his own making. The prophet in Fromm’s thinking is the individual who bring together prophetic thought and prophetic action, thus rejecting simple positivism of memorization for a dialectical and revolutionary action approach to human history. The prophet is not divorced from the world, or cocoons himself in mental abstraction, but is radically engaged in his society, his community, his government, and his religion / philosophy. Fromm states that,

It is the function of the prophet to show reality, to show alternatives and to protest; it is his function to call loudly, to awake man from his customary half-slumber. It is the historical situation which makes prophet, not the wish of some men to be prophets.<sup>27</sup>

For Fromm, a historical situation which leads to the rise of prophets is one of deep disillusionment, deep disempowerment, deep alienation, and deep hopelessness. A situation which renders an average man into an *automaton*; the customary half-slumber of those who have already given up on changing the world and their situation and have thus succumbed to their feeling of powerlessness. Because of

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<sup>26</sup> King, Dr. Martin Luther. “World House.” A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. Ed. James M. Washington. New York: HarperCollins, 1991. 621.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

such lack of agency within the individual, stemming from fear and hopelessness, and the experience of being denigrated, oppressed, and disposable by the prevailing political-economic system, they seek ideological shelter and security in the “herd”; the herd being the dominate intellectual ideology that outwardly or internally justifies and legitimizes the status quo.<sup>28</sup> The role of the prophet, for Fromm, is to penetrate this ideological security blanket, awaken the individual from his mental slumber, and convincingly demonstrate that another vision of the world is possible if only the victims of history would engage in radical overturning of “what is the case” i.e. the exploitation, oppression, hatred, and domination of the individual by the ruling minority.

Like Weber, Fromm believes that a distinguishing characteristic of the prophet and charismatic is his “personal call” to action. Weber uses this “personal call” to differentiate between the prophet and the priest. He says that,

the latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet’s claim is based on personal revelation and charisma.<sup>29</sup>

For Weber, the personal call is a question of authority. The prophet possesses authority by virtue of his “personal revelation and charisma.” In contrast, the

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<sup>28</sup> Marx pointed out the connection between the “ruling *material* force” and the “ruling *intellectual* force” in his *German Ideology*. He said, “the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed., (New York: International Publishers, 1970) p. 60. as quoted in James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997) p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> Weber, p. 440.



priest's authority is rooted in the "hierarchical office" because he is a member of an "organized enterprise of salvation."<sup>30</sup> However, Fromm sees something more sinister in the role of the priest. He says,

Prophets appear only at intervals in the history of humanity. They die and leave their message. The message is accepted by millions, it becomes dear to them. This is precisely the reason why the idea becomes exploitable for others who can make use of the attachment of the people to these ideas, for their own purposes - those of the ruling and controlling. Let us call the men who make use of the idea the prophets have announced the *priests*.<sup>31</sup>

As one can see, Fromm has a rather negative evaluation of priests. He sees their role as that of guardians of the status quo. They legitimate the prevailing institutions and structures of power through the use of semantic sophistry. Because the message of the prophet has been "accepted by millions", the priest skillfully clothes his message in the language of the prophet, all the time benefiting "those who have power" i.e. the enemy of the prophet. The priest by nature, for Fromm, is dishonest, deceitful, and untrustworthy. He continues,

The prophets live their ideas. The priests administer them to the people who are attached to the idea. The idea has lost its validity. It has become a formula. The priests declare that it is very important how the idea is formulated; naturally the formulation becomes always important after the experience is dead; how else could one control people by controlling their thoughts, unless there is the "correct" formulation? The priests use the idea to organize men, to control them through controlling the proper expression of the idea, and when they have anesthetized man enough they declare that man is not capable of being awake and of directing his own life...<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 440. I will be discussing this in further detail in the section of "Charismatic Authority."

<sup>31</sup> Fromm, Disobedience 43.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

Fromm believes that the “formula” becomes the accepted “common sense”; common sense being the *generally accepted idea of the masses that, at its core, reflects the interests of the ruling class*. Again, Marx’s thesis concerning the connection between the “ruling *material* force” and the “ruling *ideological* force” is apparent. Furthermore, the process of turning a prophetic idea into a “orthodox” formula, and its general acceptance by the masses, allows the priest to wield immense power over those who have accepted the “common sense” idea.<sup>33</sup> When that correct formula is internalized by the masses, the mental automaton is created. For Fromm, this “functionalization of prophetic language” is an effective tool of the ruling class to control, manipulate, and coerce the masses. Consequently, when a true prophet or a prophetic individual speaks and acts against the “common sense”, they are seen as being mentally unstable, deranged, or “out of the mainstream.” However, the very root of the prophetic mission is to stand outside of this “common sense”, break through the common sense ideology with a penetrating critique, and provide an alternative vision of the world. Therefore, the prophet is one who has negated and destroyed “common sense” in his own life, and is on a mission to liberate others from their ideological strait jacket parading as “common sense.”

Yet another aspect of the priest is his opportunism. If the priest is in

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<sup>33</sup> Also see Marcuse, Herbert. One-Dimensional Man. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966. for a discussion on “ideology absorption.”

disagreement with the prevailing power, he will compromise with that power in order to maintain his situation, position, and status because of his self-serving orientation. This is unlike the prophet, who is unwilling to compromise if compromise conflicts with his inner convictions or his divinely appointed mission. The priest's self-concern and self-preservation takes priority over those he is meant to serve. If he can negotiate with the power, as opposed to conflict, he is willing to sacrifice and / or compromise core beliefs and values in order to preserve his status. If this occurs, he will have to modify his "formulas" in order to fit the new political, social, and / or religious reality. He will skillfully "reeducate", through manipulation and "perception management", the masses who he controls. He will explain to them the "prophetic" basis for his new position; claiming that it is rooted in the teachings of the prophet and that the new alteration is a logical extension of the original prophetic message. And because of their automaton state, the priest will have little opposition from his followers. However, if the priestly class is not the "*mouthpiece*" of the powerful ruling class, but *is* the ruling class, they will not have to play the function of the intercessor between the ruled and the rulers. However, they will still have to justify and legitimate their changing ideology and practices through the "functionalization" of the prophets legacy and teachings.

Fromm makes it clear that there are many forms of priests, not only religious ones. There are social and cultural priests, those who by way of mass media, manipulate people into accepting and absorbing certain beliefs about society and culture; political priests, who administer the political ideology that stabilizes

governments, regimes, administrations, and society; and philosophical priests, who “administer the idea of the original thinker, to impart it, interpret it, to make a museum object and thus to guard it.”<sup>34</sup> What all these priests have in common is that they are all defenders of the status quo, and have some incentive in seeing that the prevailing social, cultural, political, and philosophical systems remain in place. Thus, they will all vehemently attack those who question their ideology and provide a alternative vision of life.

Ultimately, prophets all share a key characteristic; their unwillingness to surrender to “irrational” authority, and their active disobedience against that authority. Irrational authority can be characterized as such: *any authority that is based on exploitation, domination, and or oppression; that at its core serves the interests of the exploitative, dominating, and oppressive groups, structures, and or institutions, and can only be maintained by force, coercion, and or war.*<sup>35</sup>

Fromm makes it clear that the antagonism of interests between the oppressed and the oppressor, the slave and the master, the serf and the lord, renders the authority of the powerful in these relationships “irrational”, and therefore unworthy of submission. Social-cultural, political, and philosophical prophets stand in opposition to the prevailing and dominate social-economic, religious and political, structures that are represented by their priestly counterparts. “Rational” authority is characterized by *any relationship in which the authority’s interest is rooted in*

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<sup>34</sup> Fromm Disobedience p. 44. Also see Theodor W. Adorno The Culture Industry. New York: Routledge Classics, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> See Fromm’s discussion of rational and irrational authority in Disobedience. 20 - 21.

*the betterment, advancement, and progress of those under them; and that this relationship is maintained and perpetuated on a willing basis; free from coercion and or force.* Therefore, Fromm's prophets are capable of identifying irrational authority; articulating an alternative to that authority; guiding his followers in the act of transforming or replacing that authority; and at the end, establishing a new authority that is rational.

After examining the theory of charisma of Weber, and the theory of prophet by both Weber and Fromm, we should be able to establishing a concrete and workable definition based in those two scholars. I define prophetic charisma as such: *"An individual who possess or is perceived to posses charisma, i.e. extraordinary gifts, talents, and or abilities, not generally attainable to the average person; whose uncompromising goal is to show alternative vision of being; the dissemination of rational authority over irrational and or authoritarian authority; and in general embodies that rational authority through the theory - praxis dialectic; thus becoming an example of the alternative mode of being; without regards to his own personal safety, status, and or wealth."* We will see how this definition can be applied to Muhammad, the exemplary prophet of Islam, 'Ali, Hussein, and finally Imam Khomeini.

## **Prophet Muhammad as Standard Bearer for What is “Prophetic”**

In the Islamic tradition, the most sacred figure is Prophet Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah ibn Abu Muttalib ibn Hisham of the 7th century Arabia. He was born in the year 570 CE in the town of Mecca in Arabia, among the tribe of “bani Hisham”, which was a sub-tribe of the Quraysh, a very powerful and influential clan. Orphaned at a young age, Muhammad was sent to live with his uncle Abu Talib, who taught him the skills of a trader, making frequent trips north to Syria and south to Yemen. At the age of 25 he was married to Khadijah, a wealthy business woman in Mecca who bore his six children: 4 girls and 2 boys.

Unfortunately, the two boys both died as infants, while all 4 girls lived to adulthood. During Muhammad’s lifetime, Mecca became very prosperous for two reasons. First, it lay in the middle of the trade routes connecting the Far East with Europe, Middle East, and Africa. Secondly, Mecca was the epicenter of Arabian paganism, with Arabs continuously journeying from all corners of the peninsula to worship their pagan deities in the Ka’ba (cube). This massive stone structure was said to be originally built by Abraham (Ibrahim) and his first son Ishmael (Isma’il) in dedication to the one true god of Abraham. Regardless of whether or not there is any historical validity to this claim, the Ka’ba was at the time of Muhammad a center of paganism, with 360 idols residing inside the structure.

As Mecca grew in affluence, wealth and power, the traditional social values

of the Arabs began to wane. They neglected orphans, abused women, gambled, were hard drinkers, owned slaves, and even practiced female infanticide. Social inequality was the ugly step-sister of the ever-increasing wealth of the elites of Mecca, especially the Quraysh tribe. Being very aware of his own precarious position as a orphan, Muhammad was very sensitive to the plight and predicament of others. He was disgusted by the rampant deterioration of any semblance of justice and mercy, and often would retreat to a cave outside of Mecca for prayer and contemplation. Furthermore, Muhammad was a *hanif*, someone who did not participate in the paganism of the time but rather preferred to reserve his worship for the single yet ambiguous deity addressed as *Allah*. Though there was no formal religious tradition centered around a monotheistic notion of Allah, there were many who would be labeled *hanif* because of their pre-Islamic disapproval and rejection of polytheism. Taken together, Muhammad's concerns were primarily religious and social in nature; he believed the origins of social inequality were to be found in the prevalent paganism of Mecca.

According to Islam, Muhammad, at the age of 40, received an unexpected commission from the divine when he was meditating in his cave. He was called to be the *Rasul Allah* or Prophet of God, and to deliver a message to the world, beginning first with his own Arab community. This message, which was given to him via the angel Gabriel (Jibra'il), consisted of the very words of the divine. These words or *ayat* (signs), would form what would later be called the *Qur'an*

(the recitation), the sacred scripture of Islam. The essence of this new revelation was twofold; first, *tawhid*, the oneness of God and the rejection of polytheism or *shirk* (associating partners with God). Secondly, the establishment of a just society, based on the principles laid down by the Qur'an and Sunnah (traditions) of the Prophet. Taken together, the Qur'an lays before the believer the *Sirat al-Mustaqin* or the straight path.

Because of Muhammad's radical attack on the gods of Mecca and the corrupt society that stemmed from those gods, the Prophet became a dangerous enemy to the status quo. Not only did he attack the validity of the pagan gods, and therefore the honor of the families that worshipped them, his message also had a economic consequence; if the gods of the Ka'ba were not real, then why should Arabs make *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca to worship worthless sticks and stones; furthermore, if they didn't come, the pockets of the wealthy who depended on the pilgrimage for their income would suddenly go empty. His attacks were therefore both religious and economic and radically subverted the status quo. Not only did the message of Islam fundamentally call into question the pagan gods of the Ka'ba, but also the corrupt and destructive society which stemmed from those gods. However, the pagan Arabs associated their growing financial success with the religious devotion to the gods of their fathers and to attack those gods was to attack their way of life and their wealth. Muhammad, like all prophets, would not succeed without a struggle.



Opposition to Muhammad first began with an attempt to buy him off. He was offered money, status, women, and a leadership position in Mecca, if only he would cancel his attacks on the gods and Meccan society. He refused, saying,

...by God, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left and ordered me to give up this cause, I would never do it until either God has vindicated me or I perish in the attempt.<sup>36</sup>

All attempts by the elites of Mecca to discredit and discourage Muhammad's message didn't stop it from attracting followers, especially among the poor, slaves, and women - i.e. the disenfranchised and oppressed of the city.<sup>37</sup> His calls for social equality and justice were especially attractive to those who had never seen a day of peace in their lives. Although a few in his own family didn't follow his religious appeals, they nevertheless protected him from being killed by members of other tribes and clans. Because tribal law prevented them from killing him, the city fathers enacted an economic embargo against the early Muslims as the next best thing. This embargo forbid anyone from doing business with them, which, in effect, was intended to starve them out of existence. On top of this, Muslim homes and properties were confiscated and sold off to the caravans, and thus they were forced to live outside the protective confines of the city. Despite this massive campaign against him, Muhammad's community (ummah) continued to grow and the message of the Qur'an continued to be revealed to him through Gabriel.

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<sup>36</sup> Yahiya Emerick, Muhammad (Indianapolis, IN: Alpha, 2002) 78.

<sup>37</sup> One of the most prevalent accusation against Muhammad was that he was a poet and thus his Qur'an was the product of his own mind, and not that of a deity. He was accused of being insane, possessed, or simply a power-hungry demagogue.

This oppressive situation lasted until September of 622 CE, with opposition so fierce that Muhammad's life came to be in perpetual danger. Then an invitation to mediate a conflict bordering on a civil war in the northern city of Yathrib was extended to Muhammad.<sup>38</sup> On the condition that he and all his followers would be welcome in the city as equals, and that the city would be under the guidance of Islam and the Prophet, Muhammad accepted the offer and began to move his people north. This "migration" or *hijrah* to Yathrib would mark the year 1 in the Islamic calendar.<sup>39</sup>

An Islamic government was established in Yathrib (later renamed *Medinat al-Nabi*, City of the Prophet) and Muhammad's role as Prophet took on a new component - that of a statesman and ruler. Between the year 622 CE, the year of the migration, and 632, the year he died, Muhammad continued to build an Islamic society, based on the principles and beliefs revealed to him by Allah. He ushered in peace to the torn city of Yathrib, entered into mutual defense pacts with various tribes including many Jewish tribes, signed peace treaties, expanded his religious following throughout Arabia, cemented friendly relations with other Arab tribes through marriage, led and fought in multiple armed conflicts, sent Muslim emissaries to regional powers including Persia, Egypt, and Byzantium inviting

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<sup>38</sup> Muhammad was in more danger than before because his uncle Abu-Talib had recently died, thus lifting any tribal protect afforded to Muhammad by tribal law. Assassination attempts were being plotted and even implemented. Ali, Muhammad's cousin, was almost killed in Muhammad's bed in an attempt to fool the conspirators. Because of Ali's ruse, Muhammad was able to escape Mecca unharmed. Glasse, pp. 156 - 157.

<sup>39</sup> Muslims date events "Before Hijrah" (BH) or "After Hijrah" (AH) as opposed to BC, AD, BCE, or CE. For sake of clarity, I will continue to use the western secular system BCE and CE.

them to accept Islam built mosques, taught his followers the verses and meaning of the Qur'an, and ultimately established a model of Islamic governance that has been used as a guide for Muslims from then on.<sup>40</sup> This was also the time period where the vast majority of Islamic law was revealed by the Prophet. This law, later canonized as the "shari'ah" by the four Sunni schools of law, was mostly the result of this "Medina" period of Islam and contains a wide variety of subjects including property law, inheritance law, laws of war, trade laws, laws concerning slavery, divorce, family, etc.

By the end of Muhammad's life he had occupied the roles of messenger of God, military general, revolutionary, statesman, arbitrator, father and husband, and law-giver. What is most important about these roles is that they provide a guide for later Muslims. This "custom of the Prophet" is called the *sunnah*.

The Qur'an and sunnah are the two primary sources of Islamic law, customs, theology, and general guidance. The Qur'an is considered by Muslims to be the direct and literal word of God (*Kalam Allah*). It was preserved primarily through memorization among Muhammad's immediate followers and, after his death, was codified on paper by Caliph Uthman ibn 'Affan. On the other hand, the

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<sup>40</sup> Khomeini would later invoke these missions to the regional powers as proof of Allah's condemnation of monarchy. He said: "Islam proclaims monarchy and hereditary succession wrong and invalid. When Islam first appeared in Iran, the Byzantine Empire, Egypt, and the Yemen, the entire institution of monarchy was abolished. In the blessed letters that the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) wrote to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius and the Shahanshah of Iran, he called upon them to abandon the monarchical and imperial form of government, to cease compelling the servants of God to worship them with absolute obedience and permit them to worship God, Who has no partner and is the True Monarch." Algar, Islam and Revolution 31.

sunnah of Muhammad is predominantly found in collections of *hadith* (traditions), including Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja, which were compiled within the first centuries after Muhammad's death. Although there are other collections of hadith, these six, often called the *al-Kutub al-Sittah* (the six books), are considered the most authentic.<sup>41</sup> Among these, the first two, al-Bukhari and Muslim, are considered the most authentic and reliable because of their *isnad*, or chain of transmission. These chains are meant to demonstrate the reliability of the report by linking it through credible sources until it reaches the original source. Thus the solidity of the *isnad* lends validity to the report.

When we look into the *sirah* (history) of the Prophet, we can begin to see an example of an individual who embodies what we can call "prophetic charisma." Although Muslims do not consider Muhammad to be a deity, his earthly example is taken as being normative in all dealings in the world. Because he was divinely appointed to his mission, and served as the vessel through which the Qur'an was delivered to mankind, his behavior is legitimated by the divine himself, thus giving it authority to serve as a guide to other Muslims. Therefore Muslims for the last fourteen hundred years have engaged in a *imitatio Muhammadi* (imitation of Muhammad). No other person in the history of Islam has enjoyed

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<sup>41</sup> Glasse, pp. 141 - 143.

such a position.<sup>42</sup>

When we reexamine Weber's and Fromm's characterizations of "Charisma" and "Prophet", we begin to see a mold that is adequately fit by Muhammad. Firstly, Muhammad certainly fits the definition Weber lays out for charisma. He is "considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities."<sup>43</sup> This, of course, comes by virtue of his relationship to the divine, being the active agent and mouthpiece of that deity. His position as Prophet of Allah is not "accessible to the ordinary person" because he is in fact considered the "seal of prophets" or the final prophet to mankind. Because of this status, he is considered by his followers to be their "leader." Furthermore, his legitimacy is not based on his acceptance by those around him. He is, regardless of their belief or disbelief, the legitimate prophet because of his "divine call" or commission by the divine; he was designated by the divine, not chosen by the people. Therefore, unlike Shabbtai Zvi, success or failure does not affect his status as a prophet or carrier of charisma. However, success ultimately did come to Muhammad and that greatly enhanced the attraction people had to his message.

Consistent with Weber's notion of prophet, Muhammad certainly

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<sup>42</sup> Imitation of the 'Ali, Hussein, the later Imams, and the Marja i-taqlid (highest ranking Shi'a clerics), have been limited to the Shia'. Likewise, imitation of individual Shaykhs in Sufism is limited to certain orders. All Muslims, Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, etc. engage in an imitation of Muhammad.

<sup>43</sup> Weber, Max. Economy and Society 241.

“proclaimed a religious doctrine or divine commandment.”<sup>44</sup> Although Weber himself doesn’t make a distinction between the “renewer of religion” and the “founder of religion”, it is clear from Muhammad’s title of *Rasul*, that he would be considered both in the Islamic understanding. Recall that the Rasul primarily brings a new doctrine, but through that new doctrine, also reminds the believer of that which he already knows. Muhammad’s mission to the ‘Arabs was not only to bring the Qur’an (new doctrine), but to “restore” the religion of Abraham (old doctrine). Thus Muhammad status of Rasul assumes a dual role - renewer and founder.

Muhammad also fulfills the general role of a prophet: that is, to stand outside of the broader dominant culture and political structure, and uncompromisingly speak truth to power. When he was offered wealth and status he refused to compromise. Although there were multiple assassination attempts on his life, he refused to give up his mission. The belief that he could not be bought or killed only added to his appeal from those around him who were used to the corruption of pagan elites and the blood feuds between tribes. Although his ultimate message had peace as a goal, he was not a harmonizer. The peace he envisioned could only come from a radical negation of the given society. Until then, he would expose and attack the unjust living situation of the slaves, women, poor, and orphans, and the social structure that kept them in their place. He ended the wide-spread practice of female infanticide; he called for an end to lifetime

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

slavery; he called for the equal treatment of women, and proclaimed that society at large had a responsibility to meet the needs of orphans. This social message, rooted in the fear of Allah justice, radically subverted the “intellectual force” - i.e. the paganism and hedonism of the Arabs - which legitimated the status quo of the “material force.” Thus his call to Islam and the justice demanded by Allah fundamentally undermined the material dominance of the ruling elite. His new intellectual force, Islam, showing a new alternative vision of the future, first attacked, then subverted, and ultimately replaced the old intellectual and material force. For Muhammad, what *ought* to be the case negated what *is* the case, and from the first day of Muhammad’s prophethood that was an integral part of his mission.

Muhammad was certainly what Weber calls a *law-giving prophet*. Islam, similar to Judaism, is a tradition that places an emphasis on law: i.e. personal law, public laws, and laws of governance. However, Muhammad himself served as a model and embodiment of that law in the eyes of the Muslims. According to Islam, Muhammad did not suffer from a *theory - praxis disconnect* that is so important for Fromm’s notion of a prophet. What became law for the Muslims was law for Muhammad.<sup>45</sup> Revolutionary speech was transformed into revolutionary action. The Qur’an speaks about hypocrisy in a very damning way,

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<sup>45</sup> There were notable exceptions because of the unique nature of Muhammad as a prophet. For example, Islamic law restricts Muslims from having more than four wives while Muhammad was permitted to have more for reasons of state relations with other tribes, etc.

even calling it a “disease of the heart.”<sup>46</sup> Through the comprehensive guide of the Qur’an and Muhammad’s sunnah, he brings about an understanding that the world is a “meaningful ordered totality”, and that the social, political, and religious chaos of the jahaliyya Arabs is a deviation from that ordered world. Furthermore, that “meaningfully ordered world” is legitimated by the single deity Allah, not by the discredited and impotent gods of the pagans, who had no power to resist their own destruction.

For many people who heeded the call of Muhammad, their adoption of Islam was a rejection of “irrational authority” and an acceptance of an authority that encouraged growth and development of their intellectual capacities, their capacity for solidarity and equality, the rejection of tribalism and an economic structure based on subjugation and oppression, and a return to society based on just principles. Freedom came through disobedience to the status quo and submission to a new revolutionary force, i.e. Islam. Coming from the context of the powerless, Islam deeply empowered the formally disenfranchised and liberated their capacity to develop themselves as individuals and member of a community. Islam and Muhammad, for the newly freed, represented the ultimate in “rational authority.”

From this point on, Muhammad’s story of struggle against this irrational authority, the irrational authority of pagan gods and their elite beneficiaries established a model of prophetic action based in prophetic speech that would be

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<sup>46</sup> Qur’an, 2:10



emulated by later revolutionaries, such as Khomeini, and would be easily recognizable as “prophetic” by the followers of such revolutionaries.

### **The Prophetic and Martyrdom: ‘Ali and Hussein**

Because the orthodox doctrine of Islam says that Muhammad is the last and final prophet to the world, no one after him can legitimately claim to be divinely designated as a prophet. At best, people who wish to claim some form of legitimacy based in religion, can claim to be embodying the mold established by the prophet, thus bearing the description of “prophetic.” But they cannot claim prophethood because they lack the legitimacy of a divine designation. Unlike Fromm’s notion of a prophet, meaning anyone who represents rational authority and speaks truth, while fully living up to the theory - praxis dialectic, Islam believes it takes a individual designation by the divine to be a prophet. Muhammad’s call to prophethood in the cave outside of Mecca is a prime example. Henceforth, when we speak of a “prophet”, we shall be using the Islamic understanding based on the designation clause, while using “prophetic” for those who engage in actions and speech that would be associated with prophets, but who lack a direct designation by the divine.

Because of the violent origins, and the brutal suppression of the Shi’a sect of Islam, the Shi’a have a long history of glorification of martyrdom and martyrs

(*Shuhada'*) A typical definition of a martyr is anyone who dies or is killed while fighting, bearing witness (*shahid*) to the faith.<sup>47</sup> Although there are many martyrs in the Shi'a tradition, two stand out well above all others due to their importance in the development of the Shi'a sect. First, there is 'Ali ibn Abu Talib (598 - 661CE), Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law through his marriage to the prophet's daughter Fatimah. The second is 'Ali's second son Hussein, who was also killed while fighting those he believed were usurpers to the office of *Khalifah* (representative or successor to the prophet).

The story of 'Ali's martyrdom is complex and detailed. However, I shall summarize much of the story in order to get to the "prophetic" aspect of his life and death. 'Ali was one of the first converts to Islam. Raised in Muhammad's house after Abu Talib, 'Ali's father, had died, the father of Muhammad's two grandchildren, a great military general who conquered and converted Yemen to Islam; and was appointed representative of the Prophet while Muhammad was engaged in a battle at the northern oasis city of Tabuk<sup>48</sup> According to the Shi'a tradition, Muhammad had officially designated 'Ali to be his religious and military successor upon his death.<sup>49</sup> However, after Muhammad died, 'Ali's claim to power was thrice rejected. Abu Bakr al-Sadiq (d. 634 CE), Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644 CE), and Uthman ibn 'Affan (d. 656 CE), were all elected caliph, by means

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<sup>47</sup> Glasse, p. 360.

<sup>48</sup> Halm, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> This assertion is of course denied by the Sunni sect.

of a *shura* (council), before ‘Ali ever saw power.<sup>50</sup> It was only after Uthman ibn ‘Affan was assassinated in Medina in 656 CE that ‘Ali was installed as the successor to the Prophet.

A deep division ensued between those who followed ‘Ali and the belief that the *bait al-Rasul* (house of the Prophet) were the legitimate successors to Muhammad (since known as the Shi‘a, from *Shi’at ‘Ali* - Party of ‘Ali), and those who believed that succession should be decided by the companions of the Prophet through an elective council. Furthermore, during Uthman’s reign, the Umayyad clan ascended to power through the political and military conquest of the Middle East. During the time of the Prophet, the Umayyads were the “urban aristocracy of Mecca” that first bitterly opposed the Prophet, then only nominally converted to Islam after being faced with overwhelming forces.<sup>51</sup> Through the reign of Uthman, his Umayyad clan maintained and augmented their wealth and power and their hedonistic lifestyle, hidden behind the public veil of Islam. Nepotism was the norm in the Umayyad dynasty, and it deeply antagonized ‘Ali and his followers, who believed Islam and the office of *Khalifa* was being abused by a corrupt family. Furthermore, the core of their resistance to the Umayyads was the belief that ‘Ali was the only legitimate heir to the prophet because he was publicly designated by the Prophet for that position. Thus, all three men who had been elected to succeed

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<sup>50</sup> Those who elected these three men were eventually called the Sunni sect.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

the Prophet by the shura were illegitimate and rejected by the Shi'a. The fact that these men were elected over Muhammad's clear designation of 'Ali is often explained as being a test from Allah to separate the *mu'min* (true believers) from the *munaḥḥiqun* (hypocrites).<sup>52</sup>

Although 'Ali was eventually installed as the Khaliph by those who killed Uthman, support for his rule was small and he was forced to leave Medina for the safety of Kufa, Iraq, an 'Arab garrison town between the Tigris and Euphrates.<sup>53</sup> Because of the assassination of Uthman, a blood-feud erupted between the families of 'Ali and the slain Khaliph. Mu'awiya, the Damascus governor of Syria and an Umayyad clan member, vowed to destroy the Shi'a and their troublesome leader. Likewise, 'Ali was prepared to fervently defend his claim to leadership. Because of this, their two armies eventually faced each other on the battlefield of Siffin in 657 CE.<sup>54</sup> However, none of the battles were decisive and both sides reluctantly agreed to arbitration. Afterwards, Mu'awiya judged that he had ultimately won the battle and continued to declare himself the legitimate Khaliph. On the other hand, many in 'Ali's army were extremely dissatisfied with his decision to agree to arbitration, saying that he had no right to compromise on what Allah had ordained; their cry was "Decision is God's Alone."<sup>55</sup> For his treachery, the *Khawarij*, seceders from 'Ali's army, succeeded in assassinating 'Ali by stabbing him with a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> Glasse, p. 222.

poisoned sword late in January 661 CE, while he was entering his mosque in Kufa.<sup>56</sup> He was buried in the Iraqi city of Najaf, where today his tomb serves as a pilgrimage site for many Shi'a, and a center of Shi'a theological training.<sup>57</sup>

For those who stayed loyal to 'Ali, this crime was an unspeakable rebellious act against Allah himself and it has served as a line of division between the Sunni and Shi'a sects ever since. Furthermore, 'Ali's refusal to submit to an illegitimate authority has inspired his followers through the ages. Like Muhammad, he serves as a template for radical prophetic leadership through his uncompromising attempts to negate the status quo and his willingness to be martyred for the cause. Unlike the Khawarij, who saw 'Ali's agreeing to arbitration as a compromise, the Shi'a have generally been reluctant to interpret it in such a way. Rather they see it as a pragmatic strategy, designed to save lives and resources and fight another day. Although Damascus hoped this challenge to their rule would diminish, the antagonism between them and the descendents of 'Ali didn't end with the death of Mu'awiya nor 'Ali. It was passed on to the next generation.

Upon Mu'awiya's death, Umayyad authority passed onto his son Yazid, an overtly hedonistic and irreligious man. Likewise, for the Shi'a, authority passed to Hasan, the eldest son of 'Ali, known for his piety and scholarship. Despite his claim to authority, the overwhelming military strength and Syrian occupation of

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<sup>56</sup> Richards, Yann. Shi'a Islam (Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1995) 19.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

Iraq forced Hasan to negotiate with the Umayyads, and this eventually led to his abdication of authority in 661 CE.<sup>58</sup> He would eventually retire in Medina and dedicate his life to scholarship; his only major contribution was his fathering of many children; he therefore became the progenitor of nearly all the descendents of Muhammad. Hasan's non-resistance to tyranny would later provide the Shi'a clerics with a precedent for political "quietism": the purposeful absence of clerics in national and international politics.<sup>59</sup>

The Shi'a disappointment with Hasan soon faded as they set their eyes upon his younger and more politically active brother Hussein. Mu'awiya's death and designation of Yazid in 680 CE allowed for another opportunity to challenge the legitimacy of the Umayyad Khaliphate. The Shi'a, led by Hussein's cousin, Muslim ibn 'Aqil, had determined that the conditions were right for such a challenge and informed Hussein that thousands would support his claim to the Khaliphate if he wanted it.<sup>60</sup> Wanting to avenge his father and believing in the correctness of his cause of reestablishing the legitimate heir to Muhammad, Hussein secretly traveled from Mecca northeastward towards Iraq. What he didn't know was that his travels were being watched by Umayyad spies sent by Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad, the Iraqi Governor, and that they were plotting an ambush for Hussein and his party, which consisted mostly of family and a small

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<sup>58</sup> Halm, pp. 7 - 8, Richards, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> Richards, p. 27. As we will see, Khomeini was very critical of the doctrine of political quietism.

<sup>60</sup> Glasse, pp. 162 - 163. Muslim ibn 'Aqil was later captured and executed by the Umayyad governor for his role in the plot against the dynasty.

contingency of fighters.<sup>61</sup> The Umayyad force pushed Hussein's party north of Kufa until they reached Karbala. The next day the enemy forces were reinforced with approximately 4,000 solidiers and forced the Shi'a to go without water for three days.<sup>62</sup> Most disappointing to Hussein was the fact that none of the "partisans" of Kufa, who had sworn they would fight for the cause of Hussein showed up, leaving his small group to fight an overwhelming force on its own. When Hussein refused to pay tribute to Yazid on the 9th of Muharram, the army encroached on the camp and, by morning on the 10th, had attacked and slaughtered all the people in Hussein's camp, including women and children.<sup>63</sup> Although Hussein's men fought valiantly, and he himself led the fight from the back of his horse, they were no match for the overwhelming force of the Umayyads. Hussein was decapitated and his body trampled by horses.<sup>64</sup> Afterwards the dead were buried in Karbala and the head of Hussein was sent to the Governor in Kufa; it later ended up in Damascus or Cairo.<sup>65</sup> Although at the time the death of Hussein had little effect on the overall political environment of Iraq, it became a extremely important event in the development of Shi'a Islam. Up to this time, as Heinz Halm has argued, the Shi'a movement was only one of political motivations. However, after the brutal killing of Hussein and his family, the Shi'a tradition was forever separated religiously from the more dominant Sunni

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<sup>61</sup> Halm, pp. 9, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 9. Other reports have the number of days without water as eight. Glasse, p. 163.

<sup>63</sup> Halm, pp. 9, 15. Richards, p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Richards, p. 29.

<sup>65</sup> Halm, p. 15. Both cities have a competing claim to the head of Hussein.

tradition. Hussein himself became the archetype of the martyr, forever suffering under the authority of illegitimate power, yet never submitting to that authority. The story of Hussein's martyrdom at Karabala at the hands of Yazid came to play a major part in Khomeini's narrative about the Shah; Khomeini called the Shah the "new Yazid."

As we can see, the story of early Islam provides many models and templates for the resistance to irrational and illegitimate power. These templates would come to be used quite effectively by Khomeini as he struggled against what he believed to be a new manifestation of the same powers that martyred 'Ali and Hussein. As Yann Richards has written, "the martyrdom of Hoseyn [Hussein] has become the prototype of every struggle for justice, every suffering. That is where the heart of Shi'ism lies, in this agony which is at one and the same time a revolt and a sign of hope."<sup>66</sup>

Heinz Halm has articulated a very important factor in the development of the Shi'a from a political opposition group to a minority religious sect. When Hussein was in need of reinforcements from his "partisan" followers of Kufa, they shamefully remained idle and in consequence allowed Hussein and his party to be massacred. The emergence of "the penitents" (*al-tawwabun*) came from what Halm calls a "crisis of conscience" from those partisans because of their failure to assist Hussein.<sup>67</sup> This movement, led by a man named Sulayman ibn Surad, who

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<sup>66</sup> Richards, p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 16 - 20.



had earlier sworn allegiance to Hussein and his claim to authority, sought to relieve their collective through collective repentance (*tauba*).<sup>68</sup> Because this sin (*dhanb* or *khata* ') was shared throughout the Shi'a community, it's atonement must be sought even by future generations and is still performed today in Iran and other Shi'a dominated areas.<sup>69</sup> The bloody 'Ashura ceremony, which takes place every year on the 10th day of Muharram and includes ritual flagellation and beating one's brow with a sword in processions and collective gatherings is seen as a substitute for the death which should have occurred at Karabala. The penitent shows his desire to relieve his historic guilt by saying: "...if we been there at Karbala we would have stood with him [i.e., the imam Hussein] and shed our blood and died with him."<sup>70</sup> As Halm correctly points out, Ayatollah Khomeini skillfully tapped Shi'a sensibilities concerning their failure to help Hussein when he was in need, when he likened the modern struggle against the Shah to the struggle against Yazid and the earlier tyranny.<sup>71</sup> The Shi'a, it would seem, would not let another revolutionary figure become a martyr because of their inaction. Even after Khomeini's death in 1989, Iranian television displayed Iranian prisoners of war returning from Saddam Hussein's Iraq who knelt at the grave of Khomeini, begging for his forgiveness at their failure to die in battle. In effect, Khomeini became a modern Hussein figure, and this time Iranians would support him.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

## CHAPTER IV

### KHOMEINI'S PROPHETIC CHARISMA

Now that we have investigated the many facets of "prophetic charisma", and have determined the exemplary figures of prophetic charisma in the first paradigm of Shi'a Islam, i.e. Muhammad, 'Ali, and Hussein, we need to examine Khomeini's political and religious history to determine where these concepts are applicable to Khomeini.

Returning to Weber's original definition of charisma, Khomeini was considered by many to be "extraordinary" and endowed with "exceptional powers or qualities." His powers of intellect, persuasion, scholarship, and rhetoric, not to mention his unflinching courage, all contributed to the almost mystical aura and appeal that surrounded him. However, though he never claimed to be anything other than a cleric, many perceived him to be nearly "supernatural", and or "superhuman." In fact, the very title of "Imam", usually only applied to the Twelve Imams of Shi'a Islam, testifies that some speculated, whether spoken or only in thought, that he could be the returning Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi, or at

least that he was somehow connected with the return of the hidden Imam.<sup>1</sup> Because this speculation could only enhance his legitimacy, this underground notion was never officially repudiated by Khomeini himself, nor his government. On the other hand, it would not have been appropriate, for reasons that are obvious, to confirm or openly encourage such assertions. Some conservative clerics saw the novel use of the term as possibly blasphemous.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Khomeini neither confirmed nor denied the speculation. However, he was often called *Naib al-Imam* or Vice-Regent of the Hidden Imam throughout the Iranian press.<sup>3</sup> This designation gave him heightened stature through his connection to the Hidden Imam, while implicitly denying that he was the Hidden Imam himself.<sup>4</sup>

For those who did not believe Khomeini was the hidden Imam, yet submitted to his authority, he was an exemplary figure who, because of his exceptional abilities, was “treated as a leader.” This is important because Khomeini’s legitimacy as a revolutionary leader was dependent on the consent of the followers, not from a direct divine designation, located in a given time of history. Although he had religious authority as a scholar, a *mujtahid*, and *marja-i taqlid*, his political leadership was not commissioned by the divine, as a Prophet’s would be, but was born through his own initiative and later supported by the

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<sup>1</sup> Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* 35. Even if some believed he was the “hidden Imam”, there is a deniability clause in term “Imam”, for it is also used by the Arabs and Sunnis to mean a prayer leader.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Algar, *Roots of Revolution* 79.

<sup>4</sup> According to Hamid Algar, the practice of calling Khomeini “Imam” began while he was in Iraq, an Arab country, where in Arabic, Imam simply means leader, not in the traditional Shi’a sense of the Twelve Imams. Ibid., p. 79.

Iranian people. The situation in Iran gave rise to Khomeini's quest, not a divine appointment from above.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, his legitimacy as a revolutionary had to be accepted by those around him who through their acceptance, conferred upon him legitimacy as the leader of the revolution. Without it, he would have been just another Ayatollah among many.

Weber makes "proof of success" an important feature of the charismatic leader's claim to continuing acceptance. If success eludes him, Weber says, "his charismatic authority will disappear."<sup>6</sup> In the early days of the revolution, it would be hard to categorize the situation as being anything but successful. The Shah was consolidating power, militarizing, implementing the "White Revolution", poverty was on the rise, international corporations were dominating the economy, and the Shah and his family were reaping the benefits. However, in the long run, Khomeini did deliver on his promise to rid Iran of the Shah and his Western cultural influences and his so-called "modernization" programs. Although there were setbacks, challenges, and painful moments, i.e. exile, loss of freedom, death of loved ones, and massacres, these were interpreted as being tests from the divine to separate the *mu'min* from the *munafigun* - just as it was for 'Ali and Hussein. Interpreting the events in such a way deflated any accusation that, because of the setbacks, the divine had abandoned their cause. In the perception of the majority

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<sup>5</sup> The issue of Khomeini's charismatic authority will be taken in greater detail later.

<sup>6</sup> Weber, Economy and Society 242.

of Iranian people, the fight against the Shah's tyranny led by the Ayatollah resulted in Iranian independence from the *dictatora coronada*, Western domination, and a new promise of the future. Needless to say, that was not the view of the defeated regime.

It is absolutely clear that Khomeini never claimed to be a prophet, nor did his followers see him as such. However, they did see him and his actions as being "prophetic" in that it fit the model of the prophet, and the prophetic example of 'Ali and Hussein. Recalling the general role of the prophet to stand outside of the dominate culture and political structure, uncompromisingly speak truth to power, interrogate institutions of irrational authority, stir up discontent by exposing the contradictions and antagonisms in society, government, religion, etc., and finally offer an alternative vision of being in the world as opposed to the status quo, it is clear that Khomeini molded himself, either by design or by nature, to the prophetic models that preceded him. The prophetic role to undermine and transform or abolish systems and structures of corruption and domination was fulfilled in Khomeini's uncompromising attacks of the Shah and his regime. Just as Muhammad had led a movement to end the age of Jahaliyya (ignorance) during his time and offered an alternative vision of the future, likewise Khomeini would interpret his own actions and the actions of his fellow revolutionaries as being much the same; a righteous attack against ignorance and domination in order to establish an alternative order based on the principles of the Qur'an. Furthermore,

Khomeini's revolutionary stance against the Westernization of Iran through the so-called "White Revolution", and the cultural and political chaos that flowed from that policy, was domesticated by Khomeini's attempt to bring political, social, and religious order back to Iran. Khomeini, in the eyes of the Iranian people, was a spearhead that would kill the chaos of the Shah.

### **Modernization Without Westernization?**

There is a certain dialectic of the Iranian revolution that many scholars seem to misdefine. Khomeini was not against technological modernization. The case is quite the opposite; he believed those clerics who were to be "reactionaries." He felt that Iran had to modernize, but not at the expense of the Iranian Shi'a identity. He was fervently against "cultural modernization" - i.e. westernization of Iran - and even called the cultural infatuation with the West "westoxication." However, part of Khomeini's revolution was to reestablish an Iranian "identity" based in Shi'a Islam, not Iranian nationalism based in blood and soil, while absorbing parts of modernity that could be used without conflicting with that Shi'a identity. Khomeini tried to bring Iran into the modern world organically, while at the same time saving and preserving cultural identity from the Shah's culturally suicidal plan. This strategy preserved enough of the Shah's modernization program so that the country would not fall into a new dark age, while maintaining

the traditional and historical Shi'a religious identity. Through his *determinate negation* of modernity, preserving technology while rejecting Western cultural penetration, Khomeini's attack on the Shah was meant to end cultural chaos while still modernizing Iran, albeit promoting a modernization that is organic, not forced upon Iranians from the West or from the monarchy.<sup>7</sup>

Some Western scholars - i.e. Jurgen Habermas - would argue that the *instrumental rationality* of the modern technological world would undermine the *communicative rationality* of the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition, citing the precedent of Christianity in Europe. However, Khomeini agreed with the radical sociologist 'Ali Shari'ati's thesis that secularization brought progress to Europe, because of the historical tyrannical rule of the church (presumably Catholic). But Islam was not Christianity, and regardless of all their faults, the Shi'a clergy never acted in a tyrannical way, partly because they had never held power, and partly because the Islamic tradition did not have a deep seated antagonism towards science and technological progress as did Christianity. In Western history, science undermined the legitimacy of religious rule because it negated the sacred text that legitimated that rule. Once weakened, the Western worldview became increasingly secular, and was devoured by *instrumental rationality*. In the East, including Iran,

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<sup>7</sup>Iran was surrounded by well equipped militaries such as Iraq, Turkey, and Israel, and Khomeini could not have even attempted to disassemble the Iranian military modernization program without subjecting Iran to threats from neighboring countries, let alone a possible counter-revolution by the U.S. Although Khomeini did not agree with the Shah's extensive purchasing of U.S. military goods, which he claimed made Iran most dependent on the West, he was soon using those weapons in the Iran - Iraq war from 1980 -1988.

*instrumental rationality* was neglected for a strong *communicative rationality*.

Hence technological progress was slow but families, communities, and their sense of solidarity remained intact. Thus Khomeini and other “modernizers” of Iran did not fear the influence of technology, but fervently rejected the politics behind the Shah’s cultural modernization.

### **Khomeini’s Theory - Praxis Dialectic**

As demonstrated before, a major aspect of Fromm’s notion of the prophet, and my theory of prophetic charisma, is the *theory - praxis dialectic*.<sup>8</sup> In order for Khomeini to fit the mold of the prophetic, he would have to demonstrate that his actions are congruent with his theory. Does Khomeini practice what he preaches? Is he a leader who leads by example, fulfilling his own pronouncements, or does he stop at the act of speaking and criticizing and leaves the doing to subordinates?

According to Fromm, the man whose words are not followed by deeds cannot be prophetic, because the very nature of the prophetic is rooted in the consistency of theory and praxis. When we look into the political biography of Khomeini, we see an individual who placed himself at the center of a struggle, not only offering up a critique of the regime, but physically paying the price for that critique. For example, after Khomeini made a speech in June of 1963, likening the

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<sup>8</sup> Fromm, On Disobedience 42.



Shah to Yazid, that sparked the *Qiyam-i Khordad* uprising, Khomeini spent nineteen days in jail and another nine months under house arrest for his actions.<sup>9</sup> Following his confinement, he dispelled all myths that he compromised with the Shah, vowing to continue to struggle against him.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, these continued attacks led to Khomeini's exile from Iran that lasted over a decade. At all times Khomeini was prepared to face death. Although SAVAK, the deeply feared secret police, always monitored his movements and speeches and frequently killed political opponents of the regime, including thousands of his supporters, Khomeini stayed resolved to speak truth to power prophetically. Khomeini remained undaunted by the Shah's overwhelming forces, and like the Prophet Muhammad, taught that death in the defense of religion is not only honorable, but to be welcomed. Speaking to a delegation of customs officials in March of 1979, he said: "My dear brothers! Do not abandon this secret of your success, do not abandon orientation to God, to Islam. For the Muslim, for the believer, martyrdom is a source of happiness. Our young men regard martyrdom as a blessing, and this, too, is a secret of our success."<sup>11</sup> Khomeini faced death at every moment yet did not fear it. He often even taunted his enemies to make a martyr out of him, saying: "I say this quite clearly; if they wish, let the agents of Israel come put an end to my life."<sup>12</sup> However, the Shah feared making Khomeini into a

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<sup>9</sup> Moin, p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> Algar, *Islam and Revolution* 17.

<sup>11</sup> Algar, *Roots of Revolution* 161.

<sup>12</sup> Algar, *Islam and Revolution* 176.

martyr. During a conversation with Ayatollah Kamalvand in 1963, the Shah said; “I assure you that we are not going to kill Khomeini and turn him into a martyr. We are going to compromise and discredit him among the people.”<sup>13</sup> Clearly, the Shah’s attempts to discredit him failed as well and the Ayatollah remained uncompromising. Unlike the other clerics, who stopped only at criticism of the regime and often compromised with it, Khomeini was determined to end the reign of the Shah, and would not ask others to do what he was not willing to do himself. This aspect places him well within Fromm’s category of prophet.

Furthermore, Khomeini interpreted the suffering and martyrdom of the young revolutionaries to be in the service of Prophet Muhammad and Imam al-Hussein. On April 3rd, 1963, at a fortieth day commemoration of the Martyrs of Qum, Khomeini said,

Indeed, we must offer our condolences to the Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) and the Imam of the Age (may God hasten his renewed manifestation), for it is for the sake of those great ones that we have endured these blows and lost our young men. Our crime was defending the laws of Islam and the independence of Iran. It is because of our defense of Islam that we have been humiliated and brought to expect imprisonment, torture, and execution.<sup>14</sup>

The language of Khomeini’s speech betrays his mindset. As you can see, he speaks in terms of the collective. He says “*We* have endured these blows, and lost *our* young men”, “*Our* Crime was defending the laws of Islam..”, “It is because of

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<sup>13</sup> Moin, p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Algar, Islam and Revolution 174.

*our* defense of Islam that *we* have been humiliated...” Through his rhetoric, Khomeini is able to draw the listener close to the leader, demonstrating to them that their struggle is against the common enemy, and that the leadership of Khomeini will not, like so much of the clergy, simply stop at words. Although this semantic strategy has been a Machiavellian trick used by tyrants and despots for ages, Khomeini’s story corresponds to his words. Khomeini did lose his son Mustapha to the struggle, he was imprisoned by the Shah, he was exiled, and he was humiliated in Turkey when they stripped him of his clerical garb. Consequently, Khomeini is perceived as the “suffering charismatic” much like the suffering of Muhammad, ‘Ali, and Hussein; his suffering is done *fi sabilillah* (for the sake of Allah); like Hussein, he is a “defender of Islam” treated shamefully by a tyrannical despot.<sup>15</sup> His personal suffering does not go unnoticed by the people, especially when they compare his plight to the relative ease of the quietist clerics. In fact, when Khomeini was jailed, accused of being a agent of imperialism, or when his son mysteriously died, all these events served as a catalyst for demonstrations and protests against the regime. His prophetic action and his suffering was in stark contrast to the priestly others’ inaction, and signaled his sincerity to engage himself totally in the struggle against the Shah. Furthermore, the special attention the Shah gave to Khomeini only highlighted Khomeini’s leadership of the revolution. By recognizing Khomeini as a real threat, the Shah

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<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that Khomeini and Hussein’s image were used as symbols of resistance to the Shah. It was not uncommon to see the images of these two men side by side in the massive street demonstrations in Iran.

legitimated Khomeini's leadership and helped to bolster his profile and therefore his following. This strategic blunder on the part of the Shah highlighted the difference between the prophetic Khomeini and the priestly clerics, who were quickly falling out of popularity with those who were joining the revolution. It also sidelined other moderate middle-class opposition movements who were more interested in reforming the monarchy than overthrowing it.<sup>16</sup>

### **Khomeini and the Priest**

If we are going to say that Khomeini embodies the prophetic, based on the model of the Prophet and his martyred family, then we have to examine comparatively the notion of the Priest according to Weber and Fromm. At first glance it would be easy to assume that Khomeini would fall into the category of a priest because, as Weber states, the priest claims authority "by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition."<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the prophet's claim is "based on personal revelation and charisma."<sup>18</sup> Setting aside the issue of authority, which I will examine later, it is clear that Khomeini never claimed to have a special designation from the divine that would give him the authority of a prophet. On the other hand, although his political activism was rejected by many senior clerics, his service to the sacred tradition through his scholarship, teaching, and religious leadership was

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<sup>16</sup> DeFronzo, p. 267.

<sup>17</sup> Weber, Sociology of Religion 440.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 440.

impeccable. Based solely on Weber's concepts, we are left with only the possibility that he was a "priest" in service to the Shi'a tradition, yet functioned, through his political speech and actions, to fill the model of the prophet, thus being prophetic. Therefore, he could be considered a "prophetic priest." This would make Khomeini the exception in Weber's analysis. In distinguishing between the prophet and priest, Weber says; "it is no accident that almost no prophets have emerged from the priestly class."<sup>19</sup> His use of the term *almost* indicates that Weber is open to the possibility that a priest could become a prophetic renegade, a traitor to his class. Once this is the case, the prophetic priest assumes the role of the prophet, and although his origins are in the priesthood, and his authority is still to some extent based there, his role as a prophetic leader eclipses his traditional role as a priest. Much like the liberation theologians of South and Central America who rejected the neutrality of the church, and its collusion with state power, in order to side with the victims of that oppressive situation, Khomeini likewise rejected the clerics' historical quietism and / or melancholy acceptance of the tyrannical regime, to lead a movement that would benefit the victims of the regime. The priest turned prophetic.

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<sup>19</sup> Weber , p. 440.

## **Khomeini's Attempt to Bring the Prophet to the Priests**

In his conversation with other clerics, Khomeini's goal was often to radicalize them and to instill the prophetic into their priestly religious attitudes. He did not in any case wish to destroy and or abolish the clerics, who were his own power-base. What he did wish to do was to instill the prophetic Hussein model into the clergy that was so heavily dominated by the Hasan model of political quietism. In short, Khomeini tried to instill the prophet into the priest.<sup>20</sup> In a friendly debate with the Iraqi Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim, Khomeini skillfully urged the quietist scholar to follow the prophetic model of Hussein. He said;

*Khomeini:* "How could it [a revolution] not achieve results? Did not the uprising of Hossein serve history? Are we not benefiting greatly from his uprising?"

*Hakim:* "What do they have to say about Imam Hassan? He did not stage an uprising!"

*Khomeini:* "If Imam Hassan had as many followers as you have he would have led an uprising. He initially stood up [ for his religion] but failed because his followers had sold themselves out to the enemy. But you have followers in all Islamic countries."

*Hakim:* "I do not see anybody who would follow us if we took action."

*Khomeini:* "You order an uprising and I will be the first to follow you."<sup>21</sup>

Soon after this discussion, Grand Ayatollah Hakim died and sent the leading clerics into a frenzy over his replacement. The Shah strategically sent encouraging telegrams to the apolitical conservative clerics Shari'atmadari and

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<sup>20</sup> Very few of the senior clerics, who had a lot to loose if they were too critical of the Shah, joined Khomeini in his open rebellion. However, the younger generation of clerics, many of whom where trained by Khomeini and or where influenced by the political anti-imperialism left, were more susceptible to Khomeini's appeals.

<sup>21</sup> Moin, p. 143.

Khonsari in an attempt to dissuade other from recognizing the militant Khomeini as Hakim's successor, thereby preserving the Hassan model in the higher echelons of clerical authority.<sup>22</sup> During this period, Khomeini made multiple speeches on the need to establish an Islamic state in Iran, pressing his audience to understand that it is a "religious duty" to bring about such a state.<sup>23</sup> Anticipating attacks from the conservative clerics for his mixing politics and religion, Khomeini appealed to the moderate clergy saying,

Whenever a man has risen to prominence they have killed, imprisoned or exiled him, and have tried to accuse him of being political. *This mollah is political. The Prophet was a political person.* This evil propaganda [the need for the clergy to remain outside politics] was spread by the agents of imperialism to cause you to shun politics, to prevent you from intervening in the affairs of society, and struggling against treacherous governments and their anti- nationalistic and anti-Islamic policies. They want to do whatever they please without anybody trying to stop them.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear from this speech that Khomeini associated the Prophet with politics. By stating that the Prophet was political, and that he is also political, Khomeini is attempting to prove to his audience that political opposition to the Shah is grounded in the prophetic model: that privatizing religion, keeping it out of politics, not only castrates its prophetic potential; it is a strategy of those who fear the power of Islam and is contrary to the *sunnah* of Muhammad. Speaking in Najaf, just forty days after the massacre of protesters in Qum on January 8, 1978,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 154. Italics are mine.

Khomeini responded to the notion of the separation of religion and politics, saying,

The imperialists know full well how active the religious scholars are, and what an activist and militant religion Islam is. So they drew up a plan to bring the religious scholars into disrepute, and for several centuries propagated the notion that religion must be separated from politics. Some of our *akhunds* [religious authority] came to believe it and began asking, 'What business do we have with politics?' The posing of this question means the abandonment of Islam; it means burying Islam in our cells in the *madrasa*! It means burying Islam in our books! The imperialists dearly wish that religion could be separated from politics, and our politicians, in turn, have filled people's mouths with these words, so that some of us have come to believe them and ask, 'What business do we have with politics? Leave politics to those whose business it is, and if they slap us in the face, let us turn the other cheek!'"<sup>25</sup>

In no way did Khomeini believe in the separation of religion and politics. For him, the uncompromising prophetic stance of the Islamic tradition was the only true and authentic form of resistance to a tyranny - a tyranny that was attempting to destroy Iran, Islam, and the Muslim world. He did not want to follow the Western bourgeoisie model of restricting religion to private life, only to call upon it in order to legitimate policies and / or actions when going through a crisis of legitimacy.<sup>26</sup> This was the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie enlightenment and of secular democracies abroad. More importantly, if Islam was a "complete and total way of life", and not just an intellectual philosophy, then it was not even possible to compartmentalize politics and religion. Because the Prophet's life is taken as a "normative" example of how a Muslim should live, and because he himself did not

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<sup>25</sup> Algar, Religion and Revolution 219. *Akhunds* was Khomeini's sarcastic term for religious "nit-pickers."

<sup>26</sup> In the Critical Theory of Religion developed by Dr. Rudolf Siebert, this phenomenon is called the "functionalization of religion", and serves to legitimate otherwise illegitimate policies and actions.



separate religion from politics, then it was not feasible for those who are supposed to represent that tradition (sunnah) i.e. the clerics, to do otherwise.

Of those “priestly” clerics who represented the status quo, who had compromised with the Shah and joined ranks with him, Khomeini defiantly says,

God knows what misfortunes Islam has suffered from its inception down to the present day at the hands of these evil ulema [scholars]. Our youth must strip them of turbans. I am not saying they should be killed; they do not deserve to be killed. But take off their turbans! They do not need to be beaten much; just remove their turbans.<sup>27</sup>

Khomeini did not want clerics to be attacked in the streets; this would bring about accusations that he was an “agent of imperialism” by the Shah or collaborating clerics. Furthermore, Khomeini believed that the Shah would be delighted to see clerics turn on themselves and hence diminish the power of the clergy through internal divisions.<sup>28</sup> However, he did believe that clerics who compromise Islamic principles by submitting to or working with illegitimate and tyrannical regime should be stripped of their clerical rank; hence the removal of the turbans.

Although he hadn’t given up hope on the majority of the ulema, Khomeini did vehemently attack some conservative “priestly” clerics, including Iraqi Ayatollah Kho’i. Kho’i was a very influential and authoritative scholar who had an immense following in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. Having rejected Khomeini’s political activism, Kho’i criticized what he believed were the inconsistencies and

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<sup>27</sup> Moin., p. 156.

<sup>28</sup> As previously mentioned, Khomeini was attacked as a “agent of imperialism” in the article “Black and Red Imperialism”, published by the “semi-offical” newspaper *Illila’at* in 1978. Algar, Brief Biography. 5.7

flaws of Khomeini's philosophy of Islamic governance, *velayat-i faqih* (Rule of the Jurist).<sup>29</sup> Even as Khomeini was actively resisting the Shah in December of 1978, the Ayatollah Kho'i was entertaining visits from the Empress Farah and Saddam Hussein. Ever the Shah's friend, Ayatollah Kho'i gave the Empress a ring as a gift for the Shah. The inscription read "God's power is superior to theirs'."<sup>30</sup> The Ba'athist dictator Saddam Hussein and the Empress were actively courting the Ayatollah Kho'i support against Khomeini and the growing rebellion.

To no one's surprise, Khomeini held a deep dislike for the conservative, apolitical Kho'i. Khomeini resented the ties between the monarchy and the cleric, who was a leading voice against the revolution because of his immense influence. This priestly cleric, whose authority was based in the same traditional scholarship and institutions of learning as Khomeini's, was a potent alternative to Khomeini's views, and therefore a threat to the movement. If he had gained enough influence he could have been the water that doused Khomeini's prophetic fire. After Kho'i called Khomeini's followers "donkeys" for being killed by SAVAK machine guns, Khomeini responded,

While our young people were killed in the streets he sent a ring for the health of Muhammad Reza (the Shah). These people, as Imam Ali himself said, devote their entire attention, like animals, to their fodder, their whole life is spent filling their stomachs.<sup>31</sup>

No compromise could be made with such priestly scholars; after it was established

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<sup>29</sup> Moin, p. 158.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 158 - 159.

that they would not defect to Khomeini viewpoint, he no longer tried to convert them. On the issue of Kho'i quietism, I disagree with some scholars who would say that Kho'i's position was apolitical. What he did not do was engage in oppositional politics - he did politically choose sides, and he sided with the monarchy. That in and of itself was a political act. Furthermore, Heinz Halm, in his discussion on traditional Shi'a quietism, makes it clear that quietest clerics did intervene in current events on occasion if clerical interests were at stake, such as the tobacco concessions and land reforms of the previous Shah. Therefore it would not have been a total break from tradition to intervene in the current ongoing struggle.<sup>32</sup> In Khomeini's view, the situation in Iran was now far more detrimental to the interests of the clerics than ever before, and thus warranted a break in the quietist position. However, Ayatollah Kho'i was not persuaded and continued to remain loyal to the Shah; and to be a political enemy to Khomeini.

The Ayatollah also had no tolerance for clerics who claimed it was the responsibility of the Twelfth Imam to set things right. He said, "now we find one of the 'ulama ... expressing himself as follows: 'If the Imam of the Age [Twelfth Imam]...thinks it necessary, he will come, I cannot claim to be more concerned for Islam than he is; so if the Imam sees what is happening, let him come himself to remedy our affairs! Why should I do anything?'"<sup>33</sup> In an attack on such a cowardly and priestly position, Khomeini responded, "that is the logic of people

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<sup>32</sup> Halm, p. 132.

<sup>33</sup> Algar, Religion and Revolution 220.

who want to avoid responsibility... they have not read the Qur'an...because such traditions are contrary to the custom of the prophets."<sup>34</sup> Khomeini was not prepared to wait until the return of the Imam in order to end the tyranny of the Shah. Desires for an eschatological salvation was not going to change the situation in Iran. This would have to be done by very earthly means. Furthermore, Khomeini believed the Mahdi would only reappear when Muslims through off the shackles of mental and cultural colonialism and returned to Islam, producing a just society and exporting revolution abroad.<sup>35</sup>

Despite his inability to attract many important senior clerics to his mission, Khomeini continued to try to woo others to his prophetic stance against the Shah. Khomeini believed that the prophetic model demanded prophetic action against an illegitimate and irrational authority, much like 'Ali and Hussein's battle with the Umayyads. The goal of other clerics was self preservation, by maintaining and preserving the status quo through staying out of politics and / or compromising with the regime. For Khomeini, those who follow the Prophet and Imam Hussein are people of prophetic action, while those who follow the priestly model dedicate their lives to "filling their stomachs."

Khomeini was often perturbed by those apolitical clerics that would question his motives by citing the Qur'anic verse that reads: "obey God, the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 220.

<sup>35</sup> Abrahamian, Khomeinism 32.

Prophet, and those who have authority over you.”<sup>36</sup> In refuting their exegesis, Khomeini makes a clear distinction between those who have authority and those who have power. He said, “such question[s] involved a clear denial of the Qur’an”, because Pharaoh had kingship, but Allah sent Moses to oppose him. Nimrod had kingship, but Abraham opposed him. Even Mu’awiyah was a “holder of authority”, and the “Commander of the Faithful”, yet Imam Hassan and later Imam Hussein both opposed his “authority.”<sup>37</sup> For Khomeini, those who had authority were not those who simply held power, but were the “shadow of God.” He explained that the

Islamic ruler is the shadow of God, but what is meant by shadow is something that has no motion of itself. Your shadow does not move by itself; it moves only when you move. Islam recognizes a person as the “shadow of God” who abandons all individual volition in the sense that he acts only in accordance with the ordinance of Islam, so that his motion is dependent, not independent.

For Khomeini, an unjust man, a tyrant, an exploiter and an oppressor can all have power; but since none of them can claim to be the “shadow of God” because of their personal submission to the will of the divine, they will never have authority over believers.<sup>38</sup> Therefore the prophetic model of Islam, most explicitly represented by the martyrdom of Hussein, does not recognize simple power as

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<sup>36</sup> Qur’an, 4:59. The entire verse says, “O believers, obey Allah and obey the Prophet, and those who have authority over you. If you differ in matters among yourselves, refer the matter to Allah and his Prophet, If you believe in Allah and Judgment Day: it is best for you and your final destination.” My translation.

<sup>37</sup> Algar, Religion and Revolution 225.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

authority, and hence it is not a contradiction to Qur'anic principles to oppose such power. He goes on to say that

we constantly read in the Qur'an that the Pharaoh acted in a certain way and Moses in another way, but we don't think about why the Qur'an tells us all this. It tells us this so that we may act like Moses toward the Pharaoh of our age; let us pick up our staffs and oppose this vile Shah.<sup>39</sup>

For those priestly clerics, who espouse the "capitulation" point of view, and do not want to oppose the "Pharaoh of our age", Khomeini says they "have not read the Qur'an properly and have not understood the logic of the Qur'an."<sup>40</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In summary, Khomeini's prophetic charisma was based on six characteristics. 1) He was perceived to be extraordinary with "exceptional powers or qualities" not accessible to the masses. 2) He stood outside of the prevalent religious and secular institutions of power and uncompromisingly spoke truth and demanded change. 3) He offered an alternative vision for the future and, although there were setbacks, he attained stated goals. 4) He demonstrated congruency in the theory - praxis dialectic, often in contrast to "priestly" clerics. 5) He was seen as a "suffering charismatic" who experienced the same pain and humiliation as the masses. And lastly, 6) he was perceived to be, as Hamid Algar says, "a complete embodiment of the human ideal of Islam" - through words and actions, fulfilling

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

the model of prophetic behavior furnished by the examples of Muhammad, 'Ali, and Hussein, including the willingness to become a martyr.

## CHAPTER V

### CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY IN THE SHI'A TRADITION: ALLAH, MUHAMMAD, 'ALI, TWELVE IMAMS, AND THE ULAMA

Unlike many charismatic religious figures throughout history, whose authority was based solely on their *personal* relationship to the divine, this was not the case for the Ayatollah Khomeini. Furthermore, outside of Prophet Muhammad, it is problematic in the Islamic tradition to maintain the idea of any kind of authority being based solely on a *direct* and *personal* relationship to the divine. As we will see with the Ayatollah, the sources of charismatic authority are much more complicated.

In order to understand the complex nature of Islamic authority, we must begin with the Prophet Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah of 7th cent. Arabia, to whom all Islamic authority traces back. The Prophet did not have authority over his community due to his *Karamah* (charisma), or "divine gifts."<sup>1</sup> *Karamah* as a term is deficient in explaining how and why Muhammad would have political and religious authority over his followers, and could consequently demand their obedience. Within the Islamic tradition, any concept that attempts to explain Muhammad's charismatic authority must be unique to him. It must express the peculiar relationship between Muhammad and Allah. If this concept can be applied

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<sup>1</sup> The following analysis is based on the work of Hamid Dabashi in his Authority in Islam (New Brunswick U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1989) pp. 33 - 45.



to others, such as the 'Ulama, Sufis, or Shaykhs, than it does not adequately describe Muhammad's unique and personal charismatic authority. If it is not unique to the Prophet, than it cannot explain why, within the Islamic tradition, his peculiar authority is binding on all Muslims while other Muslims' charismatic authority is not. Weber says that

the "natural" leaders in moments of distress...[are] the bearers of specific gifts of the body and mind that were considered "supernatural" (in the sense that not everybody could have access to them.)<sup>2</sup>

In the Islamic tradition, all Muslims are open to "divine gifts" (*karamah*) because Allah is active in history and takes an active role in the lives of individuals. Furthermore, individuals who show their dedication to the Islamic path are the recipients of divine favor and gifts. These gifts can range eloquence of speech to *fana'* (annihilation) in Allah for mystics, from beauty in Qur'an recitation to the cunning logic and legal creativity of a jurist. However, receiving divine gifts does not make the receiver's personal religious authority binding on other Muslims. For example, because a Sufi has obtained a certain level of "reality" (*haqiqa*), does not mean he can bind the whole of the Muslim *ummah* (community) to his "enlightened" interpretation of Islam. His "gifts" do not come with the authority to do such a thing - his "gifts" are personal and non-binding on others. Therefore, this term is inadequate in describing Muhammad's authority because, despite the

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<sup>2</sup> Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. ed. by Guenther Roth and Clause Wittich. 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). pg 1111 - 1112. Cited in Dabashi, p. 36.

fact that Muhammad received *karamah*, it is open to all Muslims. Thus Weber's notion that "not everybody could have access to them" do not apply to the term *karamah*/charisma in the Islamic context.

Seeing the deficiency of the term *karamah*, scholars have proposed another term to explain Muhammad's charismatic authority - *wilayah*.<sup>3</sup> *Wilayah* is often translated as "authority" or "protection." It comes from the tripartite Arabic root of "WLY" which generally implies "to be in charge," "manage," "run," "administer," "govern," or "rule."<sup>4</sup> Another variant form of the "WLY" is "wali" - friend, or "awilyah - friend of God (saints)." In various places, the Qur'an states that Allah is the friend of believers as Shaytan is the friend of disbelievers. The biggest problem with this term is that 1) it lacks any reference to "charisma", 2) it does not address the issue of legal use of force to establish charismatic authority, 3) it is not specific to Muhammad.<sup>5</sup> Since protection and friendship is a mode of relationship between humanity and God, it does not express any specific or unique relationship. Therefore personal "charismatic authority", based on a special relationship, cannot apply. Secondly, any notion of the legitimate use of force to establish charismatic authority is absent in the term. In none of its Qur'anic forms does *wilayah* entitle the bearer to use violence to enforce his authority.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dabashi, p. 38. Dabashi himself is indebted to the Iranian sociology scholar Isma'il Nuri 'Ala and his book *Jami'ah Shinasi-i Siyasi-i Tashayyu'-i Ithna 'Ashari (The Political Sociology of the Twelve-Imami Shi'ism)*. Tehran: Quqnus Publications, 1978.

<sup>4</sup> Dabashi, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> Dabashi, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Dabashi, p. 40.

Furthermore, charismatic authority is never implemented by force, violence, or terror. Thirdly, Muhammad does not have a monopoly on the title *wali Allah* (friend of God). In the Qur'anic sense, all those who submit to Allah and follow the Prophet are described as *wali Allah*, and Islamic saints, including scholars and Sufis, have been traditionally categorized as *awaliya Allah*, or "Friends of God."

Because the concepts *karamah* and *waliyah* can not in and of themselves account for Muhammad's unique "charismatic authority," five criteria can be established in order to point us in the direction of a proper term. 1) The term must directly convey the idea of "authority"; 2) it must identify the nature of this authority as "charismatic," that is, as a "personal gift" received from the source of legitimacy; 3) it must entitle the recipient of the "charisma," Muhammad, to use physical force in order to establish his authority; 4) it must be specific to Muhammad, so that no one else within the Islamic context can claim a similar "charismatic authority"; and, finally, 5) it must be a clear and distinct term, immune to oscillating interpretations and readings [like the term *wilayah*].<sup>7</sup>

The most distinctive quality of Muhammad's relationship to the divine was his given status of prophethood or messengership (*risalah*). Although there are many instances in the Qur'an where the term *risalah* or other variations of the term are employed, the most important for our study is the Qur'anic statement found in Sura VII: 158:

"Say [O Muhammad]: O mankind! I am sent to all, as the messenger of

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<sup>7</sup> Dabashi, p. 42.

Allah (*rasul Allah*), to whom belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth; there is no god but Allah; the giver of life and death. Believe in Allah and his messenger (*rasuluhu*), the illiterate (*ummi*) Prophet (*rasul*), and those who believe in Allah and his message, follow him so you may be guided.<sup>8</sup>

According to Dabashi, all five criteria are addressed in this one verse. Because Allah is the sovereign of the heavens and earth, all authority belongs with him. Furthermore, because Allah sends (*'arsala*) Muhammad out as a Prophet, Muhammad is the carrier of divine authority. Salvation thus comes from submission to the will of Allah as expressed through the dictates and actions of Muhammad. Muhammad's authority is legitimated because it represents the will of the ultimate sovereign of the universe. Thus it is necessary for those who recognize the sovereignty of Allah to recognize the divine messengership of Muhammad and submit to his leadership. Because he is the carrier of Allah's authority, his call for the use of force is legitimate. Furthermore, he is perceived charismatic by way of his personal status as *rasul*. Dabashi says, through Muhammad, the authority of Allah is sought to be established on earth, and through Allah the authority of Muhammad is legitimated. Consequently, his unique and personal position as *rasul Allah*, indicates the charismatic authority that Muhammad maintains as the divinely guided messenger - the bearer of God's will. This charismatic authority is distinctive to Muslims and not

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<sup>8</sup> my translation.

open to all Muslims.<sup>9</sup>

In the Islamic tradition, Muhammad is the last and final prophet - the seal of the prophets. No new prophet will come after him, because he has delivered the “perfected” religion of Islam to all of humanity. Unlike “national prophets” who were sent only for their given community, Muslims believe that Muhammad’s message, and therefore the message of Allah, is universal: i.e. Muhammad is seen as an “international prophet.” Therefore the message of the Qur’an is universal and applicable to the human condition regardless of time, race, geography, language, etc. Although the status of *rasul Allah* ends with Muhammad, in the Shi’a tradition Muhammad’s charismatic authority continues and is vested in the Twelve Imams.

Throughout history, the death of a charismatic leader has proved to be a difficult issue for followers. The early Islamic community went through a “crisis of leadership” episode just after the death of Muhammad in 632 CE. For the majority of Muslims, the most legitimate way to find a leader’s through election. Thus the *Sunni* majority elected Abu Bakr al-Sadiq to be the first *Caliph* (successor) to Muhammad.<sup>10</sup> For the first four Caliphs, authority came through election and through embodiment of the *sunnah* (Muhammad’s *modus operandi*). However, this was not the case for the Shi’a, those who supported ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib,

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<sup>9</sup> Dabashi, pp. 43 - 45.

<sup>10</sup> According to Islamic history, Abu Bakr was Muhammad closest companion, one of the first converts to Islam, a military general, and Muhammad’s father-in-law through Muhammad’s marriage to ‘Aisha.

Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law.<sup>11</sup> They believed that Muhammad had designated 'Ali to be his successor, and thus he was appointed to "general guardianship" (*walayāt-i 'ammah*) of the community. Weber says, "designation on the part of the original charismatic leader of his own successor and his recognition of the part of the followers...in this case legitimacy is *acquired* through the act of designation."<sup>12</sup> Leaving aside for the moment the opposition to 'Ali as Muhammad's successor, let us focus on the notion of "legitimacy through designation." Because Muhammad clearly designates 'Ali, according to the Shi'a, 'Ali is henceforth the carrier of Muhammad's prophetic authority. However, since 'Ali was not given that authority directly by Allah, he is not considered a *rasul*. He is given "prophetic authority", not Muhammad's personal "charismatic authority." Charismatic authority, as was described above, can only come *directly* from the source of all authority i.e. Allah, and that direct access is manifested into a scripture - the Qur'an. What Muhammad passed to 'Ali was the authority of his charisma, not his personal charisma, or the divine gift of messengership. Consequently, 'Ali's authority was not equal to Muhammad's, because he did not receive a divine revelation. For the Shi'a, the word Imam, which will play an important part of the Shi'a tradition, meant the Prophet's successor in worldly and other-worldly affairs. Thus, successor to the Prophet means perpetuation of

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<sup>11</sup> The term *Shi'a* come from *Shi'at al-'Ali* or the "Party of Ali." 'Ali himself was partially raised by Muhammad when Muhammad was living with his uncle Abu Talib the father of 'Ali. 'Ali was also a military general and was a close companion to Muhammad. I will refrain from using the westernized term *Shi'ite* when referring to the *Shi'a* community.

<sup>12</sup> Weber, 1978, p. 247.

charismatic authority.<sup>13</sup> Thus, 'Ali acquired his authority through his designation as successor by Muhammad. Muhammad received his charismatic authority from being "called" to prophethood by Allah, the ultimate source of authority. This leaves the question: How did the descendants of 'Ali acquire their authority?

For the question of succession, Weber formulates the idea of "hereditary charisma," which plays an interesting part in the story of 'Ali's children and descendants. Weber says,

the conception that charisma is a quality transmitted by heredity; thus that it is participated in by the kinsmen of its bearer, particularly by his closest relatives. This is the case of hereditary charisma...In the case of hereditary charisma, recognition is no longer paid to the charismatic qualities of the individual, but to the legitimacy of the position he has acquired by hereditary succession. This may lead in the direction of either traditionalization or legalization. The concept of divine right is fundamentally altered and now comes to mean authority by virtue of a personal right which is not dependent on the recognition of those subject to authority. Personal charisma may be totally absent.<sup>14</sup>

According to Weber's theory, the personal charisma of Hasan and Hussein, the sons of 'Ali and grandsons of Muhammad, is secondary to the fact that their legitimacy is based on heredity. Their authority, based in their biology, becomes more important than the issue of personal charisma. They were simply born into legitimacy; they did not have to acquire it like 'Ali, nor were they called to it like Muhammad. Therefore, the "charismatic qualities of the individual" mattered less than who their father is. Although in the Shi'a tradition both Hasan and Hussein were "gifted" with certain charismatic qualities, for Weber, those qualities were

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<sup>13</sup> Dabashi, p. 101.

<sup>14</sup> Weber, 1978, p. 248. As quoted in Dabashi, p. 102.

not necessarily what legitimated their rule - it was the fact that their legitimacy came from the blood of 'Ali, whose own authority was bestowed on him from Muhammad. Indeed, for the Shi'a, being the only grandchildren of the Prophet is what made Hasan and Hussein legitimate leaders of the Islamic community.

Although Muhammad was not survived by a son, 'Ali from the moment of his birth to the death of the Prophet was Muhammad's closest male kin. He was also raised by the Prophet after the death of Abu Talib ('Ali's father) and he later married the Prophet's daughter Fatimah, thus producing Muhammad's only grandchildren Hasan and Hussein. Only second to Khadijah (Muhammad's first wife) did 'Ali, as a small boy, accept Muhammad's prophetic call to *tawhid* (oneness of God). It was 'Ali who risked his own life by disguising himself as Muhammad when the Meccans were attempting to assassinate the Prophet. The only other male of the first Muslims who could even be considered as comparatively close to Muhammad was Abu Bakr, Muhammad's best friend, who subsequently was elected the first Caliph by the Sunni majority.<sup>15</sup> However, for the Shi'a, 'Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Hussein comprise the *ahl al-bayt* (people of the house), or the holy family of the Prophet. Their legitimacy stemmed from their proximity to the Prophet and to the references about them in the Qur'an (Surah 33, ayat 33).

The transfer of authority from 'Ali to his children began the Shi'a tradition

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<sup>15</sup> There is a Shi'a tradition that when the Muslims elected Abu Bakr, 'Ali was busy preparing Muhammad's body for funeral and therefore missed the opportunity to publicly argue his claim to leadership.



of hereditary charismatic authority. From this point on, the descendents of Muhammad through 'Ali, up to the twelfth Imam benefited from being born into legitimacy. On top of this "natural" legitimacy from birth came the notion that all subsequent Imams were endowed with *'ismah* (infallibility) and the exclusive knowledge of the hidden meanings of the Qur'an.<sup>16</sup> This would have continued the belief that salvation comes from submission to the Imams because they are the sole recipients of divine knowledge and guidance. Concretely, this is a perpetuation of Muhammad's charismatic authority through his male descendents.

To summarize, the twelve Imams of the Shi'a tradition, including Hasan and Hussein, received their charismatic authority on the basis of the them being *born* a descendent of Muhammad through 'Ali and Fatimah. 'Ali received his charismatic authority from being *designated* the successor (caliph) to the Prophet by the Prophet himself. Muhammad received his charismatic authority from being *called* into prophethood or messengership (*risalah*) by Allah. And Allah is the ultimate source of all authority and thus the giver of charismatic authority. Through this *silsilah* (lit. "chain", transmission of authority), the charismatic authority originally given by Allah to Muhammad is sustained and perpetuated though slightly transformed. Because none after Muhammad were given charismatic authority *directly* from Allah and thus didn't receive revelation, none were considered Prophets - yet they were the divinely designated carriers of prophetic authority and therefore legitimated through this chain that begins with

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<sup>16</sup> Dabashi, p. 105.

Muhammad's original call to prophethood.

After the "occultation" (*ghayba*) of the twelfth Imam, authority in political and religious matters rested in the hands of the Shi'a 'Ulama. They were not the recipients of direct authority given by Allah, but nonetheless represented the prophetic authority of the Imams as it is embodied in the Shi'a religious tradition. Because the last Imam had to flee and go into occultation, the 'Ulama were to lead the Shi'a community. From the death of the twelfth Imam to the present, the 'Ulama have served as guardians of traditional religious learning and devotion that has been the whole basis for social and political action.<sup>17</sup> However, unlike the Prophet, 'Ali, and twelve Imams, the Shi'a 'Ulama were not infallible. They *represent* the charismatic authority that began with Muhammad and ended with the last Imam, but they do not personally *possess* that absolute authority. Their authority rests in their spiritual chain of transmission (*silsilah*) which ties them back to the Prophet Muhammad. Yet they are the sole possessors of the secret meaning of the Qur'an and are thus wield legitimate authority over worldly and other-worldly matters. In the absence of the Imam, they are the spiritual guide of the people. Furthermore, authority in the Islamic tradition is found in the law, therefore Islam, including the Shi'a minority, is considered an *orthopraxis* religion. This means that all Muslims are bound to the authority of *Shari'a* (religious law), but are not bound by other forms of authority such as the authority of the mystic, or of the philosopher, etc. Because '*Usual al-fiqah*, (science of law) and *Kalam*

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<sup>17</sup> Algar, Roots of Revolution p. 48.

(theology) are not separated in the Shi'a tradition, theologians are also authorities on legal matters, which further legitimates their rule. They are in fact both theologians and jurists.

### **Khomeini's Charismatic Authority**

Khomeini's legitimacy as a revolutionary leader is more complicated. Because his authority was not derived from one source of legitimacy. It is partly based on his education, titles and status, as well as his actions, and partly on how he was perceived by the Iranian people.

In the Islamic tradition, in order for a Muslim to engage in certain activities, he or she must have met certain qualifications. For example, in order to issue a *fatwah* (legal ruling), a Shi'a cleric must have been given the authority to do so after years of study and mastering the traditional curriculum of Shi'a education. It is the education of the individual and the subsequent permission given by other high authorities that allows the Muslim to issue legal rulings. All "fatwahs" given by individuals who do not have the appropriate permission lack authority and are thus null and void. However correct in insight those "illegitimate" fatwahs may be, no Muslim is obligated to submit to such rulings because the particular formulators of those rulings lack the appropriate authority to issue them. Furthermore, those lacking appropriate authority cannot unilaterally

overrule the judgments of those who do have appropriate authority, even if the latter's rulings are questionable.

Khomeini's own traditional education based in *fiqh*, *hadith*, *tafsir*, theology, philosophy, and mysticism became the basis for his own *clerical* authority, as the latest *representative* of the original charismatic authority.<sup>18</sup> In fact, because of his excellence in the highest curriculum of the Shi'a tradition, he was granted the title of *Ayatollah* (sign of Allah), and later *Ayatollah al-Uzma* (the greatest sign of Allah). He was also considered a *Marja'-i Taqlid* (lit. reference point of emulation). This last title designates him as a first-rate religious authority who is capable of producing original and unprecedented decisions in matters of theology and law. Because of this, he is also considered a figure to be emulated by lesser scholars and laymen.<sup>19</sup> His mastery of the traditional Shi'a curriculum places Khomeini firmly in the prophetic line stemming back to Muhammad's original call. Although his status as an "Ayatollah" is not exclusive, his education, various titles, and "offices" makes him a legitimate *representative* of the highest order of the prophetic charisma handed down through the *silsilah* (chain). He, like the other Ayatollahs of his day, represented the latest phase of the "routinization" of charisma.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 48. Because of his excellence in the "purely learned dimensions" of the Shi'a tradition, added to that his social and political importance, Hamid Algar describes Khomeini as the "culmination of the tradition."

<sup>19</sup> Glasse, Cyril *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989) p. 259

However, clerical authority based on excellence in the traditional curriculum is not what made him a prophetic individual and leader of the revolution, although it certainly and unmistakably must be seen as an important *basis* for his legitimate authority. For without his prestige as a great scholar and representative of the chain (*silsilah*) of clerical authority, he would not have had such a concrete platform from which he could mount such a powerful attack on the legitimacy of the Shah's rule. Ultimately, his *clerical* authority served as a basis for his *prophetic* authority. His clerical authority stems from his educational achievements and status as a *Marja-i Taqlid*, where as his prophetic authority did not.

### **Khomeini's Prophetic Authority**

Khomeini's prophetic authority must be distinguished from his charismatic authority because the former cannot come from scholarship, offices, or titles; was not *biologically passed* onto him like Hasan and Hussein; nor was he *designated* by a charismatic leader as his successor as was 'Ali; nor was he directly *called* to prophethood like Muhammad. Khomeini's prophetic authority is based on his followers' *perceptions* of him - and those perceptions are based on four important conditions. 1) An environment of alienation and prevailing chaos that readies the people for prophetic

leadership. 2) A criteria for recognizing “prophetic” leadership pre-exists in Shi’a Islam. 3) The populace recognizes that this criterion is met by Khomeini. 4) The people transfer leadership authority to Khomeini because of their perceptions.

Firstly, the environment within which Khomeini’s leadership grew was one of widespread alienation due to political coup d’etats, western cultural invasion, massive industrialization, population shifts, militarization, and political repression. When we look at the period between 1961 to 1979, from the “White Revolution” to the “Islamic Revolution” we see massive destabilizing changes in Iran. For most of the early Twentieth century, Iran was going through major difficulties, including the fall of the Qajar dynasty, the First World War that led to Britain and Russia’s dividing Iran up into “spheres of influence”, the deposing of the Reza Shah Pahlavi (Muhammad Reza Shah’s father), and the deposing of the Socialist Mossadeq regime in 1953 - which then saw the re-installment of the Pahlavi family to the throne. However, it was the “White Revolution”, under Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi in 1961 that set the immediate stage for Khomeini’s rise and the Islamic Republic that would follow.

### **Political Environment of Pre-Revolutionary Iran**

To understand the environment that led to Khomeini’s leadership, we need to examine the class structure of Iran during the “White Revolution” as well as the

economic, cultural, and political issues affecting Iranian social classes. There were four major classes. The first was the aristocracy, which included about sixty families, mainly related to the Shah.<sup>20</sup> Just beneath them were the several hundred families of lesser nobility, ranked according to their degree of closeness to the monarchy.<sup>21</sup> These and other well-to-do noble families obtained the majority of their wealth from land-holdings and investments. Lucrative government contracts were frequently given to the businesses of these families.<sup>22</sup> Overall, the “upper class constituted less than 0.01 percent of the population” but overwhelmingly benefited from the regime.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the upper class was nominally religious, rarely contributing sons to the religious seminaries, and generally Western-oriented in culture.

Second, the *traditional* middleclass was comprised of two main groups.<sup>24</sup> The *Bazaaris*, were mainly traders and craftsman, and were members of the powerful bazaar guilds and associations.<sup>25</sup> The second group mainly consisted of small workshop owners who were generally not associated with any guilds and were often carpet-weavers and moderate to small-size farm owners.<sup>26</sup> Unlike the upper class, the traditional middle class was deeply religious and a reliable source

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<sup>20</sup> DeFronzo, *Revolutions* p. 258.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>24</sup> I define “middleclass” as a “prosperous working-class whose work and toil allows then some bourgeois comforts in life with minimal amounts of financial difficulties, coupled with a false bourgeois identity.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

for money and students for theological schools.<sup>27</sup> Much of Iran's ulema came from this middle class, including *mujtahids* (interpreters of Qur'an) and Ayatollahs, and was seen as an honorable occupation for middle class men. However, despite their religiosity, the traditional middle class was usually politically moderate, preferring stability over revolution.

Unlike the traditional middle class, *modern* middle class Iranians generally had advanced degrees and were in skilled professions. These included engineers, bureaucrats, doctors, managers, lawyers, teachers, and intellectuals, many of whom were educated in the West.<sup>28</sup> This high degree of secular schooling was the result of the education modernization process in Iran, which greatly increased the number of students in high school and college.<sup>29</sup> However, as the sons and daughters of the *traditional* middleclass got education, they were less likely to return to the countryside to operate their family farm and businesses, thus making it easier for the government to appropriate more fertile land for agribusiness and the growth of export crops, and the further decay of traditional rural life. The growth of education was not all beneficial to the regime, and proved to be a mixed blessing. Although those who specialized in "instrumental rationality" i.e. technology, engineering, etc. - were able to contribute to the industrialization and modernization of Iran, those who studied abroad and specialized in "communicative rationality" - i.e. the social sciences - often were exposed to

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 259.



radical ideas such as Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, Franz Fanon, Vladimir Lenin, Jean Paul Satre, and other leftist philosophies.<sup>30</sup> As we shall see, many of these students and the ideas they brought back to Iran would contribute to the downfall of the Shah.

Lastly, the industrial working class rose dramatically during the “White Revolution.” They grew from 26.5% of the population in 1966 to 34.2% in 1976, with most of the new workers arriving from the countryside in search of employment.<sup>31</sup> The fastest growing segment was the unskilled newly-urban wage laborer, who toiled in unsafe conditions and lived in primitive housing.<sup>32</sup> A very interesting facet of the population shift from the countryside to the city was the fact that the majority of those new migrants brought with them their deeply held religious sensibilities. The urban elite, long since abandoning religion, was confronted with a growing population in the cities that was conservative and religious, and in no way optimistic about “westernization.” By 1978, this underclass was disproportionately involved in the revolution.<sup>33</sup>

The growing class divide was augmented by the immense wealth that was pouring in from oil sales. In 1963 Iran earned \$450 million in oil income, but by 1973, the year of the Arab oil embargo on the U.S., in which Iran did not

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<sup>30</sup> The two most famous examples of this being Jalal Al-i Ahmed, and Dr. ‘Ali Shari’ati.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>32</sup> See *Impressions of South Tehran* by John Mohawk in Albert, David H. Tell the American People: Perspective on the Iranian Revolution. Boulder, CO: Movement for a New Society, 1980.

<sup>33</sup> DeFronzo, Revolutions 260.

participate, its profits were up to \$4.4 billion.<sup>34</sup> With this newly acquired wealth and closer relations with the U.S., the Shah and his advisors used the money to rapidly industrialize and expand its military hardware, offering major contracts to the “American Military Industrial Complex.” With these new weapons came military advisors and an estimated 60,000 foreign technicians to service those weapons.<sup>35</sup> The salaries of these highly paid foreigners contrasted sharply with the vast numbers of urban poor who were steadily increasing the cities’ populations, and caused a dramatic rise in inflation. The income gap became a bitter issue contention. By 1975 Iran’s oil exports dropped by 12.5 percent. Yet the Shah continued to import military hardware at an unsustainable rate and even ordered a 26% increase in spending.<sup>36</sup> On top of that, the Shah continued to increase the amount of foreign technicians, from 1, 207 in 1975 to 4,473 in 1977 - a 270% increase.<sup>37</sup> Predictably, inflation soared beyond control and by 1977, it had reached 30%.<sup>38</sup> This had a devastating effect on the poor, especially in cities like Tehran where the poor and lower working-class families had to compete with the wealthy foreigners for housing. As more foreigners moved in, property value increased thus pushing out those who could not afford to pay the inflated amounts. This phenomenon continued to send more Iranians to the slums, a deepening source of resentment and a haven for radical activity.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>36</sup> Albert, Tell the American People 54.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

Because inflation was increasing faster than wages, the middle-class began to encounter financial difficulties as well, including a fall in their income.<sup>39</sup> This inevitably led to tensions between the regime and the middle class, which usually served as a moderating factor and a buffer between the aristocracy and the working poor. Now the Shah had begun to alienate his trusted middle class constituency. To make matters worse, at a time of decreased social spending and high inflation, the Shah continued to spend millions on armaments, provoking more accusations of corruption.<sup>40</sup>

Compounding the already existing financial tensions, the middle and lower classes were also appalled and offended by the “liberal” behavior of the Westerners, who would frequently engage in “public drinking, revealing clothing, sexually explicit movies”, all of which are anathema to traditional Islamic principles.<sup>41</sup> This cultural penetration was seen by many as another assault on their Islamic and Iranian identity, and just another tool of submission to all thing Western. To make matters still worse, some Iranians had begun to copy these Western practices.” Abandoning traditional heritage and culture was termed *gharbzadegi*, or “Occidentosis,” meaning - a plague from the West, by the intellectual Jalal Al-i Ahmad.<sup>42</sup> His book, bearing the same title, was circulated

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 29th Century* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998) 88 - 89. See Jalal Al-i Ahmad, Occidentosis: A Plague from the West. Trans. Hamid Algar. Berkley: Mizan Press, 1984.

among students and intellectuals and was widely read. In it, Al-i Ahmad reflects much of the growing discontent with blind imitation of the West at the expense of traditional culture. Furthermore, popular scholars such as Ali Shari'ati also contributed to the formulation of critiques against this plague from the west which were carried into mainstream thought, even having an influence on Khomeini himself.<sup>43</sup> Their work, and the work of others like them, contributed to the growing animosity for the Shah and the influence his policies were having in Iran.

Coupled with the onslaught of Western culture was the Shah's continual glorification of pre-Islamic Persian culture. The Shah's propaganda machine increasingly portrayed him as the grand successor of the empires of the Achaeminids and Sassanids, as if Iran's Islamic heritage and the religious sensibilities of its people were of no consequence.<sup>44</sup> In October of 1971, the Shah staged an elaborate ceremony at the ancient Persian capital of Persepolis, in celebration of the 2,500 year of the monarchy. The international guests of honor dined on French food and wines under a huge tent city designed in France.<sup>45</sup> The celebration culminated on the "tomb of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian empire, where the Shah reassured his predecessor that he could sleep in peace 'for we are awake!'"<sup>46</sup> Elaborate and expensive schemes like these at a time of economic crises for so many people only increased the resentment of the Shah and

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<sup>43</sup> We will discuss Ahmad and Shari'ati's influence on Khomeini later in greater detail.

<sup>44</sup> Moin, p. 163.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

further alienated him from his Islamic populace.

As the Shah carried on with his militarization policies, he brutally suppressed dissent and protest with his secret police SAVAK. Known to have killed thousands of Iranians and having close ties to Israel, SAVAK was the domestic hammer in the Shah's policies. As the economic and cultural alienation continued, the repression of dissent followed - and with every violent counter-protest, the opposition to the Shah grew. Furthermore, not only were the religious parties protesting the Shah, but secular liberals, Mossadeqists, democrats, Marxists, ~~bazaaris~~ bazaaris and laborers all banded together in opposition to the monarchy.

With all this in the background, on November 27, 1977, U.S. President Jimmy Carter added insult to injury when he proclaimed in a New Year's toast to the Shah: "Iran under the great leadership of the Shah is an island of stability in one of the most troubled areas of the world. This is a great tribute to you, Your Majesty, and to your leadership, and to the respect, admiration and love which your people give to you."<sup>47</sup> This speech, meant to show the world that the United States stood by its ally in Iran, affirmed, in the minds of many Iranians, the United States support for the unpopular policies of the Shah.

Because of the growing sense of instability due to financial decay, "occidentosis", and political repression, the two largest social classes were moving increasingly into the hands of Khomeini and those parties that wished to overthrow the Shah. This expanding environment of alienation and discontent prepared the

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<sup>47</sup> Albert, p. 57., Moin, p. 186.

people to accept “prophetic leadership” as the only means to rid them of the Shah’s chaos.

### **Criteria for Establishing the Prophetic Authority**

For the sake of not repeating too much of what has already been covered in the previous chapter, it would be appropriate here just to briefly review the “criteria” of the prophetic.

Khomeini, through his public speeches and acts, demonstrated to alienated Iranians his “prophetic” credentials by: 1) opposing the Shah and his corrupt regime, i.e. speaking truth to power; 2) offering an alternative vision of the future and bringing forth successes i.e. *velayat-i faqih* and the Islamic Republic; 3) he demonstrated congruency in the theory - praxis dialectic, often in contrast to quietist clerics; 4) identifying with the suffering and humiliation of the masses, and likewise suffering with them; 5) being perceived as the “embodiment of Islam” through his willingness to be martyred, based on the prophetic examples established by Muhammad, ‘Ali, and Hussein.

Because of these criteria, the Iranian peoples found it easy to identify Khomeini as a legitimate leader.

## **Khomeini is Recognized as being Prophetic**

The single most important aspect of Khomeini being “recognized” as prophetic is the fact that it is through this recognition by the people, he acquires prophetic authority. Despite scholarship, titles, publications, etc., prophetic authority can only be achieved if it is recognized by a body of potential supporters.

As the economic, cultural, and political situation in Iran continued to worsen, the Iranian people looked for guidance from those who had historically been their guides. What they found was a mass of clerics who wished not to get politically involved with the Shah’s regime, and therefore stopped at vocal critique. Nevertheless, some religious voices, breaking free from the “clerical herd”, provided the guidance that the people were searching for. In contrast to the high ranking clerics around him who insisted on quietism, Khomeini was easily recognized as being a leader. Furthermore, as he intensified his verbal critique of the Shah, the regime intensified its repression of the Ayatollah, thus unwittingly heightening his profile.

Yet other groups also rigorously opposed the Shah, such as the pro-Soviet Communist Tudeh party, secular “Mossadiqist” nationalists, and the Marxist guerilla fighters *Fedayeen-i Khalq* (Self-sacrificers of the People). Although these groups and many others were instrumental in the overthrow of the Shah, Khomeini and the religious opposition had certain advantages over their more political

platforms. First, Khomeini's following was seen as *organic movement*, deriving its principles from Islam, Shi'ism, Iran, and Iranian history, and thus not dependent of western analysis.<sup>48</sup> Second, despite their often cited quietist tradition, clerics were still seen by many as the *historical* guardians of Iranian and Shi'i society, and thus where fulfilling their historical role. Third, unlike the others, the clerics constituted a well established "organizational network permeating most classes and social groups, urban and rural."<sup>49</sup> Fourth, because the clerics and masses shared a common religious tradition, the Ulema could activate latent revolutionary concepts inherent in Shi'a Islam, whereas the secular and western oriented opposition groups would have to "convert" people to their ideologies.<sup>50</sup> Fifth, the secular and western-oriented opposition groups had very little following in the countryside and among the newly urbanized workers, who had religious educations but were neither familiar, nor very receptive to, secular or Western derived ideologies.<sup>51</sup> Finally, Khomeini enjoyed support from the *bazaaris*, who had suffered great economic losses due to the Shah's policies. The *bazaaris*, who were religious, were also skeptical of the "communist" orientation of some of the groups as they where of Mossadiq's socialist regime; fearing loss of their property and business

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<sup>48</sup> As we will see later, Khomeini was familiar with Western oriented Marxist, Leftist, and Nationalist literature, and apparently seemed to appropriate some of their arguments. However, the issue here is perceptions of Khomeini. Many perceived him to be fully rooted in Islam, Shi'ism, and Iran.

<sup>49</sup> DeFronzo, p. 261.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 261.



rights.<sup>52</sup> These six aspects gave Khomeini's religious opposition clear advantages over their fellow revolutionaries.

Moreover, Khomeini attracted followers by addressing the specific issues that were plaguing the country in religious terms that were understandable by the masses. Both the secular and religious could easily grasp the principles and dynamics he was speaking of. For example, in a 1967 open letter to the Shah's Prime Minister Hoveyda, Khomeini chastised the bureaucrat saying,

...with your empty claims of progress and advancement, you have kept the country in a state of backwardness. ...I must point an accusing finger at those responsible for them, so that those who are unaware (or pretend to be unaware) come to recognize their duty and are no longer taken in by your hypocrisy and deceit.

Sitting in your opulent palaces, which you change once every few years, you spend millions of tumans with an extravagance our people cannot even imagine and steal it all from the purse of our wretched nation. You witness complacently the hunger and poverty of our people, the bankruptcy of the bazaar, the unemployment of our educated youth, the sorry state of our agriculture and industry,... You see that most of the villages near the capital, let alone those in remote regions, lack the basic necessities of life - clean drinking water, bathhouses, and medical care. You see the diffusion of moral corruption, dishonesty, and irreligion in the depth of the countryside. You see the funds set up that are supposedly cooperatives, but in fact are a means for government officials to rob and plunder the peasants, who come ruefully to understand that they have been cheated. Finally you see all the illegal imprisonment, terror, and threats that are inflicted on the people, while you are immersed in your pleasures, enjoyments, and shameful games and recite the funeral prayers over this cemetery called Iran.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>53</sup> Algar, Islam and Revolution 190 - 191. See further Khomeini's speech, *Search and Find the East* in, Albert, Tell the American People 204 - 210. I will examine Khomeini's religious-political language later.

As you can see, in this small section of a letter, Khomeini linked the economic, cultural, and political malaise of Iran to the hypocrisy and deceit of the Shah. For those who would read or hear these words, the perception of Khomeini would be one of leadership in the face of tyranny. Because he routinely put into words the experiences of those who were victims of the Shah's policies in a language that all could understand and was prepared to follow it up with action, he was recognized as being a "prophetic" leader in the mold of those heroes of Shi'a Islam.

### **People's Acceptance of Khomeini as "Revolutionary Leader"**

The last of the four-part conditions is the transfer of revolutionary authority and leadership to Khomeini. One by one, as people "recognize" Khomeini as being the most viable opposition and the one most attuned to their grievances, authority to speak in the name of the Iranian nation is given to the Ayatollah. Even secular, Marxist, and liberal opposition groups rally behind Khomeini because he is the most capable and most likely to succeed in bringing down the Pahlavi regime. It is not because of their acceptance of his religious platform that these secular groups accept his leadership, but rather it is a strategic.

They see that the majority of Iran's people are less likely to submit to philosophically Western-derived opposition movements and are more in tune with the religious opposition. We should make this clear: that the official decisions of these groups to back Khomeini were *strategic*, while the decisions to support Khomeini by a majority of the people was because they recognized his "*prophetic leadership*" through his embodiment of the prophetic criteria. In any case, it is because of the popularity and growing strength of his prophetic leadership that the opposition groups follow him and ultimately submit to his authority. They had the choice of either strategically submitting to his leadership, and joining forces with him in the common effort to remove the regime, or they could remain separate in their opposition to the Shah and hence divide and weaken the opposition movement. Because their hatred of the Shah's regime was greater than their reservations about Khomeini, most of the opposition groups submitted to Khomeini's inevitable leadership of the revolution in the hope that they would somehow be rewarded after the success of the revolution.<sup>54</sup>

As we have seen, Khomeini's authority is twofold. First, his *charismatic* authority stems from his position as Ayatollah and Marji-i taqlid, both making him the legitimate *representative* of the original charismatic authority handed down

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<sup>54</sup> The rewards (or lack thereof) for their coalition with Khomeini in the Islamic Republic is a topic not within the parameters of this study. However, we can say that though Khomeini made no concrete promises, he was publicly rather vague about the form of government that would follow the revolution. However, privately, those who were familiar with his work *Hukumat-i Islami* (Islamic Government) had a very good idea as to what Khomeini wanted to see occur.

through the *silsilah* (chain of transmission); thus representing the latest in the “*routenization*” of charisma. This authority serves as a basis for his *prophetic* authority which is recognized by the people because of his fulfillment of the “prophetic” criteria during his opposition to the Shah. As the economic, cultural, and political chaos prevalent in the society led to further alienation, the people were ready for prophetic leadership and ultimately accepted Khomeini as their leader.

## CHAPTER VI

### KHOMEINI AND THE POLITICAL LEFT

In her well argued article *Can Revolutions Be Predicted; Can Their Causes Be Understood*, the University of California historian Nikki R. Keddie postulates three important factors that uniquely contributed to the overthrow of the Shah: “1) the evolution of the Shi’ite clergy in Iran, which made a Khomeini and his network possible. 2) “the particularities of the Shah and the way he ruled, and, 3) probably the most important, the major contradiction between an increasingly autocratic political structure and forced, inequitable, and rapid socioeconomic change that to some degree alienated all classes in society.”<sup>1</sup> While I agree with her general thesis, I believe there is an important factor that she fails to account for, and that is the degree to which the Iranian under classes absorbed leftist class struggle and anti-imperialist ideology. This was delivered to them through Khomeini’s “Islamization” of leftist concepts and critiques. If one looks into the many opposition groups that struggled against the rule of Shah, one sees that they were all influenced in some way by Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialism and class struggle ideology. Furthermore, leftist intellectuals like Jalal Al-i Ahmad and Dr. ‘Ali Shari’ati had a large impact on revolutionary leftist and religious movements during the time leading up to the revolution. Despite this, the prevalence

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<sup>1</sup> Nikkie Keddie, ed., Debating Revolutions (New York: New York UP, 1995) 11.

of this ideology among the urban middle class does not explain how many of these ideas were absorbed by the lower classes, including the peasants and newly urban wage laborers, who did not have access to privileged information, nor did they attend Western schools.<sup>2</sup> We must then ask, how did this class, whose education and culture is based primarily in the rural traditional religious setting, come to accept many of the core beliefs of the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Who was responsible for this, and how did this phenomenon serve the revolution?

But before we answer the “how” and “why” of this phenomenon, it would be beneficial to examine the most important philosophical, sociological, and political issues of Marxist-Leninism, as they were manifested in the third world during the 1950’s, 1960’s and 1970’s. Secondly, it is important to see the major opposition groups’ and intellectuals’ connections with those issues, from what classes they derived, what was their platform, and how they responded to Khomeini. And finally, we will answer the question of how the religious poor and working class of Iran came to accept thoughts and ideas that are generally associated with the Western Marxist intellectual tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> Due to their alienation and lack of class consciousness, Marx believed the revolutionary potential of the peasantry was nearly nonexistent, and that they were mostly reactionary and counterrevolutionary.

## Marxist-Leninist Philosophy

Throughout the 50's, 60's, and 70's, the world saw massive changes, among them being various struggles against colonization, apartheid, and imperialism. There were successful revolutions in China, Algeria, Vietnam, Cuba, Egypt, Congo, Guatemala, etc, and in many other places there were vigorous struggles. In America and Europe, the "New Left", intellectually led by members of the "Frankfurt School", engaged in radical political action designed to bring about progressive change.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, America saw the ethnic struggles of the massive civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, and the Black Nationalist movement led by Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, H. Rapp Brown, and the Black Panthers. On a global scale, colonized countries were slowly gaining independence from their former masters and beginning to run their countries independently. Behind much of this change was the growing influence of anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist Marxist-Leninism, sometimes sponsored by the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> However, regardless of sponsorship, the "liberation" movements of the mid twentieth century seemed to be the sign of times.

Without extensive analysis of Marxist-Leninism, which is well beyond the scopes of this study, we will have to do with a general conceptual understanding of

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Bottomore, The Frankfurt School (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1984) 27-54., David Held, Introduction to Critical Theory Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 38-39.

<sup>4</sup> We should say that much of its sponsorship was due to geo-political strategy, not necessarily for altruistic reasons.

the motivations and desires of this radical philosophy.

In most Third-World countries, awareness of Marxism was due to the colonial experience and is thus bound to anti-imperialism.<sup>5</sup> The primary concerns of this development in Marxism is the “impact of metropolitan capital on pre-capitalist social structures, the emergence of new classes, and the resulting patterns of class alignments and class contradictions that underlie the development of those societies and the conditions of revolutionary struggle.”<sup>6</sup> These movement are deeply concerned with the removal of exploitative and oppressive regimes, often times seen to be in the service of the ruling class and or a foreign power, and in their place the establishment of a government that is based in popular sovereignty and is socialistic in economic, politics, and culture. Because imperialism is seen as the “highest stage of capitalism”, the fundamental right of self-determination of the indigenous people is suppressed in order to serve foreign and ruling class interests.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, liberation movements maintain that the imperialists and their paid ruling class must be removed from power. These movements are further interested in establishing a political system to control if not eradicate the “private accumulation of collective surplus value” i.e. capitalism, thus often emphasizing social equality over individual freedom. In order to do this, it becomes imperative that a strong centralized government be put in place that will regulate the political

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Bottomore, ed., A Dictionary of Marxist Thought (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991) 350.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 350.

<sup>7</sup> “Imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism” is a phrase coined by Vladimir Lenin.



and economic activities of civil society.

Many of these Marxist movements, in which Iranian's movements would be included, see "cultural imperialism" as just as threatening as physical and political imperialism. Many theorists saw "cultural penetration" by the imperialist as a method of diminishing or eradicating indigenous ideologies and cultural forces that would oppose the imperial power. Throughout his campaign against the Shah, Khomeini would routinely state that Western culture, especially secularism and its privatization of religion, was a tool to castrate Islam of its political and cultural power, thus leaving Iran open to exploitation from foreign imperialists with little or no opposition. It is interesting to note that Jalal Al-i Ahmad, though once a member of the Tudeh (communist) party, later believed that the Shi'a Islamic tradition was the one cultural force that had not been penetrated by the corroding effects of Western culture, and thus it was the only viable opposition force to the Westernization of Iran. Both Ahmad and Khomeini subscribed to the theory that Iran was struck with *gharbzadagi* or "westoxification" or even "occidentosis", which undermined Iran's ability to defend itself from the West.

The class analysis, as in all Marxist thought, is essential to understand the Third-World orientation of Marxist-Leninism. The minority ruling class is generally, but not always, associated with an imperial power, especially when economic conditions within the country overwhelmingly benefit the ruling class and those foreigners who are connected to that class. When the policies of the ruler

brings ruin to the people, yet enriches the ruling class and its benefactors, the logical connection is that enemies exist within the state as well as outside it. Therefore, just as the foreign imperialist is an enemy, so there is a domestic enemy. In the case of Iran, it was the *Dictatura Coronada* (crowned dictator), and his American handlers that were perceived to be the common enemy of the people. Consequently, in order for there to be socioeconomic and political development that will benefit the masses as opposed to the ruling class, the old regime has to be transformed or removed. The method of its transformation or removal is also a subject of debate within the Marxist communities.

Many communist parties, especially in Latin America, preferred a gradualist and legalist penetration into national politics that would slowly assemble a base of support and prepare a easier transition to communist rule.<sup>8</sup> Many of these moderate groups compromised with their governments by accepting official positions and cabinet appointments.<sup>9</sup> However some communist groups, including at least two in Iran, rejected this “gradualist” approach for a more radical and violent overthrow, forming small units of fighters in order to stage “guerilla

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<sup>8</sup> The Iranian communist “Tudeh” (Masses) party and the Socialist-Nationalist “National Front” party at various times held this position.

<sup>9</sup> See Marc Becker’s *Introduction* to Che Guevara’s, Guerilla Warfare (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) xi.

warfare” against the regime.<sup>10</sup> Modeled after the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro and Dr. “Che” Guevara, these groups operated under the *foco* theory of guerilla warfare, which argues that a “small guerilla army operating in the countryside could spark a revolution that would then spread to the cities.”<sup>11</sup> Che’s theory proved to be too simplistic. He did not consider the unique socioeconomic and political factors of every country in which he wanted to spark a revolution because he believed the experience of the Cuban Revolution could be universally replicated. However, when his approach was tried in other countries such as Peru and Bolivia, it proved to be inapplicable and ended in failure. Likewise, in Iran, Khomeini could not accept the idea that small groups of guerilla fighters would be able to bring down the Shah, and he was proven to be correct. However, the basic premise of Che’s work remains, that only a violent campaign against oppressive government will be able to remove it, and that it is the job of the guerilla fighter to contribute to its removal.

These groups deviated significantly from Marx. Marx believed that history moved in a certain predictable pattern, from feudalism through capitalism and finally to communism. Like Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who attempted to

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<sup>10</sup> Although guerilla warfare is widely identified with communism, it was hardly invented by communists. For example, guerrilla warfare was practiced against the British in the American Revolution by South Carolinian Francis Marion, also known as the “Swamp Fox”, and by the Spaniards against Napoleon’s occupying armies (1808 - 1813). See Samuel B. Griffith II’s *Introduction to Mao Tse-Tung’s On Guerilla Warfare* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 9 - 10.

<sup>11</sup> Becker, *Introduction to Che’s Guerilla Warfare*. xii., Also see Anderson, John Lee. Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life. New York: Grove Press, 1997.

demonstrate that it was possible to bypass the capitalist stage and bring a feudalistic country directly into communism, these groups believed they could create the conditions that would spark a revolution, as opposed to waiting for capitalism to rise and finally decline due to its systemic contradictions. Fidel Castro once said, "The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution. It is known that the revolution will triumph... but it is not for revolutionaries to sit in the doorways of their houses waiting for the corpse of imperialism to pass by."<sup>12</sup> In the case of Iran, socioeconomic and political conditions beneficial to revolutionary movements were quickly developing, partly due to the Shah's "White Revolution" which brought rapid modernization and industrialization. These destabilized conditions were not the work of radical communist guerilla fighters attacking military units in the jungle, but were more the result of the Shah's policies that alienated the population.<sup>13</sup> These more radical groups often found themselves in conflict with the "official" communist parties in their countries, not only concerning tactics but also about allegiances. For example, the Tudeh party in Iran was perceived by many to be the pawn of the Soviet Union, therefore acting as an agent of another imperial power and hence likewise to be distrusted. In contrast, non-Soviet supported communist groups were deeply

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>13</sup> Although I'm not entirely convinced of this, it can be argued that the period between 1922 (rise of Reza Shah) and 1979 (Islamic Revolution) represented a brief but rapid experience in capitalist modernization in Iran. If this is the case, then the three governments that held power during this time; Reza Shah, the National Front, and Muhammad Reza Shah, brought Iran out of a pre-capitalists, quasi-feudalistic type situation into being a modern capitalist state. However, the resulting overthrow of this capitalism did not end in Marx's communism, but ended in an Islamic Republic built partly on the backs of communist supporters.

effected by nationalism and swore allegiance only to Iran. Because of their autonomous stance, Moscow refused to support financially or politically many of these groups until it became apparent that they would be successful in their revolution. In the case of Cuba, the Soviet Union supported Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution only after they seized power from Fulgencio Batista and began to call itself a "socialist" revolution.<sup>14</sup> Likewise in Iran, despite the fact of substantial Marxist influence among the revolutionaries, the Soviet Union switched from indifference to Shah to supporting the revolution very late in the process, much to the worry of Washington D.C., who feared growing Soviet geo-political influence in the oil rich Persian Gulf. In either case, the official Soviet recognized communist party was neither a decisive factor in guerilla warfare, nor a significant contribution to the successful overthrow of the government.

### **Five Marxist-Influenced Iranian Opposition Groups**

In order to demonstrate the prevalence of Marxist influence in Iranian society during the revolutionary process, I've identified five major groups that

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<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that the "official" communist party in Cuba did not support Fidel Castro's *July 26 Movement* (the revolutionary name that commemorates Fidel's unsuccessful attack on the Moncato military barracks in 1953). See Coltman, Leycester. The Real Fidel Castro. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

were operating during this time, based on their historical significance to the Iranian revolution. Although it is impossible to quantify the influence of each group, I believe these five best represent the Iranian-Marxist tradition and all its variations.

### *Tudeh Party*

The oldest of the Marxist parties was the Tudeh Party (*Hizb-i Tudeh-i Iran*: Party of Iranian Masses), which was officially established in 1941 - 42, but had its genesis between the two world wars in the 1930's under Reza Shah.<sup>15</sup> Although it especially admired Vladimir Lenin and his political philosophy, it did not openly announce its Marxist or communist orientation in the beginning of its existence for fear of alienating potential members who held religious views.<sup>16</sup> However, once it had its support from the Kremlin, the political platform it espoused became one of typical communist opposition groups, calling for a democratic government, electoral law reform, political rights for women, redistribution of wealth, eight hour work days, and recognition of trade unions.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it advocated specific reforms to Iran under Reza Shah, including “restoration of civil liberties, in accordance with the Iranian Constitution, and cancellation of the “anti-democratic” laws..., including the 1931 law banning

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen Kinzer, All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003) 65.

<sup>16</sup> Gheissari, Iranian Intellectuals 65.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 66.

communist activities.”<sup>18</sup> From 1941 to 1953, the Tudeh party organized massive Iranian May Day parades that celebrated and demonstrated the massive power of the workers and their Unions.<sup>19</sup> According to Stephen Kinzer, the growing power and popularity of the Tudeh party was cited as one of the major reasons for the 1953 CIA backed Coup d’etat that overthrew Dr. Muhammad Mossadeq. Fearing the spread of Soviet influence, the Eisenhower administration felt that the Tudeh party could possible overthrow or seize power from Mossadeq and install a Soviet-backed communist state in the heart of the Middle East. Because of this, the administration believed it imperative to install a more stable and pro-U.S. regime as soon as possible.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, in 1953, Mossadeq was forced to abdicate power and Muhammad Reza Pahlavi was installed as dictator of Iran. From 1953 to 1958 Tudeh went underground as the pro-West Shah suppressed communism with the help and blessing of the U.S.<sup>21</sup> Until disillusionment with the Shah became much more pervasive, the Tudeh party quietly continued to resist the monarchy and its pro-Western capitalism policies, doing whatever it could to hurt the Shah and his regime.

Although the Tudeh party lasted all the way through the Islamic Revolution, the power it had during its height in the 1940’s never returned. Furthermore, the general public viewed as subservient to the Soviet Union and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Abrahamian, Khomeinism pp. 65 - 68.

<sup>20</sup> Kinzer, pp. 205 - 206.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 194., Moin, p. 160.

atheistic, neither of which was very popular in deeply nationalistic and religious Iran.<sup>22</sup> Even during the tumultuous events of the “White Revolution”, where political alienation ran at its highest, the Tudeh party could find little support in the countryside or among the newly urbanized rural workers.<sup>23</sup> By the 1960’s and 70’s, its base of support continued to be older secular intellectuals who were generally associated with the constitutional period of Iranian history. Many children of Tudeh party members would inherit their parents’ left-wing politics, but would reject their atheism, preferring to maintain a religious affiliation. Despite its marginalization, the Tudeh did indeed support the leadership of Khomeini, believing he shared their anti-imperialist position. Its official paper *Navid* even participated in the November 27th, 1978, collective hallucination that saw Khomeini’s face on the full moon. They wrote, “Our toiling masses, fighting against world-devouring Imperialism headed by the blood-sucking United States, have seen the face of their beloved Imam and leader, Khomeini the breaker of Idols, in the moon. A few pipsqueaks cannot deny what a whole nation has seen with its own eyes.”<sup>24</sup> Though many mullahs saw this episode as a cheap psychological trick foisted on the people, Khomeini refused to deny the event and the “spontaneous initiatives of the people.”<sup>25</sup> In the end, the Tudeh party would be the last of the major opposition groups to join Khomeini’s movement. However,

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<sup>22</sup> Gheissari, p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> DeFronzo, *Revolutions* 261.

<sup>24</sup> Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler Publishers, Inc., 1986) 238.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.



once they did recognize the “supreme leader”, they brought invaluable expertise in “psychological warfare, sabotage, ... [and] industrial strikes” to the movement.<sup>26</sup>

### *National Front*

The National Front (NF) was the secular party closely associated with Dr. Muhammad Mossadeq. Founded in 1949, the NF was both socialist and nationalist, calling for an “end to foreign political influence and economic exploitation.”<sup>27</sup> It rigorously opposed monarchical prerogatives and the abandonment of the 1906 constitution; calling for the end of the one party system, for freedom of press, and for an elected government.<sup>28</sup> Dr. Mossadeq, an aristocrat and doctor of law, became Prime Minister in 1951 as the result of the popularity of his nationalist appeals that demanded the nationalization of Iran’s oil, taking it primarily out British control, and the imposition of power limits on the monarchy.<sup>29</sup> Although originally supported by important clerics such as Ayatollah Kashani and the younger Ayatollah Khomeini, because of his anti-imperialism stance, the alliance was later broken when the anti-clerical views of Dr. Mossadeq’s followers were made public.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the Bazaaris distrusted Mossadeq’s communist sympathies and saw the Shah as a potential counterweight

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>27</sup> DeFronzo, p. 253.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>29</sup> Moin, p. 64.

<sup>30</sup> DeFronzo, pp. 253 - 254.

to his leftist politics. By 1953, with National Front alliances broken and support dwindling, the CIA-backed coup d'état brought the NF government to an end and installed the Shah back in power. However, the NF continued to have influence in national politics through the Islamic Revolution, despite the Shah's 1963 repression of their leadership.<sup>31</sup> Although the Shah was personally more worried about renewed attempts by the NF to regain power, their inability or unwillingness to directly confront the Shah with massive resistance led many of its followers to other groups more willing to do so, including the guerilla forces and Ayatollah Khomeini's clerical leadership.<sup>32</sup>

Though not as dogmatic as the Tudeh party, the NF was heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist anti-imperial philosophy. Its supporters detested the Pahlavi's authoritarian rule, suppoorting as an alternative the constitutionalism of 1906. Not in favor of violent revolutions or guerilla warfare, the NF preferred to seize power through more non-violent means. However, much like the Tudeh party, the NF was mainly from the urban, educated, new middle class; it had little influence on the rural peasantry or working classes and therefore its influence was restricted mainly to the cities.<sup>33</sup> The nationalism of the NF distinguishes it from the Tudeh, which was almost entirely subservient to Moscow. The NF was completely independent of foreign support and relied heavily on its reputation for nationalist independence to attract participants and funding. This fierce nationalism, which

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 72, 95.

<sup>32</sup> Taheri, Spirit of Allah 123.

<sup>33</sup> DeFronzo, p. 253.

celebrated Iranians' ability to solve their own problems without the help (or control) of other was the message that most appealed to the political left.<sup>34</sup>

Because of this, many Iranians remained loyal to the NF from the time of the 1960's repression up through the success of the Islamic Revolution.

### *Freedom Movement of Iran*

In 1960, *Nehzat-i Azadi-ye Iran* (Freedom Movement of Iran) was formed by Mehdi Bazargan, Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, and Dr. Yadollah Sahabi.<sup>35</sup>

These men, who represented "modernist" or "progressive" Islam, believed that if Islam was properly interpreted, it could 1) modernize Iran, 2) achieve an equitable distribution of wealth, and 3) protect Iran from "foreign cultural domination and economic exploitation."<sup>36</sup> The proponents of "modernist Islam" believed that their way was the only serious engagement between Islam and modernity, and thus was the only version that could unify all sectors and classes of the population, both preserving that which is essential in Islam and Shi'ism, and critically adopting parts of modernity. Unlike some clerics who were completely hostile to Western science, those of the Freedom Movement believed that Islam and science were not only compatible, but complimentary - that, if taken in moderation, modern science

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<sup>34</sup> The nationalization of the oil resources was a very popular Mossadeq policy. However, it was his "original sin" in the West.

<sup>35</sup> Moin, p. 77.

<sup>36</sup> DeFonzo, p. 263.

could benefit Iran.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the system of government they proposed was different from the *vilayat-i faqih* (rule of the jurist) of Khomeini. They believed that a future Islamic state should not be run by clerics, but by Islamicly- committed laymen who are highly educated and trained in administration and technology.<sup>38</sup> For them, this would preserve the historical role of the clergy, which had advised rulers without being directly involved in politics, while ensuring that the Islamic point of view was the guiding force in government. This scheme was designed to wed the instrumental-rationality of the bureaucrats and technocrats with the communicative-rationality of the Islamic tradition - both needed to form a “just” and functioning modern government. Knowing that the Shi’a tradition maintains that all forms of government are illegitimate without the twelfth Imam (Imam al-Mahdi), it also serves as a necessary alternative to letting tyranny rule until his return.

Unlike the Tudeh and National Front, which constitute the secular political left, the Freedom Movement was committed to a religious political platform.<sup>39</sup> Although much of its policies resembled those of the Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialist movements, the Freedom Movement remained motivated by religious beliefs. Using the Prophet’s Medina community as a template, Ayatollah Taleqani believed that “Islam properly interpreted supported a socialist system”: a

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>39</sup> Many founders of the Freedom Movement were originally in the National Front before the 1953 coup d’état. Gheissari, pp. 74 - 75.

religiously based socialism, not dependent on Western forms of socialism, but one organically derived from Islam, Shi'ism, and Iranian history.<sup>40</sup>

During the revolution, the Freedom Movement often served as a bridge between the secular and religious factions.<sup>41</sup> The leadership of Ayatollah Taleqani, a highly esteemed religious scholar, and Muhandis Mehdi Bazargan, a religiously trained engineer (though not a cleric), demonstrates the movements secular-religious alliance.<sup>42</sup> They remained committed to the constitutionalist position of Dr. Mossadeq, yet were driven by religious based nationalist motivations. They saw Islam's emphasis on universal moral values as preceeding the cosmopolitan values proclaimed by the bourgeois revolutions in Europe and America. They said,

We are Muslims ... our entry into politics ... is prompted by our national duty and religious obligations. We do not consider religion and politics separate, and regard serving the people [as] ... an act of worship ... We are Muslims in the sense that we believed in the principles of justice, equality, sincerity, and other social and humane duties before they were proclaimed by the French Revolution and the Charter of the United Nations.<sup>43</sup>

Social awareness for them was not an invention of the West, but was inherent in the Islamic tradition; and consequently there was no contradiction in affirming certain Western values when they coincided with similar Islamic values.

In the 1960's the Freedom Movement was suspicious of much of the clergy

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<sup>40</sup> Moin, p. 167.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>42</sup> According to Hamid Algar, Mehdi Bazargan was the first major exponent of the "modernist" Islam position, even before it became popular by 'Ali Shari'ati. Algar, Roots of Revolution 87.

<sup>43</sup> Moin, p. 168. However, they obviously did not believe in the "separation of church and state" which was a hallmark for the bourgeois revolution.

due to the clergy's role in the 1953 overthrow of Dr. Mossadeq. However, its supporters were impressed by Khomeini's political commitment and would later acknowledge him as the "supreme leader" of the revolution.<sup>44</sup> Using modern Persian and Marxist language, the Freedom Movement attempted to rescue Islam from linguistic obscurantism and abstraction, with the effect of politically radicalizing the clerics. "The Ayatollahs", they said, "should not restrict themselves to campaigning against the local election bill, but refer as well to autocracy and authoritarianism, the real source of the nation's malaise."<sup>45</sup> Taleqani was influenced by the leftist writer Jalal Al-i Ahmad, and often peppered his speeches with Ahmad's fiery revolutionary language, focusing on social issues, as opposed to abstract theological speculations.<sup>46</sup> Along with the reform cleric Motahhari, Taleqani established a series of lectures to "wake up the religious community, to put an end to the lethargy that had characterized it and to attempt to make Islam relevant to social, economic, and political problems of the day."<sup>47</sup> For their actions, Bazargan and Taleqani were sentenced to long prison terms during the Shah's 1963 suppression. After the suppression, nine members of the Freedom Movement would defect to create a more radical guerilla group called Mujahideen-i Khalq.<sup>48</sup>

One of the most important aspects of the Freedom Movement was their

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>46</sup> Roy Mottahedeh, The Mantle of the Prophet (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 325.

<sup>47</sup> Moin, p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> DeFronzo, p. 263. I will be discussing this group next.

extensive network of young radicalized students abroad. According to Hamid Algar, Bazargan was active in organizing student and opposition groups abroad and was the chief patron of the Muslim Student Association (MSA), which had branches in the United States and Europe.<sup>49</sup> Because Khomeini saw the benefit to having allies in Western countries who would defend the revolution and provide intellectual and financial assistance, he actively courted their support. Furthermore, student groups outside of Iran were openly critical of the regime in ways that students inside the country could not be, and frequently protested official visits to European and American capitals in an effort to embarrass the publicity-conscious regime.<sup>50</sup> Being impressed by the Paris riots of 1968 and the anti-Vietnam war protest movement in the United States, the students returning to Iran drew a sharp philosophical distinction between patriotic loyalty to the country and allegiance to the regime. This was important because these students would return home to jobs in the government, business sector, and universities with divided loyalties.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, a disproportionate number of foreign-educated workers of the modern middle class would participate in the overthrow of the Shah. As the revolution continued to intensify, the Freedom Movement, still based in the universities and disillusioned with the political process, became increasingly

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<sup>49</sup> Algar, Roots of Revolution 86.

<sup>50</sup> Gheissari, p. 78.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

sympathetic to the young student-led guerilla forces.<sup>52</sup>

After the revolution was successful, Ayatollah Khomeini appointed Bazargan as the new Prime Minister, a move he would later regret because of their clashes over the form of the new government.<sup>53</sup> The removal of Bazargan's government by Khomeini effectively consolidated his power after the revolution, and fully opened the door to his system of government - the *vilayat-i faqih*.

### *Mujahideen-i Khalq*

Although not organized until the 1970's, *Mujahideen-i Khalq*, or Holy Warriors of the People, grew out of the 1963 protests.<sup>54</sup> This group, best described as a leftist Islamic anti-Shah guerilla movement, blended revolutionary Marxist theory with traditional Shi'a notions of martyrdom and oppression. Influenced by Mao, "Che" Guevara, and Castro, the Mujahideen-i Khalq engaged in low-level guerilla warfare against the Shah and his well-equipped and well-trained secret police SAVAK, becoming more of a nuisance for the regime than a major threat. The founders of *Mujahideen-i Khalq*, as Baqer Moin points out, where "impressed by the logic of Marxism, [and] attempted to show that the true

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>53</sup> Algar, *Roots of Revolution* 31.

<sup>54</sup> DeFronzo, p. 262., "Mujahideen" comes from the Arabic word "jihad" meaning "struggle" or "effort." Though "mujahideen" has often been translated into "Holy Warriors", it literally means "one who struggles", presumably in a sacred cause.



Islam of Mohammad, Ali, and Hossein was as revolutionary as Marxism without abandoning the spiritual dimension of life.”<sup>55</sup> They believed that struggling to create a classless society and to end imperialism and despotism was the duty of all Muslims and would continued the struggle started by the Imams.<sup>56</sup> First beginning in Bazargan and Taleqani’s Freedom Movement, the nine founders of *Mujahideen* drew on a modernist ideology, but later broke away in disagreement about tactics, preferring guerilla warfare to less-violent “gradualist” and “legalist” means. They wrote a famous pamphlet called *Nahzat-i Hussein* (Hussein’s Movement) which likened Che Guevara’s struggle against Latin American dictators to the early Shi’i martyrs that had violently resisted an oppressive regime. This, they argued, provided an example that should encourage Muslims and oppressed peoples everywhere to struggle against oppression.<sup>57</sup>

Most of the young revolutionaries in *Mujahideen* came from the “highly religious traditional middleclass.”<sup>58</sup> Influenced by many leading Iranian intellectuals, including ‘Ali Shari’ati, they staged their first military attack in 1971 and nearly lost all their original members. However, their daring attempts to destabilize the regime proved to be potent tools for recruitment, and they attracted many young college educated students, mainly with physical science degrees.<sup>59</sup> As a result of to the growing appeal of “Islamic Marxism” (as the Shah called it) to

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<sup>55</sup> Moin, p. 165.

<sup>56</sup> DeFronzo, p. 263.

<sup>57</sup> Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* pp. 28 - 29.

<sup>58</sup> DeFronzo, p. 262.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

college educated youths, the monarch grew increasingly paranoid that this socialist ideology would spread from the college to the countryside, thus sparking a urban-rural coalition force against him.<sup>60</sup> According to Ervand Abrahamian, Khomeini criticized his apolitical colleagues for being “asleep” while college students actively resisted the Shah.<sup>61</sup> “We cannot remain silent”, he proclaimed, “until college students force us to carry out our duty.”<sup>62</sup> Because of the threat of losing so many young minds to Marxism, Khomeini believed the clergy had no choice but to engage in oppositional politics and offer an Islamic alternative to atheistic Marxist theory. Furthermore, because of their mass appeal, Khomeini was increasingly under pressure to correspond with the leadership of the Marxist groups, including the *Mujahideen*.<sup>63</sup>

Yet Khomeini disagreed with the guerilla groups’ violent tactics against the Shah, believing they were ineffective and would alienate the public. He denounced the *Mujahideen*’s attacks on the Iranian military as counterproductive, and instead advocated “moral attacks” in order to persuade them from their loyalty to the regime.<sup>64</sup> If he could divide the Shah’s forces, he thought, at least getting some military men to defect, then he would weaken the Shah’s ability to make war on his own people. He believed that to attack them would only strengthen their loyalty to

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<sup>60</sup> Gheissari, pp. 76 - 77., Though he was never a member of the group, the Shah thought ‘Ali Shari’ati was the intellectual force behind “Islamic Marxism” and the *Mujahideen-i Khalq*. See Moin, p. 174.

<sup>61</sup> Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> DeFronzo, p. 269.

the Shah and that therefore this was not a strategically viable option. On top of this, Khomeini did not believe the guerilla forces had either the legitimacy or the influence to topple the government. In a meeting with guerilla representatives, he said “the regime would only fall when the clergy as a whole joined the opposition.”<sup>65</sup> It would be the leadership of the clergy, the traditional guardians of Shi’a, that would take down the Shah, not a fraternity of guerilla fighters.

Although Khomeini demanded the *Mujahideen-i Khalq* withdraw anti-clerical polemics in their publications, which had criticized apolitical and pro-regime clerics, he did dispense funds to the families of *Mujahideen* political prisoners in a gesture of solidarity.<sup>66</sup> Regardless whether or not Khomeini personally liked the guerilla groups, they did provide a great service to the revolution. They, if anything, demonstrated the chaos that the increasingly despotic Shah would bring to the nation, and showed that this chaos would only end if the people united under the banner of opposition. In the end, the *Mujahideen-i Khalq* would ultimately join forces with the Khomeini’s clerically-led opposition, providing many young revolutionaries who were ready to face the Shah and his military might directly.

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<sup>65</sup> Moin, p. 176.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

## *Fedayeen-i Khalq*

The story of the *Fedayeen-i Khalq* is similar to the *Mujahideen-i Khalq*, except that the *Fedayeen* were not religious, but rather a secular Marxist anti-Shah guerilla force.<sup>67</sup> Born out of the 1963 protests, they were founded by Bijan Jazani and Mas'ud Ahmadzadeh and officially organized in the 1970's.<sup>68</sup> Portrayed as "atheist terrorists" by the Shah, the mission of the *Fedayeen* was to remove the regime and install a government based on Marxist principles.<sup>69</sup> Attempting to bring a sense of agency to the people, one leader proclaimed "to inspire the people we must resort to a revolutionary armed struggle ... to shatter the illusion that the people are powerless."

The *Fedayeen* developed out of a coalition of three university Marxist groups initially organized by activist students and writers in Tehran, Tabriz, and Mashad.<sup>70</sup> Mainly children of the modern middle class whose parents had been involved in the left-wing politics of Tudeh and National Front, the *Fedayeen* ideologically drew on the Guevara theory of *foco* guerilla warfare.<sup>71</sup> These young activists, who were inspired by the liberation movements of China, Vietnam, and

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<sup>67</sup> "Fidayeen" comes from the Arabic word "Fidyah" which literally means "expiation by sacrifice" or "redemption." However, in this case, the word "Fidayeen" means "men of sacrifice" signifying their willingness to sacrifice their lives for a cause. Glasse, p. 126.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 164., DeFronzo, p. 262.

<sup>69</sup> DeFronzo, p. 262.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 262., See Guevara, Che. Guerilla Warfare. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Cuba, were generally college-educated with advanced degrees, often from Western universities.<sup>72</sup> Their adoption of the *foco* theory expresses their rejection of the “gradualist” school of political thought represented by the Tudeh and National Front. Like Che Guevara, they believed a small band of revolutionary guerillas could spark the revolution that would bring down the regime. This could only occur by means of a violent guerilla struggle against the well-equipped military; hence they attacked foreign corporations, banks, and assassinated officials.<sup>73</sup> However, having lost many members as of 1976 to hit-and-run operations against SAVAK and seeing little political results from such operations, the *Fedayeen* ceased all military operations until such time as there would be more favorable conditions for such operations. As with the case with *Mujahideen-i Khalq*, Khomeini disagreed with their attacks on the Iranian military, and didn’t believe they could succeed in Iran as Guevara succeeded in Cuba without the support of the clergy. Although he didn’t condemn this group during the revolution, it was clear that Khomeini did not approve of its dogmatic Marxism and its anti-religious views.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>74</sup> Moin, pp. 175 - 176.

## **Marxist Intellectuals Behind the Revolution: The Politics of Return**

Two Iranian Marxist intellectuals had a major impact on the Revolution. They are Jalal Al-i Ahmad (1923 - 1970) and 'Ali Shari'ati (1933 - 1977). The intellectual traditions of these two men have been the subject of countless studies in the West and in the Islamic world. Because of their impact on Iranian society during the reign of the Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, no study of Khomeini or the Iranian Revolution is complete without examining their role. Although I cannot do a thorough study of these two scholars here, I will briefly review their unique contributions to the revolution and how they affected Khomeini and his leadership.<sup>75</sup>

### *Jalal Al-i Ahmad*

Of all the modern Iranian writers, Jalal Al-i Ahmad was probably the most often read by all sectors of society, from secular leftist intellectuals to scholars of religion. Born in a clerical family, Al-i Ahmad disregarded his father's desires for him to become a cleric. Instead he left religion altogether and joined the communist Tudeh party. Under the influence of Khalil Maleki, a German-educated social democrat, Al-i Ahmad became a major player in the party, writing many

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<sup>75</sup> A third intellectual whose work in many ways mirrored Al-i Ahmad and Shari'ati was Ehsan Naraqi (b. 1926) but because of his involvement in state institutions and NGO's, his writings made a minimal contribution to the revolution. See Gheissari, pp. 92-97.

articles for the communist publications *Mardum* and *Rahbar*.<sup>76</sup> After he graduated from the Teacher's Training College in 1946, he became a school teacher and begun to write short stories and novels.<sup>77</sup> Most of his fictional stories were based on his own life experiences, and addressed the problems and dynamics of tradition Iranian life. His two most famous workers were *Mudiri-i Madrasa* (The School Principle) and *Did va Bazdid* (Visitis Exchanged), both of which ridiculed the "superstition" of religion as exemplified by his father.<sup>78</sup> In the late 1940's, at the height of Tudeh's power, Al-i Ahmad and other important members left the party, disillusioned with the party's insistence on defending the Soviet Union's refusal to resist the Iranian military's takeover of Iranian Azerbaijan.<sup>79</sup> After he left the party, Al-i Ahmad concentrated on teaching and writing, publishing three volumes of short stories between 1945 and 1948.<sup>80</sup> In these stories, Al-i Ahmad expresses his deep love affair with Persian culture and language, a relationship that is mutually shared by his readers. Despite his growing alienation from politics, he remained in contact with his intellectual father Khalil Maleki, who had also left the Tudeh party. Together, in 1950 and 1951, they formed the *Hizb-i Zahmat-Khashan* (Toilers' party) in support of the nationalist work of Dr. Muhammad

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<sup>76</sup> Mottahedeh, p. 289, Hamid Algar, *Introduction to Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984) 10.

<sup>77</sup> Algar, *Occidentosis* p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> Mottahedeh, p. 290.

Mussadeq.<sup>81</sup> He would later follow Maleki out of the Toilers' party in to a new *Niru-yi Sivvum* (Third Force) party, but likewise found the politics of that group disheartening. Soon after he left that party, Dr. Mossadeq was overthrown by a coup d'état and Al-i Ahmed returned to his intellectual endeavors, leaving politics behind.<sup>82</sup> This drifting from one party and ideology to the next was the general course of Al-i Ahmad's life and was described by his widow as his *hadisaju 'i*, "search for happenings or events."<sup>83</sup> He was a perpetual student, always searching for an insight that would assist him in understanding himself, his country, and his culture.

Wanting to reconnect to the culture of his youth, Al-i Ahmad traveled to his ancestral village of Aurazan in order to do anthropological work on rural Iranian lifestyles.<sup>84</sup> This work led him to believe that the "real Iran" lay not in the urban cities, but in the age-old, neglected, and forgotten villages that had not been seduced by materialism, commercialism, and superficiality.<sup>85</sup> After the publication of *Aurazan*, followed by *Tatnishinha-yi Buluk-i Zahra*, and *Jazira-yi Kharg*, both studies of rural villages, he was invited to edit a series of anthropological monographs at the Institute of Social Research at the University of Tehran.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Algar, p. 11., Mottahedeh, p. 293.

<sup>82</sup> Algar, p. 12.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>85</sup> Mottahedeh, p. 294.

<sup>86</sup> Algar, 12. Al-i Ahmad made deep personal connection with the subject of *Tatnishinha-yi Buluk-i Zahra*, which reminded him of his own upbringing. He hope this study would help purge his mind of memories of childhood. He called this his "mental housecleaning." Mottahedeh, p. 295.



Although his time spent at the Institute was very productive, his *hadisaju'i* was overpowering and he wanted to begin work on a new subject he had become intrigued with: *gharbzadegi*. This term, having been translated as “Occidentosis”, “Westoxication”, or the innocuous “Euromania”, was partly inspired by the direction of the institute in Tehran, which he believed wanted to produce monographs that would be acceptable to Western scholars.<sup>87</sup> He said, “they wanted to make the monographs into something worthy of being presented to Westerners, i.e., inevitably written according to Western criteria.”<sup>88</sup> Being philosophically opposed to this Euro-worship, he said he “was aiming at ... gaining renewed acquaintance with ourselves, a new evaluation of our native environment in accordance with criteria of our own.”<sup>89</sup> This turning away from Western- oriented positivistic anthropology toward a political philosophy of social criticism, was the beginning of Al-i Ahmad’s rediscovery of Iran and Iranian culture.

*Gharbzadegi*, which by no doubt was the most important theoretical contribution of Al-i Ahmad to the revolution, took up an idea first expressed by the Iranian scholar Ahmad Fardid, who explained it in philosophical terms of the West’s worldview (*Weltanschauung*). Fardid believed the problem of *gharbzadegi* originated in the ancient Greeks “existential separation between the human mind as

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<sup>87</sup> Algar, p. 12.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

the knowing subject and the external world as the object of study.”<sup>90</sup> He believed that this worldview was in contrast to the East’s “totalizing, harmonious, and illuminative qualities,” and because of the separation, “began a period of universal darkness that has since concealed the original unity and totality of Being.”<sup>91</sup>

In the spirit of Marx’s relationship with Hegel, Al-i Ahmad, although impressed by Fardid, turned his theory from the abstract to the concrete, making it into a critical political social philosophy. For him, *gharbzadegi* can be characterized as the “abandonment of traditional cultural identity and the blind imitation of all things Western.” In terms of popular culture, he saw that most of the imitation was blind, simply borrowing images from the West without having any knowledge of how these phenomenon came to be. The historical forces that served as the basis for Western political and economic progress, which the Shah’s “White Revolution” was attempting to emulate, were not understood either. He therefore identified the fundamental contradictions between traditional Iranian society and the massive tension arising from the pull of Western modernity. He was appalled by the abandonment of traditional cultural values, language, dress, tastes, foods, and the decline in traditional ways of living; believing that Iranians had forgotten who they were while attempting to be something they were not. In defining “*gharbzadegi*”, he spoke in terms of a disease, writing it is “like cholera

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<sup>90</sup> Gheissari, p. 89.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

[or] frostbite. But no. It's at least as bad as sawflies in the wheat fields. Have you ever seen how they infest wheat? From within. There's a healthy skin in places, but it's only a skin, just like the shell of a cicade on a tree."<sup>92</sup> To be plagued with *gharbzadegi* is to be sickened with disease that kills from the inside, a disease of the heart and mind.

Al-i Ahmad declared the cultural "Westernization" of Iran to be a subversive attempt, disguised as progress and development, to weaken internal and traditional opposition forces (Shi'a Islam and Iranian nationalism) that would oppose any colonial or imperial attempt to control Iran. This "cultural invasion" occurred alongside of the political and economic invasion of Iran. Thus, Westernization made Iran politically, economically, and culturally subservient to the Western powers. In their attempt to be "modern", Iranians were paying the price by losing their cultural identity and their national sovereignty.

This notion of "cultural invasion" or "cultural imperialism" not only played a major role in Al-i Ahmad's critique of Iran, but also played a major role in third-world Marxist critique in general. For example, Paulo Freire, the Brazilian founder of "liberation pedagogy", described "cultural invasion" as such,

...the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression. Whether urbane or harsh, cultural invasion is thus always an act of violence against the persons of the invaded culture, who lose their originality or face the threat of losing it. In cultural invasion...the invaders are the authors of, and actors in, the process; those they invade

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<sup>92</sup> Mottahedeh, p. 296.

are the objects.

All domination involves invasion - at times physical and overt, at times camouflaged, with the invader assuming the role of a helping friend. ....invasion is a form of economic and cultural domination.

*Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders. In cultural invasion it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes.*

For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority. Since everything has its opposite, if those who are invaded consider themselves inferior, they must necessarily recognize the superiority of the invaders. The values of the latter thereby become the pattern for the former. *The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, dress like them, talk like them.*<sup>93</sup>

For Al-i Ahmad, this “cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded”, and “alienation from the spirit of their own culture”, is what he termed *gharbzadegi*.

Despite his rigorous critique of the cultural invasion, Al-i Ahmad saw one aspect of Iranian cultural and society that had not been penetrated by the West: Shi’a Islam. Coupled with his personal rapprochement to Islam, he believed that the only “authentic” and therefore legitimate way to resist the Westernization and colonization of Iran lay with the power of the Shi’a clergy and their leadership of a religiously committed Iran. No other ideology, religion, or philosophy had the power to united and motivate the people like Shi’a Islam. Although he could

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<sup>93</sup> Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum, 2003) 152-153. Emphasis added.

never fully commit himself to a religious life, believing his very prayers to be hypocritical, Al-i Ahmad surprisingly felt comfortable in his own skin when speaking from the point-of-view of a Shi'a Muslim.<sup>94</sup> For him personally, salvation of Islam came through the radicalization of Islam. Without such radicalization, religion remained superstitious and obsolete, and therefore unable to address the concrete problems of existence, especially the chaos that was prevalent in Iran. Although he still had his doubts, in 1964 he made a pilgrimage to Mecca where his relationship with Islam deepened.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the success and growing popularity of his works, Al-i Ahmad was distrusted by strict conservative clergy and dogmatic communists as well. In life, he was claimed by no one, and pledged his allegiance to no one. After his death, religious, secular, Marxist, etc., all seemed to suggest that he was one of theirs. However, although he was never claimed by Khomeini, it is obvious that the Ayatollah was influenced by the rhetoric of Jalal Al-i Ahmad, and frequently incorporated his *gharbzadegi* language into his own speeches. In 1962, Khomeini met Al-i Ahmad at the funeral of his father, who had been an important cleric. It is said that Khomeini spoke with Al-i Ahmad there and told him of his admiration for his book.<sup>96</sup> Later, in 1964, Al-i Ahmad visited Khomeini, then under house-arrest in Tehran, shaking his hand and saying, "If we continue to join hands we will

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<sup>94</sup> Muttahede, pp. 300, 304.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 303-304.

<sup>96</sup> Mottahede, p. 303.

defeat the government.”<sup>97</sup> Many believed these symbolic meetings suggested a willingness to ally secular and religious opposition in their ongoing struggle against the Shah’s tyranny and the *gharbzadegi* that follows.<sup>98</sup>

The influence of Al-i Ahmad on Khomeini is most striking in Khomeini’s address at the Faiziyeh School in Qom on September 8, 1979 marking the “Black Friday” massacre a year prior.<sup>99</sup> In it, he likens “westoxication” with the “darkness” spoken about in the Qur’an, Surah 2:257.<sup>100</sup> he says, “all “westoxication” is darkness, those who turn their attention to the West and foreigners, have taken the West to be their direction of prayer. They have moved into darkness and their saints are idols. Eastern societies...have turned to the West and, having the direction of their prayers, the West, have lost themselves. They do not know themselves. All the problems of Easterners and, among them, our problems and miseries, are caused by our losing ourselves.”<sup>101</sup> Khomeini goes on to say that if Iranian books, streets, drug stores, factories, etc., don’t have Western names, then they are not accepted. “Easterners have completely forgotten their honor”, he continues, “They have buried it. In place of it, they have put others. These are all darknesses which a tyrant transforms us to from light. It is these very

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>99</sup> To see a full transcript of the speech, see the appendix in Albert, David H., ed. Tell the American People: Perspectives on the Iranian Revolution. Philadelphia: Movement for a New Society, 1980.

<sup>100</sup> Qur’an 2:257: “*Allah is the protector of the Faithful: He takes them out of darkness into the light. For those who reject faith, Evil ones are their protectors: from the light, they lead them into darkness. They are the companions of fire, and there they shall reside.*” My Translation.

<sup>101</sup> Albert, pp. 204-205.

tyrants - of the past and present - who have reached out towards “westoxication.” They take all their subjects and sources from the West and have given them to us. Our universities were at that time Western universities. Our economy, our culture were Western. We completely forgot ourselves.”<sup>102</sup> Taking a page directly from the rhetorical of Al-i Ahmad, Khomeini states that “as long as we are in this state of imitating, we do not wish for independence”, and that “it is only the mosques which do not have Western names and that is because the clergymen, until now, have not succumbed.” As Al-i Ahmad said, the religious institutions were the only traditional section of society that had not been corrupted by *gharbzadegi*, a thesis with which Khomeini agrees. He goes on to explain the kind of freedom *gharbzadegi* offers; the freedom of gambling houses, bars, and prostitutes, the freedom of lewdness, heroin, and marijuana.<sup>103</sup> This sort of freedom he calls “colonististic freedom”, a freedom that is dictated to countries from their colonial masters. “An enlightened heart”, he says, “cannot stand by silently and watch while traditions and honor are trampled upon. An enlightened heart cannot see its people being drawn towards baseness of spirit or watch in silence while individuals... live in slums.”<sup>104</sup>

It is clear that the rhetoric of *gharbzadegi* made popular by Jalal Al-i Ahmad has a tremendous influence on Khomeini and many other clerics. Though it is impossible to quantify such influence, it is likewise impossible to ignore the

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 206-207.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

overwhelming likeness of Khomeini's argument about cultural invasion to Al-i Ahmad's *gharbzadegi*. In Khomeini's speech, he prophetically pleads with his audience to abandon their infatuation with the West, and "search for and find the East", the very thesis of Jalal Al-i Ahmad's work.<sup>105</sup>

Through the remainder of Al-i Ahmad's life, he continued to publish socially conscious works, mainly dealing with the plight of rural peasants, and the role of education in Iran.<sup>106</sup> He died on September 9, 1969, and was later buried in southern Tehran near the Firuzabadi mosque.<sup>107</sup> After his death, his works would become more famous than they were when he was alive, and would help shape the direction of the Iranian Revolution.

### *Ali Shari'ati*

Much of Jalal Al-i Ahmad's work would be expanded upon by a young radicalized and very popular scholar, 'Ali Shari'ati. Hated by the Shah and loved by his students, Shari'ati brought a modern and very radical understanding of Islam, Islamic history, and Islamic culture. To the younger generation of Iranian radicals, his work represented the salvation of religion - a religion that had become sterile due to its institutional "ghettoization." Rejecting the clergy's "security

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>106</sup> Gheissari, p. 90-92.

<sup>107</sup> Algar, p. 14.



blanket” of political quietism, Shari’ati believed that the clergy had the duty, as representatives of Islam and the Shi’a tradition, to engage in the political and social life of the nation. Through his radical lectures, he lifted the veil of dogmatism and superstition to expose the radical nature of the Islamic *weltanschauung*, and synthesized it with the best of modern “liberation” philosophy. Applying this future-oriented remembrance of the radical origin of Islam to the contemporary Iranian context, Shari’ati became one of the most intelligent and eloquent voices of opposition. Seen as the “ideologist of the revolt”, Shari’ati did the most to prepare the young revolutionaries for the Islamic upheaval that would engulf the country.<sup>108</sup>

‘Ali Shari’ati was born in 1933 in Mazinan, a small village in Khorasan, the northeast part of Iran.<sup>109</sup> Forever influenced by his childhood in the countryside, he felt forever indebted to his grandfather and uncles, all of who were religious scholars and pious men. He would often praise his forbearers for their “philosophy of remaining a human being in an age when life is polluted, when remaining a human being is extremely difficult, and when a repeated jihad is needed everyday, and when jihad cannot be waged.”<sup>110</sup> However, it was his father who had the most influence on young ‘Ali’s life. Aqa Muhammad Taqi Shari’ati was one of the founders of the “Center for the Propagation of Islamic Truth” in Mashad, and was

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<sup>108</sup> Nikkie R. Kōddie, Roots of Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 215.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>110</sup> Algar, Hamid. Introduction. On the Sociology of Islam, by Ali Shari’ati. (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979) 15.

an intellectual giant among the Islamic intellectual movement in Iran.<sup>111</sup> His mission, to bring young Western-seduced Iranian students back to the Islamic way of life without rejecting modernity for religious obscurantism, would have a deep impact on the thought and work of his son. Together, he and his son would join the “Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists”, a leftist political party that was not willing to reject religion as other intellectuals had done.<sup>112</sup> ‘Ali would later say “it was he who introduced me to his friends - his books; they were my constant and familiar companions from the earliest years of my schooling. I grew up and matured in his library, which was for him the whole of his life and his family.”<sup>113</sup> After receiving his secondary education, Shari’ati at the age of seventeen entered a teacher’s training college and within two years became a teacher, while writing and translating works on religion and engaging in pro-Mossadeq politics.<sup>114</sup> His work at the teacher’s training college, plus the frequent lectures he gave at the Center for the Propagation of Islamic truth, introduced him to the problems posed by Islam and Western modernity. He began to take an interest in the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist philosophy of Third World liberation struggles. During this time he translated from ‘Arabic Abdul Hamid Jowdat al-Sahar’s book, *Abu Zarr: Khoda Parast-i Sosiya*list (Abu Zarr: The God-Worshipping Socialist), which praised Abu Zarr, an companion of the Prophet Muhammad who rejected

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>112</sup> Abrahamian, Ervand. Iran: Between Two Revolutions. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 464.

<sup>113</sup> Algar, p. 17.

<sup>114</sup> Keddie, p. 215.

Ummayyad claim to authority, supported 'Ali's claim to caliphate, withdrew to the desert, and uncompromisingly spoke on behalf of the poor and destitute.<sup>115</sup> At twenty-three he was accepted into the Faculty of Letters at Mashad, and earned his bachelors degree three years later, specializing in 'Arabic and French.<sup>116</sup> Because he was one of the top scholars, he was awarded a scholarship to the Sorbonne in Paris, although he had to wait a full year until he could leave.<sup>117</sup>

'Ali Shari'ati's time in Paris was one of great intellectual flowering. He mainly studied religious history and sociology, including the writers and intellectuals popular at the time; Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Satre, and the French Islamologist Louis Massignon, with whom he had a deep connection.<sup>118</sup> Through his study of Marxism and French sociology, he came across Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, which left a lasting impact on him.<sup>119</sup> Although Fanon had first been introduced to Europe by Satre, Shari'ati wrote an article in 1962 praising his keen insights into the mind of the colonized, and advocated its study by Iranian students.<sup>120</sup> As he became increasingly interested in Third World anti-imperialist struggles, he rejected both positivistic sociology and dogmatic Marxism as being

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<sup>115</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran* p. 465.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 465., Keddie., p. 215.

<sup>117</sup> Keddie, p. 215.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 215, Algar, *Sociology* p. 21.

<sup>119</sup> During this time, he translated Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Che Guevara's *Guerilla Warfare*, and Satre's *What is Poetry?* into Persian. See Abrahamian, *Iran* p. 465.

<sup>120</sup> Though he admired Fanon's dedication to anti-imperialism and colonialism, he disagreed with Fanon's assertion that Third World peoples had to abandon their particular religions in order to oppose Western domination. Shari'ati would argue the opposite; that it was imperative for Third World people's to regain their historic identity, especially their religion. See Abrahamian, *Iran* p. 465.

inadequate to answer the problems of the Third World.<sup>121</sup> His time in Paris coincided with the violent Algerian Revolution, which was a struggle against France's control over the North African country, and through which the anti-imperialist struggle would eventually be brought to French soil.<sup>122</sup> For Shari'ati, The Algerian Revolution was a struggle between Muslims and imperialists, and he actively supported the Algerian resistance. It brought a further insight to him when the French and Algerian Communist Parties both denounced the rebellion and supported the extended annexation of Algerian by France, a move that forever cemented his suspicion of dogmatic communist parties.<sup>123</sup> He joined the Liberation Movement and the Iranian Students Confederation, organizing many of their protests in support of the Algerian struggle, resulting in hospital time nursing a head wound.<sup>124</sup>

With his doctorate in hand, in 1964 Shari'ati returned to a chaotic Iran that had just been through one of the most violent suppressions of domestic opposition in Iranian history. While Shari'ati was in Paris, the Shah was engaged in his massive 1963 sweep of dissenters, locking intellectuals and clergy in prison, banning opposition parties, and killing young protesters. Shari'ati would be no exception. As soon as he crossed into Iran from Turkey he was immediately

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<sup>121</sup> Algar, Sociology p. 21.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 22

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>124</sup> Abrahamian, Iran p. 465.

arrested and put into prison for several months.<sup>125</sup> Shari'ati's reputation as a leftist and anti-imperialist intellectual preceded his physical arrival, and the Shah was going to send him a strong message.

After his release in 1965, he taught first in a Khorasan village, then at a Mashhad High School.<sup>126</sup> However, he was soon appointed to the University of Mashhad as an assistant professor, and became a very popular professor among the student body. His popularity and the nature of his subject matters soon caused alarm in the administration and he was forced to retire.<sup>127</sup> Committed to bringing his revolutionary ideals to the Iranian people, he forgot his unjust retirement and moved to Tehran, where he was hired as a lecturer at the Husseinayah Ershad, a progressive Muslim teaching institution created in 1969 and financed by veterans of the Liberation Movement.<sup>128</sup> As the Shah's repressive police state continued to suppress all forms of opposition, the Husseinayah Ershad was closed down in 1973, Shari'ati's works were banned and he was forced into hiding.<sup>129</sup> Eventually he was caught and served five hundred days in solitary confinement without any trial.<sup>130</sup> After his release in 1977, Shari'ati knew he could no longer stay in Iran and fled to London in May. In a last desperate attempt to shame Shari'ati, the Iranian regime refused to let his wife and two of his three daughters join him; he

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<sup>125</sup> Algar, *Sociology* p. 26., Keddie, p. 216.

<sup>126</sup> Keddie, p. 216.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. p. 216., Algar, *Sociology* p. 27.

<sup>128</sup> Keddie, p. 216., Abrahamian, *Iran* p. 466.

<sup>129</sup> Keddie, p. 216., Abrahamian, *Iran* p. 466. The two authors give different dates for the closing of the Husseinayah. Abrahamian has it as 1972.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 216., Algar, *Sociology* p. 27.

therefore met only one of his girls at the airport.<sup>131</sup> Only a month later, on June 19, 1977, Shari'ati mysteriously died, a death that was popularly blamed on SAVAK, acting on orders from the Shah.<sup>132</sup> Although he didn't live to see the fall of the Peacock Throne (as the Shah's regime was called), Shari'ati has been rightly credited as being the "intellectual of the revolution."<sup>133</sup>

Shari'ati's writing style reflects his speaking style; he was first and foremost a religio-political orator. As a sociologist, he does not load his books with positivistic facts and statistics, as is often seen in Western sociological studies; instead he relies heavily of logical and religious arguments. From the wide range of his writings that where published, most of them after the successful revolution, we can examine his most important ideas he had about Islam, liberation, revolutionary struggle, and religion in general.

Shari'ati was foremost an Islamic intellectual concerned about the vitality and future of Islam as a revolutionary force for good. Just as importantly, he was a dedicated theorist of liberation, struggling to formulate a universal answer for the problems of oppressed and colonized peoples of the Third World. Just as Al-i Ahmad had articulated the dangers of *gharbzadegi*, Shari'ati believed Iran was in a precarious situation, increasingly culturally alienated from itself, and putting its self in constant danger of becoming a colonial state with its destiny dictated by the

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<sup>131</sup> Keddie, p. 216.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 216., Though it was rarely believed, a British coroner attributed his death to massive heart failure. Abrahamian, Iran p. 466.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 466.

West.

The issue that was most important to Shari'ati was the nature of the Shi'a tradition. Was it as obsolete and obscurantist as Western-educated intellectuals charged? Or was it a apolitical personal religious tradition, unconcerned with matters of the state, as many of the 'Ulema believed? Shari'ati rejected both of these positions in the belief that Islam, and especially Shi'a Islam (which to him *was* Islam), was a revolutionary ideology that was as relevant to modern society as any Western democratic philosophy. Proving his point, he said Shi'ism has a unique "worldview, ideological foundation, philosophy of history, mission, agenda, class base, political strategy, system of leadership, tradition of party campaign and organization."<sup>134</sup> Rejecting the reactionary mullahs, who kept religion a private matter, Shari'ati believed that it was the responsibility and duty of all committed Muslims to engage in the political life of the nation, as did the Prophet Muhammad. This Islamic worldview, drawing on the early Islamic Medina experience as a template, demonstrates what Shari'ati called the *Nizam-i Tawhid* - a complete social order that stresses justice, peace, equity, solidarity, communal ownership of wealth, and finally, a classless society.<sup>135</sup> This complete Islamic society has the potential to fulfill all human needs and wants in a healthy balance between individual autonomy and collective solidarity. Furthermore, this progressive Islam preserves historic Islamic identity while critically adopting

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<sup>134</sup> Gheissari, p. 101.

<sup>135</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran* p. 466.

aspects of Western technological progress in order to ensure the viability of the nation in the modern world. Shari'ati saw no future in the "reactionary" stance of the conservative apolitical mullahs, nor in the vision of the anti-religious *gharbazadegi* intellectuals who wished to see religion relegated to the dustbins of history.

Unlike Michel Foucault, whose brief journey into political journalism corresponded with the Iranian revolution and believed it to be a concrete negation of Marx's statement that "religion is the opiate of the masses", Shari'ati knew very well, that within the Shi'a tradition, there was still an orientation that could be considered opium Shi'ism.<sup>136</sup> This form of the Shi'a tradition was what he called "Safavid Shi'ism" and it is in stark contrast to the original Shi'ism (Alid Shi'ism) of 'Ali, the first Imam.<sup>137</sup> Alid Shi'ism is Islam in its original progressive and dynamic state - a tradition that is uncompromisingly radical in its defense of social justice and its commitment to *tawhid* (oneness of God). In contrast, Safavid Shi'ism degraded religion into an institution of state power, mixing it with nationalism and ethnocentrism for political means. Because it became an ideology legitimizing the status quo, it was deprived of its revolutionary potential.

For Shari'ati, Safavid Shi'ism was also the Shi'ism of the Pahlavi Peacock

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<sup>136</sup> See Ree, Jonathan. "The Treason of the Clerics." *The Nation* 15 August 2005: 31-34.

<sup>137</sup> Keddie, p. 217. The Safavids were dynasty that ruled Persia from 1501 to 1732 CE. In order to consolidate power, they made Twelver Shi'a Islam into the state religion which alienated Persia from its Sunni and 'Arab neighbors. Glasse, p. 341.



Throne.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, the modern ‘ulema that lent their legitimizing services to the corrupt regime, renounced their roles as “awakeners”, ghettoized themselves in their obscure theological debates, and transformed Shi’ism into a religion of the “vanquished” and “defeated” (as in the Muharram festival), these were the men who made Shi’ism the opiate of the masses. For Shari’ati, the essential battle was not one between religion and secularism as in Marx, but one of religion vs. religion (Mazheb ‘Aliyeh Mazheb).<sup>139</sup> Only rediscovery of the essence of the Shi’a tradition, exemplified by ‘Ali, Hussein, and the Imams, and their radical struggle against tyranny, could rescue the Shi’a tradition from the *mala’* (priesthood: Safavid Shi’a clerics).

Like Fromm’s analysis of the role of Prophets and Priests, Shari’ati locates the priests and the opulent (*mutrif*) in the exploiting classes, who bitterly opposed the revolutionary message of the prophet because of their personal stake in the status quo.<sup>140</sup> The prophet, on the other hand, is the representative of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the proletariat, and the martyrs. Bitterly opposed to an oppressive status quo, he represents a perpetual revolution that continually strives for the perfection of mankind and of his own society. Furthermore, the prophet bears the worldview of *tawhid*, which manifests itself in a just society; a society based on the Islamic principles of equality, solidarity, justice, peace, and

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<sup>138</sup> Keddie, p. 218.

<sup>139</sup> See Shari’ati, Ali. Religion vs. Religion. Trans. Laleh Bakhtiar. Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 2003. This is a collection of lectures delivered on the topic of the battle between the “religion of legitimization” and the “religion of revolution.”

<sup>140</sup> Algar, Sociology p. 29.

belief in Allah. In contrast, the society of *shirk* (associating partners with God or idolatry), is the society of inequality, injustice, commercialism, materialism, greed, war, and unbelief. It is the role of the prophet and the prophetic to engage in worldly activities in order to secure the environment from which the society of *tawhid* can flourish. If this historical mission is abandoned or compromised, then tyranny, like the Ummayyads and the Shah, will reign over the lives of mankind.

Shari'ati not only accused the priestly 'ulema of abandoning the spirit of 'Ali, but he also criticized the Western-oriented intellectuals for depending on the West for an identity. He believed this made them impotent in the struggle against imperialism. Rejecting their appeals to racial and ancient past national identity, Shari'ati stressed the "return to Islam" as the only legitimate source of Iranian identity. He said,

Our people do not find their roots in these civilizations... [Sassanid, Achaemenians, etc.] Our people remember nothing from this distant past and do not care to learn about the pre-Islamic civilizations... Consequently, for us a return to our roots means not a discovery of pre-Islamic Iran, but a return to our Islamic, especially Shiah roots.<sup>141</sup>

As is evident from this quote, the Shah's frequent elevation of pre-Islamic Persian civilization, and the secular intellectuals' pride in being "Persian" while abandoning Islam, fell on the deaf ears of Shari'ati. He categorically rejected attempts by the Shah and the *gharbzadegi* intellectuals to pit Persian culture against Islamic

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<sup>141</sup> As quoted in Mottahedah, p. 331.

culture, believing they only used these appeals to ancient Iranian history to legitimate imperial rule. But because the vast majority of Iranians saw their identity not in blood and soil, but in Islam, a return to anything but Islam was unacceptable.

Likewise, popular religious traditions, or as the Sunni philosopher Abu-Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali (1058-1111 CE) called them, the “religion of the riff-raff”, also had to be abandoned because of their opiate effect on the masses, placating their alienation with superstitious ideas and practices, and making them less likely to be revolutionary.<sup>142</sup> He preferred the intellectual and “enlightened” Muslim, imbued with the spirit of protest, to the static priestly scholar or the unenlightened superstitious commoner.<sup>143</sup>

If Shari’ati was rejecting both “Safavid” Shi’ism and “riff-raff” Shi’ism, as well as the *gharbzadegi* infected intellectuals, in preference for the “Alid” Shi’ism, then we must ask what has influenced this form of the Shi’a tradition. Shari’ati would not be honest if he claimed that he was not influenced in many ways by Western intellectual traditions. His Islam was a hybrid mix of non-Muslim and non-Iranian ideas and concepts, including Marxism, socialism, Leninism, existentialism, French sociology, and the works of many Third World revolutionaries.<sup>144</sup> Combined with Sufi mystic metaphors and symbols, Shari’ati’s

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<sup>142</sup> See Ghazzali, Hamid *Ihya’ ‘Ulum ud-Din (The Revival of Religious Learnings)*. Trans. Al-Haj Maulanan Fazal-ul-Karim. 4 Vols. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 2000.

<sup>143</sup> Algar, p. 33.

<sup>144</sup> Gheissari, pp. 97-98.

Islam was a blend of Western and Eastern influences.

However, his use of Western analysis could cause a problem, especially because it came from someone who was criticizing others for their dependence on Western analysis. Yet, Shari'ati saw truth to be truth. If truth came from a Western source, it logically would have an Islamic equivalent, because Islam, as a comprehensive worldview and system of thought and action, was capable of discerning truth from falsehood, and could not reject truth just because it had first been articulated elsewhere. Shari'ati was well aware of the revolutionary potential of his ideology. If he was able to imbue the Iranian masses with such ideas, his ideology could become a real force against the regime and its supporters. Therefore, in order to communicate with the masses, Shari'ati could not rely on the language of the Western Marxists and socialists; he had to "Islamize" his analysis. Needing to proceed through the language with which most could identify, Shari'ati replaced Western terms with terms corresponding to Iranian-Islamic culture, history, religion, philosophy, literature, and the contemporary situation, giving his analysis an organic origin and depth of culture-specific meaning that could not be achieved through Western terminology.<sup>145</sup> There is no evidence Shari'ati did this systematically, as if it were a planned strategy to deceive his listeners; it seemed to have a natural development in which he recognized the areas in which the Shi'a tradition and Western analysis were congruent.

As we shall see, the "Islamization" of Western political analysis would

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<sup>145</sup> Algar, Sociology p. 31.

become very important to Khomeini. Although he didn't accept all of Shari'ati's views, Khomeini did benefit from the piercing critique provided by Shari'ati and accepted by the masses, and from the linguistic idiom in which Shari'ati delivered his critique.

### **Khomeini's Use of Leftist-Islamic Language**

In his 1993 work *Khomeinism: Essays of the Islamic Republic*, Ervand Abrahamian rejects the "fundamentalist" label assigned to Khomeini by many in the West, and instead prefers the term "populist."<sup>146</sup> This is for several reasons: 1) All Muslims can be considered "fundamentalist" inasmuch as this means that they believe in the inerrancy of the Qur'an as the word of the divine. 2) If "fundamentalist" implies the layman's ability to grasp religious truth directly from the sacred text without help or support from the clergy, tradition, or scholarship, Khomeini rejected this naive view, claiming that even the Angel Gabriel couldn't fully comprehend the "inner meanings" of the Qur'an. 3) If "fundamentalist" implies the desire to "return" to a "golden age" of religion, then Khomeini would not fit the description, for he rejected such "pre-modern" utopian ideals as inadequate in facing the modern world. 4) If "fundamentalist" entails the calling for the abandonment of the modern nation-state, then this description does not apply

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<sup>146</sup> As English translations of Khomeini's frequent speeches, newspaper articles, addresses, are minimal in number, I am indebted to Abrahamian's excellent scholarship of the issue of Khomeini's political-left language.

to Khomeini's acceptance of modern national boundaries - despite the fact that he often condemned the "artificial" separation of Muslims made by imposition of Western colonial borders. 5) If "fundamentalist" implies rigid implementation of laws and institutions based on a strict traditional interpretation of sacred text, then Khomeini was not fundamentalist, because he was open to non-Islamic notions of government if they were acceptable to Islamic tradition. Hence he supported many Western democratic and parliamentary ideas.<sup>147</sup> 6) If "fundamentalist" entails a dogmatic rejection of modernity and Western technology, then Khomeini was no fundamentalist because he advocated the technological modernization of Iran, often labeling clerics who rejected technology as "reactionary" (*ertejayi*). 7) In origin, the term "fundamentalist" refers to a strain of twentieth-century American Protestantism that rejected a socio-political "social gospel" for an eschatological gospel of "saving souls" and biblical literalism. Although he was by no means neglectful of theological issues, Khomeini was predominately concerned with the politics and society of his day. 8) If "fundamentalism" proposes "fossilized" ideas, devoid of novel and dynamic interpretations, a negation of the dialectic of knowledge, then Khomeini was no fundamentalist. On the subject of politics, society, and philosophy, etc., and despite his appeals to orthodoxy, he was open to new developments, often treating traditions and customs quite cavalierly, while blending others with Western-derived concepts. Thus his religio-political

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<sup>147</sup> The reader should be reminded that the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution is partially based on de Gaulle's Fifth Republic of France.

philosophy was similar in many ways to Third World populism found in other areas of the world.<sup>148</sup> For these reasons, the term “fundamentalist” as it is popularly used is simply not applicable to the unique role and views of Khomeini.

In its place, Abrahamian describes Khomeini’s movement as “populist”, which he defines as:

a movement of the propertied middle class that mobilized the lower classes, especially the urban poor, with radical rhetoric directed against imperialism, foreign capitalism, and the political establishment. In mobilizing the “common people,” populist movements use charismatic figures and symbols, imagery, and language that have potent value in the mass culture. Populist movements promise to drastically raise the standards of living and make the country fully independent of outside powers....<sup>149</sup>

The only important aspect I would add to Abrahamian’s definition is the incorporation of “radical” rhetoric. As I have argued, that rhetoric originated in the Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialist intellectual tradition, especially as manifested in Third World liberation struggles. Inasmuch most of the Marxist-Leninist-influenced intellectuals and guerilla groups came from the Iranian “middle class”, although not all were entirely “propertied”, the middle class was indeed responsible for the rise in radical anti-imperialist critiques of the Shah and his regime, especially in the cities, universities, and abroad. Nonetheless, I must slightly disagree with Abrahamian in the case of Iran, because it was not these “middle class” intellectuals and parties that radicalized the “lower classes” and “urban

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<sup>148</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran* pp. 13-17.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

poor” during this period. It was in fact the clergy led by Ayatollah Khomeini who radicalized the poor and urban Iranians. Although some would argue that the clerical class belonged to the broader middle class, I would argue that the clerics represented a separate class on their own, having a distinctive social function, way of appropriating wealth, way of living, and worldview. More importantly, the language used by clerics such as Bazargan and Khomeini, especially during the 1970’s, was in fact appropriated from the Marxist intellectuals, although filtered through Islamic terms and concepts. Thus Khomeini and the radical clerics that followed became a conduit through which Marxist ideas, concepts, and analysis could pass through to the lower classes, albeit while drawing on Islamic language.

Prior to the 1970’s, Khomeini seems to have accepted the inevitability of monarchal rule. Even during the 1963 suppression, when he was quickly becoming the most vocal anti-Shah cleric, he did not advocate revolution or overthrowing the Shah.<sup>150</sup> However, while he was in exile during the 1970s, a change of direction in Khomeini’s language seems to point to an ever increasing influence of Marxism. Back in Iran, while social conditions were continually deteriorating, the writings of Jalal Al-i Ahmad, ‘Ali Shari’ati, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Frantz Fanon, and other liberation theorists were all becoming increasingly popular among young radicals, sometimes being the sole merchandise sold by bookstore owners. As these writers became increasingly popular, we see a corresponding change in Khomeini’s language which reflects his deep connection

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 21.



to the events occurring in Iran. He begins to use words he has rarely used before, or interprets terms differently as to encompass a greater audience.<sup>151</sup> For example, when Khomeini spoke of two antagonistic classes (*tabaqah*), the *mostazafin* (oppressed) and the *mostakberin* (oppressors), such language was easily understandable by both the religiously- oriented urban poor and rural, and by middle class leftist intellectuals. Just speaking in terms of class antagonism was an appeal to the Marxist tradition, while also articulating the very experience of the poor and downtrodden. Khomeini's world was divided among the *tabaqeh-i bala* (the upper class), consisting of the oppressors: the rich, powerful, capitalists, exploiters, corrupt, elite, plutocrats, aristocracy, and royalty, essentially those who did not work for a living (he often referring to them as parasites), and the *tabaqeh-i payin* (lower class): who were the poor, oppressed, exploited, downtrodden, slum-dwellers, starving, disenfranchised, alienated, and in general deprived of the necessities of life, essentially those who found themselves victims of history.<sup>152</sup>

As he had likened the Shah to Yazid, the murderer of Imam Hussein, Khomeini charged the upper class with always supporting tyranny, oppression, and falsehood over freedom, justice, and truth. Much like Shari'ati, Khomeini argued that Muhammad had engaged in a "class struggle" against the aristocracy of Mecca, and that Imam Hussein died in an attempt to liberate the oppressed from

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

the oppressors.<sup>153</sup> The contemporary Iranian situation could be understood as a parallel to Muhammad's "class struggle" and to Imam Hussein's struggle against oppression, because both traditions, the Marxist and Islamic, have within themselves a dialectic of history, whether this can be summed up as "all of history is a class struggle" or a *jihad*, sacred struggle between "good and evil."

A very clever example of Khomeini's frequent borrowing of Marxist language was his use of the phrase "opium of the masses", as he regularly did in his speeches. For example, when denouncing those nations that sign the "Declaration of Human Rights", such as the United States and Britain, yet also violate those human rights throughout the world, he calls such declarations the "opium of the masses."<sup>154</sup> This is because those imperial nations wish to show the world that they are for universal human rights, thus lulling nations into believing they are benign forces for good. Another example is when he charges that the Western educated, anti-religious intellectuals try to convince Iranian students that the clerics are reactionaries and their religious traditions are an "opium of the masses", that keeps them from seeing the truth in Western modernization.<sup>155</sup> For Khomeini, the opium dealer was the West and the *gharbzadegi* intellectual, not Islam or the clergy.

To his audiences, Khomeini cleverly pointed to capitalism and imperialism as the latest form of "evil" in the world, an evil with which the Shi'a community

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>154</sup> Algar, Religion and Revolution 214.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

has long since been familiar. In order to “enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong”, as stated in the Qu’ran, Khomeini promised the end of the *Dictatora Coronada*, replacing it with an Islamic system of governance, that would resemble a utopian “socialist” state, i.e. ending exploitation, poverty, injustice, inequality, unemployment, landlessness, etc.

On the verge of success, but still at Neauphle-le-Chateau, Khomeini declared that “the demands of the oppressed people of Iran are not restricted to the departure of the Shah and the abolition of the monarchy. Their struggle will continue until the establishment of an Islamic Republic that guarantees the freedom of the people, the independence of the country, and the attainment of social justice.”<sup>156</sup> Linguistically, Khomeini was parroting the language of the young radicals, while imbuing it with clerical and prophetic authority. That he spoke the revolutionary language they spoke, that he clearly articulated their experiences, that he fully identified with the revolutionaries’ goal of ousting the Shah, that he lived the ideal lifestyle of the “suffering charismatic” and continued to be uncompromising in his opposition to the Shah only served to heighten his credibility as a revolutionary leader among the Iranian masses. Furthermore, Khomeini placed the Iranian revolution in the broader context of the Third World rejection of imperial subjugation. For the Marxist intellectual, the destruction of man’s domination of man is the goal of all “liberation” movements, and therefore it became a duty to engage in the revolutionary overthrow of the Shah. For the

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

religious, the Hussein model of Shi'a Islam advocated by Khomeini also made opposition to tyranny a religious duty, one championed by the Prophet and his descendents. Furthermore, Khomeini promised that after the Shah's fall would come a government based in *rational authority*, therefore bringing an end to man's unjust domination over man - music to the ears of a socialist.

Although Khomeini and the leftist opposition had much in common, it must be made clear that, although Khomeini could not accept leftist denunciation of apolitical clerics. Khomeini believed that, after the revolution was completed, the clergy would govern the nation, and therefore, no diminishing of the clergy's power or legitimacy should be tolerated prior to that time. This sounds slightly hypocritical given that Khomeini often denounced fellow clerics who took the quietist position. However, his critique was an inter-clerical critique, a dispute among equals. Such criticism from non-clerics was not welcome because it would diminish their ability to govern later. Even though he would not tolerate such anti-clerical views, he did nonetheless offer support to many groups and thinkers when their goals including the overthrow of the Shah.

The convergence of Marxist-Leninist movements among middle class intellectuals, with the ability of Khomeini to radicalize the religious urban poor and rural produced a "coalition of dissent" that together brought the Peacock Throne to its knees. Although Khomeini believed his views were an unblemished representation of the Shi'a tradition, it is very clear that leftist intellectual traditions

did influence his thinking and rhetoric. He was not immune to, nor did he overtly claim to be unimpressed by, the analytical critiques of Marxist-Leninists and leftist Islamic scholars, thinkers, and parties. With their help, Khomeini successfully led the coalition against the Shah, an unprecedented conjunction of secular, religious, Marxist, socialist, and Islamic elements, banded together for a single purpose.

### Summary

As has been demonstrated, the influence of radical Marxist-Leninism and the philosophy of Third World “liberation” struggles saturated the intellectual and political life of Iran during the period leading up to the Iranian revolution. The communism of the Tudeh party grew exponentially in the 40’s achieving their massive influence among the industrial workers. Mossadeq’s socialistic nationalism of the National Front came to power in 1951, effectively cutting short the rampant powers of the monarchy, only to be overthrown by the CIA in 1953. The rule of the Muhammad Reza Pahlavi Shah saw the growth of Leftist Islamic groups such as the Freedom Movement of Iran, and the birth of Islamic-Marxist guerilla warfare. As the nation saw increasing demographic changes, industrialization, modernization, and Westernization, cultural alienation began to flourish throughout the cities and country sides. Many towering left-influenced

scholars, such as Jalal Al-i Ahmad and 'Ali Shari'ati began to systematize the experiences of *gharbzadegi* into a radical political philosophy, and impressed on the people the need to return to Islam as the only way of liberating themselves and their nation from the Shah's Western cultural and political tyranny. Khomeini, exiled abroad yet still seen as the figurehead of the revolution, benefited immensely from these radical critiques of the Shah. By appropriating much of their revolutionary language and arguments, and returning it to the people recast in Islamic language, he was able to appeal to both the anti-imperial intelligentsia and the religious commoner. Not only did the political and religious left influence his personal understanding of the Shi'a tradition, but it also helped prepare the revolutionary groundwork for the Iranian revolution.

## CHAPTER VII

### FINAL CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, the success of Ayatollah Khomeini in leading the Iranian revolution was due to multiple factors, only some of which have been detailed in this study. I believe that the theory of “prophetic charisma,” which brings together the “charisma” elucidated by Weber, and the “prophetic” as understood by Erich Fromm, stressing the importance of the general role of prophets who stand outside the given status quo of power, the *theory - praxis dialectic*, together with Prophet Muhammad’s example as the standard bearer of Islamic notions of the “prophetic”, as well as the additional models of ‘Ali and Hussein willingness to be martyrs, provides a general model for which all later Muslim actions and speech can be judged to be truly charismatic and prophetic. As we have seen, the application of this theory to the individual who was Khomeini provides abundant evidence that he represents a modern manifestation of such prophetic charisma.

He not only denounced the Shah through politically and culturally piercing words, but uncompromisingly in deeds as well - thus exemplifying Fromm’s most important notion of the theory-praxis dialectic. Although great loss befell him, such as prison time, exile, and the death of his son, he never backed down from the threat of violence and continued his jihad without

fear of persecution. Not only did he stand prophetically against the Shah, but also against those “priestly” clerics who wished to hide cowardly behind the “Hassan model” of political quietism while their national sovereignty was slowly handed over to foreign nations, corporations, and despots. In doing this, Khomeini proved to his followers inside and outside of Iran that he not only had authority based in the tradition of scholarship and titles, of a *marja’-i taqlid*, but that he also was the carrier of *prophetic authority* based on the people’s perception of his actions: that is to say, the perception those actions conformed to a prophetic pattern established in the Qur’an and by the exemplary figures of Islam. He would not resign himself to inter-clerical debates over obscure religious matters while the social and political realm was deteriorating under the heel of *gharbzadegi*-stricken monarchs and intellectuals. To him, it was the right and duty of Muslims, and especially of Muslim clerics, to engage in the political world, for Prophet Muhammad himself was not only a man of *‘ibada* (worship), but a man of social action.

Khomeini led the first major revolution in the twentieth century that brought together the secular and religious camps in opposition to one single enemy. Through the influence of Marxist influenced intellectuals such as Jalal Al-i Ahmad and ‘Ali Shari’ati, and the appropriation and subsequent Islamization of their Marxist language, theories and concepts, Khomeini acted as a conduit between radical urban intellectuals and the religiously-oriented underclass. This “coalition of dissent,” expressed through massive protests, violent demonstrations,



and low level guerilla warfare, brought the mighty Peacock Throne to its knees, ending the rule of the *Dictatora Coronada*. Despite various factions' different philosophical and theoretical backgrounds, the prophetically charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, coupled with the intense hatred of the Shah, acted as a glue to hold the factions together to achieve their common purpose, the overthrow of Muhammad Reza Shah and his government. Khomeini was able to appropriate the best and most penetrating critiques of the Shah and his "White Revolution", modernization, and Westernization, into one organically whole critique that could be was easily accepted by both the secular and religious.

Whatever else is said about Khomeini, whether one wishes to concentrate on the negative or positive outcomes of the revolution, one must acknowledge the importance of his leadership and extraordinary achievements in bringing off one of the most unlikely revolutions of the twentieth-century.

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