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A The Short Term Society a Comparative Study in Problems of Long Term Political and Economic Development in Iran¹

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ABSTRACT

The theory presented in this paper serves to explain the roots of Iranian history, past and present, and may well be relevant to other countries of the Middle East and North Africa as well. Iran was a short-term society in contrast to Europe's long-term society. It was a society in which change - even important and fundamental change - tended to be a short-term phenomenon. This was precisely due to the absence of an established and inviolable legal framework which would guarantee long term continuity. Lack of long-term continuity, by definition, resulted in significant change from one short period to the next, such that *history became a series of connected short runs*. In this sense, therefore, change was more frequent - usually also more drastic - and as noted, social mobility across various classes considerably higher than in traditional European societies.

1. Introduction

*T*he theory presented in this paper serves to explain the roots of Iranian history, past and present, and may well be relevant to other countries of the Middle East and North Africa as well. Iran was a **short-term society** in contrast to Europe's **long-term society**³. It was a society in which change - even important and fundamental change - tended to be a short-term

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3. See Katouzian (1998 & 2001)

phenomenon. And this was precisely due to the absence of an established and inviolable legal framework which would guarantee long term continuity. Over any short period of time, there could be notable military, administrative and property-owning classes, but their composition would not remain the same beyond one or two generations, unlike traditional European aristocracies, even merchant classes. In Iran, property and social positions were short term, precisely because they were regarded as **personal privileges** rather than inherited and inviolable **social rights**. The situation of those who possessed rank and property - except in very rare examples - was not the result of long-term inheritance (say, beyond two generations before) and they did not expect their heirs to continue in the same positions as a matter of course. The heirs could do so only if they managed to establish themselves on their own merits - merits being the personal traits necessary for success within the given social context. There thus was a high degree of social mobility, unthinkable in mediaeval and much of the modern European history. This did not exclude the position of the shah himself, since legitimacy and the right of succession were nearly always subject to serious challenge, even rebellion.

The most visible example of the short-term nature of Iranian society is the habit of declaring a building – especially a residential building – as a ‘pick-axe building’ (sakhteman-e kolangi). Most of these buildings are no more than thirty (even twenty) years old, and they are normally sound in foundation and structure. In a few cases they may be run-down and in need of renovation, but the feature that results in their condemnation as such, and incidentally wipes off the value of the structure and only leaves the price of their site, is that their architecture and /or interior design is unfashionable according to the latest forms, concepts or whims. Therefore, rather than building a new house or whatever, thus adding to the stock of existing physical capital, it is demolished by the owner or purchaser, and a new building is erected on its site. Therefore, I have described the short term Iranian society alternatively as ‘the pick-axe society’, the society where many of its aspects – political, social, educational,

literary, etc. – are constantly in danger of receiving the pick-axe treatment by short term whims of fashion¹.

Lack of long-term continuity, by definition, resulted in significant change from one short period to the next, such that *history became a series of connected short runs*. In this sense, therefore, change was more frequent - usually also more drastic - and as noted, social mobility across various classes considerably higher than in traditional European societies. But, also by definition, it rendered very difficult *cumulative* change in the long term, including the long-term accumulation of property, wealth, capital, social and private institutions, even the institutions of learning. These did normally proceed or exist in every short term, but they had to be reconstructed or drastically altered in the following short terms.

Evidence of the short-term nature of society as described above is to be found virtually in all of its aspects almost throughout Iran's long history, both pre-Islamic and post-Islamic. Here we shall present a brief analysis of three of its main features closely related to one another:

- Problems of legitimacy and succession, and the toll that this took of rulers, other royal persons, and ministers and military commanders.
- The tenuous nature of 'life and possessions' (*jan o mal*).
- Problems of accumulation and development.

2. Problems of legitimacy and succession

The testability of the criteria of legitimacy and succession, and the toll this took of rulers, other royal persons, ministers and military commanders was a major feature of 'the short term society'. Both in the feudal states of Europe and the absolutist states which succeeded them through and after the Renaissance, the rules of legitimacy and of succession were normally secure and inviolable. Primogeniture was the principal rule that in both the late feudal and the absolutist state governed succession, a rule which was also firmly in force in the case of landed estates. The duke's or earl's first in line was as firmly entitled to inherit his wealth and title, as was the king's first in line to

1. See Katouzian (1998 & 2001)

inherit his kingdom. The ‘first in line’ in both cases would be the first son or the nearest surviving male relative (although, since the 16th century, there were a few female monarchs in the absence of a clear and convincing male heir apparent). James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) was the legitimate successor to Elizabeth I through a distant and complicated relationship, which none the less made him first in line to the English throne¹.

It is important to emphasize that strictly speaking neither the king nor aristocrats could have any say over the rules of succession, whereas merchants and other capitalists had the freedom of will over the bequest of their estates. And this was not surprising since the survival of manorial feudal estate ownership depended on it (and on the Law of Entail); and since – unlike the merchant classes – it was extremely difficult for those of non-aristocratic descent to be selected to its membership, and impossible for any king to be such. Even in the odd case of Poland where the habit grew of ‘electing’ their king, the election was made only from royal or old aristocratic families: in the early 1570s they elected Henry Duke of Anjou, first in line to the French throne, who, barely having arrived in Warsaw returned to Paris as Henry III upon the untimely death of his brother Charles IX².

Thus, royal succession according to established procedures was the most basic requirement for a king’s legitimacy, not only in the feudal period, but also under the absolutist state, which governed Europe for a maximum of four centuries (1500-1900) for the continent taken as a whole. Apart from that, the support or co-operation of the church was also necessary, despite the fact that its powers had been trimmed in the latter period. The power of the established church was less after Reformation than before even in catholic Latin countries. Still, it was one of the pillars of legitimacy for the absolutist government. Indeed, in countries like Spain, Austria, France and England which (unlike most of Germany, the Low Countries and Switzerland) were united under a single monarch, the existence of an established as well as episcopal church was seen as necessary for the strength of the king’s authority. James I, who ruled a fundamentally Protestant country and, besides, fancied himself as a

1. See Williams (1971), Fraser (1970), Bindoff (1952) and Morris (1973)

2. See Davis (1936 & 1974), Butterfield et. al (1959) and Fisher (1936)

theorist of pure despotic rule, was at the same time fond of saying ‘no bishop no king’¹. It is important to note that while the principal of ‘no bishop no king’ emphasizes the usefulness of an established, indeed episcopal, church, for the king’s power and authority, at the same time it clearly shows his formal dependency on a class of people outside of himself.

The aristocracy provided the other main pillar for the king’s authority, once again as in the feudal period but at a reduced scale. The merchant or bourgeois classes were by now another principal social base for the state, such that in the early Renaissance period the state used their support to reduce the aristocratic magnates, perhaps the biggest single example of this being the triumph – in the 15th century - of Louis XI over the so-called League of the Public Good, led by Charles the Bold of Burgundy². Yet, not long afterwards the aristocracy (and gentry) became once again the state’s principal social base next to the church, which jointly underpinned the legitimacy of absolutist rule. It would be quite reasonable to argue that Charles Stuart’s greatest misfortune was that both of these two pillars of the state were divided in their attitude towards him, at least until his trial and execution in January 1649³. It was in the same decade that, upon the death of Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu one after the other, the rebellion of some of France’s grandest aristocrats as well as the judicial authorities of Paris (known as the Paris *Parlement*) in the two successive *Frondes* caused great disruptions for the rule of the very young Louis XIV and his regent and minister, Queen Anne and Cardinal Mazarin⁴.

In Iran there was no law or entrenched tradition, which made succession predictable and/or legitimate before the event. The most fundamental rule for succession and legitimacy was *not* Primogeniture, although being a son or relative of the ruler was helpful. It was possession of *farr-e izadi* or God’s Grace. Anyone in possession of the Grace would have the right to succeed or accede to the throne, and his rule would therefore be regarded as legitimate.

1. See McIlwain (1918) & Trevor-Roper (1957)

2. See Clark (1966), Fisher, (1936) and Dickens (1977)

3. See Wedgwood, (1964), Christopher (1974) and Kenyon, (1966)

4. See Ashley (1966); Ogg (1967); Hassall (1903) and Wedgwood (1958).

The theory or myth of the Grace, and the consequences of its possession and loss in practice, are spread virtually all over Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, including the purely mythological, the heroic or epic and the 'historical' parts of the poem. Significantly, the Grace takes a physical form on one occasion, and perhaps even more significantly this occurs in the 'historical' part, the story of Ardeshir son of Babak descendent of Sasan and founder of the Sasanian empire. When Ardeshir is running away from the last Arsacid emperor, Ardevan, and is being chased by him, the latter reaches a 'town' (*shahr*) through which the former has passed. He asks if Ardeshir had been seen there and is told that they had seen:

A ram galloping after a rider

More beautiful than fabulous pictures

Ardevan's counsel then tells him it would be useless to go on chasing the man, because the Grace in the form of the Ram is accompanying him. The relief in Naqsh-e Rostam shows Ardeshir receiving the Grace or *farr* from Ahura Mazda in the form of a diadem. Both man and god are shown mounted on horseback while Ardeshir is being invested with the Grace. All this shows the supernatural as well as mythological nature of the Grace. It is clear then, (a) that the Grace and its possession is a gift of God which carries paranormal or mysterious qualities, and (b) that it is the crucial and fundamental test for succession and legitimacy over and above any other, including Primogeniture or indeed royal descent. The problem however is that, whereas in a mythological world supernatural feats may be performed, or tests conducted, to determine a claimant's legitimacy, in the world of reality there will not be any public test for it, a test, that is, which like Primogeniture may be observed commonly by all concerned.

The last observation is absolutely crucial. The legitimate ruler was one who was anointed by God to act as his vicegerent on earth. Two fundamental differences emerge between the God's Grace theory and the European rule of Primogeniture. First, that in the real world there cannot be an objective test of legitimate succession and rule. Or, in other words, this was possible to know merely by virtue of the fact that a pretender or claimant succeeded and maintained power. Primogeniture unambiguously conferred legitimacy to the

first in line to the throne, a rule that the king (or for that matter the feudal lord) himself did not have the power to contradict. There could be argument about it as that between William of Normandy and Harold of England, and even though ultimately the sword determined this case, first there had been a legal battle in which the Pope had cast his vote in William's favour. Otherwise, rebellion was treasonable and even if it succeeded it could not confer legitimacy, unless it was successfully led by a prince or high aristocrat, and was supported by a sizeable portion of the ruling classes, the aristocracy and (later) gentry. That would be civil war like the successful revolt of Bolingbroke, Henry IV, against his cousin Richard II, or Wars of the Roses, and even the rise of Henry Tudor against Richard III, the last of the Plantagenets¹. Or, from French history, the unsuccessful rebellion of Henry Duke of Guise, against Henry III, and the successful revolt, at the same time, of Henry of Bourbon, King of Navarre, against the same King of France, the last of the Valois². Whereas on the basis of the myth, tradition or theory of *farr-e izadi*, virtually anyone could hold power, thus claiming that he had the *farr*, and anyone could be claimed to have lost it by virtue of a successful rebellion against him.

The second fundamental difference between the two traditions follows directly from the first. Since Iranian succession and legitimacy were entirely determined by a divine gift which almost any one could be deemed to possess by virtue of attaining power and maintaining it, he was in no way bound by any entrenched tradition or (written or unwritten) legal framework. And *ipso facto*, he was not dependent on the consent – other than enforced submission – of any part of the society, whether high or low, which is contrary to various European traditions from the classical through medieval to modern and contemporary times.

Plainly it appears from the evidence that the real test of holding the *farr* was success itself, i. e. the fact that the ruler actually held and maintained supreme power. For apart from the mythological examples of Ardeshir carrying the Ram – the symbol of *farr* – on horseback, or Fereydon and

1. See Clark (1971); Woodward, (1947) and Harvey (1976)

2. See Clark (1966), Fisher, (1936) and Dickens (1977)

Keikhosrow riding through wide and turbulent rivers, or the latter's father Siyavosh riding through fire, it is clear that the holding of the *farr* was recognized *ex post facto*, i. e. by the rule of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*: in a real world, he had the *farr* and was therefore legitimate as ruler who was actually in power and ruled effectively¹. The position resembles some recent theories that the *Vali* or Leader in an Islamic state emerges as a manifestation of the will of God, and would therefore lose authority and /or fall by divine will alone, the society or people, or any of their parts, not having any say in the matter.

This had a dialectical effect on the position of the ruler. On the one hand, and contrary to the position even of the absolute rulers of Europe, he was not bound by any earthly law, tradition or restraint, and could exercise authority at will up to the limits of his actual physical power, which, for prudent rulers, included consideration of limits to which the society would tolerate their actions. On the other hand, he almost constantly faced the fear of palace coups and potential rebellions - and he would never know with a reasonable degree of probability who would succeed him after his death - because, unlike in Europe, virtually all that potential rebels needed for taking power with at least as much 'legitimacy' as him was to succeed. In fact the 'legitimacy' of the successful rebel was nearly always greater at first than that of the fallen ruler, since (for reasons arising from these and other features of arbitrary rule) Iranian society normally disliked its rulers and wished them to be replaced by one who was 'less unjust' or 'more just'. Predictably, arbitrary state and arbitrary society, *unaccountable government and ungovernable society*, were two sides of the same coin. That was another principal dialectic of Iranian history².

The myth of God's vicegerency of the ruler was not limited to the ancient, pre-Islamic, times³. The term *farr* itself was also used to confirm the divine legitimacy of post-Islamic rulers. Ferdowsi himself applies the term to Mahmud of Ghazna and his rule in a number of his prefatory verses to various

1. See Katouzian (2003)

2. See Katouzian (2008)

3. See Beyhaqi, (1995) and Tusi (1961)

books of *Shahnameh*. For example: ‘World Ruler Mahmud, owner of *farr* and generosity... The Book has begun with his name / His *farr* whitens dark hearts like ivory’¹.

No doubt Islamic concepts and theories of legitimate worldly authority emerged from the Qur‘an, various bodies of Tradition, and the theological and jurisprudential arguments and decisions based upon them. The comparison here made refers simply to the practical implications of the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic concepts, not their strict religious or metaphysical origins. Just as the sultanate and, even more so, caliphate were concepts that emerged and were justified on the basis of Islamic doctrine and tradition, but that nevertheless it would be difficult to deny their practical resemblance – sometimes down to small detail - to pre-Islamic Iranian traditions.

The problem of succession persisted down to the nineteenth century. Fath‘ali Shah chose his grandson Mohammad Mirza as his successor after the death of his son Abbas Mirza, the Prince Regent and Mohammad’s father, though he knew that it would cause serious dissent among his other sons and so delayed its announcement for as long as it was possible². Yet, some of Mohammad’s uncles rebelled against him when he succeeded to the throne³. Later, Mohammad Shah himself was known to favour his younger son Abbas Mirza (Nayeb al-Saltaneh, later Molk Ara) in preference to his eldest son, Naser al-Din, the heir apparent. When the latter managed to succeed his father, the nine-year-old Abbas Mirza would have lost his life, or been blinded, if foreign envoys (and Amir Nezam) had not intervened on his behalf. But his court was looted on official orders, and later he spent much of his life as a refugee in Mesopotamia and Russia. Permission for him to go to Mesopotamia as an exile was obtained as a result of persistent interventions of both the British and Russian ministers in Tehran to stop him from being killed at the age of thirteen by his brother the Shah on the mere supposition that he might be regarded as their alternative candidate for the throne by some unknown, imagined, intriguers.

1. *Shahnameh*. vi, (1554)

2. See Ann (1988)

3. See, Bamdad (1992)

The correspondence between the two foreign envoys and the chief minister makes fascinating reading. At one stage when the British minister wrote that they should not sacrifice 'fairness' to mere imagination (that there is a plot centred around the boy), the chief minister revealed the logic of arbitrary justice, by pointing out that in that country one should act on mere supposition, for otherwise he may end up by losing the game. And this was so precisely because 'legitimacy' always belonged to the winner. He wrote that he had reported the British minister's letter to the Shah. The Shah had agreed with the minister that he meant well, but had added that:

Your excellency must pay attention to some peculiar Iranian customs and traditions and realize that, in Iran, the things that your excellency has in mind will not work, and one cannot be immune from the evil intent of seditious and rebellious people. If the leaders of the Iranian state wish to act on the basis of fairness and justice to maintain order and security for all their subjects, *they would have no choice but at the slightest thought, imagination or supposition of rebellion, irrespective of who it might be, to try to put it down forthwith and not to hesitate even for a moment*¹.

At any rate, the problem of royal succession eventually came to an end as a result of Great Power guarantees of the succession of the heir-designate to the throne. Yet it is extremely instructive that Naser al-Din Shah - who was by no means the worst example of an arbitrary ruler of Iran - almost withdrew the right of succession from his son and heir-designate, Mozaffar al-Din Mirza and sold it to his other son, Zel al-Soltan. He wrote to the former that the latter had offered him two (Persian) crore - roughly a million - tumans for the position. Zel was well known both for his shrewdness and lack of scruples. Mozaffar was lucky, therefore, that, in reply to the Shah his father, his able secretary, Amir Nizam Garrusi, warned that Zel might well spend another ten crores for the Shah's position itself. It was, of course, an open secret that Zel was doing everything possible (including offering subservience to the British) to overthrow his father. There could be no better evidence at any rate for the

1. See *Sharh-e Hal-e Abbas Mirza Molk Ara*, ed. Abdolhoseyn Nava'i, 2nd edition (Tehran: Babak 1982).

unpredictability of succession in Iranian history that, not much longer than a hundred years ago, it looked quite normal for the Shah to sell the succession for money.

Legitimacy and succession being so much determined by mere success, by the mere fact of gaining and holding power by virtually anyone, it is not surprising that there was so much filicide, fratricide and parricide within the royal household. Apart from outright killing, the blinding and/or permanent incarceration of princes within the women's compound (*haram* or *andarun*) was a favourite Safavid device. It was from the *andarun* that Shah Safi emerged to claim the throne of his grandfather, Abbas I, and ruled with exemplary cruelty. And it would not take much imagination to think of the magnitude of insecurity in which ministers, chieftains and magnates lived and worked - and sometimes died. The familiar story - from ancient to modern times - of the long line of such powerful persons who (alone or together with their family and clan) perished on the order of their rulers, told in detail, would fill several volumes of chilling history.

There were few chief ministers and important high officials, and especially very few of the most able of them, who survived the suspicion, wrath or treachery of their masters, either because they feared their ability and strength or wanted to plunder their wealth and property or both. A few relatively recent cases - and in particular the case of Amir Nezam Farahani (Amir Kabir) - are well known. But, like so many other features of arbitrary state and society, this too was structural and systemic. The names of Ablofazl Bal'ami, Abolfath Bosti, Abol'abbas Esferayeni, (Ahmad son of) Hasan Maimandi, Hasanak the Vizier, Amid al-Molk Kondori, Nezam al-Molk Tusi, Ahmad Zia al-Molk, the brothers Sham al-Din and Ata Malek Joveyni, Rashid al-Din Fazlollah, Emamqoli Khan, Hajj Ebrahim Kalantar, Qa'em-maqam Farahani, Amir Kabir, Mirza Aqa Khan Nuri, Abdolhoseyn Teymurtash, SardarAs'ad Bakhtiyari, Nosrat Al-Dowleh Firuz, among so many others, readily spring to mind, from the Samanids down to recent times¹.

1. See Beyhaqi (1995)

3. The tenuous nature of 'life and possessions' (*jan o mal*)

This feature of Iran's 'short-term society' followed directly from the first. The ruler being God's vicegerent on earth and in no way answerable to anyone or any social class, however high by virtue of descent, position or money, he had complete dominion over the life and property of all of his subjects or 'flock' (*rai'yat*). When the ruler as the personification of the state is completely independent from the society, there may be no rights independently from him. That is, in the final analysis, no person or class of people may be able to claim any rights except that which is bestowed or reaffirmed by the ruler. And what is bestowed by a ruler may be taken away by him or his successors, so long as they have the power to enforce their will. It follows that there will not be any legal code or procedure that may limit the power of the state, or be invoked against its transgressions. Indeed the very term 'transgression' could not be used in the normal sense, for where there is no independent right it cannot be legally violated, although some arbitrary moral and ethical sense may be used to describe an act as transgression.

This is the simple reason why there was not and there could not be private property in Iran in any sense that that conveys from the history of Europe. *Khasseh*, *khaleseh*, and *divani* lands were directly or indirectly owned by the ruler and state¹. Their definition and extent changed from one era to the next, from one dynasty to another, sometimes even from one ruler to the next. The revenue assignment systems – *iqata'*, *tiyul*, *soyurghal*, etc. - also varied among themselves, and within each category through time. Frequently, there were different types of each of the categories at one and the same time. This itself is evidence for the absence of a fairly well defined framework, showing that not only government was arbitrary, but so was its administrative system.

The most important aspect of the system – if this be the appropriate term – was that those who held land or enjoyed its revenue one way or another had no independent right to it. It was a *privilege* rather than a *right* which the state (i.e. the ruler, or local governors backed by him) could take away from him at will, so long as they had the physical power to carry it out. Floor refers to the

1. For a theoretical discussion of the nature and causes of these developments, see Katouzian (1983)

adage 'All that a slave owns belongs to his master' as the logical explanation for such confiscation¹. Another version of that adage is '*The slave and all that he owns belong to his master*' (*Ibid.*, 335.). This is a more appropriate version because (as we shall see below), not only the property but also the person of a subject, however high, was ultimately at the disposal of the ruler, or of those who acted within his authority. Since government was not based in law, power, position, possession and life itself could be taken away at short notice and without any formal procedures. The structure of insecurity ran through all the orders of society, from the village headman through the local craftsman, the merchant and trader, to the state's agents, the governor and governor-general, the *mostowfi*, the vizier, and not least the shah himself.

The primary sources of Iranian history are packed with innumerable examples of acute insecurity of not only property but also life itself. As already noted, countless viziers and other high officials of the state were killed or otherwise destroyed, and/or their entire property was confiscated, without any legal procedure and leave to appeal. Moreover, the plunder of the nobles' and notables' property did not happen only when they fell from office and grace. It could happen at any time.

Master Secretary Bunasr-e Moshkan was a very important and highly respected high official of the state under both Mahmud and Mas'ud of Ghazna. He was also very fortunate to die in bed. Baihaqi, who wrote his history several centuries before the Safavids, relates that shortly before Bunasr died, the Sultan, prompted by a lesser official, had demanded a number of horses and camels from each of the Persian ('tazik') notables, including Bunasr. Every one of them humbly complied. But Bunasr lost his equanimity, says Baihaqi, solely because he thought that that lesser official had aimed this scheme at him personally. He sent a list of everything he possessed to the ruler, saying that he had earned them all in his long service to the state, and they were all there for Mas'ud to take and grant him an abode in a prison-citadel. The Sultan was angry but decided to overlook the matter and drop his demand in Bunasr's case. Shortly afterwards the latter died, 'and they told all sorts of tales about

1. See Ann (1953) and Floor (1998)

[the causes of] his death, which I shall not mention'. At any rate, he was mourned in honour. Nevertheless, all of his possessions were transferred to the state. And it is clear from Baihaqi's text that this was normal practice: And they took his good well-trained slave boys to the Sultan's compound, and put the Sultan's brand on his horses and camels. And [a Treasury official] was told to draw up a list of whatever the man had for the treasury...¹.

The example is important for some fairly obvious reasons, but most important of all because it shows that the appropriation of the estate of a man such as Bunasr, even though he had died in honour, was a normal exercise.

There are countless examples of this kind of official requisition in Iranian history, showing that a man's property, dead or alive, was always in danger of confiscation, in part or as a whole, even if he had not incurred the wrath of the shah, or whoever could exercise arbitrary power over him. Here are a few examples, from the nineteenth century - in fact, all except the first one from late nineteenth century - when many leaders of the state and society, including at times the shah himself, were convinced that the country's salvation was in establishing orderly, responsible and lawful government. After death in office (under Mohammad Shah) of Manuchehr Khan Gorji, Mo'tamed al-Dowleh, the very powerful governor-general of Isfahan, his estate 'was confiscated by the state, and his body was buried in Qom, in his own special tomb'².

Asef al-Dowleh, one-time governor of Khorasan, who, because of a major rebellion against his injustices, had been withdrawn from his post, appeared to have gone mad. He had a large fortune, and rumour had it that he was pretending to be mad for fear that Naser al-Din Shah would take his wealth from him. When he died, Amin al-Soltan, the Grand Vizier, had his personal treasury sealed off on the Shah's orders, so that there was no access even to the special shroud he had purchased for himself, but in the end they opened the seal, got the shroud, and sealed the treasury again. Eventually, they got a total of 150,000 tomans from his heirs³.

1. Respectively: Al-'abd ma fi yaduhu li-mowlahu' and Al-'abd wa ma fi yaduhu kan-i li-mowlahu'.

2. See *Tarikh-i Beyhaqi*, pp. 791-799.

3. See Mehdi Bamdad, *Sharh-e Hal-e Rejal-e Iran*

Mostafa Khan-e Amir Tuman, governor of Ardabil and Khoi died. 'The shah expressed much regret. I have subsequently heard that he sent a man to seal off his house, because they say he has a lot of money'¹. Yahya Khan Khajeh Nuri had endowed most of his property for fear that the shah would take them after his death². Mehdi Khan was an official who had amassed a large fortune. When he died, the Shah had his house sealed off, and took a large amount of his wealth³.

Kamran Mirza, the shah's third son and minister of war, jailed the wife of the Commander of Artillery after his death to obtain money from her. She refused to pay 70,000 tomans, and he eventually accepted 3000. Having heard this, Nezam al-Dowleh, who was then the richest commander in the army, endowed the whole of his property⁴.

On the eve of the Constitutional Revolution Mirza Mahmud Khan Hakim al-Molk, Mozaffar al-Din Shah's long-standing physician and favourite, and recently minister of the royal court, who was hated by Amin al-Soltan, then Chief Vizier and Chancellor, died as governor of Gilan. He was believed to have amassed a fortune of about two and a half million tomans. Rumours were rife that he had been poisoned. His entire fortune was sealed off on the orders of Amin al-Soltan⁵. Once again, it is important to bear in mind the logic of the system for, according to Mokhber al-Saltaneh, since much of the riches amassed by state officials were themselves due to 'plunder', confiscation from their property by the state was not viewed as an extraordinary violation of their rights⁶.

These are just a few examples of plunder of property when the victim had not fallen from office or grace, and was not an object of wrath by the ruler. They are examples of cases when the ruler demanded money from an otherwise 'innocent' notable. But there were other occasions when the ruler

1. See Bamdad, *Sharh-e Hal*, 2, 301-317; *Ruznameh-ye Khaterat-e E'temad al-Saltaneh*, ed. Iraj Afshar, (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1966), 345-545.

2. See E'temad al-Saltaneh, *ibid.*, 543

3. See Bamdad, *Sharh-e Hal*, 5, 333

4. Bamdad, 5, 303. For a somewhat different, though not contradictory, version see E'temad al-Saltaneh, p. 601.

5. Bamdad, 5, 291-92; 1, 151-53.

6. See, Abdolhoseyn Khan Sepehr, (1989), and Bamdad, *Sharh-e Hal-e Rejal*, 4, 35-38.

traded the life of an 'innocent' notable or official for money, 'innocent' here meaning that the ruler himself did not have the slightest anger or grudge against the notable.

Ravandi says that Sultan Mohammad of the Seljuk was a good-natured ruler 'but he had a great love for accumulating riches'. Zia' al-Molk, son of Nezam al-Molk and currently the Soltan's vizier, had offered him 500,000 dinars, to put a very important man (who was also a seyed) 'at his disposal' and the Sultan had agreed. Having got wind of the situation in time, the seyed quickly saw the sultan, and offered 800,000 for him to put Zia' al-Molk at his disposal instead¹.

That was nine hundred years ago. Now at the close of the nineteenth century, Rokn al-Dowleh, a brother of Naser al-Din Shah had been governor of Fars for only seven months when he heard that the Shah was thinking of giving his post to someone else who was offering a bigger *pishkesh*. He took various steps - most effective of all, using the influence of the Shah's favourite wife - to stop that.

However, he bore a deep grudge against Qavam al-Molk, the biggest landlord and most important magnate in the province, had the soles of his feet beaten by sticks and thrown him in jail. He had then offered 100,000 tomans to the Shah and 30,000 to the Grand Vizier, Amin al-Soltan, to 'sell' Qavam al-Molk to him. They did not accept, partly because of the influence of his uncle, and partly - perhaps mainly - because of likely adverse comments by Europeans. E'temad al-Saltaneh writes in his diaries:

After entering Shiraz, Rokn al-Dowleh had had [Qavam al-Molk] bastinadoed and imprisoned, and then written a letter to Tehran saying that he would pay 100,000 tomans to the Shah and 30,000 to Amin al-Soltan to sell Qavam to him, that is, for him to have the life and property of Qavam at his disposal. But he did not manage to buy Qavam, since he is a nephew of Sahab-Divan, and, apart from that, this is not like the age of Fath'ali Shah to be

1. See Mokhber al-Saltaneh (Mehdiqoli Hedayat), *Khaterat o Khatarat*, which is a good, fairly detached, source on the political culture of the Qajar and early Pahlavi period.

possible to buy and sell the magnates and notables; the Europeans would make a fuss. He did not manage to buy Qavam....¹

This happened in the early 1890's. The reference to the sale of important people by Fath'ali Shah is not spurious, for Amin al-Dowleh writes in his memoirs quite independently:

The shah [i. e. Fath'ali] even used to sell the court officials and state dignitaries to each other...[since], as Iranian sycophants keep repeating, life and private possessions were the rightful property of the shah-an-shah².

But, as the above example from the Seljuk period shows, this was by no means a Qajar invention. In fact such things had been part of the country's social structure and it is difficult to believe that they had not been practised at any length of time. For that reason, it would be a mistake to attribute them to the personal moral dejection of rulers, viziers, governors, or whoever. No doubt some of these were less kind or more greedy than the others. But the matter was deep-seated and systemic. It is succinctly captured by the above-quoted adage, 'The slave and all that he owns belong to his master'.

4. Problems of accumulation and development

If there is one point on which all the major theories of economic development are agreed it is that the industrial revolution occurred as a result of long-term accumulation of, first commercial, then industrial capital. Long term accumulation of capital was a necessary though not sufficient condition for modern industrial development. Without it, neither the necessary investment would have taken place in the commercial sphere, resulting in the unification of the internal market and virtually continuous expansion of foreign trade, nor would it in the goods which made the innovation and application of modern techniques and processes possible in agriculture and industry³.

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1. See E'temad al-Saltaneh, *Ruznameh-ye Khaterat*, ed., Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1980), 821; *Bamdad, Sharh-e Hal*, 3, 403.
 2. See, *Khaterat-e Siyasi-ye Mirza Ali Khan Amin al-Dowleh*, ed. Hafiz Farmanfarmaian (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1991), 6.
 3. See Alexander Gerschenkron, 'The Approach to European Industrialization' in *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

The simple but highly acute point about the necessity of long term accumulation of capital was discovered by early classical economists, who observed that in order for the firm to expand it needed to accumulate, and in order for it to accumulate, it had to save first. This was what they sometimes described as the process of 'ploughing back capital'. Turgot described the process more clearly than any one before. But it was Adam Smith who put forward a memorable argument for the necessity of prior saving for the expansion of the firm, hence the industry and therefore the whole economy. He said with a certainty – perhaps even dogmatism - uncharacteristic of his even tempered approach to most matters of theory and policy that it was not so much technical progress, but saving and investment, making its innovation and application possible that were the principal cause of industrial development. He therefore concluded that every saver was a friend, and every spender, an enemy of the society¹.

In other words, aggregate saving is the sum of the savings of all firms and individuals. Furthermore, he said, it is saving, not production, which is the initial cause of investment, of capital accumulation². It follows that savers compensate for the habits of the spendthrift in preventing economic decline. Savers therefore help the society, while spendthrifts hinder it.

To sum up the fundamental points made above, capital accumulation required significant and continuous saving for long term investment. Finance for investment was supplied directly by the savings of propertied classes, by banks, the state or - in the last century and a half - by all of them. Since the 20th century, development finance has also been supplied by advanced industrial countries for investment in third world economies. Its classic and earliest example was the long-term accumulation of - first commercial then industrial - capital in England, mainly by the bourgeoisie, the commercial classes, although 'enlightened landlords' also participated in the process from mid-seventeenth century onwards.

1. See Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into The Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (London: Methuen & Co., 1950) 1, ii, 3, 'Of the Accumulation of Capital, or of productive and unproductive labour', 320.

2. Ibid

Yet, to save continuously and at a significant rate would be *rational* only in a social framework where there was no endemic fear of plunder and confiscation. Even in Europe, long-term capital accumulation was greatly encouraged, first by the emergence of free towns - burghs, etc. - which afforded protection from feudal encroachments; and, secondly, by the rise of the Renaissance and absolutist monarchies, with the full blessing of the commercial and middle classes, which gave them protection vis-à-vis the great aristocratic magnates. It was the accumulation of financial capital which made possible the financing of technical innovations, and, through time, this led to modern technological development and industrial expansion - i. e. what used to be generally known as 'the industrial revolution'.

There used to be a puzzle posed by classical economists, and later economic historians and development economists, to which apparently no solution satisfactory to themselves and others has been offered. It was this: Why did the process of capital accumulation not begin in societies like Iran in their rich and technologically advanced times, say in the early mediaeval period. The clearest answer to that question is that it was not safe to engage in long-term saving for fear of plunder and confiscation; and that in a small number of cases where such attempts were made, or for other reasons a very large commercial fortune was amassed, later plunder and confiscation put an end to the process.

Max Weber's solution to that old puzzle was that the other, non-accumulating, societies lacked something corresponding to Protestant ethics. Weber's theory of the crucial role played by these ethics in shaping 'the spirit of capitalism' in Europe is intelligent, though it has also been subjected to serious criticism¹. Notwithstanding that, the question in the context of our inquiry is whether such ethics could have become widespread in societies where, at least in practice, there was no right of long-term property ownership;

1. See Max Weber, *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London; Allen and Unwin, 1930); R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937). For a short but poignant critique of Werner Sombart (as well as Weber, in whose spirit he wrote his *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*), see Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Jews and Modern Capitalism', in *Historical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1957). See also his 'The Medieval Italian Capitalists', *ibid.*

and, if they did, and even lasted, for reasons which are difficult to envisage, they would have resulted in long-term accumulation of capital.

For even if significant saving *had* taken place in such highly discouraging circumstances, it would not have resulted in long term accumulation when it was perennially plundered. There can be little doubt that Protestantism, and especially its more radical sects, actively encouraged frugality and hard work (even in spite of Luther's emphasis on salvation by faith, and Calvin's doctrine of pre-destination)¹. But, from a scientific point of view, it is virtually impossible to know whether this was primarily a cause or consequence of the growth of the bourgeoisie and rise of commercial capitalism in Western Europe, i.e. the familiar scientific problem of determining the direction of causation - what in simple parlance they call 'the chicken or egg argument'. However, even assuming – as does Weber, virtually – that it was a cause, it is unlikely to have been such, if the European bourgeoisie had not had legal protection for their property, a protection which was much enhanced by the emergence of the Renaissance absolutist states with their blessing and support.

Thus in answering the fundamental historical question as to why the industrial revolution did not take place in countries like Iran, this author wrote in 1978 in an attempt to explain the chief reason for lack of long term capital accumulation in Iranian history:

The Iranian landlord...enjoyed no...right to his title, or security of his income. If European capitalist property involved an inviolable ('natural') *freedom*, and feudal property involved an inviolable ('natural') *right*, Iranian landed income and wealth were an alienable (arbitrary) *privilege*...the same state of insecurity of income and wealth applied to merchant capital, both in the merchant's lifetime and after.

Capital accumulation requires postponement of present consumption, i. e. saving; and saving necessitates a minimum degree of security and certainty concerning the future. In a country in which money itself – let alone financial and physical assets – has been under the threat of confiscation and

1. See further, Dickens, *The Age of Humanism and Reformation*; Joel Hurstfield, *The Reformation Crisis* (London: Edward Arnold, 1965); V. H. H. Green, *Luther and the Reformation* (London and New York: Batsford and Putman's Sons, 1954); Mann Phillips, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance* (London: The English Universities Press, 1949).

expropriation...it is impressive that financial capital *was* accumulated and trade *was* carried out to the extent that they were...The entire course of Iranian history and the existing chronicles of its events are crowded with examples of this state of insecurity and unpredictability....¹.

Long term accumulation of capital was indeed one necessary condition for industrial development. But there were other conditions, other coincidental changes that made the emergence of modern state and society possible, not least the rise of the absolutist state in Europe which made capitalist property freer than before from the encroachment of the old aristocratic magnates. This factor both helped and was helped by the 'spirit of capitalism' which sought to please God by low consumption, high saving and hard work.

It might have been a common place if the fundamental point had not been constantly in danger of being missed about long term development that it is a process which marks a total transformation of the society from one state into another. It is total transformations of this kind - changes which required a long and continuous process, in some cases taking a few centuries to transform the society - that seldom took place in Iran, and on the few occasions that they did for some time, the basic norms of arbitrary state and society led to their disruption, sometimes followed even by decline and retrogression, thus turning history into a series of 'connected short terms'. And that is why, despite such commercial, cultural, and technical achievements in certain periods, traditional Iranian society did not reach stages of development corresponding to post-Renaissance Europe².

Development requires not only *acquisition and innovation*, but also, and especially, *accumulation and preservation*, whether of wealth, of rights and privileges, or of knowledge and science. European society was a 'long-term society'. Major change, whether the fall of feudalism, the rise of capitalism and the emergence of the liberal state, whether the rejection of Aristotelian physics, Ptolemaic cosmography and the Greco-Roman political thought, or the Roman Catholic hegemony - all of these took a long time and a great deal of effort and struggle to occur, but when they finally did, the change was

1. See Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran*, 18-20.

2. See further, Katouzian, *Iranian History and Politics*.

irreversible, and a new social framework, a new law, a new science, even a new religion was established that would once again take much time and effort to change, even to reform¹.

As noted, the long-term society makes possible long-term accumulation, precisely because the law and traditions that govern it, and its institutions, afford a certain amount of security by making the future reasonably predictable. At the same time, and for the same reason, it makes major change in the short run very difficult. In the long-term society, revolution, whether in law, politics or science is a rare and extraordinary occurrence, but when it does happen it is non-reversible and therefore has long-term effects.

5. Some observations on recent developments

It will make at least another full paper to discuss more recent Iranian history in light of the foregoing. But let me just make a few rapid observations. In the 1970s many if not most Western journalists, analysts and academics used to describe Iran as ‘an island of stability and Japan of the Middle East’, a Western economist even went as far as predicting Iranian GDP, rate of growth, etc., in the year 2000. In the late 70s the entire Iranian society rose against the state and overthrew it².

In 1997, a totally unexpected landslide electoral victory swept the Islamic reformists into power. Many believed that that was ‘the beginning of the end’

1. This discreet and long-term process of change in science as well as society had been well known. In the case of society it had been well documented and subjected to much theorising. In the case of knowledge and science, it had once been discussed in the original sense of Hegelian and Marxian concepts of ideology (i. e. ‘ideology’ as consciousness bound by the limits of moral and /or material development in its various ‘stages’). Thomas Kuhn offered a new model in the case of ‘scientific revolutions’, though he overlooked the fact that the theory was a tautology as it was equally valid for the history of all (not just scientific) knowledge; and he implied that it was necessarily the best procedure for the advancement of science. See his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); Homa Katouzian, ‘T. S. Kuhn, Functionalism and Sociology of Knowledge’, *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, June 1984, ‘The Hallmarks of Science and Scholasticism, A Historical Analysis’, *The Yearbook of the Sociology of the Sciences* (Dordrecht, Boston and London:, D. Reidel, 1982), *Ideology and Method in Economics*, 4.

2. See Homa Katouzian, *The Persians, Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, paperback edition, 2010), 10-12; Fahkreddin Azimi, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran : a century of struggle against authoritarian rule* (Cambridge, Mass. and London : Harvard University Press, 2008); Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran : Roots and Results of Revolution*, and with a section by Yann Richard (New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 2003).

for the Islamist regime. Eight years later, a fundamentalist was elected president, and although there were some complaints about electoral irregularities, hardly anyone doubted that he had had a large share of the votes.

Let us begin with a brief account of the background to the present situation. In 1979 all shades of opinion combined to bring down the state. No social class and no political party stood against the revolutionary movement, and 98 percent of the people voted for the establishment of an Islamic republic. But almost at the same time fundamental differences began to emerge among the revolutionary forces such that by 1982 all but the Islamists had been eliminated from politics. There were conservative and radical tendencies among the Islamists themselves but their differences rarely led to conflict and confrontation in the 80s, partly because of the necessities of the long war with Iraq, but mainly perhaps because of the unifying role of Ayatollah Khomeini who acted as the regime's supreme arbiter¹.

The end of the war in 1988 and Ayatollah Khomeini's death in the following year began a new era in the politics of the Islamic Republic. At first the union of the conservative Seyyed Ali Khamenei as supreme leader and the pragmatist Ali Akbar Rafsanjani as president seemed to work fairly well but, especially in Rafsanjani's second term of office (1993-1997), the conservatives began to show dissatisfaction with his policies. Apart from the conservatives and pragmatist, however, two other distinct factions had emerged in the 90s: the fundamentalists and the reformists. The fundamentalists – mainly representing the traditional lower and lower middle classes – tended to emphasise the Islamist nature of the regime, advocated an anti-Western foreign policy, and championed the cause of 'the downtrodden': 'death to the capitalist' was a favourite slogan in their street demonstrations. The reformists, on the other hand, displaying an Islamic social-democratic outlook, believed in a more open society and (later) better regional and international relations. The conservatives were closer to the fundamentalists on their religious and foreign policy views; the pragmatists were more in line

1. Katouzian, *The Persians*, chapters 11-13; 'The Iranian Revolution at 30: The Dialectic of State and Society', *Critique*, Spring 2010.

with the reformists on both domestic and foreign policy issues, although in more moderate and accommodating terms.

Contrary to all the predictions, the 1997 presidential election resulted not in a conservative but a reformist-pragmatist victory. Yet it was not, and could not be, an Iranian ‘Thermidor’, as some of the more historically conscious Western commentators rushed to describe it, if only because the Revolutionary Guard, the ultimate legislative authority (Council of Guardians), the judiciary, and considerable business and property interests were on the side of the conservatives. Khatami won another landslide victory in 2001, but while he brought about significant changes in domestic and foreign policy, he had few friends left in the last two years of his presidency, since the conservatives and fundamentalists used all in their power to limit his options, while at the same time most of his constituents accused him of lack of faith for not delivering the moon. During an address in November 2004 at a meeting at the University of Tehran, Khatami was booed and heckled, some students shouting ‘Khatami, you liar, shame on you’. Yet, if only to prove the short-term nature of Iranian society, when he went there again in 2007 – the second year of Ahmadinejad’s presidency - the crowd were shouting ‘Here comes the people’s saviour’¹.

Ahmadinejad was a fundamentalist and the candidate of a fundamentalist-conservative coalition, later forming the parliamentary group called Osulgarayan, and his election once again caught many of the Iran observers in the wings. Posing as a man of the people and promising increased welfare for the lower strata of the community, he won most of their votes while at the same time attracting the support of powerful conservatives who wanted to be rid of the reformists at all costs. That is why while the conservatives generally applauded his reversal of the reformist trends in domestic and foreign politics, they not infrequently displayed their displeasure at his economic policies and millenarian views.

Four years of Ahmadinejad’s government taught the reformists and the secularists a hard lesson and made them nostalgic about his time as president.

1. Katouzian, *The Persians*, chapter 14

Under great pressure, Khatami first came forward but then stepped down in favour of Mir Hossein Mousavi, a radical prime minister of the 1980s. Backed by the pragmatist faction as well, Mousavi's campaign started late through a very slow process and –as further proof for the short-term nature of the society – it was only about three weeks before the election day that it began to take off the ground. And even as late as that, no-one could have predicted anything remotely close to the imminently unfolding events.

The electoral dispute that followed is now well-known history and need not be recounted in this brief. It was however a major turning point in the history of the Islamic Republic as it had not experienced anything like it since the power struggles of the early eighties. The factional struggles during the Khatami years were at most a crisis of authority. But now there was a crisis of legitimacy as well, since the Islamic Republic had split down the middle, each side claiming legitimacy and –at least implicitly- denying legitimacy to the other side.

At the political-cum-ideological level the reformist leaders stressed the representative and republican features of the system, whereas the fundamentalists put the emphasis on the authority of the supreme leader as representative of the Hidden Imam's, and thereby God's, authority, rather analogous to the ancient Iranian God's Grace theory described above. This brought up to the surface the unresolved dichotomy between the 'republican' and the 'Islamic' features of the constitution.

'The politics of elimination', as I have termed it, is also a long-standing feature of Iranian politics. For example, after the coup d'état of 1953, a dictatorial regime came into existence which eliminated the National Front, the Tudeh party and their supporters from politics. But the regime still maintained a social base, largely consisting of the political and the religious establishment. There was no democracy but nevertheless there was some degree of consultation, representation and participation, and there was a certain amount of freedom of expression. However the regime jettisoned its social base in 1963 in the wake of the shah's White revolution and the revolt of June that year, without replacing it with any other section of the society. Therefore, politics was altogether abolished and power became both absolute

and arbitrary. That was the basic reason why the state had no social force or political party to defend it during the revolution¹.

Things are never absolutely the same as before but, by way of a simple analogy, it may be observed that – apart from the secularists who had been dispossessed since the early 80s - the reformists and pragmatists are now on the verge of being eliminated from legitimate politics, leaving it almost solely to the fundamentalists and conservatives, and making the situation look like the period 1953-1963.

Forecasts which promise the imminent fall of the Islamic regime, or ‘the beginning of the end’ for it, are premature and often based on optimistic sentiments even when they come from otherwise serious analysts. There is at the moment no major external threat to the regime, and as for the domestic forces, the ruling parties have under their command the armed, police and intelligence forces, the economy, the parliament and the judiciary, not to mention the fact that they too have a base in society.

However, things can always happen to Iran and Iranians which are beyond rational expectations. It is not for nothing that Iranians themselves call it ‘the country of possibilities’.

1. Katouzian, *The Persians*, chapters 10-12 and ‘The Iranian Revolution at 30: The Dialectic of State and Society’

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