

RE/PRESENTING CLASS

□ *Essays in Postmodern Marxism*

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surplus labor was produced and distributed, that may have been catalysts in the revolution.² In particular, discussions of the 1979 Revolution have failed to recognize: (1) the role of internecine conflict within the ranks of capitalist appropriators; and (2) the importance of ancient (or self-exploiting) direct producers and their allied agents in the collapse of the monarchist regime.³ In general terms, it is the argument of this chapter that struggles over class processes were a significant factor in shaping the crises that culminated in the 1979 Revolution.⁴ In particular, it is argued that the wide-scale presence of self-exploitation, and the dependence of a vast range of social agents on self-exploitation, coupled with the internecine disputes among capitalist appropriators, created conditions ripe for a revolutionary change in the political processes constituting the Iranian state.

The primary thesis of this essay is that the efforts of the monarchist regime to create a particular form of capitalism dominated by large-scale capitalist firms under the control of a small elite of families, herein described as *oligarchic capitalism*, created a range of social crises that threatened the survival of ancientism (or self-exploitation) and non-oligarchic capitalism.⁵ The policies of the monarchist regime, sometimes referred to as the "Modernization Program," had a definite impact on class processes in Iran, and created some of the conditions for its own demise. These policies, while *explicitly* directed toward fostering economic growth, created and then deepened the social crises that threatened preexisting forms and configurations of surplus appropriation and distribution, particularly the prevalence of self-exploitation in the rural villages and urban bazaars, but also capitalist appropriation of the non-oligarchic type. The dual threats to both small-scale capitalism and to self-exploitation, and the ways of life related to these distinct class processes, resulted in complex forms of resistance. Among those with a stake in opposing the modernization program were a wide range of social agents who perceived the crises as a direct threat to their survival, including nonoligarchic capitalist appropriators, ancient direct producers, and social agents allied to one or the other or both of these groups of appropriators, including the Shi'a Islamic *ulama* (theologians and clergy).

Self-exploitation was arguably the most widespread form of surplus appropriation in terms of numbers of direct producers.⁶ Insofar as the monarchist regime's Modernization Program threatened to displace self-

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A CLASS ANALYSIS OF THE IRANIAN

REVOLUTION OF 1979

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 (henceforth referred to as the 1979 Revolution) has been described as one of the epochal events of the twentieth century, inaugurating a period of Islamic revivalism and struggle against "modernization" in many nations where Islam is the predominant religion. In discussions of the 1979 Revolution, the significance of Islamic fundamentalism, the use of political repression by the regime of Mohamed Reza Shah (hereafter referred to as the monarchist regime), particularly the violence perpetrated by the Information and Security Organization of the Nation, a.k.a. SAVAK (the secret police), widespread corruption and official favoritism, rising income and property ownership inequality, and the impact of "Western" imperialism and global capitalism have all played causal roles.¹ Jahangir Amuzegar (1991) provides a relatively comprehensive review of the standard explanations for the 1979 Revolution.

Amuzegar rejects linking the 1979 Revolution to any fixed set of causes and implies that it was sui generis, indicating that the processes that shaped the revolution were both serendipitous and unlikely to have corollaries in other social formations, whether of the past or future. While this chapter is in agreement with Amuzegar's antireductionism, it is more sanguine about the prospects for finding characteristics of the 1979 Revolution that are common to other social formations of both the past and the future. This optimism about the possibility of learning something from the 1979 Revolution comes, in part, from a recognition that analyses of the revolution have tended to ignore or downplay important internal struggles over class processes, defined as the particular forms in which

exploitation with oligarchic capitalist exploitation, the 1979 Revolution that stopped, or, at least, slowed this process, might better be described as a *counterrevolution*. In this scenario—the 1979 Revolution as counter-revolution—one of the objectives was to initiate a *political revolution* in order to avert a gradually progressing *economic revolution*. Viewed thus, the movement against the monarchist regime was fundamentally reactionary in nature. The use of conservative religious discourse as a tool in this struggle reinforces the notion of 1979 as a moment of counter-revolution, rather than of broad-based social (political, cultural, and economic) revolution.

If, on the other hand, the selection of the adjective used to define a social formation in class terms is based on the fundamental class process wherein the largest *market value* is created, then Iran was capitalist both prior to and after the 1979 Revolution. Capitalist exploitation was clearly dominant in terms of the total market value of produced commodities in Iran during both periods, primarily because capitalism dominated the markets for industrial and extractive output. Insofar as monarchist Iran was, in aggregate market value terms, a capitalist social formation, with a significant presence of self-exploitation, it remained such a social formation after the 1979 Revolution, although the trajectory of change may have been altered.

Nevertheless, in agriculture and handicraft production, self-exploitation prevailed in both market value and in numbers of direct producers involved. The same can be said of the numbers of allied agents involved in the Iranian economy. Merchants, moneylenders, landlords, and clergy who depended on received shares of ancient surplus were far more numerous than those who depended on received shares of capitalist surplus. In the villages and urban bazaars it was self-exploitation, not capitalism, that dominated economic and social life. Thus, an argument can be made that Iran was not really a capitalist social formation but an ancient one, with the presence of a significant and powerful capitalist sector.

In the next section, the role of self-exploitation within Iranian villages, including the relationship between ancient direct producers and a subset of their allied social agents, is examined as one of the preconditions for the 1979 Revolution.

Ancient Villages, Ancient Democracy, and the Foundations of Revolution

To the extent that the monarchist regime created positive conditions for the development of oligarchic capitalism, it simultaneously created negative conditions (crises) threatening the survival of noncapitalist appropriators and their allied agents, particularly ancient producers, landlords, merchants, and moneylenders. Although it is difficult to gauge whether and to what extent feudalism might have persisted in rural Iran beyond the 1920s, when the dominance of the countryside by rural warlords, the so-called *khtans*, was ended by a military-dominated monarchist regime, it is possible that some landlords may have maintained the position of feudal appropriators and that the sharecroppers on their land occupied the position of feudal direct producers well after feudalism had ceased to be prevalent in the country.⁷

Based on the best available evidence, it is assumed in this chapter that feudal appropriation did not prevail in the Iranian countryside during the monarchist regime of Mohammed Reza Shah. Nevertheless, to the extent it existed at all, it would have been threatened by the same dynamic that threatened other noncapitalist forms of appropriation. This would add an additional element to justify the landlords' opposition to the monarchist regime, which will be discussed later.

The argument here proceeds under the assumption that the prerevolutionary Iranian countryside was not feudal. Indeed, it is assumed that the vast majority of rural direct producers, called *nasaq-holders*, were neither feudal nor capitalist. Each of these *nasaq*-holders distributed his surplus to a wide range of social agents, including, but not limited to, landlords. Since the *nasaq*-holder was the first distributor of the surplus he created, then it is assumed that he was also the first receiver of that surplus. This defines self-exploitation. Given that *nasaq*-holders comprised approximately 65 percent of the direct producers in agriculture, it can be further assumed that the rural villages were, in class terms, ancient.

To reinforce this argument, it is noted that ancient farmers were not the only ancient producers in the villages. Self-exploitation also prevailed among barbers, blacksmiths, carpenters, cobblers, health practi-

tioners, printers, tailors, and a variety of other nonfarming direct producers. These ancient producers participated in numerous and complex social relationships — often described in the literature as “backward” and “semifeudal.”⁸ These relationships reproduced some of the conditions necessary to continued self-exploitation. A subset of these relationships resulted in ancient producers being subject to claims on their self-appropriated surplus, including claims by ancient landlords, moneylenders, merchants, water distribution coordinators, teachers, and the clergy. No village resident could avoid some form of relationship with ancient producers and/or the social agents allied to ancient producers.

In other words, self-exploitation infused every aspect of life in the Iranian villages. It provided the basis for a wide range of social interactions and alliances. These interactions might be properly described as relatively nonhierarchical. For the most part, individuals negotiated the terms of their economic relationships with each other as individuals, rather than as the representatives of larger social institutions. In this ancient social environment, even the individual Shi’ite clergy enjoyed a certain “relative autonomy” from each other. These decentralized, “grassroots” relationships of the Iranian village, like those of the bazaars in the cities, placed constraints on the exercise of state or corporate power, impeded the encroachment of capitalism into the countryside, and created conditions conducive to the reproduction of self-exploitation. As it turns out, these conditions may also have been conducive to a political revolution against a regime that threatened to displace the ancient way of life with an alternative set of social relationships.

Thus, those commentators, such as Amuzegar (1991), who assume that landlords were dominant over rural life in twentieth-century Iran are ignoring the way day-to-day decision making occurred in the villages and dismissing the possibility that self-exploitation could provide the basis for an economic “system” on a par with feudalism or capitalism. Unlike the period when the khans (tribal warlords) dominated rural life, individual self-exploiting direct producers in the twentieth-century Iranian villages were stubbornly insistent on having a voice in most of the major decisions of village life. It was rare that these producers would acquiesce to the dictates of external institutions, whether they came from the state or from absentee landlords.

Self-exploiting direct producers typically came to agreements among

themselves about key aspects of village life. For example, ancient producers in the Iranian villages had a long tradition of cooperation in the use of village resources, including the supply and distribution of water.⁹ The producers agreed among themselves about how these resources would be used and maintained.

This should not be surprising, given the conclusion that the vast majority of direct producers in the villages were self-exploiting. The very act of self-exploitation requires a strong sense of the *self* and of one’s individual power to control one’s destiny. How else can the ancient producer have the will to act “alone” to secure his own surplus labor? Ancient cultural programming — the belief in the power of the “independent” individual — might be expected to create an environment within which direct producers feel free to make relatively autonomous decisions about a wide range of issues.

The relationships formed in a world shaped by this ancient cultural programming and by a shared economic dependence on self-exploitation had as much significance in shaping the “rules of the game” in rural Iran as any political process occurring in Teheran. Iran’s ancient villages remained belligerently independent of the authority of the monarchist regime of Mohammed Reza Shah.

The above argument implies that Iranian villages of the twentieth century were governed by a form of *ancient democracy*, that is, the collective political will of the ancient producers and their allied agents. This political will was typically exercised through informal social relationships, rather than through formal political institutions. Again, the role of landlords in the political functioning of these villages is often exaggerated. As indicated, many of these landlords were not even present in the villages and most of the other unproductive (of surplus labor) social agents had direct, albeit often informal, relationships with the ancient direct producers, not with the landlords. Thus, political processes in the Iranian villages were far more open and democratic than is often recognized. Ancient producers met informally to discuss issues related to shared resources, common economic problems, and social concerns. Although much has been made of the illiteracy of rural direct producers, these ancient producers had a keen understanding of the history of their village, of production techniques, of the impact of climatic changes on agricultural production, and a variety of other issues that informed their

arguments and subsequent decisions regarding appropriate solutions to economic and noneconomic problems. Thus, village life depended on a sense of ancient equality akin to notions of equality and democracy associated with ancient Greece. A side effect of this ancient democracy within the village was that it facilitated grassroots organizing. Grassroots organizing was important on numerous occasions when Iranian villages opposed state policies, including the prelude to the 1979 Revolution.

Land Reforms and Ancient Crisis

While it is clear that ancient landlords did not perceive the land reforms as beneficial to them, why did not the ancient producers who received land not become staunch supporters of the monarchist regime? It is, indeed, possible that the initial effect of the land reforms was to increase support for the monarchist regime among some segment of the rural population. To understand the dynamic by which a large consensus against the regime was formed, however, one needs to look more closely at the way the reforms evolved over the period from 1962 to 1978 and at the side effects of the reforms.

The land reforms were designed to: (1) free up "underemployed" labor in agriculture to expand the capitalist wage labor markets;¹⁰ (2) "modernize" agricultural technology such that agricultural productivity would increase and the unit cost of agricultural commodities fall; (3) transfer surplus from the agricultural sector to the industrial sector through higher land taxes, higher prices for manufactured inputs, lower agricultural output prices, and direct control by the state of a greater share of agricultural surplus via state farms; (4) encourage the development of capitalist agricultural enterprises, particularly large-scale agribusiness firms; and (5) gain the support of the rural population for the monarchist regime or, at least, make it more difficult for the rural direct producers to organize into a cohesive opposition. The Shah and his ministers were committed to land reform, partly because the 1949 Chinese Revolution had become a potent symbol of the explosive potential of a disaffected peasantry. Indeed, in a precursor to the 1960s land reforms, Mohammed Reza Shah had attempted, in 1950, to win support from among the rural population by distributing some of the royal lands to ancient farmers. Nevertheless, the various objectives of the land reform were not always compatible.

This becomes clear when we examine the three stages of the land reform. The first stage was the land distribution to the *nasaq*-holding ancient producers. The Land Reform Act of 1962, embodying the rules of the first stage of the land reform, was adopted by executive fiat after the regime dissolved the landlord-dominated national legislature. This bold political act began the process by which some ancient farmers were gifted with a land redistribution. The state exerted eminent domain over a significant share of the property held by largely absentee landlords in exchange for providing these landlords with financial compensation. A subset of the lands confiscated by the government was sold directly to farmers, primarily ancient direct producers who had a traditional right to cultivation. These *nasaq*-holders signed contracts with the state to pay for the acquired land in fifteen cash installments that would equal the amount of compensation to the landlords plus a 10 percent tax.

This stage primarily antagonized the ancient landowners, who agitated against the monarchist regime from their urban bases. Nevertheless, the monarchist regime hoped that the reforms would win over the vast majority of the rural direct producers. One of the lessons of the 1949 Chinese Revolution was that it was sometimes in the interest of the national government to act against the interests of the landlords if, by doing so, the peasantry could be pacified. Certainly the land redistribution had its strong supporters among the *nasaq*-holding, ancient producers. But even this group would eventually be lost by the monarchist regime's attempts to achieve its other objectives, particularly those related to the development of oligarchic capitalism.

During the transition to the second stage, some unsuccessful ancient farmers lost their land and were forced into capitalist labor-power markets, primarily in the cities, although a few stayed home to work for their more successful neighbors. Former ancients who migrated to the cities were among the more zealous street organizers during the anti-Shah demonstrations leading up to the 1979 Revolution.

In the second stage of the land reform, the monarchist regime, still conscious of a need to counteract any Chinese-style "peasant" movement, pushed the successful farmers, mostly ancients but some now also involved in capitalist agriculture, to join state-controlled cooperatives. These cooperatives were epitomized by constant meddling by state-appointed bureaucrats into the production-level decisions of the farmers

—a clear deviation from traditional political processes in the ancient villages. Matters would become worse, however.

The third stage of the reform brought an unambiguous effort to destroy the ancient villages. The monarchist regime moved to eliminate self-exploitation by encouraging ancient farmers to exchange their land for equity shares in newly formed capitalist agribusiness corporations. The new scheme was highly unpopular, but the regime systematically removed conditions for the reproduction of self-exploitation in order to push ancient farmers to comply. The regime raised input prices for electricity, fertilizers, and farm equipment, “dumped” subsidized capitalist agricultural goods onto rural markets, and drastically cut the budgets for rural services, including schools, irrigation, and road maintenance.¹¹ This squeeze on ancient producers guaranteed that any success at gaining broad-based, rural support for the monarchist regime and its “White Revolution” would be negated. The deliberately manufactured *ancient crisis* stimulated increased opposition to the regime among some of the most organized producers in the countryside.

In hindsight, it is clear that the land reforms were never intended to provide all rural direct producers with the land and other means of production necessary for them to engage in self-exploitation. For the monarchist regime, capitalism and modernity were integrally intertwined. Granting land to some ancient producers could be used for the purpose of weakening the political power of the landlords, who are said to have controlled approximately 60 percent of the seats in the national legislature, but the monarchist regime never accepted self-exploitation as a component in its Modernization Program.

Indeed, even the *nasaq*-holders who received land found themselves struggling to obtain the other means of production necessary to self-exploitation. The state banks that were established in rural Iran showed a clear preference for capitalist farmers. The extension service agents provided by the monarchist regime encouraged successful ancient farmers to expand their production by acquiring more land and hiring wage laborers to work that land. Large capitalist agricultural domains, such as tractor farms, orchards, and tea plantations, were never included in the land reform. Overall, it was clear that farmers who hired wage laborers and produced cash crops were favored by the regime and more likely to receive

state benefits. This could occur both through the competitive process described by Lenin in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* — whereby successful ancient farmers were transformed into capitalists and the unsuccessful ancient farmers were transformed into wage laborers — and by the ancient producer/landlords hiring traditionally landless rural direct producers who had not benefited from the land redistribution. Either way, capitalism would grow and the ancient way of life in the villages would be undermined.

We may now look at this process in more detail, in order to see precisely how land reform might contribute to an erosion in the ancient rural economy, by fostering divisions among ancient producers, and the development of the capitalist rural economy. First, the land reforms were designed to increase the cash needs of ancient direct producers, forcing them to increase their production of cash commodities. For example, it was necessary for those ancient producers who acquired confiscated land to generate sufficient revenues to make their installment cash payments to the state. Second, those ancient producers who had become their own landlords gained social status *vis-à-vis* those ancient producers who continued to rent their land, and this created the basis for a new social division within the ranks of the self-exploiting. Third, the state sale of confiscated lands helped establish the principle of alienating rural lands from *traditional* owners by the process of buying and selling; thus, the means by which the more well-to-do direct producers might acquire the land of the less well-to-do was established. This would prove important, as some of the ancient producers who purchased land would fail to generate sufficient revenues to keep their land. More successful producers might expand their holdings by acquiring the land and, perhaps, equipment and other materials of these unsuccessful producers. Ancient producers with more land and other means of production, given the encouragement of institutions, such as state banks, would likely evolve, if they had not already done so, into full-time or, at least, part-time capitalists. To further divide the ranks of the ancients and former ancients, these new capitalists would often hire some of the less fortunate direct producers who had lost their land. The monarchist regime considered the development of new capitalists from among the ranks of ancient producers to serve a positive social purpose. However, this drift toward

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capitalism in agriculture was a direct threat to the ancient way of life in rural Iran and to all those who depended on the reproduction of this way of life.

Ancient Crisis in the Urban Bazaars

The monarchist regime's assault on ancientism was not restricted to the countryside. Urban areas in Iran were epitomized by the presence of special zones, spatially demarcated from the rest of the town or city, where scores of small storefront enterprises operated. These storefront enterprises, collectively referred to as the *bazaar*, were comprised of a wide range of ancient artisans, merchants, moneylenders, and restaurateurs. Most of the entrepreneurs operating within the bazaars, referred to as *bazaaries*, were either directly engaged in self-exploitation (primarily the so-called *pishivaran*) or dependent on the receipt of shares of ancient surplus.

The bazaaries had their own political organizations and relations of power, vocabularies, and discourses, and maintained close ties to the Shi'a Islamic ulama. The bazaaries had a long history of active participation in shaping the cultural, political, and economic life of the country. Indeed, the bazaaries were important catalysts for the so-called Constitutional Movement of 1905-1911, a movement that was culturally nationalist, politically democratic, and economically pro-ancient.¹² As Afshari (1983) has pointed out, the pishivaran and allied agents, particularly the merchants, had suffered during the feudal period in Iran, as warlords from the countryside and Qajar monarchs frequently extorted goods or money from the pishivaran and other bazaaries.¹³ The bazaaries had developed a strong political consciousness and organized to resist arbitrary expropriations and other such interferences.¹⁴ Thus the bazaar represented not simply a production and commercial space but a realm shaped by particular notions of acceptable social relationships, strongly influenced by strongly delineated conceptions of identity and democracy, by specific interpretations of divine Islamic law, and by well-organized collective efforts to reproduce the existing political, economic, and cultural relationships on which the bazaar's survival depended.

These collective efforts were fostered by the fact that the bazaaries were organized into well-financed and politically powerful guilds (*as-*

naf). These ancient guilds united the bazaaries—pishivaran and their allied agents—and served as social sites for promoting the philosophy of self-exploitation and respect for those direct producers who had attained senior artisan status, teaching associated ideas of ancient political organization, such as the resolution of internecine disputes by consensus, mobilization of financial resources to satisfy common objectives, and election of executive officers of the guild from among pishivaran elders. The primary coordinating body of the guild organizations was the High Council of the Asnaf, which, in cooperation with the Shi'a Islamic ulama, wielded considerable influence over the social and political life of Iran's towns and cities. As one of the oldest political machines in Iran, the guilds posed a problem for a monarchist regime bent on revolutionary changes in the configuration of class processes in the nation.

Just as the monarchist regime attempted to neutralize the political power of the ancient landlords, it pursued a similar policy with regard to the guilds. The regime simultaneously pursued policies that undermined the viability of the bazaars, while using SAVAK to infiltrate the High Council of the Asnaf. It is believed that the monarchist regime bribed some members of the High Council to gain their political acquiescence. Thus, the monarchist regime hoped to bring about a revolutionary change in economic relationships—the White Revolution—with a minimum of political opposition.

The so-called White Revolution provided the framework for the expansion of oligarchic enterprises into areas that directly threatened the survival of the bazaaries. The regime adopted regulations and macroeconomic policies that promoted the growth of both large-scale capitalist enterprises that competed directly with ancient artisans and large-scale merchanting enterprises, such as department stores, shopping centers, and supermarkets, that competed with ancient merchants in the bazaars. The expansion of state banks eroded the share of loanable funds markets controlled by the ancient moneylenders in the bazaars, while the creation of public health clinics and pharmacies cut into the market for ancient herbalists, midwives, and other self-exploiting health care providers.

In 1975, the monarchist regime adopted a rigid stance toward price increases by the bazaaries, who were already at a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis the larger-scale capitalist enterprises that had the full support of the regime. Thousands of bazaaries were fined and hundreds jailed

for violating the so-called anti-inflationary laws. Bazaaries, faced with a frontal assault on their market share, rising input prices, and higher taxes, were not allowed to compensate for these problems by sufficiently raising the prices of finished commodities. In other words, the monarchist regime was deliberately making it difficult for the pishivaran and their allied agents to take measures necessary to their survival. Thus, while the regime continually attempted to gain control over (corrupt) the political leadership of the bazaaries, it pursued a policy aimed at destroying self-exploitation and related social relationships.

This strategy was, in hindsight, clearly unsuccessful. The bazaaries, particularly the pishivaran, were both more democratic and more "class-conscious" than the monarchist regime had anticipated. Efforts by the regime to "buy off" the top leadership of the High Council of the Asnaf did not lead to blind obedience by pishivaran to the monarchist regime's policies. If anything, the pishivaran became more militant in their opposition to the monarchist regime and recognized the regime's efforts to corrupt their guild leadership and undermine the conditions for their economic survival.

Consequently, the pishivaran were among the most vocal opponents of the monarchist regime and provided many of the foot soldiers in the revolutionary organizations that were instrumental in the 1979 Revolution.

Ancient Crisis and the Shi'a Islamic Ulama

Some elements of the Shi'a Islamic ulama compared the attempts by the regime to corrupt the leadership of popular organizations, such as the guilds and leading figures within Shi'a Islam, to the way in which the national leadership of Iran had been corrupted by the "West." The growing influence of transnational corporations, particularly those from the United States, on Iranian life was viewed as symptomatic of a displacement of traditional moral values with "Western" moral values. If the ancient way of life of the villages and bazaars was an important condition of existence of traditional moral values, and there is every reason to believe that the clergy thought so, then the capitalist way of life epitomized by the United States and carried into Iran by transnational corporations represented the antithesis to those traditional moral values. Anti-Americanism

in Iran became a way of protesting the local oligarchy (which was viewed as Americanized), transnational corporations, and the cultural mores associated with American-style capitalism.

Shi'ism, as a particular set of assumptions about appropriate ("good") human behavior and relationships, provided the conceptual tools and logic for this opposition to oligarchic capitalism and the way of life associated with oligarchic capitalism. It simultaneously provided a cultural condition for the reproduction of ancient social relationships and the underlying prevalence of self-exploitation in Iranian villages. The ulama defended the traditional way of life in the village with a specific *discourse* that was accepted by a large part of the population as transcendent, that is, the embodiment of *truth*. This transcendental discourse simultaneously attacked the social changes that would have promoted oligarchic capitalism and promoted values that were supportive of self-exploitation: reinforcing beliefs in the right of the ancient producer to be the first appropriator of the fruit of his labor, the right of the ancient landlord to claim a share of that self-appropriated ancient surplus, and the obligation of the ancient producer to support the spiritual mission of the clergy by sharing yet another portion of that self-appropriated surplus. Any attempt by the monarchist regime to alter traditional village relationships could be interpreted as an incarnation of "evil."

Thus the Shi'a Islamic ulama played an important role in providing ideological justification, by their interpretation of divine Islamic law, for the social relationships of the ancient villages, including the rights of ancient producers to engage in self-exploitation, the role of the absentee landlords, and the social relationships of the bazaars. The ulama were often among the staunchest defenders of the ancient way of life in Iranian villages, towns, and cities.

Why did the Shi'a Islamic ulama support self-exploitation? Was this simply a manifestation of conservatism, a desire to maintain traditional ways of life, or is it possible to identify a concrete class aspect to the actions of the clergy? Were the ulama linked to self-exploitation in such a way that they were directly impacted by the monarchist regime's assault on ancientism?

The ulama had a close relationship with ancient producers in the villages and the bazaars. The mosque was the center of social life in the villages and bazaars. The ulama were the educators of the children of

the bazaaries, who were among the better educated citizens of Iran. At times, the ulama provided the spiritual and tactical leadership in organizing direct actions to oppose anti-ancient policies of the state. Indeed, the decentralized political organization that facilitated grassroots opposition to the state and made it so difficult for the monarchist regime(s) to coopt the ulama can be interpreted as a by-product of ancient democracy.

This close connection between the ancients and the ulama was also economic. The ulama received a share, a tithe, if you will, often in kind, of the surplus each ancient producer self-appropriated. The ulama also received nonclass payments from the ancient merchants and landlords, who were, in turn, dependent on the self-appropriated surplus of ancient producers. Ancient producers and their allied agents, particularly the merchants, paid tuition to the ulama for educating their male children and this tuition revenue constituted a significant portion of the ulama's income. The modernization campaign began to sever the economic lifeline between the ulama and the ancient producers and other allied agents. Secular schools were established. Supermarkets and department stores displaced ancient merchants. Landlords lost large portions of their rent-generating land. Additionally, the encroachment by capitalist enterprises on the territory of ancient enterprises threatened the surplus-appropriating ability of ancient producers, going directly to the economic heart of ancient society. Thus the generosity of ancient farmers, craftsmen, landlords, and merchants was compromised by the growth in capitalism.

It seems safe to say that, for the most part, the land reform and urban modernization campaign negatively affected the incomes of the clergy. Although some members of the ulama might have benefited from the reforms, most did not. Given the decentralization of the ulama, even if the monarchist regime provided favors to a select few members of the group, this would not, in and of itself, have likely won much allegiance by the group as a whole.

But this is not the only economic connection between the ulama and the ancient producers. As it turns out, the ulama were the direct beneficiaries of subsumed class payments from ancient producers (nasaq-holders) in the form of rent on charitable land endowments. Thus among the various social roles played by members of the ulama was the role of ancient landlord. The land reforms represented interventions by the state into

the traditional relationship between these religious landlords and their ancient tenants; likewise they would come to intervene in a wide range of other ancient landlord-ancient producer relationships. In particular, the land reforms compelled the ulama to enter into long-term (ninety-nine-year-) contracts with those ancient producers who had traditionally worked the ulama-controlled lands and, like the nonclerical landlords, to accept rents below the historical norm. This imposition of the state between the ulama qua ancient landlords and their tenants qua ancient producers could not have been passively received by the ulama.

Indeed the potential erosion in the economic conditions of existence of the Shi'a Islamic ulama to which this interposition contributed might constitute one of the motivating factors for the ulama's opposition to the land reforms, in particular. Thus the ideological support provided by the ulama for the social organization of the ancient villages and bazaars was not only directed to justifying self-exploitation, the role of the absentee landlords, the status of the bazaaries and their guilds, but may also have been directed to justifying their own role as landlords and, more generally, as beneficial participants in ancient social relationships.

As has already been indicated, the changes in social relationships initiated by the land reforms and urban modernization undermined the traditional relationships of the villages, towns, and cities. Even if the capitalists had made up for the revenue effects on the ulama of these changes, there could be no guarantee that the overall status of the ulama could be reproduced in such an environment. The very process by which ancient Iran was threatened called into question the traditional social status and role of the ulama. It was in this context that many members of the ulama proclaimed the changes inconsistent with divine Islamic law. And this defiance of the monarchist regime by the ulama, often considered among the most conservative elements of Iranian society, was certainly an important step in the direction of the 1979 Revolution.

Conflict within Capitalist Iran

The monarchist regime further weakened its position by not only neglecting but acting against the interests of small-scale capitalists. This "petty" capitalist segment of the population might have been more supportive of the monarchist regime if the White Revolution had simply

been designed to encourage the growth of capitalism, rather than the advance of oligarchic capitalism. As it was, the monarchist regime benefited a relatively small elite of oligarchic capitalists and transnational corporations. These favored firms received a wide range of public supports for their development and domination of labor markets, markets for loanable funds, access to infrastructure, and markets for the sale of finished commodities. The oligarchic elite, including members of the Shah's family, benefited directly from these policies. To some extent, the favorable treatment of oligarchic families has been linked to corruption—specifically, illegal subsumed class payments from the oligarchy to public officials in exchange for such treatment. It is also clear, however, that the monarchist regime viewed large-scale firms as more “modern” and “Western” and, given the elite's privileged access to finance capital, it was easier for them to construct large-scale capitalist firms.

Furthermore the elite families that came to dominate large-scale manufacturing and agriculture were part of a larger—although still relatively small in absolute size—oligarchy that included directors of big banks, insurance companies, and new mega-merchanting enterprises. This capitalist oligarchy cooperated to dominate the Iranian economy and to share in the surplus extracted by the oligarchic capitalists and industrial transnationals. They were often involved in export-oriented businesses and consistently received special treatment by the regime. The economic success of this oligarchy often came at the expense of the traditional capitalists, small-scale moneylenders, and the traditional merchants.

The monarchist regime, under the rubric of modernization, instituted industrial and agricultural policies designed to promote higher profits within enterprises controlled by the oligarchy. Smaller-scale domestic capitalist and noncapitalist enterprises were put at a competitive disadvantage. This was done by the adoption of discriminatory taxing policies, state control over the licensing of economic activities and the use of public spaces, and discrimination in the allocation of public resources, including sanitary water, roads, electrical lines, and credit. It was widely understood that the Shah's family and associates within the oligarchy and certain transnational corporations were given preferential treatment at all levels of the government.

It was precisely this bias in favor of oligarchic capitalism that made it impossible for capitalists to develop a united front in favor of the monar-

chist regime and against the ancient sector of Iranian society. It is even possible that a united front of capitalists might have been successful at “buying off” a larger segment of the ulama and neutralizing the religious opposition to the monarchist regime. To the extent petty capitalists were contributing to the religious authorities, however, there was no clear message of support for the monarchist regime. To a significant extent, the message that came from the petty capitalists was in opposition to that regime, further bolstering the antimonarchist consensus among the ulama.

Conclusion

Iran was a social formation with a sharply dualistic character. There was a *capitalist Iran*, with its internecine conflict between oligarchic capitalism and petty capitalism, and an *ancient Iran*. Most of the Iranian people lived in ancient Iran, including most of the ulama. So long as the boundaries of these two Irans did not intersect, there was probably not sufficient tension in the society to generate a revolutionary crisis. Despite the struggle of nonoligarchic capitalists to resist the encroachments of oligarchic capitalism, it seems unlikely that these small-scale capitalists were either numerous enough or collectively powerful enough to have successfully fought the oligarchy. The monarchist regime, however, not only created internecine strife within capitalist Iran by encouraging the growth of oligarchic capitalism but it continually pushed the boundaries of capitalist Iran into ancient Iran, threatening the survival of ancientism. This was a critical catalyst in the 1979 Revolution.

The underlying realities—that self-exploitation was a significant catalyst in the 1979 Revolution and that ancient direct producers and their allied agents constituted a majority of those participating in the Iranian economy—has eluded social analysts, even those who acknowledge the presence of this “precapitalist” element in Iranian society. This chapter has sought to open minds to the importance of self-exploitation and related processes in the 1979 Revolution, as well as to the importance of self-exploitation more generally. It is clear that direct producers engaging in self-exploitation constitute a unique body of economic agents, capable of securing the conditions for their continued existence as self-exploiting direct producers and of organizing against their opponents. In the case

of Iran, they were joined by a potent coalition of social agents, many of whom had direct interests in the preservation of ancientism, and the end result was a political revolution of such dramatic force as to capture the attention of the rest of the world.

Notes

- 1 Polemical arguments from the Iranian left tended to favor the argument that so-called Western imperialism and global capitalism were the driving forces behind the monarchist regime and, therefore, the cause of the 1979 Revolution. The most prominent organized left groups were the National Front, the Tudeh Party, the Mujahedin Khalq, and the Fedai'ayan Khalq. Both the Fedai'ayan Khalq, a Marxist-Leninist political organization with links to guerrilla groups that had fought against the monarchist regime, and the Tudeh Party supported the establishment of an Islamic republic because of their reductionist belief that imperialism was the condition of existence of capitalism in Iran and the further conclusion that the Islamic government would eliminate imperialist influences on Iran. The Mujahedin Khalq is best described as a left Islamic organization grounded in a philosophy akin to the philosophical foundations of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. This group was subjected to the most violent suppression under the new Islamic government.
- 2 A number of social analysts, such as Jazani (1980), Afshari (1983), Bayat (1987), and Milani (1988), have analyzed Iranian revolutions as the consequence of class struggles, where class is defined in terms of ownership of means of production or, alternatively, in terms of power relationships. Afshari, for instance, in examining the foundations of the 1905-1911 Constitutional Revolution, draws a clear one-to-one correspondence between ownership of the means of production and political power. He therefore recognizes the economic independence of urban artisans (*pishivaran*) because most of them own their means of production, but views the rural direct producers (*peasants*) as a homogeneously exploited (by others) group because, for the most part, they do not own the means of production. Class struggle is analyzed primarily as the struggle between owners and nonowners of the means of production over control of the state.
- 3 For a discussion of the ancient fundamental and subsumed class processes and self-exploitation, see Gabriel (1990, 85-106).
- 4 There is a rather large and varied literature on the 1979 Iranian Revolution. In addition to Jazani (1980), Bayat (1987), and Milani (1988), see Zabih

- (1979), Jabbari (1981), Katouzian (1981), Ricks (1981), Abrahamian (1982), Moghadam (1988), Pesaran (1982), Amuzegar (1991), and Moaddel (1991).
- 5 The Shah's family was part of this elite, as were many of his close friends and allies.
- 6 The number of self-exploiting farmers can be roughly estimated based on the number of such direct producers who were *nasaq*-holders. *Nasaq*-holding farmers distributed their own surplus among various claimants, retained a "traditional right of cultivation," and were not subject to arbitrary changes in the rent payments required by landlords. The existence of a long-term tenancy with rents unrelated to the absolute size of the surplus produced on the land mitigates against the landlord gaining control over the entire surplus and transforming the relationship into one that might properly be described as feudal. These conditions indicate that most *nasaq*-holders were self-exploiting, and therefore ancient, but all non-*nasaq*-holding farmers cannot be assumed to be nonancient. Given that many craftspeople were also self-exploiting, any attempt to estimate the total number of rural ancient producers based solely on the number who were *nasaq*-holders can be considered conservative. Milani (1994, 47) quotes an estimate of 2.1 million *nasaq*-holding direct producers in 1961. Moaddel (1991, 318) quotes an estimate of "nearly a million families" dependent on self-exploitation in the urban bazaars.
- 7 The regime of Reza Shah had come to power in a military coup that ended the Qajar dynasty. Reza Shah was able to come to power, in part, because of the success of a pro-ancient movement, the Constitutional Movement, in the cities. This movement was funded and organized by merchants and the self-exploiting artisans with whom they were allied. The regime, free from the old feudal ties of the Qajars, moved decisively to destroy the economic and political power of the khans, who were at the top of a feudal hierarchy that had been loyal to the Qajars. This action was, in class terms, revolutionary and helped set the stage for the events leading to the 1979 Revolution.
- 8 See, for example, Amuzegar (1991, 184). Rural economics within which self-exploitation prevails are often described as semifeudal because the social analysts refuse to accept the possibility that a nonfeudal, noncapitalist, nonbipolar fundamental class process might prevail in such an economy.
- 9 Katouzian (1981) describes these relationships among ancient producers as "communal" and specifically discusses the importance of cooperation among producers over the use and distribution of water.
- 10 As Katouzian (1981) points out, officials of the monarchist regime estimated that 35 percent of the Iranian rural sector was "underemployed." It is inter-

esting that this is precisely equal to that portion of the rural population that did not meet the definition of "self-exploiting."

- 11 The regime provided the corporate capitalist farms and state capitalist farms with cheap inputs, easy credit, and other advantages that allowed these firms to underprice both ancient farmers and smaller-scale capitalist farmers.
- 12 The Constitutional Movement pressured the monarchist regime of Mozaffar ad-Din Shah to create a national legislature, the *Majles*, and an ecclesiastical committee of ulama, as mechanisms for, among other things, restricting the authority of the state to impose taxes on land and sales, and imposing onerous rules on the bazaaris. There are strong similarities between the configuration of social forces behind the Constitutional Movement, ancient craftspeople, merchants, landlords, and the ulama, and the movement that culminated in the 1979 Revolution. There is however, one component of the 1970s antimonarchist movement that was missing from the turn of the century Constitutional Movement—the ancient farmers. While it is clear that self-exploitation was prevalent in the bazaaris throughout the nineteenth century, and that ancient artisans and their guilds played an important role in the Constitutional Movement, it appears that rural Iran remained feudal during this period of Iranian history. It is possible that changes set in motion by the Constitutional Movement, including the military coup that put Reza Khan, later to become Reza Shah, into chief executive authority, ended the dominance of feudal exploitation in the Iranian countryside and created the prevalence of self-exploitation in the countryside.

13 See Afshari (1983, 140–43).

14 See Afshari (1983, 143–53) for an extensive discussion of bazaari resistance, including various alliances with other social agents, such as the clergy.

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SHARECROPPING AND FEUDAL CLASS PROCESSES IN THE POSTBELLUM MISSISSIPPI DELTA

Sharecropper forced to flee after producing 30 acre cotton crop
—*Jackson Advocate*, September 24, 1949

Negro preacher-farmer leaves family of twelve in flight from state cotton plantation. . . . Tells story of slave-like treatment of sharecropper family
—*Jackson Advocate*, June 20, 1953

State farmers freed on charges of forcing negro to work off debt
—*Jackson Advocate*, October 23, 1954

Young sharecropper charges planter beat wife who would not leave sick baby to pick cotton—*Jackson Advocate*, November 20, 1954

This chapter presents a class analysis of the sharecropping system that came to prominence in the aftermath of the Civil War in the Mississippi Delta region of the United States and continued to exist until the rise of the civil rights movement in the 1950s. Although most of the material discussed pertains to the Delta region, the analysis could probably be applied to the sharecropping system in the Southern regions of the United States in general.

The main thesis I would like to advance is that sharecropping in the Delta region had a feudal character in which surplus labor produced by the tenant was extracted by the landlord in the form of rent.¹ In order to substantiate this claim, I look at the broader context of Southern sharecropping and conceptualize the ways that certain legal, political, cultural, and economic processes shaped this form of surplus labor extraction.