International relations in the making of political Islam: interrogating Khomeini's 'Islamic government'

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Eurocentric approaches to political Islam tend to deploy an internalist methodology that theoretically obscures the generative and constitutive role of international relations. This article addresses this problem through a critical application of Leon Trotsky's idea of 'uneven and combined development' to Ayatollah Khomeini's invention of the concept of 'Islamic government'. It argues that this concept was international in its socio-political stimulus and intellectual content, and, crucially, reflected, influenced, and mobilised an emergent liminal sociality that combined Western and Islamic socio-cultural forms. This heterogeneous character of Iran's experience of modernity is, the article argues, theoretically inaccessible to Eurocentric approaches' homogeneous and unilinear conceptions of history, which, as a result, generate exceptionalist modes of explanations.

> Pray as much as you like; it is your oil they are after … the puppet governments they have installed prevent us from industrializing … [Thus,] should a [knowledgeable and just Islamic jurist (*faqih*)] emerge and establish a government, he has the same authority (*velayat*) in ruling the society as that of the Prophet.
>
> Ayatollah Khomeini

Introduction

The 2009 post-election crisis in Iran has renewed academic and popular interest in the future of the Islamic Republic, the global flagship of political Islam. Although triggered by vote-rigging allegations, the ongoing crisis arguably represents deeper contestations over the meaning and legacy of the 1979

revolution (Bayat 2009; Jafari 2009). A key axis of these contestations revolves around the nature of the relationship between religion and the state currently governed by the constitutional principle of *velayat-e faqih* or the 'governance of the jurist'. Crucially, according to the Iranian constitution, *velayat-e faqih* and its associated powers, institutionally invested in the office of the Supreme Leader, are an extension of God's divine sovereignty. Yet, the postrevolutionary constitution also defines Iran as a republic based on popular assent.[1] It is arguably this structural amalgamation of religious and secular sovereignties that underlies the Islamic Republic's periodic experience of political crisis. This hybrid form was produced by the 1979 revolution, which poses the intellectual challenge of theorising the constitutive role of religion in a thoroughly modern revolution, a phenomenon that defies classical sociology's secular eschatology of modernity (Mirsepassi 2000: 9; Keenan 2003).

An early response to this apparent divergence of theory and history was the invocation of 'exceptionalism'. Shi'a Islam was considered to be intrinsically opposed to secular powers and hence having a tendency towards seizing the state (Algar 1972; Skocpol 1982; but see Floor 1980). This claim refers to the Shi'i belief that during the period of the occultation of the twelfth imam all existing temporal powers are usurpers and hence illegitimate (Weber 1978: 822–3; cf. Abrahamian 1993: 18–19). The evidence that is often conveniently invoked is the concept of 'Islamic government' introduced by Ayatollah Khomeini in the early 1970s in a series of lectures on *velayat-e faqih* later published as a book entitled *Islamic Government* (1981a).

The idea of an intrinsic fusion of Islam and politics that is inhibitive of modern secular state formation is, however, by no means limited to the case of Iran and Shi'ism. It is common to Eurocentric approaches to Muslim societies. The basic trope consists of contrasting the 'anomalous' fusion of religion and politics in Islam with the 'normalcy' of European secularism (Lewis 1966; Lambton 1988). This passive comparison cannot but render the Iranian Revolution, and Islam-inspired political movements more generally, historically exceptional, even pathological. Charles Kurzman (2004: vii), for instance, declares that 'I still see the Iranian Revolution as a "deviant" case'. Similarly, Theda Skocpol (1982: 267) claims that, unlike other great revolutions, the Iranian Revolution is the only revolution that 'did not come but was made'. But exceptionalising this purported fusion presupposes 'secular Europe' as a coherent empirical and normative referent for modernity, an assumption that is also contested (Asad 2003; Hurd 2004). At any rate, the notion of a perennial fusion of Islam and the state is compellingly challenged (Jung 2007; Pasha 2009).

Nevertheless, explicitly exceptionalist accounts of political Islam have lost much of their initial influence to a growing body of literature that is informed by comparative sociology and politics. A hallmark of this literature is the

'fundamentalism project' of the 1990s (Marty and Appleby 1991, 1993a, b, 1994, 1995; cf. Keddie 1998; Eisenstadt 1999). The departure point of the project is that contemporary fundamentalism represents 'militant and political religious movements which [have] organized in reaction to the prevailing patterns of modernization' (Marty and Appleby 1995: 1). Thus, political Islam is redefined as a particularly potent instance of the worldwide phenomenon of 'fundamentalism' directly reacting to modernisation processes (Almond *et al*. 1995: 405). As such, it was seen to be 'both derivative and vitally original' (Marty and Appleby 1993a: 3).

De-exceptionalisation of political Islam through a conceptual emphasis on its causal relation with modernisation as a global phenomenon is certainly a significant achievement of the fundamentalism project. There are, however, three basic problems with this approach. First, the project's de-exceptionalisation of political Islam involves the normalisation of the opposition or inhospitableness of all forms of religious politics to modernisation (but see Gellner 1995). This involves an implicit or explicit essentialisation of religion that obfuscates its socio-historically constructed character (cf. Bayat 2007). Second, and more importantly, the disruptive impacts of modernisation, the main stimulant of 'fundamentalisms', are derived from the uneven development of capitalism, which itself remains unexplained (Almond *et al*. 1995; Keddie 1998: 699–700). And third, and equally importantly, the novel and hybrid character of fundamentalisms is acknowledged (Almond *et al*. 1995: 402) but not seen as a provocation to the concept of modernity, which remains firmly monolithic and Eurocentric (e.g. Beyer 1994: 8). This ultimately renders fundamentalisms, and hence political Islam, as simultaneously a deviation from, and yet also a contingent feature of, modernity (e.g. Roy 1994). These problems are compounded by a sizable body of literature that shows that European modernity has itself comprised a multiplicity of different instances. The 'impurity' of the English bourgeois revolution (Anderson 1966), the pre-modern character of the French Revolution (Comninel 1990), the 'special path' (*Sonderweg*) of pre-Second World War (WWII) modern Germany (Fischer 1986), and the aberrational character of the Russian Revolution (Gramsci cited in Forgacs 1999: 32–36) are but a few examples.

I hope this brief, and unavoidably schematic, discussion has shown that the problem of theoretical comprehension of political Islam and other 'fundamentalist' movements is bound up with a deeper intellectual problem, namely, the tension between the conceptually homogenous character of the idea of modernity and historically heterogeneous nature of its occurrence. This disjuncture, long recognised and emphasised (e.g. Bhabha 1994; Eisenstadt 2000), is arguably itself the result of a basic, though underappreciated and under-theorised, paradox in classical sociology and social theory, namely, the simultaneous *empirical* recognition and *theoretical* exclusion of 'the international' (Rosenberg 2006).

I use 'the international' to refer to dynamic determinations and influences generated by the interactive co-existence of multiple societies. I use 'society' in the basic sense of historically varying forms of social coherence into larger and mutually recognised integrities. The theoretical exclusion of the international is therefore generated by an internalist, and therefore static, comparative method that departs from an ontologically singular conception of society, one which is at the heart of the main traditions of modern European thought (Poggi 1965; Chernilo 2006). The development of a non-exceptionalist account of political Islam — and movements known as 'fundamentalist' more generally — therefore involves a larger intellectual challenge, that is, the formulation of a non-Eurocentric social theory that incorporates, at the most fundamental level, the heterogeneous and interactive nature of social development (cf. Mirsepassi 2000; Matin 2012a).

This article contributes to tackling this challenge, using Leon Trotsky's (1985) idea of 'uneven and combined development' and its recent re-articulation in the discipline of International Relations (IR).[2] The argument consists of a critical reinterpretation of Ayatollah Khomeini's formulation of the concept of Islamic government, which conceptualises the generative and constitutive significance of international relations through the idea of uneven and combined development. I present the argument in four parts. First, I briefly outline the theory of uneven and combined development and show its ability to transcend the internalist logic of Eurocentrism. Second, I sketch the contours of Iran's modern history of uneven and combined development with a special focus on the changing status and role of the Shi'a ulama in Iranian politics. Against the background of this historical sketch I shall, in the third part, interrogate Khomeini's idea of Islamic government as an innovative attempt to recuperate the hegemony of the Shi'a ulama and ideology that had come under an existential threat from the Pahlavi monarchy's internationally driven modernisation, an attempt whose success further compounded the hybrid character of Iran's emergent modernity.

Uneven and combined development: transcending eurocentrism

Eurocentrism essentially posits that modern world development does, or ought to, consist of a series of discrete replications of modernity's original and independent emergence in Europe. This claim is rooted in classical sociology's key assumption that the nature of a society's development is determined by its *internal* structures and agents (cf. Poggi 1965; Bendix 1967). This self-contained conception of development involves a simultaneous internalisation and globalisation of capitalist development in Europe (Amin 1989). This is effectuated through the subordination of *space* to *time* through a double-movement.

Different geo-political spaces are conceptually delinked with respect to their internal developmental processes, while they are simultaneously enclosed and homogenised within an abstract universal history derived from the concrete *internal* history of one such geo-political space, Europe. Thus, the constitutive and mutative significance of the social world's political multiplicity is dissolved into European temporality (e.g. Rostow 1960). At the heart of Eurocentrism, which arguably characterises both liberal and radical traditions of modern European thought, therefore lies a strategic combination of 'internalism' (Tenbruck 1994) and 'historicism' (Chakrabarty 2008) that can be called 'monadic sociology' (Matin 2007).

Eurocentrism has been subject to growing critique in recent decades. Two approaches have become particularly influential: 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt 2000) and 'late postcolonialism' (Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1994).[3] Their rejection of Europe as the epitome of modernity, and their emphasis on the plural nature of modern experience, resonate with my own approach. However, each faces real difficulty in transcending Eurocentrism. The Weberian sociological framework of the multiple modernities approach detains it within a static comparative methodology that renders the international contingent. This in turn attenuates the constitutive role of (geo)politics and capitalism, and the structural violence attendant upon them, in the globalisation of modernity. The approach therefore lends itself to a culturalist/relativist mode that is preoccupied with questions pertaining to the specificity of each instance of modernity, leaving Eurocentrism's internalist method largely intact (Eisenstadt 2000: 2; Masud and Salvatore 2009: 45).[4] By contrast, late postcolonialism interrogates the interactive construction of 'colonial modernity' through an explicitly internationalist method (Dabashi 2006: xi–xii; 2007). But its poststructuralist hostility towards general theory and universal categories arrests the translation of its powerful critique of Eurocentrism into an alternative non-ethnocentric social theory (Dirlik 1994, 1999; Matin 2012a). Thus, although highly successful at impeaching Eurocentrism, multiple modernities and late postcolonialism have not decisively displaced it.

Uneven and combined development, I contend, avoids these pitfalls and fully overcomes Eurocentrism. Its conceptual core is threefold (Trotsky 1985; Rosenberg 2006). First, 'unevenness' posits multiplicity, differentiation, and interaction as the ontological fabric of the social world. Second, unevenness *ipso facto* conditions, and is reconditioned by, processes of change within and across the interacting societies. This interactive process necessarily renders the analytical distinction between the 'internal' and the 'external', and by implication the 'traditional' and the 'modern', themselves ontologically blurred. For 'unevenness' necessarily generates particular 'combinations' of its own components, continuously generating new iterations of unevenness. Crucially, combined development is an open-ended and politically charged

process. It involves proactive agents, differentially located within a complex structure of uneven power relations, adopting and adapting available resources, wherever they might be from, in order to create a 'new' socio-political order or reform an existing one, a process wrought with unintended consequences. Third, the 'uneven' and 'combined' nature of the social world finds its concrete expressions in historical processes of 'development'. Development is, of course, among the most controversial and Eurocentric concepts in the nomenclature of orthodox Marxism, modernisation, and development theories. However, in Trotsky's idea it is neither unilinear, nor homogenous, nor homogenising but 'interactively multilinear'. It conceptua-lises the reproductive activities of living human collectivities that are ontologically implicated in mutually constitutive relations. These relations underpin 'processes of directional change over time, which can be theorized by analyzing the causal properties of particular structures of social relationships' (Rosenberg 2007: 330).

Now, analysing the specific nature and outcomes of modern uneven and combined development requires concepts of a lower level of abstraction.[5] 'Backwardness' and 'substitution' are two such concepts. The notion of 'backwardness' is commonly associated with a European colonial discourse of stagist history reproduced in modernisation theory. However, following Trotsky I use it in a radically different sense in this article. Upon its emergence, capitalism generates inescapable dynamics of geo-political pres-sures and developmental and institutional contrasts that challenge non-capitalist forms of social organisation and threaten their survival.[6] Political projects of 'national regeneration' through 'modernisation' therefore have always had the immediate aim of avoiding foreign subjugation and main-taining cultural continuity (cf. Gerschenkron 1962; Mirsepassi 2000: 11). Backwardness therefore conceptualises a relational condition of power-differ-ential constantly felt through the 'whip of external necessity' and developmental comparisons that compels non-capitalist polities to initiate projects of national revival in order to maintain political and cultural independence (Trotsky 1985: 26–27). Such projects pertain as much to European as to non-European contexts (Shilliam 2009). A key element of such projects is the phenomenon of 'substitution'.

Trotsky first used the term 'substitutionism' in his critique of Lenin's proposals for reforming party organisation (Knei-Paz 1978: 192–99). But following the 1905 revolution, he began to view it as a much wider and multifaceted phenomenon organic to modern combined development and operational in the political, intellectual, ideological, economic, and bureau-cratic arenas (Trotsky 1985: 25–37). In this broader sense, substitution involves the mobilisation in the backward polity of various replacements, native and foreign, for the agency, institutions, instruments, material, or methods of

earlier processes of capitalist modernisation in West European countries. Substitution generates amalgamated forms that are dynamically tension-prone since they are inorganic to the backward country. More importantly, such forms are irresolvable into the purportedly 'universal' categories derived from the European experience of modernity. Furthermore, it also creates new political and developmental possibilities unforeseen or suppressed by Euro-centric and unilinear theories of history. The interrelated concepts of 'backwardness' and 'substitution' play a key role in my concrete application of the theory of uneven and combined development in the following sections. But before that two important clarifications are in order.

First, uneven and combined development might be conflated with the concept of 'uneven development'. 'Uneven development' conceptualises differential development within different sectors or parts of a country, or between different countries and regions. It has been extensively used to describe the unequal pace and depth of economic and political modernisation in Pahlavi Iran (Bill 1972; Abrahamian 1982: 427; Halliday 1988: 39–43; Milani 1994: Chapter 4). But there are two crucial differences between the two concepts. First, 'uneven development' is derived from the internal dynamics of capitalism. It therefore obscures the causal significance of political multiplicity and IR central to uneven and combined development. And second, 'uneven development' does not capture conditions of hybridity. In its more complex renditions it connotes 'articulation of modes of production' whereby capitalist and non-capitalist modes hierarchically coexist but remain internally coherent (Laclau 1971; Foster-Carter 1978).

Second, I am aware of the teleological and normative liability of using terms such as 'modern', 'premodern', 'traditional' and so on. But in the absence of better alternatives, I use such terms only to signify historically specific contrasts made by proactive agents encountering historically novel reconfigurations of international *power* relations. These shifts in power-differential are generated by the anterior and internationally driven crystallisation of capitalist relations in Europe (for Iran see Tabatabayi 2003: 521). The terms and the distinctions involved in their use are therefore analytical and not theoretical. At any rate, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam (2005: 4) correctly argues, it is impossible to escape using such terms 'in any form of periodization that is argumentative and not simply mechanical in nature'.

A note on methodology

My account of Khomeini's concept of Islamic government does not neatly fit into any of the three main approaches to the history of political thought, namely, textualism, intertextualism, and contextualism. It places elements of

the first two approaches into a relation of over-determination with the third one. The reason for this is threefold. First, textualism is ahistorical, assumes the autonomy of the text, and imputes evolutionary coherence to a thinker's intellectual outputs and activities. All of these assumptions have been compellingly problematised (Skinner 1969; but see Parekh and Berki 1973). Second, I do not exclusively rely on an intertextualist approach because while it certainly involves a higher degree of historical contextualisation of ideas and intellectuals it nonetheless reduces the 'social context' to the constraints imposed on agents by the range of normative vocabulary available to them (Skinner 1998: xiii). The 'perlocutionary' character of my analysis of Khomeini therefore tends to be relatively stronger than its 'illocutionary' dimension (Skinner 1969: 42–46). In other words, while I broach the question of *understanding* Khomeini's *intention to* reconstruct the Shi'i doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (the governance of the jurist) into the modern concept of Islamic government, my main objective is to *explain* Khomeini's *intention in* that reconstruction. However, my explanation is not identical with the kind of contextualisation of ideas involved in 'sociology of knowledge' or 'social history of political thought', either (Wood 2011). For a key aim of my analysis is to demonstrate that international relations form a distinct field of causality that is *generative* and *constitutive* of the social context of the formation and evolution of political thought (cf. Shilliam 2009). But this does not mean that my approach belittles more exhaustive textual reading or downplays the relevance of transnational intellectual influences on Khomeini's innovative exercise. Rather, my approach is best understood as a non-Eurocentric theoretical reconstruction of existing empirically oriented accounts of Khomeini's political thought (e.g. Rose 1983; Ismael and Ismael 1990; Dabashi 2006).

In the following two main sections I first demonstrate the generative and constitutive significance of the international for Khomeini's formulation of the idea of Islamic government through the elucidation of Iran's modern uneven and combined development. The subsequent section concentrates on showing the discursive enunciations of these significances in Khomeini's writing on the subject. This means international relations are not explicitly mentioned in the second section. Rather, their impact on Khomeini's invention of the idea of Islamic government is discussed through two auxiliary concepts, 'backwardness' and 'substitution', discussed above and operationalised in the first section. The unequal presence of the international in the two parts of the analysis is therefore only apparent and not substantive. In their combination the parts of the analysis are intended to form a single cumulative argument.

Finally, the following sketch of the contours of Iran's modern uneven and combined development has an international-internal analytical accent. This is dictated by the nature of the problematic investigation, namely, the international dimension of Khomeini's articulation of the idea of Islamic government. A fuller

account of Iran's modern uneven and combined development should therefore include the reconstitutive effects of Iran's 'internal' development on international relations (see *inter alia* Esposito 1990). This would also throw into a sharper relief uneven and combined development's conceptual and historical destabilisation of the distinction between the 'modern' and the 'traditional'.

Iran's uneven and combined development: from the Safavis to the Pahlavis (1501–1979)

Iran's internal development was fundamentally co-constituted by geo-politics and geo-economics during the Safavi period (1501–1722). The Safavis' reunification of Iran and pursuit of regional supremacy pitted them against the Sunni Ottomans. The ideological dimension of this rivalry was the Safavis' imposition of Shi'ism as the state religion. This raised the status and influence of the Shi'a ulama who took charge of educational and judicial organs. But the ulama remained subordinate to the state as the Safavis had successfully claimed prophetic descent (Minorsky 1943). The Safavis' revenue flowed from three main sources: state tax, war, and long-distance trade. The latter two sources were severely curtailed as rising European powers dominated West Asian trade and geo-politics by the mid-17th century (Matin 2007). Consequently, the Safavis intensified taxation but exempted large amounts of their own lands by converting them into *waqf* (inalienable religious endowment). *Waqf* lands were managed by the ulama as trustees. Over time and with the progressive weakening of the central state the ulama's trusteeship gradually transformed into *de facto* ownership, laying the basis for the ulama's growing autonomy, which reached its zenith during the Qajar period (1791–1925).

The Qajars lacked prophetic descent and hence were unable to replicate the Safavis' 'caesaropapism' (Arjomand 1988). They therefore needed the Shi'a ulama for ideological legitimation, which boosted the latter's power and autonomy. Thus, the ulama assumed a key role in forging the hegemonic cultural and ideological forms of the emerging civil society, with important implications for Iran's modern politics (cf. Dabashi 2006: 493). Meanwhile, the ulama also solidified their alliance with the bazaar merchants, increasing their influence. The result was the system of the 'dual sovereignty' of the state and the ulama (Arjomand 1988).

European imperialists' increasing encroachments and geo-economic pressures on Iran, however, intensified political tensions between the Qajar state and the ulama-bazaar alliance. A series of devastating military defeats by the Russian and British empires powerfully impressed upon the ruling Qajar dynasty and the Iranian elites their country's backwardness. The Qajars attempted military, financial, and administrative reforms along the lines of the

Ottoman *tanzimat* but, in the face of strong resistance from the provincial magnates and the Shi'a ulama, soon abandoned them. Consequently, the Qajar kings were increasingly forced to maintain their rule and Iran's nominal independence through substituting financial and trade concessions to Anglo-Russian capitalists for military and financial reforms. The 'dual sovereignty' was, therefore, increasingly undercut by the monarchy's 'dual appeasement' of Britain and Russia to the detriment of the indigenous privileged classes, especially the bazaari merchants.

The Qajars' substitutionism preserved their rule and saved Iran from outright colonisation. But it did not resolve Iran's backwardness. In fact, from the perspective of the privileged classes and the nascent intelligentsia, Iran's comparative economic backwardness and political impotence had only intensified. This was amply demonstrated by the Tobacco Boycott Movement of 1891–1892, a bazaar-instigated and ulama-led movement against Naser al-Din Shah's decision to grant to a Briton full monopoly over the production, sale, and export of tobacco in Iran (Keddie 1966). The movement was successful but the Qajars' financial and economic concessions to Anglo-Russian capitalists continued. A more radical solution was therefore attempted through the Constitutional Revolution (1906–1911). Inspired by Russia's defeat by Japan and her 1905 revolution, a heterogeneous alliance of prominent bazaar merchants, influential members of the Shi'a ulama, and liberal and socialist intelligentsia led a democratic revolution against Qajar autocracy (Matin 2006). The revolution modernised Iran's political structure through establishment of a national consultative assembly (*majlis*) that was to oversee foreign and trade policies. Directly generated by Iran's interactive coexistence with the modernising Europe, the Constitutional Revolution superimposed the political institutions of capitalist-based European liberal democracy on a substantively non-capitalist socio-economic structure. This peculiar amalgamation was the first acute expression of Iran's experience of modern uneven and combined development (Matin 2012b).

Another international event radically changed the internal political scene yet again. The 1917 revolution in Russia emboldened Iran's small but growing leftist forces to overthrow the Qajar state, which had been significantly weakened by the Constitutional Revolution and the First World War. Inspired and supported by the victorious Bolsheviks in neighbouring Russia, the Iranian left sought a radical non-capitalist solution to Iran's backwardness. The formation, in 1920, of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran in the Northern province of Gilan was the first important step (Chaqueri 1995). But this developmental route was quickly blocked by Reza Khan's British-assisted coup in 1921. The new Pahlavi autocracy was aided and abetted by important sections of the ulama, merchants, and large landlords, who were all alarmed by the communist advance. Reza Khan's rise to power strategically fixed Iran on

the path of capitalist-oriented modernisation. This was reinforced by Iran's growing geo-political significance in the United States and West European powers' confrontation with the Soviet Union.

Reza Shah imposed central authority and initiated a reform project comprising state-rationalisation, military modernisation, bureaucratic expansion, and the legalisation of private property in land (Banani 1961). Following the example of Ataturk, Reza Khan also severely restricted the public power of the ulama. These reforms further sharpened the tensions within the amalgamation forged by the Constitutional Revolution. For Iran's largely feudal-mercantile economy was now overlain with an expanding modern state bureaucracy with which it had hardly any organic relation. This was largely due to Reza Shah's formal recognition of the large landlords' authority in the countryside in return for their political support, without which he could not rule (Karshenas 1990: 68). Archaic rural feudalism, dwindling urban mercantilism, and British domination of the new oil industry reinforced Iran's backwardness.

WWII yet again changed the *status quo*. Reza Shah's pro-German sympathies and Iran's strategic location for supplying the embattled Red Army led to the Allies' occupation of Iran. Reza Shah was forced to abdicate, and a decade of political freedoms was inaugurated. The left, liberal and religious forces rapidly grew in strength while the power of the young Mohammad Reza Shah was curtailed and became largely ceremonial. Liberal nationalists increasingly saw the control of the oil industry, a British economic enclave since 1907, as the only viable basis for developing Iran's primitive economic structure, a project seen as instrumental to countering the growing power of the Iranian left. Mosaddeq's oil-nationalisation movement was therefore a struggle for national and economic independence, as well as a politically conservative strategy of development (cf. Katouzian 1981, 1990). However, the United States, persuaded by the United Kingdom, increasingly viewed Mosaddeq with hostility, fearing that he might push Iran and its vast oil resources beyond the 'iron curtain'. The 1953 Anglo-American coup, supported by the conservative ulama, restored a politically docile Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to the Peacock throne (Akhavi 1988).

The geo-political exigencies of WWII therefore created a radical political situation inside Iran, while the post-WWII American strategy of 'containment' motivated a conservative restoration. But the causal impact of international relations on Iran's internal development continued in even more profound ways. The success of peasant-based revolutionary movements in China, Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam alarmed the Shah's new American mentors (Wolf 1971). Thus, despite the 'non-revolutionary' character of the Iranian peasantry (Abrahamian and Kazemi 1978), they advocated a 'revolution from above' (Trimberger 1971) in

order to pre-empt a peasant revolution from below. They recommended a reform package including a comprehensive land-redistribution programme and educational, electoral, and administrative reforms, which would sharply reduce the power and influence of the big landlords and the ulama (Hooglund 1982: 55–71). The Shah was initially wary of the implications of a unilateral termination of his post-coup political pact with the landlords and the ulama. But reassured of US political support and emboldened by growing oil revenues, he eventually obliged. Thus, the 'White Revolution of the Shah and the People' was launched in 1962 (Pahlavi 1966). In a new bid for overcoming Iran's backwardness, the agency of an age-old monarchy was therefore substituted for organic social classes whose English counterparts had carried through the process of the 'so called primitive accumulation', the social basis of capitalist modernity (Marx 1990: Part 8).

However, as with most substitutions, the Pahlavi Revolution from above had paradoxical consequences. The land reform politically destroyed the large landlords, although various loopholes in the reform programme allowed them to reinvent themselves as urban financiers or industrialists (Lambton 1969). The impact on the peasantry was extremely negative and produced massive rural–urban immigration, creating sprawling urban slums where millions lived in abject poverty (Kazemi 1980). By contrast, the big bazaar merchants generally benefitted from the reforms (Halliday 1988: 40–41; Abrahamian 1989). Nonetheless, despite their absolute gains, the bazaar was discontented with its relative exclusion from the government's massive credit schemes and loans that were primarily granted to comprador industrial bourgeoisie and big multinationals. Moreover, they also recognised that in the long run the Shah's industrial bias would erode the mercantile basis of their socio-economic power.

The impact of the reforms on the ulama was ambiguous. In an immediate sense, they lost income from running *madrasas* (religious schools) and *mahkamas* (religious courts). But they could still collect *khums* (tithes) and *zakat* (alms), and run mosques, shrines, and seminaries. In the longer term, though, the ulama increased their wealth and influence. Their riposte was the rationalisation and centralisation of their financial and bureaucratic practices and the establishment of private educational centres mixing modern and religious curricula (Abrahamian 1989: 18–19), which attracted many students hailing from religiously minded (petty) bourgeois and state employees. The graduates of these schools formed the organisational and ideological backbone of proliferating Islamic associations and societies. Their intermediary class position, ideological traditionalism and modern educational background enabled them to carry out successful political mobilisation of the lower classes behind the ulama-led Islamists (Harman 1994). The net result was that the ulama, supported by the bazaar, achieved an enhanced ability to exercise their

corporate power and ideological and political influence on a nation-wide scale (Panah 2007: 40–41).

Uneven and combined development thus generated a new contradictory socio-political amalgam in Iran. A rapidly growing modern industrial-service sector dominated by the state-elite collaborating with a small and socially rootless indigenous bourgeoisie and foreign capital was juxtaposed to a large, native mercantile economy with established institutions and a powerful ally in the shape of the Shi'a ulama. The employees of the vast state bureaucracy and civil service, Iran's new middle class, had ideological and cultural affinity with the latter. The cumulative impacts of this amalgamation process generated a hybrid sociality and ideological sensitivity. For the Shah's internationally induced developmental strategy systematically subverted the political con- summation of capitalist property relations it had introduced from above. These relations had been the concrete basis of formal political freedoms and liberal democracy in the core capitalist countries. But in Iran their politico-ideological expression was muted through the substitution of an anachronistic absolutist state for modern civil society. Consequently, relations between formally equal and hence politically 'free individuals' of capitalist relations were directly mediated by the state, personified by the Shah himself. A pamphlet on the White Revolution therefore triumphantly declared: 'the Shah and the People … constitute two superforces [with no] intermediary or insulator to intervene in the direct relationship between them' (cited in Foran 1993: 316).

By the late 1970s, the Shah's regime was developmentally strained, politically disoriented, and internationally isolated. Sheer repression became the main instrument of internal stability. The economic downturn of the late 1970s and the Carter administration's pressure for political liberalisation paved the way for the outbreak of a revolutionary crisis (Milani 1994: 95–98, 107). Within this context a reconstructed Shi'a discourse was fashioned by a group of Shi'a ulama and religious intellectuals that proved extremely influential, an influence that assumed a particular salience due to the organisational destruction and political crisis of the secular left (Mirsepassi 2000: Chapter 3). The bazaar- backed Shi'a ulama and religious intelligentsia steered the revolution toward an Islamic dénouement.

The rapid course of the revolution resembled a classic case of the 'war of movement', which Gramsci had argued to be the optimal strategy of revolu- tionary change outside Europe. This was based on Gramsci's distinction between Eastern states, which essentially consisted of political society and instruments of coercion only, and European states, which in contrast comprised 'political society + civil society … hegemony protected by the armour of coercion' (Gramsci cited in Forgacs 1999: 235). Revolutionary struggle against the latter therefore required the strategy of a protracted 'war of position' fought on cultural, educational, and ideological terrains. Although highly illuminating in

many respects, the theoretical framework of Gramsci's typology obfuscates the effects of the interaction between these different state-forms, and international relations more generally (cf. Shilliam 2004). This is a consequential omission.[7] For, as argued above, Iran's international relations were constitutive of its particular pattern of development and state-formation whereby Shi'ism and its vanguard, the ulama, retained a socio-politically salient role throughout Iran's history from the 16th century onwards. Thus, in Iran, although 'the state was everything', civil society was not 'primordial and gelatinous' (Gramsci cited in Forgacs 1999: 228–30). In fact, the phenomenon of dual sovereignty discussed above had enabled the Shi'a ulama to construct a religious civil society that was remarkably independent from the Pahlavi state (cf. Dabashi 2006). To be sure, the Shah established many popular cultural, educational, and developmental organisations as part of his 'passive revolution'. But this 'ethical state' was *formally* and openly subordinated to the 'political state', hence unable to generate consensual allegiance. As a result it could not supersede or subsume Iran's religious civil society, over which the Shi'a ulama arguably had a near-exclusive hegemony. Thus, there were in reality two civil societies in pre-revolutionary Iran, a secular and a religious one (cf. Keddie 1998: 722). The former rested on an ultra-nationalist discourse that centred on Iran's forgotten imperial history. It therefore had little appeal to the popular masses whose modern socio-economic conditions were overdetermined by pervasive Islamic sensibilities. The latter, by contrast, had a much longer and organic tradition and entrenched organisations deploying a reformulated political discourse that '[secured] a comfortable, familiar, and indigenous atmosphere for its restless constituency, [and connected] more quickly and effectively with the political agenda of a mass mobilisation' (Dabashi 2006: 187). The efficacy of this reconstituted Shi'a discourse was ultimately based on its ability to engage and capture the hybrid sociality and subjectivity that Iran's uneven and combined development had generated (cf. Rajaee 2007). This efficacy was, to no small extent, the result of a radical modernist revision of a classical Shi'a approach to political authority carried out by Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini (1902–1989).

Khomeini: the theologian of political revolution

Two broad approaches to Khomeini's political thought can be identified.[8] The first approach views his politics and ideology as an example of Third World populism (Abrahamian 1993: 2; cf. Keddie 1998: 698, fn. 5), which, as a result, tends to dilute of the substantive novelty of his idea of Islamic government. The second, arguably dominant, approach emphasises the radical novelty of Khomeini's reconstruction of the Shi'i approach to politics (e.g. Zubaida 1982; Rose 1983; Arjomand 1988; Dabashi 2006: 409–84; Martin 2007). Both

approaches provide valuable insights into Khomeini's political thought. But they do not attend to the challenge of comprehending the amalgamated nature of Khomeini's political thought, its simultaneous political radicalism and discursive conservatism, in terms of a non-Eurocentric general social theory. This is important because unless this amalgamation — which is the ultimate source of Khomeini's successful elevation of his reconstructed version of Shi'ism to the position of ideological hegemony over the revolutionary movement — is theoretically comprehended, the danger of essentialism remains omnipresent.

In this section, I pursue my response to this theoretical challenge through a discursive analysis of Khomeini's reconstruction of the Shi'i concept of *velayat-e faqih* (governance of the jurist), highlighting the enunciations of the generative impact of IR. In doing so, I primarily refer to Khomeini's seminal book *Islamic Government*. For, as Gregory Rose (1983: 176) argues, this book provides the 'most systematic presentation of [his] views on Islamic government'. And nothing in Khomeini's numerous subsequent statements, letters, and speeches alters any of the logical and intellectual premises of his original argument in *Islamic Government*.[9]

The White Revolution brought both Khomeini and the Shah to the conclusion that the post-coup compromise among the Shi'a establishment, their bazaari allies, and the Pahlavi state had lost its political rationale. The balance of power was decisively shifting in favour of the monarchy. The Shah increasingly justified the legitimacy of his rule in terms of Iran's pre-Islamic imperial legacy, reinvigorated and augmented by the prestige of his modern developmental project. He was now able and willing to rule alone (Akhavi 1980: Chapter 2). Khomeini was acutely cognizant of this and increasingly believed that there was only one solution to the problem of the growing socio-political exclusion of Shi'ism and the ulama from Iran's body politic: a decisive abrogation of the *de facto* ulama-state political compromise.

However, this new approach by no means represented a natural predisposition to political radicalism on Khomeini's part. Indeed, up until the 1960s, Khomeini still operated essentially within the traditional paradigm of 'dual sovereignty'. Thus, in his 1946 diatribe against arbitrary rule and governmental corruption and inefficiency, he invoked the extant constitution, implicitly accepting the legitimacy of the Pahlavi monarchy (Khomeini 1981b). Even in 1963, in his historic speech that led to the 'June uprising' and his subsequent exile, Khomeini did not call for a revolution to overthrow the Shah (Khomeini 1963). However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, apace with the Shah's White Revolution, Khomeini began to call for the revolutionary establishment of an Islamic state. This radical departure was therefore rooted in the combined nature of the Pahlavi modernisation project that superimposed a secular ultra-autocracy over an composite civil society whose Western veneer concealed the

substantial hegemony of Shi'i ideological and cultural sensibilities, an amalgamation whose condition of possibility was the particular conjunction of the Cold War and the exponential growth of oil revenues amidst the wider process of uneven and combined development. It was under this novel circumstance that Khomeini began to advance the argument that the monarchy must be replaced with an Islamic government based on *velayat-e faqih*, the governance of the qualified Shi'a jurist.

This was a theological invention. For the notion that in the absence of the twelfth imam, the Shi'a ulama can, or indeed must, directly govern had no precedent in Shi'a theology (Boroujerdi 1996). But Khomeini naturalised this invention through re-interpreting some of the key elements of the Shi'a theology. But it is important to stress that his was not a hermetic project but part of, and mutually influenced by, wider attempts at revitalising Shi'a and Islamic thought (Rajaee 2007). Dabashi (2006: 491) usefully identifies two main frameworks for these attempts: 'the Islamic ideology' and '*velayat-e faqih*'. The former was 'the ideological radicalism of European origin creolised into an Islamic hybrid' (*Ibid.*). Its leading proponents included Jalal-e Al-e Ahmad, Ali Shariati, Mehdi Bazargan, and Abolhassan Bani-Sadr.[10] The latter framework relied far more heavily on native Shi'a theological resources and discourse and was represented chiefly by Khomeini, and to a lesser extent by Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari, who had a more philosophical, rather than political, approach to *velayat-e faqih*.

Shariati and Mutahhari were particularly influential (cf. *Ibid.*: Chapter 3, Matin 2010). The former was a disciple and close associate of Khomeini, and the latter a lay religious intellectual extremely popular with students. Although their political projects were very different, Mutahhari and Shariati shared an intense desire to reconstitute Shi'a Islam as an ideology and value system befitting a rapidly modernising Iran, and capable of competing with the growing influence of secular ideologies, Marxism in particular. For if the Pahlavi state marginalised Shi'ism socio-politically, Marxism was 'robbing [it] of both its metaphysical claim to truth and its ideological claim to political mobilisation' (Dabashi 2006: 156). The work of Mutahhari and Shariati therefore epitomised the intellectually different but ideologically complementary character of the frameworks of 'the Islamic ideology' and '*velayat-e faqih*'. Together they supplied the intellectual material for the formation of the ideological basis of the hegemony of revolutionary Shi'ism over the 1979 revolution.

Crucially, both the Pahlavi state and Marxist forces legitimated their political projects in terms of their ability to overcome Iran's backwardness, a condition that the militant Shi'a ulama and intellectuals also keenly observed and sought to eradiate. Mutahhari, for example, declared that '[We are] half-dead'. …This is a nation that feels backward compared with other nations and

is in a hurry to catch up with them (cited in Dabashi 2006: 173–4). In fact, both Shariati (1979) and Mutahhari (1986) related Iran's backwardness to a chronic stasis in Shi'i-Islamic thought and invoked this linkage to legitimise their reconstruction of Shi'ism. Thus, Shariati argued that 'if a nation cannot know it's [*sic*] own cultural and spiritual resources and is incapable of extracting, refining, and turning them into energy, it will remain ignorant and backward' (Shariati 1981). And similarly, Mutahhari lamented that 'Islam exists, but a useless and ineffective Islam. An Islam which can no longer warm, move, or stir[,] … give force[, or] ... perception' (cited in Dabashi 2006: 177).

Khomeini's intervention took place in this immediate religious intellectual context. It was also driven by a consciousness of backwardness similar to that of Mutahhari and Shariati. But his proposed solution was much more explicitly and exclusively rooted in the canons of Shi'a theology. Thus, in *Islamic Government* Khomeini (1981a: 27) begins with an indictment of 'imperialism' which 'penetrated Muslim countries … [and tried to] extirpate Islam in order to attain its ultimate goals'. A few pages later Khomeini (*ibid.*: 34) explained what these goals were:

> Their plan is to keep us backward, to keep us in our present miserable state so they can exploit our riches, our underground wealth, our lands, our human resources. They want us to remain afflicted and wretched, and our poor to be trapped in their misery.

After painting this dark background of exploitative international relations, Khomeini moved quickly to identify 'internal factors' sustaining Muslim countries' backwardness (*ibid.*: 35). He criticised some 'individuals' who, 'dazzled by the material progress of imperialist countries[,] concluded that Muslims should jettison their laws!' (*ibid.*). Thus, 'Islamic laws', which 'provide a solution for the problem of poverty' (*ibid.*: 34), became Khomeini's focus and hence the jurisprudential thrust of his argument. The second section of *Islamic Government* was therefore essentially a sustained attempt to relate the 'obvious' necessity for Muslims to live by Islamic laws to the establishment of an Islamic government led by a qualified Shi'a jurist. Khomeini's distinct contribution to the project of 'political Islam' therefore arguably consisted in the *substitution* of the qualified Shi'a jurist for the nominally Muslim but practically secular temporal authority as the agency of socio-economic and ethical development, of overcoming *backwardness*. The rest of this section examines the theological basis that Khomeini formulated for this substitution.

Khomeini's starting point was the so-called authority verse (4:59) in the Quran: 'Obey God and obey the Apostle and those in authority among you'. The Shi'a ulama had hitherto interpreted the last part of this verse to mandate a merely 'executive function' captured by the Shi'i doctrine of *velayat*: 'successorship to the authority of Muhammad' (Dabashi 2006: 440).

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This interpretation underlay the traditional role of the Shi'a ulama as religious guides and the administrators of justice or *qadzis* (judges) in relative independence from, but under the auspices of, the state. However, Khomeini now argued that it was a fallacy to confine the *velayat* to secondary executive functions. Rather, *velayat*, he contended, meant direct governance. He invoked the Quran, the traditions of the prophet (*ahadith*), the imams (*revayat*), and logics (Khomeini 1981a: 40–45). The argument is multi-layered but ultimately simple and compelling. It can be summarised as follows.

Muslims believe that God has sent, through Muhammad, a comprehensive programme for the organisation and regulation of human life, that is, the Shari'a. It was, Khomeini continued, also beyond rational contention that the implementation of the Shari'a required an Islamic authority. Furthermore, it would have been contrary to reason and Islamic tenets to assume that God provided for the establishment of an Islamic government only for a limited period of time, that is, the lifetime of the prophet and the imams. There must, therefore, always exist an Islamic government not only to *provide* but also *enforce* the Shari'a in order to enable the Muslims to live an ethical life consistent with Islam's requirements (cf. Martin 2007: 34). Thus, Khomeini (1981a: 37) argues that 'We believe in the Imamat … therefore, we must also believe in the necessity for the establishment of government'. Khomeini therefore argued that the key question regarding the relation between Islam (Shi'ism) and politics was, and must have always been, not *whether* an Islamic government was necessary but rather *who* was entitled to lead such a government.

The traditional Shi'i interpretation of the 'authority verse', as we saw, makes an implicit distinction between *velayat* (execution of the Shari'a) and *imamat* (leadership of the Muslim community). The latter is seen as a right exclusive to the prophet and the imams by virtue of their *esmat* (divinely bestowed infallibility). According to the Shi'a orthodoxy, the right to the leadership of Muslims was thus a derivation of the spiritual qualities of the prophet and the imams, which were inaccessible to mortals. But Khomeini emphasised a 'self-evident' but 'unrecognised' distinction between the 'intrinsic spiritual status and extrinsic political function' (Brumberg 2001: 86) of the prophet and the imams as legitimate Islamic governors (Khomeini 1981a: 62–63). Citing various traditions and Quranic verses, Khomeini (*ibid.*: 64–65) argued:

> It is one of the essential beliefs of our Shi'i school that no one can attain the spiritual status of the Imams … [But] to assume the function of government does not in itself carry any particular merit or status; it is a means for fulfilling the duty of implementing the law and establishing the Islamic order of Justice. … The authority that the Prophet and the Imam had in establishing a government, executing laws, and administering affairs exists also for the *faqih* [Shi'a jurist].

Khomeini therefore in effect evacuated the spiritual from the concept of *imamat*, rendering it essentially political. He then proceeded to identify more specifically those who he believed were qualified to be substituted for the absent imam. In addition to 'general qualifications such as intelligence and administrative ability', he identified two main conditions: 'knowledge of the [Shari'a] law and justice' (*ibid*.: 59). All senior Muslim jurists could, in principle, meet this condition. It was therefore through a second condition that Khomeini narrowed down the range of candidates for the leadership (*ibid*.: 63). He attributed the qualified jurist's possession of justice to his 'excellence in belief and morals' (*ibid*.: 60). In doing so, Khomeini subtly re-introduced a new range of spiritual qualities that were similar but inferior to those possessed by the prophet and the imams. These qualities were closely associated with Islamic mysticism or *irfan*, which Khomeini himself was renowned for mastering. A salient aspect of *irfan* is the notion of 'presential knowledge', that is, knowledge that is generated by direct and unmediated experience of an 'intelligible order beyond the visible world, and enlightened inner awareness of the transcendent' (Martin 2007: 35).

In implicitly connecting justice to the possession of 'presential knowledge', Khomeini in effect added a crucial sub-condition to the leadership requirements, which only a few people, including Khomeini himself, could have claimed to meet. Moreover, the idea that the *faqih* leading the Islamic government should have both theological and transcendental knowledge had also an additional possible function. Since from a Shi'i-Islamic perspective, 'presential knowledge' is arguably superior to the technical knowledge of the law, the 'perfect man' in effect has a superior power of judgment that enables him to exercise justice (if necessary) without recourse to, even in contravention of, the Shari'a law. A glaring example of this supra-Shar'ia exercise of power was Khomeini's 1988 letter to the then-president and current leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei, in which Khomeini (1988) rejected Khamenei's restricted conception of the Islamic state's powers and proclaimed that protecting the Islamic government's interests was superior to implementing even first-order Islamic ordinances, which it could suspend or abrogate if expedient. From Khomeini's perspective this semi-Schmittian supra-legal authority was a natural, although implicit, part of his original idea of Islamic government, which he now made explicit.

Khomeini's re-interpretation of the fundamental Shi'i principle of *imamat* to involve primarily *political* (and not merely religious) leadership was therefore highly consequential. For it meant that the foundation of an Islamic government — as the only appropriate context for the execution of the Shari'a — became the religious duty of Shi'a Muslims in general and the Shi'a ulama in particular. As to why this 'self-evident' truth had, for almost 14 centuries, remained unrecognised, Khomeini cited 'reactionary *akhunds*' (junior Shi'a

clerics) and 'imperialist propaganda' (Khomeini 1981a: 36 and *passim*). Khomeini's attack on the reactionary ulama partially resonated with the anti-clerical arguments of radical religious intellectuals such as Shariati (Matin 2010). It also publicised his rivalry with the conservative majority of the Shi'a ulama who did not approve of Khomeini's political radicalism (Moaddel 1986).

The invocation of the role of unjust international relations and greedy imperialists in maintaining Muslim countries' backwardness was, as shown above, a key element in Khomeini's justificatory argument for the necessity of Islamic government. In fact, the use of certain modern vocabulary such as 'colonialism', 'the West', 'Westamination', 'the Third World' and so on, was pervasive in Khomeini's discourse. For some he substituted Islamic terms. For instance, he recurrently used the term *mostaz'afin* (the downtrodden), which was arguably a substitute for the 'proletariat' or the 'toilers', and *mostakberin* for the 'capitalist class' or 'oppressors'. This clearly indicated his reaction to, and appropriation of, the discourse of Iranian left, which also enlivened his otherwise highly scholastic discourse and broadened his appeal to the lay Shi'as and even Sunni Muslims. Crucially, he recast an apparently purely theological issue in the light of contemporary politics. This both remoulded the issue itself and rendered it accessible to the public. This tactic represented a significant departure from the erstwhile practice of the Shi'a ulama who had traditionally legitimised their privileged social status precisely in terms of their exclusive possession of specialised knowledge of the Quran and the Shari'a whose comprehension, they argued, was impossible for ordinary Muslims.

This brief discussion of Khomeini's argument for Islamic government as a religious necessity has shown that it was based on the rearticulation of *velayat-e faqih*, a doctrine native to Shi'a theology. But its description as being merely a reactive 'resuscitation' (Dabashi 2006: 491) or 'retrieval' (Marty and Appleby 1993a: 3) of the orthodox concept obfuscates the substantial transformation involved in its re-articulation by Khomeini. For akin to Shariati's strategy of 'retaining the form and changing the content' (Shariati 1979: 71; cf. Matin 2010: 118–9), Khomeini too infused a traditional concept with contemporary political concerns, reconstituting it as radical and stimulating and yet familiar to the masses, and hence an effective tool for political mobilisation. This combination was part of a wider process of substituting native material for modern European resources in an explicit attempt to overcome the deeply felt condition of backwardness. Crucially, the emergent discourses and politics that such substitutions engendered were, and continue to be, not just a variation on, but (re)constitutive of, modernity. One only needs to think of the global consequences of the Russian, Chinese, and Iranian Revolutions for the nature and course of modern world development.

As we saw, Khomeini's reconstruction of the Shi'a notion of *velayat-e faqih* was highly politically charged. But in order to become the hegemonic demand of a mass revolutionary movement it had directly to engage the hybrid nature of Iran's modern sociality, which consisted of the mutative combination of two phenomena: capitalist relations of 'personal independence' and 'double freedom' (Marx 1990: 874, 1993: 158), *and* the valorised presence of non-capitalist political and ideological forms. This was, as I argued above, due to the internationally driven character of the Pahlavi modernisation that left socio-economic power-base of the ulama and the bazaar intact. The former's capacity for underpinning formal-political democracy was subverted by their coercive introduction and direct mediation by the state, which as a result became the main target for the growing popular discontent. The latter entailed the increased salience of religious sensibilities that naturally coloured the democratic demands for popular sovereignty generated by the former. This novel combination found its most profound expression in one of the late, but key, slogans of the revolution: 'independence, freedom, Islamic republic'. Khomeini supported the slogan unequivocally. An 'Islamic republic' thus became the institutional framework of his invented doctrine of 'Islamic government' whose overdetermining element was a reconstituted notion of *velayat-e faqih* (the governance of jurist).

Iran's postrevolutionary constitution therefore contains a specific amalgamation of secular and religious sovereignties, of European 'republicanism' and Shi'a notion of '*velayat-e faqih*'. But this amalgamation reconstituted both ideas. The former was now legitimate insofar as it cultivated an ethical life consistent with Shi'a cosmology, while the latter was formally anchored in popular assent. After all, Khomeini's ideal of an Islamic government had been established through the world's most popular revolution. Khomeini's 'modern Janus' of the Islamic republic therefore provided a hegemonic ideological expression to an ambivalent sociality produced by uneven and combined development.

Conclusion

I have argued that Eurocentrism has an inbuilt tendency towards generating exceptionalist accounts of social change. This tendency flows from Eurocentrism's construction of 'universal' theoretical categories by abstraction from particular European histories *sui generis*. Eurocentric approaches are therefore theoretically blind to the interactive and multilinear nature of social change that always involves the production of hybrid forms. In other words, the intellectual syntax of Eurocentric approaches is formed through the theoretical exclusion of the international as co-constitutive of the social. Consequently,

these approaches' empirical acknowledgment of the international in studying individual experiences of modernity has no ramification for their theory of modernity *per se*. Eurocentric accounts of non-Western forms of modernity therefore often rest on the recurrent invocation of 'cultural difference' as an ontologically and epistemologically self-contained category, which renders non-Western experiences of modernity 'deviant', 'exceptional', or 'exotic' (Pasha 2010: 219). A critical review of contemporary scholarship on political Islam will provide many revealing examples (e.g. Shilliam 2010).

Uneven and combined development, I have argued, provides an alternative theoretical framework that fundamentally overcomes Eurocentrism. For it incorporates the causal and constitutive significance of intersocietal multiplicity and interactivity into its general abstractions (Rosenberg 2006: 335–6). This unique feature also imbues uneven and combined development with an intrinsic theoretical sensitivity to the role of agency in theorising historical processes of social change, a quality which critics tend to overlook (e.g. Teschke 2008). Through demonstrating both these qualities in relation to Khomeini's idea of Islamic government, this article has, I hope, demonstrated the pertinence of uneven and combined development to critical IR theory, historical sociology and the emerging project of 'critical Iranian studies' (Adib-Moghaddam 2007).

My argument has also political relevance. The 'green movement' that erupted following the 2009 fraudulent presidential election has prompted two key issues for Iran's political forces: the origins of this popular movement and its implications for the future of the Islamic republic. Some 30 years earlier, amidst a vast popular revolution against the Pahlavi dictatorship, identical questions preoccupied the left. Then, the left approached these questions through a stagist theory of history bequeathed by Soviet Marxism. Arguably, it was this theory that led some of Iran's largest leftist forces, the Tudeh Party in particular, to support Khomeini's 'progressive anti-imperialism' as the first stage of a nationalist-democratic revolution *en route* to socialism. This strategy proved to be 'embracing death' (cf. Greason 2005), with profound implications for Iranians' quest for political emancipation and social justice. In answering these earlier, yet still pertinent questions, this article has, I hope, demonstrated the theoretical pertinence of the idea of uneven and combined development for analysing the 'green movement' and the formulation of an adequate left political strategy. For its interactive and multilinear vision of historical change enables the kind of political imagination and intervention that unilinear theories of history *a priori* proscribe.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 The relevant articles are 5, 2, and 1. Article 110 defines the duties and powers of the leader. The Supreme Leader is selected by the Assembly of Experts, whose members are popularly elected. However, the candidates for the assembly have to be pre-approved by the Council of Guardians, whose members are directly or indirectly appointed by the incumbent Supreme Leader (Article 107). The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be found at http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution.php; accessed 16 April, 2010.

2 A full list of the relevant works can be found in http://www.unevenandcombined.com; accessed 27 April, 2012.

3 'Early' postcolonialism had close affinities with Marxism and a critical humanist posture (e.g. Fanon 1963; Césaire 1972). Influenced by postmodernism, 'late' postcolonialism, by contrast, rejects Enlightenment humanism and 'foundationalist' social theory (e.g. Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1994).

4 As Pasha (2010: 220) suggests, this problem also marks the 'alternative modernities' approach (Gaonkar 1999).

5 I differentiate between capitalist and non-capitalist forms of uneven and combined development (Matin 2007).

6 For the widespread use of the term 'backwardness' in Iran's postrevolutionary intellectual and political discourses, see Matin-Asgari (2004).

7 Bhabha (1994: 278) refers to a similar lacuna in Foucault's work.

8 Moin (1999) provides a good biography of Khomeini.

9 A comprehensive collection of Khomeini's speeches and written work is available at http://www.imam-khomeini.com; accessed 27 April, 2012.

10 Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, a distinguished Iraqi Shi'a cleric, was also highly influential. Sadr (2010) provided the first systematic elaboration of 'Islamic economics' and its alleged superiority to capitalism and socialism.

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