POLITICS OF CULTURAL CHANGE AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND QAJAR PERSIA
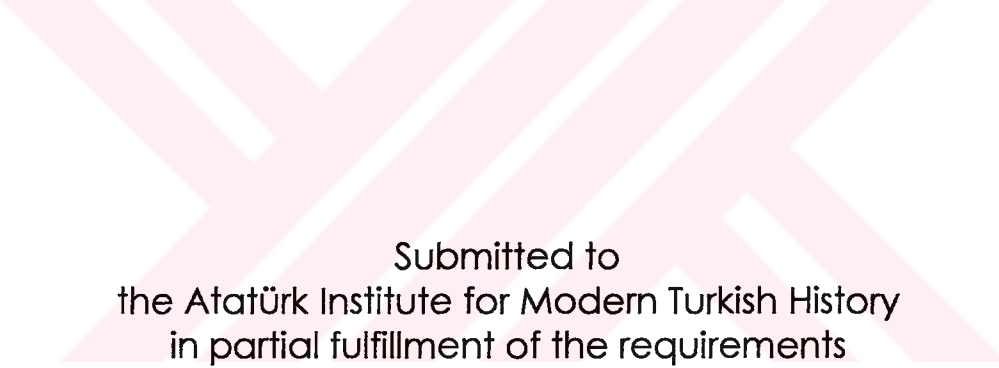
EMMANUEL HUNTZINGER

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

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POLITICS OF CULTURAL CHANGE AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND QAJAR PERSIA

by

Emmanuel Huntzinger

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"Politics of cultural change and religious discourse in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire and Qajar Persia,"
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This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

Assistant Professor Ahmet Kuyaş
(Thesis Advisor)   _____.

Associate Professor Aydın Babuna   _____.

Associate Professor Duygu Köksal   _____.

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Title: Politics of Cultural Change and Religious Discourse in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire and Qajar Persia

This thesis looks at the dynamics of rapid changes affecting cultures, discourses and ideologies in the early modern Ottoman and Qajar empires up to the constitutional revolutions of the early twentieth century. Both polities, under the political pressure and intellectual inspiration of Western Europe, engaged in technical and political reforms, by the hands of their governments. Along with them, far-reaching cultural changes occurred, re-shaping the empires' symbolic dimension, altering the meanings of all components of the social world. In the early modern Middle East, an important dynamic for intellectual innovation was the use of Islamic idiom in new specific discourses. Cultural changes were closely related to social ones, in a double-sense causal relationship. The dominant elites, especially the Hamidian regime in the Ottoman Empire and higher shi'i clergy in Persia, used religious discourses to naturalize their privileged social positions. They constructed these discourses according to their interactions with other strategic actors, and the effectiveness of their symbolic violence relied for a large part on the good-will of third parties willing to diffuse and enforce the official creed. Opposing the domination discourses, a number of resistance cultures appeared. The interstices of power in peripheries were filled with local symbolic constructions partly opposing the central one. Opposition ideologies, developed in places of exile and sustained by political subversion in the centers, frontally challenged the official discourses. Endogenous cultural confrontation, both by clandestine activism and during direct political conflicts, thus accounts for cultural change and the birth of ideologies in the early modern Middle East.

Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü'nde Yüksek Lisans derecesi için
Emmanuel Huntzinger tarafından Eylül 2004'te teslim edilen tezin kısa özeti

Başlık: On dokuzuncu yüzyıldaki Osmanlı ve Kacar imparatorluklarında kültürel
değişimlerin ve dini söylemelerin siyasetleri

Bu tez, modernleşme aşamasının başlangıcından yirminci yüzyılın başlarındaki anayasal reformlara kadar olan dönemde Osmanlı ve Kacar imparatorluklarında kültür, söylem ve ideoloji açısından meydana gelen hızlı değişimlerin dinamiklerini ele almaktadır. Her iki devlet, Batı Avrupa'nın siyasi baskıları ve entellektüel ilhamlarının etkisinde kalarak kendi hükümetlerinin çabalarıyla idari ve siyasi reformlara girişmişlerdir. Bu reformlar sırasında imparatorlukların sembolik boyutlarını değiştiren ve aynı zamanda toplumsal alanları oluşturan bileşenlere yeni anlamlar katan derin kültürel değişimler meydana gelmiştir. Modern Orta Doğu'nun erken dönemlerinde entellektüel yeniliği sağlayan önemli bir unsur, islami dilin yeni söylemlerde kullanılmasıdır.Kültürel değişimler toplumsal değişimlere çift taraflı bir neden sonuç ilişkisi ile bağlıydı. Baskın elit guruplar, özellikle de Osmanlı'da 2.Abdülhamit yönetimi ve Iran'daki yüksek Şii ulema, kendi sosyal konumlarını meşrulaştırmak için dini söylemlerden yararlandılar. Söylemlerini diğer önemli unsurlarla olan etkileşimlerine göre biçimlendirdiler. Sembolik şiddetlerinin etkili olması büyük oranda diğer unsurların resmi inancı yaymaya ve uygulamaya ne kadar gönüllü olduğuna bağlıydı. Hakim söylemlere karşı olarak çeşitli direnişçi kültürler ortaya çıktı. Hakim gücün merkezine uzak yerlerde oluşan çatlakları, merkeze muhalif olan yerel sembolik oluşumlar bir ölçüde doldurdu. Sürgün bölgelerinde ortaya çıkıp merkezdeki gizli örgütlenmelerle beslenen muhalif ideolojiler, resmi söylemlere doğrudan karşı çıkmaya başladılar. Böylece, modern Orta Doğu'nun erken dönemindeki kültürel değişimleri ve ideolojilerin doğmasını, iç dinamiklerden kaynaklanan ve hem yeraltındaki hareketler hem de açık siyasi mücadeleler biçiminde ortaya çıkan kültürel çatışma açıklamaktadır.

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I would like to thank all of you who made the realization of this thesis possible. Be sure that I highly value the patience, comments, critiques, confidence, inspiration, and friendship that I had the chance to receive during the last year.

CONTENTS

Chapter

PREFACE

This thesis can be described best as a sociological contribution to de-orientalize culture in the early modern Middle-East. Since Edward Said deconstructed the Orientalist discourse dominant in the Western academe, a shift has occurred from cultural studies to more materialist considerations of the history of modern Middle-East. Economical, demographical, structuralist political histories (whether the structure may be exogenous – the diplomatic game – or internal – Marxist-influenced materialism) have since then contributed to draw a more accurate picture of the general situation of the Middle East. The international perspective of the structural changes occurring in the Middle East, on the one hand, and local social histories, on the other, allow us today to avoid the global, essentialized, Orientalist categories.

However, overall, post-orientalist historians have not dared yet to challenge the orientalist discourse frontally. Engaging in analysis on new fields devoid of the orientalist legacy, they somehow abandoned the favorite field of the former orientalist school: culture - and its religious component. The violence of the post-orientalism counter-offensive has not only discredited the orientalist discourse, but also its favorite subject of analysis, culture as a general vision of the world for a given society.

The orientalist approach to culture was biased, based on nineteenth century models of textual and essentialist analyses. Yet the field of sociology of culture has evolved since then, and culture can now be approached in a much more flexible way, showing how social games constantly re-construct it. There is thus no orientalist fatality when speaking of culture, even for its religious aspect.

This paper therefore aims at completing the intellectual deconstruction of orientalism by historicizing culture and religious discourse. For this purpose, a sociological methodology will be followed, based on two hypotheses that will subsequently be checked and verified during the analysis:

- Culture and power: Power institutions are directly involved in constructing local cultures.

- Cultural innovation through opposition: Social struggle, political confrontation and intellectual competition between autonomous actors engender cultural innovation. Therefore this study will bear a particular interest in political crises, when political and cultural fluidity engender rapid social and cultural changes.

This thesis consciously uses sociological methods on a historical subject. Instead of providing a long, dry methodological introduction exposing the multiple studies and concepts mobilized in the subsequent analyses, we have chosen to introduce them to our reader gradually, in relation to their direct historical application.

Our demonstration will follow three stages, based on a non-chronological, sociological progress of the demonstration. The first section will establish the main conceptual tools and analyze the moral crisis created by political changes devoid of ideological support implemented by the *Tanzimat* and Persian reformers. The second section will analyze the relationship between political domination and cultural change. The third section will focus on cultural resistance and confrontation against the dominant ideologies.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: STATE, RELIGION AND THE ADVENT OF REFORM

IN THE EARLY MODERN MIDDLE-EAST

The pre-Modern Qajar and Ottoman States, Institution Communities

The nineteenth century witnessed a complex dynamic of "globalization", of increasing interdependence and interactions, between the European imperial powers on the one hand, and the political peripheries – the rest of the world – on the other hand. These intercourses, and penetration of the new European system, took many different forms and concerned various aspects of social life: the globalization of economic markets, military expansion and occupation, cultural attraction, the empowerment of local actors who were able to profit from the new techniques, all process usually designated as the irruption of modernity. This dynamic has attracted the attention of historians, sociologists, and anthropologists; it is the background of most issues and questions raised concerning the two or so last centuries.

In the immediate post-war period, a so-called "modernization" theory, and school, was even developed by mostly American scholars, who described this process as linear and desirable, analyzing social change as a struggle between "modernizing" actors wishing to follow the Western model, and what had to be called "conservative" forces, engaged in a backward resistance, doomed to failure. Social sciences as well as case-studies and local histories have since then invalidated this approach. The drive to modernity certainly affected the whole world, but in ways very contrasted and differentiated. The global does not suppress the local, and no

"model" or system of thought can be "exported" without being *imported* – an active process of integration of external influences into a local context. Recent historical and anthropological studies altogether tend to demonstrate that local actors and dynamics, under the influence of new external conditions, determine the specific conditions and forms taken by the social change occurring in their own environment.[1] Indigenous culture and action strategies, rather than general categories, are central in understanding the dynamic of any change, even if it is as global as the advent of modernity.

This dissertation aims to analyze from this perspective the dynamics of cultural and ideological change, through the specific case of religious discourse occurring in the late nineteenth century Middle-East. This geographical and temporal delimitation brings in a focus on two political entities: the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Persia, the two main effectively independent Muslim States,[2] increasingly challenged by European imperialism and the parallel export of Western new technologies and thoughts. Both the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Persia were the theatres of tremendous cultural changes, their political or cultural elites becoming increasingly influenced by the western-originated modernity. This "modernization" of their political culture actually was demonstrated spectacularly in the beginning of the twentieth century, with the two almost simultaneous constitutional revolutions of 1906 (in Persia) and 1909 (in the Ottoman Empire).

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[1] Anthropologists have for example produced numerous excellent studies of the evolution of "local knowledge" of Islam in diverse contexts: see the following: Dale F. Eickelman, "The Study of Islam in Local Contexts", *Contributions to Asian Studies* 17 (1982), pp. 1-16; M. Nazif Shahrani, "Local Knowledge of Islam and Social Discourse in Afghanistan and Turkistan in the Modern Period", in Robert L. Canfield, ed., *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

[2] "Main independent States" meaning here that we will not consider peripherical polities such as Central Asian khanates or Afghanistan as central in our analysis.

But these two states were also the heirs of a strong and ancient local culture and political tradition. The distribution and production of knowledge, its relationship with power, had peculiar characteristics, deeply rooted in the institutions and modes of conduct, pre-dating the impact of the external "modernity," and determining its integration in the local systems. Our dissertation will thus focus on the local dynamics of cultural change, consciously focusing on the internal causes and social mechanisms of cultural change and innovation. In this perspective we will study how Islam, from a political neutral religious language, increasingly became a political ideology, through its legitimizing use by the dominant groups as well as the resistance and increasing opposition of the dominated actors.

In order to analyze cultural change in the Middle-East in the modern age by giving due importance to the local dynamics, a first step will consist of describing in brief the pre-modern, classical, organization of the Ottoman and Persian social and political systems. As far as the political institutions are concerned, the Ottoman and Persian states, at the end of the eighteen century, varied considerably. The two states' historical legacies made them opposites. The Ottoman state had grown slowly from a minor principality in the vicinities of Constantinople, constituting progressively an empire ruled by a precise social group of rulers, while the Qajar state appeared at once with the military domination of Iran by the Qajar nomadic tribe, conquering in a few years of warfare almost the whole territory assembled and defended by previously vanquished rulers and dynasties.

The Ottoman State had existed since the thirteen century, evolving and constructing itself progressively, adapting to hold together an increasingly diversified heterogeneity of sub-components while it conquered half of (Christian) Eastern Europe and almost all the Muslim Sunni world West of Persia. It thus developed a peculiar political culture, made of pragmatic tolerance for the existing social orders,

combined with the idea of the supremacy of the *raison d'Etat* and respect for the symbolic apex of the system, the *devlet* (state) embodied in the *Osmanli* (descendants of Osman) dynasty. This political culture had a strong social underpinning, with a complex combination of bodies altogether constituting a civil administration, bound to the throne and devoted to preserve the whole system against external or internal threats. The local customs, often originating from the pre-ottoman Christian history, were given an official legal status, recorded and made imperial law in the official juridical compilations, the *Qanun Nâme*.

The ruler and administration occasionally initiated reforms or created new social bodies (especially new army divisions for the use of specialized weapons) when it was felt beneficiary to the sacred goal of preserving the Ottoman rule over the conquered territories.[3] To go further, the physical person of the Sultan himself was not as sacred as the symbolic institution he occupied. Since the seventeenth century especially, the Janissaries, the *ulema* (Muslim clerics), and local notables, the three other main centers of political power, often eliminated a Sultan to place one of his brothers or cousins on the throne (the revolt against Osman II led by Janissaries ushering in his execution in 1622 created a precedent in Ottoman politics). However the dynastical continuity was never challenged or threatened. Internal political turmoil and even military competition between heir princes occurred, but the institutions were invariably loyal to the state itself, to the eventual winner, actual holder of the imperial throne. For the same reason the civil administration remained sacred, and was never threatened as a whole by the ulema, the Janissaries and the

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[3] For more details on the pre-modern Ottoman Empire, that we have to mention very briefly here, see Halil Inalcık, *The Ottoman Empire. Conquest, Organization and Economy* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1978); Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law* (Oxford: V. Menage, 1973); or N.J. Pantazopoulos, *Church and Law in the Balkan Peninsula during the Ottoman Rule* (Thessalonica: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1967), which provide more specific approaches towards the particular Ottoman pragmatism in political administration.

local notables. Except for the cases of struggle within the dynasty, these several

institutions, although autonomous from the central government, had their existence

linked to the preservation of the overall system which had progressively created

them in these territories, and thus overall provided relative stability to the Ottoman

state and society.

By comparison, the newly born Qajar State lacked such an established tradition

of supremacy of the State, and long-standing central administration. In this

perspective, it is interesting to note the predominance of military institutions and

functions over the civil administrative ones in pre-modern Iran. The central

government remained a weak center, with few autonomous institutions that could

exercise controls over or have ties with the other political and social centers in the

country. Given its political instability, the best the state could expect was to hold

other centers at bay and extract enough taxes to pay its military – in permanent

lethal competition with that of competing centers. The central administration was an

extension of the Shah's household, and did not constitute a highly specialized,

sacred, autonomous social body like in the Ottoman Empire. This weakness of the

civil administration is paralleled with the absence of legal system other than Quranic

ones, such as the Ottoman Qanun Nâme.

In his study *The Structure of Central Authority of Central Authority in Qajar Iran*, A.

Reza Sheikholeslami convincingly reassesses the Weberian model of patrimonial

authority[4] to characterize the pre-modern Qajar distribution of authority, by

developing the idea of a duality in the authority patterns. While the Shah held

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[4] Patrimonial domination, as defined by Weber, is "a special case of patriarchal domination – domestic authority decentralized through assignment of land and sometimes of equipment to sons of the house or other dependents." See Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, III, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischoff et al. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), pp. 1011-1012. See also Peter Hardy, "Max Weber and the Patrimonial Empire in Islam: the

intense, far-reaching authority and patriarchal responsibility within his household, his relationships with social elements outside his direct household were tight, and his authority over them, relative.[5] Deriving from tribal politics, the Qajar political system did not encompass the technological and social knowledge necessary for the prince to exercise his authority as patrimonial ruler of such a vast and differentiated realm as Persia, in the same way that he could firmly claim the title of patriarchal leader of his family and direct clientage surrounding. The patrimonial state was thus not an enlargement of a patriarchy as Weber described it, but rather a "combination of patriarchies under one suzerainty."[6]

Outside his own dynastical territory, the prince was only the suzerain of lesser households who constituted autonomous political and military centers, and maintained themselves clientage links with yet lesser levels of patriarchates. The "State," the sovereign, worked as a merely symbolic integration center, being the only institution visible and acceptable at a global, national level. But the state itself – limited in practice to the Shah and his direct entourage - did not control directly the resources needed for exerting political domination, and even to ensure its own existence. The autonomous peripheral forces accomplished system-maintenance functions (mainly collection of taxes and the raising and maintenance of the army) only as long as the higher level of authority, the central government, provided them with overall stability and predictability, rewarding local positions, or successfully dominated them militarily.

Mughal Case," in Toby E. Huff & Wolfgang Schluchter (eds.), *Max Weber & Islam* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1999).

[5] A Reza Sheikholeslami, *The Structure of Central Authority in Qajar Iran* (Los Angeles: G.E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California, 1997), pp. 1-19.

[6] *Ibid*. P. 14.

The anarchical Persian eighteenth century, with three different dynasties and long inter regnum warfare and chaos, had shown the necessity of a king as a protection against chaos, but had also made and demonstrated the autonomy of society, ruled by local forces during the periods of political vacuum. As compared to the Ottoman Empire, the crucial difference that determined the course taken by reforms and cultural change is that the social bodies on which the prince relied – peripheral forces - were not, in Qajar Persia, directly and necessarily – organically - committed to the preservation of the dynastical system in the way Ottoman Janissaries, state ulema and civil administration were.

The institutional structure and political tradition of the Ottoman and Qajar governments thus varied considerably. The Ottoman state was characterized by a stronger presence of the state, in the sense of centralized administration and government. In the nineteenth century, when both states faced the irruption of modernity, this contrast had momentous effects on the course taken by cultural change. The Ottoman government, exerting a relatively tighter hold over social bodies, could develop more efficient responses to the threats and opportunities brought in by the contact with western "modern" techniques. As will be discussed below, in the Ottoman Empire where the state showed some ability in leading technical reforms, the elites were concerned with reforming the state; whereas in Persia, the impetus for cultural changes and new ideologies was less centered on the state than on a global approach of society, often based on religion, a trend that had wrongly led state-centered approaches or static considerations of religious culture to marginalize cultural changes in the Qajar context.

For all the structural differences in the governmental sphere, the pre-modern Middle-East, whether Ottoman or Qajar, was equally characterized by the importance of non-governmental institutions in the organization of public life. The

differences we have analyzed are determining for any political analysis; but social

life and social change in the pre-modern Middle-East was mainly non-governmental.

In other words, the function of defining the rules of the collective life, and enforcing

them if necessary was not a monopoly of the formal, or symbolic, holders of the

political power. Rather, a large part of the political activity was controlled by other

actors, who escaped from direct control of the central government such as tribal

elements in Persia, non-Muslim religious institutions or local notables in the Ottoman

Empire, and *vakif* (religious foundations),....[7]. In order to analyze social change in the

early modern Middle-East, it is therefore relevant to mobilize the concept of

institutions as a partner of the state in public life.

An institution, not in the juridical but in the sociological sense of the word, is a

belief, a mode of behavior, that has been constructed by society and that is

imposed on the individual independently from his will – be he Sultan or peasant.[8] In

this perspective, the State is an "already here" that imposes itself on its servants –

including the monarch - a complicated combination of diversified institutions

interrelated with each other in a specific way. In the case of the nineteenth century

Middle-East, an approach in terms of the political activity as diluted in a system of

institutions allows to study the political rulers as members of their own societies,

affected by the social interactions with external actors and their society's culture.

The State, with all its symbolic visibility, is in effect part of a complex social system,

defined and limited by other institutions. Altogether, these various and sometimes

conflicting institutions share common rules, culture, and a degree of accepted

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[7] "Most of the services offered by modern governments were supplied in the Near East of 1800 by non-governmental bodies – the family, the tribe, the village, the guild and the religious community. [...] Europeans reasoned from the premiss that political power should be monopolized by central government and this assumption was not that of the Near East". M. E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East: 1792-1923* (London & New York: Longman, 1987), p. 37.

integration: we will thus speak of a "community of institutions."[9] These institutions

cannot be defined by the formal function they played in the overall maintenance:

for example, the Janissaries were created as an elite military unit, but in the late

eighteenth century played a religious, social and political role rather than military

one. So the government himself could not only be defined by its claimed or

supposed functions, changing according to its interactions with local forces. The

community of institutions did not give a practical absolute superiority to the central

government in enforcing the functions it claimed as his. As late as 1910, one of

Baghdad's deputies to the Ottoman parliament noted that "to depend on the tribe

is a thousand times safer than depending on the government, for whereas the latter

defers or neglects repression, the tribe, no matter how feeble it may be, as soon as it

learns that an injustice has been committed against one of its members readies itself

to exact vengeance on his behalf."[10] Here we note that the tribe in this precise

historical and geographic context was more reliable a guarantee of individual

protection against injustice that the state. But beyond this, it is clear that the

government was not considered by the author as the only holder of political

authority, but rather as one of several competing power centers to deal with. Even

though the state may be more efficient in other areas than in Baghdad, the point is

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[8] Emile Durkheim was the first to show the coercive power of social facts towards the individual. Cf. his *Règles de la Méthode Sociologique* (Paris: n.d., 1895, reed. : PUF Quadrige,1985), pp. 3-6 especially.

[9] The term "community" is not neutral here. Community (*gemeinschaft*) is a "system" (set of rules and constraints imposing themselves to inter-related actors), but with further integration thanks to the consciousness of certain shared values providing a loose collective identity. It is however opposed to "society" (*gesellschaft*) where these relations get institutionalized through explicit contractual relationships. In this precise sense the pre-modern institution systems of the Middle-East can be termed a "community" of institutions. See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Communeauté et Société: Catégories Fondamentales de la Sociologie Pure* (Germany: n.d., 1887, French translation, Paris: Retz, 1977).

[10] Ismail Haqqi Bey Baban Zadeh, "From Istanbul to Baghdad", (Istanbul: n.d., 1910), p. 256, quoted in Hanna Batatu, "Of The Diversity of Iraqis, The Incohesiveness of Their Society, and their Progress in the Monarchic Period toward a Consolidated Political Structure," in H. Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

made here that it was just one of these institutions beside others, an element among others of the array of institutions.

In the classical institution system, the Ottoman sultan was the guardian of the balance between the institutions, guaranteeing that every actor behaved according to the rules of the system. This is the classical idea of *adalet* (justice), meaning that every actor should behave according to the rules implied by its social position, and should not try to change his own relative position in the system. The laws of the renowned institution-building sultans of the past centuries were essentially attempts at making pacifically co-existing "already here" institutions. A good illustration of this conception of society is that, despite the symbolic importance of the Muslim character of the ruling dynasty, no comprehensive effort was ever made to convert the non-Muslim populations of the Empire as long as they were included into the institution's system and accepted it. New institutions were occasionally added to the system, to meet a specific need. But they were created beside existing institutions and the government did not engage in changing the nature of the various institutions – including that of the monarch.

In neighboring Qajar Persia, the central government had an even more marginal position in the legislation and organization of public life. The Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) had intervened quite actively in shaping the social bodies it governed. It used linguistic and religious particularities as instrumental tools for what can be considered as a proto-nationalist legitimating policy, emphasizing and shaping cultural and religious differences between the Persian population and the identity of their most dangerous neighbors, the Ottoman rulers. But the so-called Qajar household, the new tribal dynasty conquering the symbolic monarchic position in 1796 (coronation of Agha Muhammad Shah), did not try during the first half of the nineteenth century to impose a new political order upon the autonomous social elements and

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institutions that had constituted or survived from Safavid times during the long years

of civil war and anarchy: the regional governments, the shi'i clergy being the most

noticeable. Interestingly, instead of installing the throne in one of the greatest cities

of Persia like previous dynasties, where they would have to make their own place

within a framework of previously installed actors, they chose a weak provincial town

without any strong local institution, Teheran, as their new capital city. In early Qajar

Persia, like in the classical Ottoman Empire, the organization of public life, individuals'

social strategies, were constructed in the framework of collective rules originating

from many more institutions than the single government and its extensions.

Therefore we choose to base our analysis on the non-centrality of the

government in the organization of the public life in the early nineteenth century

Middle-East. Instead, norms, modes of behavior and rules located outside of the

central governmental also have to be given due attention. This theoretical shift of

focus from the central government to the whole system of social institutions has

important practical consequences: one of them is to re-appraise the common

stance that Iran stayed far behind the Ottoman Empire in terms of cultural and

ideological change, which seems to be based on the sole comparison of

governmental institutions – but a wider perspective challenges this view, as will be

developed later.

The pre-modern Middle-Eastern societies of the Ottoman and Qajar States, were

daily ruled by institution communities rather than by central governments. Religion

was one of these institutions, which had a major role in public life, without being

under the direct control of the government. It has been shown that the Ottoman

sultan did not officially claim the caliphate until the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in

1774: the commonly accepted view that religion was controlled by the state in the

classical Middle-East is anachronistic, since the government officials – the Shah and

the Sultan themselves - were as constrained by the religious modes of conduct as religious clerics were constrained by the political power to behave in certain ways. Religion, in the late pre-modern Middle-East, was an institution that nobody actually "controlled," but which inter-related all the different actors, holding the whole system of institutions together. The Middle-East acquired from its history a mosaic of strongly institutionalized religions: Orthodox Christendom, Judaism, Zoroastrianism,[11] and the most recent and pregnant one, Islam – which current wisdom tends to associate so closely to the region that today, even in the academic world, "Islamic Studies" is almost an equivalent of "Middle-Eastern Studies." Although libraries are filled with studies on the role of Islam in the Middle-East, at this stage it is necessary to make a point of the position of Islam in our analytical framework.

Islam, A Universal Language

Any attempt to analyze the role of religion in general and Islam in particular, in public life, needs to avoid two main intellectual traps. Scholarly literature has shown that Islam, like any religion,[12] was not to be understood in the sole framework of "politics of continuity"[13] and as an essentialized entity whose nature is revealed and given once. Edward Said's passionate but persuasive critique of this "orientalist," essentialist approach had a stimulating impact on the academe, but his warnings still

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[11] Here we see the concept of institution in its most immaterial sense, Zoroastrism and Judaism being both religions continuing their existence although lacking any strong material support such as a sponsoring state.

[12] It seems not entirely useless to recall, almost a century after its publication, Durkheim's pioneer emphasis on the social nature of religion: it is made and constructed by society, any scientific analysis of religion involves it be studied as a social object. Cf. Emile Durkheim, *Formes Elémentaires de la Vie Religieuse* (Paris, n.d., 1912, reed.: PUF Quadrige, 1985).

[13] For a critique of the recent anthropologic relativism missing the potential for change within the moral and ethical values of Islam, see Brian Silverstein, "Islam and modernity in Turkey: Power, Tradition and Historicity in the European Provinces of the Muslim world," *Anthropological Quarterly* 76, no.3 (Summer 2003), p. 497.

remain relevant:[14] "Oriental" societies change too and have to be considered in their own dynamics. Islam is a religion of men, (re-) constructed constantly through social change. The meaning of Islam and of being a Muslim changes over time and location, and the nineteenth century is especially crucial in this dynamic. However, a simple constructivist stance arguing that Islam as a certain culture, ideology, system of norms has to be discarded as an explanatory factor of social change in itself, may impoverish the analysis. Muslim societies do change in general and construct Islam in particular, but do it in a way that is partly the result of what has previously been constructed as their culture, religion, and thus Islam. In other words, Islam is constructed by Muslims as much as it contributes to construct them in a constant dialectic: studying the nineteenth century Middle-East requires taking into account both the potential for change in Islam as a social institution, and the then-Islamic specificities of this social change.

How to practically cope with this two-way dialectic in historical analysis? How to describe Islam as an autonomous institution affecting social life, without essentializing it in an orientalist way? The question is not new and some relevant answers have already been formulated. In his study "Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey", Şerif Mardin interestingly focuses on the specific linguistic "color" of Islamic culture, using the pair concepts of "idiom" and "discourses" to study the relationship between social change and Islam. It is worth quoting him at length:

> By "idiom" I refer to a special language used in a specific sphere of social
> relations; by "discourse" the way in which this idiom is structured by a more
> specific set of practices. ... Daily life-strategies are framed by the use of
> the religious idiom, and the fund of Qu'rânic symbols on which it is based
> has a widespread popular usage. ... It is because this idiom is shared that

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[14] Edward Said, writing in 1978, denounced the "dogma" in then-contemporary Islamic studies that "the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself [...] For Islamologists there are still such things as *an* Islamic society, *an* Arab mind, *an* Oriental psyche. Even the ones whose specialty is modern Islamic world anachronistically use texts like the Koran to read into every facet of contemporary Egyptian or Algerian society." E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Pinguin, 1978), p. 301.

there appears something which we could name "social legitimation" in Islamic societies, a legitimation that derives from the widespread use of this idiom. As long as the common idiom is used by individuals to procure their needs, the social process functions smoothly, and it is legitimated by use. Anything that upsets this use of the idiom for everyday purposes becomes illegitimate. Thus, when the Ottoman reformers of the nineteenth century began to change the day-to-day space configuration of women's activities, allowing them to show themselves where they had not appeared before this was a means of escaping from popular control by changing the idiom used. ... So much for "Idiom". *Discourse* is a word which I use to bring in the plasticity of the root paradigm. The way in which the idiom is used depends on the social position of the user, the selection made from a large inventory of possible themes, the particular slant of the message and the way in which the meanings carried by the themes selected are transformed to suit current purposes.[15]

In other words "idiom" is the set of common intellectual resources available for social interactions, and "discourse" is their strategic use by actors according to their own purposes. Mardin's dialectic use of "idiom" and "discourse" is a useful clue for articulating continuity and change. Culture – including religious, Islamic, culture – can be a resource for new strategies and innovations in the framework of accepted and legitimizing long-standing structures.

Similarly, in his studies of the history of writing, Roger Chartier forcefully argues that texts are open to multiple readings, since a work "acquires meaning only through the strategies of interpretation that construct its significances. The author's – may he be prophet - interpretation is one among several and it does not monopolize the supposedly unique and permanent "truth" of the work".[16] The whole history of cultural and political reproduction and innovation in the Islamic world, even before the nineteenth century, can thus be analyzed as the "appropriation" of an original setting of idiom sacralized by the holy book, constructing a system of belief and a representation of the world, continuously mobilized as it stands, and occasionally re-

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[15] Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey, the Case of Bediüzaman Said Nursi* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 6-7.

interpreted in local discourses, in order to legitimize individual or collective strategies and institutions.[17] In this perspective, for the purpose of analysis, we propose to consider Islam as a system of belief, based on a morally superior assumption, constructing worldly representations, implicitly or not affecting the political order, giving a meaning to day-to-day experiences and the intellectual means for life and collective strategies. The moral superiority of the system, lying in Revelation, refers to an originally external, non-worldly knowledge.[18] The mastering of this holy knowledge becomes then, a resource for the actors when interacting and positioning themselves within that religious/ideological environment. By extension, the ability not only of using the established set of holy knowledge, but also of altering it, of reframing it in local circumstances (of integrating the recognized "idiom" into a new "discourse") is the dynamic of cultural struggle, creativity or reproduction, in the nineteenth century-Islamic context. Islam in our study is thus understood as an accepted religious idiom, whose cognitive elements are resources for all the actors living in societies where the formal acceptance of the Quranic revelation is a public moral base.

Şerif Mardin's insistence on the role of linguistics in strategic interactions has helped us to characterize this dialectic of continuity and change. Moreover, it is an important point to emphasize the specific role of idiom in Islam. However, the dynamic of transferring acquired knowledge and legitimizing cultural elements

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[16] See Roger Chartier, "Intellectual History and the History of *Mentalités*," in R. Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[17] For a description of the adaptation of Islamic political thought to the conquest of the Middle-east by Turkic and Mongol dynasties, see for example A. K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (Oxford, NewYork: Oxford University Press, 1971). N. Itzkowitz, in *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition* (New York: Knopf, 1972), offers a general survey of this dynamic regarding the reproduction and reformulation of the Islamic tradition in the classical Ottoman Empire.

[18] For a contemporary, inspiring, analysis of Islam as a "secular" ideology, see Olivier Carré, *L'Islam Laïc* (Paris: A. Colin, 1993).

towards new situations and strategies – what Pierre Bourdieu calls *"habitus,"*[19] and

here we guess the unclaimed influence of the French sociologist on Mardin - does

not concern the sole realm of terminology. Even though words are a crucial part of

the politics of reform in Muslim polities, all kinds of other "Islamic" symbols (from the

title of caliph to the clerical clothing of constitutionalist demonstrators in Teheran in

1907) and attitudes (the *haj* pilgrimage to the Muslim holy sites, the prayer, the ability

to resolve classical theological problems) are all other resources available for actors

to defend their own agenda in the Islamic context. Hence we make here the

hypothesis that Islam, in the context of the nineteenth century Middle-East, because

of the transferable nature of its recognized idiom, symbols and attitudes, is a system

of belief adaptable to a wide variety of conflicting strategies and different situations.

Relating this stance with our previous characterization of the Middle-Eastern political

orders as "systems of institutions," the high degree of transferability of Islam into

different fields of social life makes Islam what we propose to call in this context a

"universal language:"[20] in the Ottoman and Persian system, Islam is that institution,

more than the government, which holds all the different actors together by offering

a common reference for their social interactions, a defined language and set of

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[19] Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique* (Genève: Droz, 1972), pp. 174-178, eng. transl. : *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). The concept of *habitus* has been comprensively generalized by this author after the historical analysis by E. Panofsky of the genesis of the gothic architecture as the transfer of *habitudes mentales* ("intellectual accostumations") acquired through a durable exposition to the intellectual themes of the Christian scholastic system. See Erwin Panofsky, *Architecture gothique et pensée scolastique* (Paris: Minuit, 1967)(first ed. amer., 1952), and Bourdieu's postface pp. 135-167.

[20] Here universal is applied within the context of a specific society: different Muslim societies may develop their own religious idiom with some notable variations. But within the pre-modern Muslim societies under study, Islamic idiom was the only institution formally recognized in all the different social fields, and used for social interactions - without necessarily being applied in the own private world.

behavior for the different sectors and actors to successfully communicate with each other.[21]

Political Reforms: The Systemic Changes Introduced during the Nineteenth Century

So far, we have characterized some features of the social order of the late pre-modern Middle-East to understand the historical context in which cultural and ideological changes took place. But the major ideological shifts occurred in the late nineteenth century, in the context of what may be called the "beginning of the modernization" of the Middle-East. The systems we have just described had started to go through far-reaching transformations under the hand of government reforms. Although these political reforms are not the focus of our study, we cannot ignore them either. The present section will summarize the effects of political modernization on building a new social frame for cultural change.

Modernity was not a necessity in the Middle-East, and modernization as a whole was not the application of a general comprehensive scheme. On the contrary, accidents, failures, political crises, tactical innovations in a given local conflict, played important roles.[22] This is best exemplified by the first extensive application of national conscription in 1822 by the new ruler of Egypt, Mehmet Ali. The long-standing source of soldiers, Caucasus, was no longer available because of Russian

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[21] "For a long time Ottoman culture had been two-tiered, with a high and a low, folk, component. High culture was in turn divided into the more secular culture of bureaucrats and the Islamic culture of the ulema, the doctors of Islamic law. The tacit understanding that Islam was the premier element in Ottoman culture kept all three of these segments inter-penetrating under an Islamic umbrella." Mardin, p. 9.

[22] The theoretical inspiration of this criticism of evolutionism can be found in a article written by Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire", in his *Dits et Ecrits vol II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), English translation: Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin, 1984). The author opposes the "genèses linéaires" whose ambitions are to "recueillir, dans une totalité bien refermée sur soi, la diversité enfin réduite du temps" and emphasizes

occupation, so that Mehmet Ali looked for other source of fresh recruits. He did not think first of conscription: in 1820 he considered using slaves from the Sudan, bringing 20,000 of them to Egypt for training. But the death of no less than 17,000 of them on their way forced him to abandon this idea, and thus to take the unprecedented step, inspired by what he knew from world politics, of forcedly conscripting resentful Arabic-speaking Egyptian Muslim peasants in 1822. Hence the accidental unavailability of two traditional means of recruitment, combined with Mehmet Ali's strong ambition, seem to be the right explanatory factors of this sudden drive to modernity, which was to have subsequent far-reaching consequences both in Egypt and in the Ottoman Empire.

Modernization here was the result of short-term tactical considerations, struggle for power, and accidental impossibility of using traditional means. Modernization in the Middle-East – as it had been in Europe actually – was the unnecessary result of other dynamics, moves and historical accidents. A proper understanding of what modernity was in the nineteenth century Middle-East therefore must not take it for granted and study these historical hazards, taking place yet in a certain structured context, which altogether created and constructed it.

During the nineteenth century, a combination of innovations located in Western Europe tended to newly impose the model of a strong central government – that of the Weberian, impersonal, bureaucratic State - as a more efficient system on the international political scene. The main factor of international power being then military power, it is enough to say, for the present study, that the relatively more centralized European States had created a new combination of institutions resulting

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the importance of "le discontinu, l'erratique, l'hétérogène, le singulier et l'accidentel, c'est-à-dire les dispersions et les differences".

into greater direct physical efficiency on the battlefield. Due to this relative practical superiority combined with imperialist dynamics - clearly demonstrated during the Napoleonic wars with French-English military competition over Ottoman Egypt – the European States became an increasing threat for the common interests of the whole systems of institutions of the Middle-East through their armies and their diplomats as metaphors of their potential violence. But this trend, though it was a threat to the system as a whole, was also an opportunity for some of its components. Not the intrinsic superiority of modernity, but the advantages it represented for some actors was the basis for the politics of modernization. The understanding that some of these "modern" foreign institutions could be a source of greater power for the whole system - or its very survival in the most critical situations - could be used by some actors to develop their own agenda under the banner of the collective interest of the system. Beside this expedient legitimizing use of the external threat for individual or corporate strategies, the actors in the highest capacity to import western innovations bringing in immediate greater political efficiency on their local political arena (such as rationalized bureaucracy, and conscription), had another reason to consider European innovations as a resource. Therefore, not only external pressure but also internal competition for power between conflicting institutions, account for the extension of reformation policies in the Ottoman and Persian empires.[23]

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[23] Ottoman and Persian reform movements' historiography sometimes asked which of these two elements, "endogenous dynamics" or "external pressure", was the "real" cause of reforms – a question made especially sensitive by underlying national sensitivities. We want to avoid this debate here by setting aside the classical distinction between "foreign" and "local" forces of change. Both the Russian and ayan threats on Selim III's social position as the Sultan could be fought by the creation of a modern army. The system works with all these elements and focusing on some parameters for clarity of analysis does not mean that other factors are of less causal importance. See, for example, Alan Cuningham, "Stratford Canning and the Tanzimat," in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (eds.) *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle-east, the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 245-264, for a survey of this debate.

Government Reforms in the Ottoman Empire, 1792 - 1871

This dynamic is most clearly illustrated by Ottoman history.[24] In 1792, after a new military defeat and the shameful Peace of Jassy with Russia, Selim III (1789-1792) launched a program of reforms, *Nizam-i Cedid* ("New Order") aimed at reinforcing the central government both on the international scene (creation of a new military corps trained and organized according to European ways) and on the internal one, by reaffirming the government's authority over the other semi- or quasi-independent institutions: namely janissaries, *ayan* (local notables) and ulema. But except for a small circle of likewise inspired advisors, Selim III had no social body on which to rely for implementing the corresponding policies, while he was opposed at once by all the vested interest threatened by this redistribution of power. The concrete achievements of Selim III are thus limited on a social and political level; but in the realm of ideas his reign is accompanied by a decisive "break in the Ottoman 'iron curtain;'"[25] in other words, by a large-scale new awareness of what had gone on in Europe since the sixteenth century. A reactionary coalition of ulema, Janissaries and ayan was eventually successful in deposing the Sultan, and imposed themselves as an important negative political forces. Their conflicting interests - the *ayan* were generally supporting the Sultan for the replacement of the Janissaries by a new professional army corps – did not allow them to formulate a coherent policy or even a strategy for the conservation of power. During these troubled times, the dynastic institution and the absence of any other male successor available after the

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[24] The following account of reforms in the Ottoman Empire until the rise of Abdul Hamit II to power is based mainly on the synthetical works of M. E. Yapp, pp 1-47; and 97-127, of Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey, a Modern History* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 1993); and of Ilber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Hil, 1987).

assassination of both Selim III and his cousin Mustafa IV brought Mahmud II to the throne.

Sharing with his predecessor a reforming mind, Mahmud II (1808-1839) was in practice much more efficient in increasing the power of the central government over the institutional community. He moved much more cautiously, showing a very acute understanding of the social forces at stake in the Ottoman system of his time. His supported the support of the religious institution, whose high hierarchy supported the Sultan's reformist bid. The reduction of the semi-independent ayan was very progressive, and although force was used only in the last instance, when necessary the Sultan was successful in securing the support of the Janissary garrisons in the provinces, which were the great competitors of the notables and the only organized group the Sultan could have been able to mobilize in the whole empire against them. Between 1812 and 1817 the major Anatolian notables, and between 1814 and 1820, the Balkan ones, were then brought under control. In 1826, another major step was taken with the subjugation and the dissolution of the Janissaries (called *Vaka-i Hayriyie*, "the Beneficent Event", in Ottoman historiography). At this time, the absence of any other constituted group ready or willing to oppose the central government had left the Janissaries alone, and Mahmud II – who had cautiously positioned his artillery - could easily keep the tactical control of the street and broke the resistance of the Janissaries in thirty minutes in the capital.

So were the three main institutions that had opposed his predecessor: the ayan, the ulema, and the Janissaries, crushed or controlled by Mahmud II. To some extant, this destructive work was maybe the most important contribution of the Mahmud II to Ottoman political centralization. But still internal as well as external pressures

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[25] The expression is borrowed from Stantford Jay Shaw, "Some Aspects of the Aims and

remained high on the Porte, more and more intertwined as the Western diplomats became local actors within the very boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, and all while the importation of new intellectual constructions such as nationalism brought new harming consequences to what had been minor, local problems, especially regarding minority communities. The revolt of Mehmet Ali in Egypt, and his successful military campaigns of 1831-33 and 1839-40 were just more of such threats, which forced Mahmud II to go on strengthening the central government within the Ottoman system in order to defend his own position as Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. He engaged in a real social engineering of wholly new bodies, or the transformation of traditional ones, now devoted to serve him and the central government against these threats. He created a modern army on the Prussian model, rationalized the bureaucracy, and founded an elite schooling system for shaping the social basis of the two former ones. These institutions were only partially successful during his reign, especially when confronted with foreign challenges. But a modernized bureaucratic government now started to exist: the coalition of institutions that shared a common stake for empowering the whole Ottoman system, and within it the central government, was greatly reinforced and empowered.

During the reigns of Abdül Mecid (1839-61) and Abdül Aziz (1861-76), an era known as the period of *Tanzimat-i Hayriyie* (beneficial reforms – from the word "codification". From now on we will simply refer to it as the *Tanzimat*), the power of the new governmental institutions increased to the extent that the monarch himself became practically a purely symbolic institution until 1871. In particular, a handful of statesmen entered in the Ottoman officialdom through the diplomatic carrier, who controlled the effective power during these years: Reshid Pasha until the early 1850s,

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Achievements of the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Reformers," in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (eds.), p. 31.

and his former protégés, Ali Pasha and Fuat Pasha, until 1871. The bureaucracy was now the major reform-leading force in the Ottoman Empire. Even if European modernity was the inspiration of the reforms, the sociological identity of the groups implementing them is of crucial importance in defining them. In particular, it emphasized centralization, autocracy, and secularism. This ruling social group shaped a new society, localized in the northern districts of the Golden Horn in Istanbul, corresponding to the social ideals that inspired their political visions. A social group thus existed, characterized by cultural and social autonomy, which could support the reformist movement. [26]

Foreign politics were integrated in the internal political competition. Preservation of the empire was a powerful rationale which the bureaucracy could use to present general justifications for selfish group or individual strategies. The dismemberment of the Empire, its internal implosion under the pressures of nationalism, constituted a threat that became increasingly conceivable. Because the need to save the empire through reforms was a consensus, actors challenging the old system, could now identify their own interest for reform as a necessary sacrifice for the whole system. Therefore the promulgation of important edicts during major international crises, like *Hatt-i Gulhâne* (in 1839, during the war with Egypt), *Hatt-i Islahat* (in 1856, during the negotiations in the aftermath of the Crimean War) or of the Constitution (in 1876, during negotiations related to the Balkan crisis), were impacts of international politics but also moves directed towards internal political opponents, conservatives or potentially authoritarian sultans. During these occasions, the bureaucrats and liberal

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[26] See Paul Dumont, "Said Bey – The Everyday Life of an Istanbul Townsman at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century", in Hans Geor Majer (ed.), *Osmanistische Studien zur Wirtschafts und Sozialgeschichte: in Memoriam Vančo Boškov* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1986), pp 1-16, for a colorful description of the daily life of a high Ottoman civil servant and its social environment.

intelligentsia used the legitimacy of a requisite to satisfy the European Powers, in order to consolidate internally the continuation of reforms and their own leading role.

However, the official goals of the Tanzimat were or had been far from consensual among the Ottoman administration. The intellectual starting point of the reform movement was the relative weakening and decomposition of the classical Ottoman system, but not its intrinsic failure. Actually, at least rhetorically, the reforms were intended to restore a supposed golden age. Therefore, like with all reformist dynamics, because no clear condemnation of the system working so far was politically possible, the old-fashioned sectors potentially disadvantaged by the reforms had wide latitude to defend their interests against the threatening changes: especially religious institutions, regional notables, and old-fashioned cultural elites.

These tensions resulted in a lack of devoted and trustworthy reformist personnel until the late nineteenth century, and the development of a double theoretical system with the creation of new laws, new regulations and new institutions, rather than the abolition of old ones. Another obstacle was the fact that some old institutions that bridged the sectors and made the system work were weakened, especially the notables by centralization and the *qadi* (religious judges) with the development of legalism-rationalism. On a more ideological level, the Tanzimat reformers did not offer a spiritual vision, an emotive appeal, for the elite and the people to adhere to their construction of a new system. Without a new coherent system to replace the old, the balance of the whole Ottoman system bringing legitimacy flux from bottom up to the central government was dismantled. The Ottoman community's allegiance to the government in traditional ways was deeply affected by this impossibility of reformers, until the late nineteenth century, to create a new comprehensive cultural system understandable and acceptable by the governed.

The *mentalité* and cultural practices of the Tanzimat ruling elite are well represented by the large diffusion, in Tanzimat educated circles, of the Ottoman translation of Fénélon's *Télémaque.*[27] It seems to have been read in the French literature courses at the medical school during Mahmud II's time,[28] circulated in manuscript since 1859,[29] and was printed for the first time in 1862 – becoming the first European novel translated into Turkish. The eighteenth century French philosopher's mythical account of the upbringing of a prince constituted a transparent allegory of enlightened despotism, describing a utopian Platonic King, advocating centralization, absolutism, and benevolent respect of the well-being of the population ("Kings exist for the sake of their subjects and not their subjects for the sake of kings").[30] The resurgence of *Télémaque* in Istanbul more than a century after its first publication is thus a good illustration of the fluidity of cultural objects, demonstrating how the text of an author can be transferred and re-interpreted in a foreign context, namely the Tanzimat Ottoman intelligentsia.

It is thus symptomatic of the cultural life of that time: the generation of administrators educated under Mahmud II, thirsty for Western knowledge, brought their main contribution by translating and importing European – mostly French – eighteenth-century enlightenment literature, defending a political philosophy specific to these two parallel times: a just and paternalist ruler, close to his subjects, enlightening the sciences and developing the arts and industries. In this respect, *Télémaque* was the perfect treatise of the men of the Tanzimat. But following

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[27] Yusuf Kâmil, *Tercüme-i Telemak* (1st ed., Istanbul: Tabhane-i Âmire, 1279-1862; 2nd ed., Istanbul: Tasvir-I Efkâr Gazetehanesi, 1279/1863). The original *Télémaque* was published in Paris in 1699; Fénélon was the tutor of the Duke of Burgundy, the son of Louis XV.

[28] Niazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst & Company, 1964), p. 199.

[29] Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought,* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 241.

Chartier's view on the fluidity of the meaning of any written document, yet another reading, more critical, of *Télémaque* is possible. In fact Fénélon's parabolic *Abbé* also criticized explicitly the neglect of the feudal "representative" institutions, the three orders' "Parlement", by the monarchic government, as well as the bureaucratic order created by Louis XIV. The critic of the despotic bureaucracy and the need for a representative government were precisely two issues to be developed by the so-called Young Ottomans, a group of reform-minded exiled political opponents to the Tanzimat rulers.

Overall the structural reforms from Selim III up to the end of the Tanzimat (1871, natural death of Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha), although no direct, conscious cultural reform was launched, changed drastically the conditions of cultural activity. For all the critics formulated against the Tanzimat bureaucratic despotism, the State in general appeared through its reformist bid to Muslim elites as the one key institution for thinking strategies towards western modernity. Positivist, worldly (although not secular) discourses, legitimized by the need for reforms, became a conceptual competitor to the religious one. Technical innovations (press, modern means of communication over the empire) and related institutions (modern schooling, translations for bureaucratic and academic purposes) made it possible for a growing new category of civil servants and related urban middle-class to appropriate culture for their own social strategies. The failed constitutional revolution events of 1876-1878, and the autocratic ideology of Abdul Hamid II, were the subsequent results of these decades of profound political and institutional changes, which started and paved the way for major cultural ones.

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[30] About the formulation of this platonic idea of the state by *Télémaque*, see Kingsley Martin, French Liberal Thought in the XVIIIth Century (London: Turnstile Press, 1954), pp. 55-56.

Government Reforms in Persia, 1798-1906

The case of Qajar Persia offers an interesting perspective for testing our argument that political and social reforms are the result of pressures put upon the governing actors by foreign or domestic competitors, and the simultaneous re-appropriation of external global threats and techniques into the internal political competition[31].

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, like the Ottoman Empire, Persia started to be threatened by Christian, technically superior states: imperialist England for which Persia held a strategic position on the way to India, but even more by neighboring Russia with which two wars were fought and lost (1804-1813, 1826-1828). Similarly, a reformist trend did appear in Qajar Persia, but compared to the state-sponsored modernization of the Ottoman Empire, it remained a feeble dynamic in political terms and its achievements, although tangible, were relatively limited.

A few members of the political elite were indeed interested in reforms. Abbas Mirza, crown prince and governor of Azerbaijan until his death in 1833 (before he could succeed his father), who fought in both Russian wars, was one of the few politicians who perceived the domestic and international challenges threatening Persia in the early nineteenth century, and developed a consistent modernizing strategy as far as he was able to. Practically, this meant not much: sending the first Persian students abroad and a few technical innovations in Tabriz. He still succeeded in creating a small milieu of likewise reform-minded intellectuals who became instrumental later on. The difference between the reforming intelligentsia in Persia

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[31] The following analysis of reforms in Persia are mainly based on M. E. Yapp, pp. 1-47 and 162-172; on Hafez Farman Farmayan, "the Forces of Modernization in Nineteenth-century Iran: A Historical Survey," in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (ed.), pp 19-154; and on P. Avery, G. Hambly and C.

and in the Ottoman Empire, and the relative weakness of the former, can be characterized as the marginality of Persian reformers in the political arena. Men of high skills and commitment to justly govern their country did not lack in Persia, and the cultural productions of the nineteenth century demonstrate an awareness of the necessity of structural changes in the educated class that was not inferior to that existing in the Ottoman Empire.[32] But the predominance of tribal-patrimonial politics, progressively curved during the nineteenth century, overall kept these civil administrators at bay from the very center of the decision-making process.

Some individual statesmen still worked on modernizing the military, political, judicial, and educational system and indeed achieved some results: Persia's political system did change in the course of the nineteenth century. As regent, Mirza Taqi Khan (better known as Amir Kabir) ruled Persia in complete authority between 1848 and 1851: he created the influential *Dar al-Fanun*, the Polytechnic College of Teheran – the first modern educational institution – sent more students to Russia and Turkey, and realized important though limited improvements in the military, taxation, postal and even juridical fields. Victim of a political conspiracy, Amir Kabir was finally dismissed and then killed by the new sovereign, Naser al-Din Shah (reign 1848-1896), who seems to have later felt regret for this act.

Although no consistent move for political modernization was followed under his reign, Naser al-Din Shah gave power for a time to another renowned Persian

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Melville (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol.7: *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[32] The first anti-clerical statement of Persian intellectuals dates from as early as 1819, in an analysis of Ottoman politics by Mirza Saleh, one of the students sent to London by Abbas Mirza: "as long as the mollas interfere in the affairs of the Ottoman government it shall make no progress. Sultan Salim made an attempt to introduce the European order in Istanbul but the mollas stupidly called this order non-islamic. The Sultan also wanted to introduce European science but the mollas again through jealousy prevented him and thus kept the people from leaving the path of ignorance and darkness. In fact, it is obvious that whenever the mollas interfere in the affairs of any government that country and that administration shall never make progress." Quoted in Fereydun Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Azadi dar Iran* (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publications, 1961).

reformer. Mirza Husein Khan (called Mushir al-Dowleh while he was prime minister), had been Persian ambassador in Istanbul where he had witnessed the Tanzimat reforms with admiration. He convinced the Shah to go and ascertain the progress made in the Ottoman Empire. During their meeting in Baghdad province, a perfect case-study then of effective modernizing reforms thanks to the good tenure of the famous Midhat Pasha, the Persian shah decided to take Husein Khan with him back to Teheran. Grand Vizir between 1871 and 1873, later holding the positions of minister of foreign affairs, minister of war, and governor of Khorassan until his death in 1881, he had a strong personal and political commitment for modernizing Persia following the European model. He centralized the administration of justice, created a cabinet system largely based on models used in Europe, launched some more reforms concerning the military (the creation of a separate budget, the hiring of Austrian instructors, the separation of provincial administration from military authority), and convinced the monarch to travel to Europe. His support for granting a gigantic concession to an Englishman, Baron Julius de Reuter, for the construction of railways, the working of mines, and the establishment of a banking system, allowed a powerful coalition to oppose him. Members of the ulema, in particular, successfully mobilized popular pressure under the accusation of atheism and using proto-nationalist discourses on the preservation of domestic economic agents threatened by the Reuter concession. The sovereign consequently removed Husein Khan from high office in 1873, yet giving him the chance to put his ideas in practice in the limited fields of minor government positions and of regional government.

Naser al-Din Shah himself did not seem to have had a comprehensive vision for reforms, but as an admirer of some technical aspects of European modernity, his court came to promote the development and practice of some aspects of

European life, thus forming, for example, the first Persian film directors. [33] A degree

from abroad, or just a trip to Europe, became during Naser al-Din Shah's reign key

resources for court politics. But the scope of these changes, however innovative they

were, was extremely limited. A good example of this limited, highly concentrated,

"court" modernization was the construction of the first Persian telegraph line in 1859

between the imperial palace, *Gulestan*, and the shah's pleasure garden, *Lalehzahr*,

a distance of a few city blocks, while most of the country was still deprived of any

reliable postal service. In fact, some major technical innovations in communication

were the results of the foreign imperialist ambitions. The British developed an

extensive telegraph network starting from 1864 for the sake of their communications

with British India; by the end of Naser al-Din Shah's reign all cities and important

towns were eventually linked by telegraph. In a similar manner, when Amin al-

Dowleh wanted to improve the postal system, he hired a group of Austrian experts,

who continued for decades to manage the postal system. Nonetheless, the

development of an efficient postal and telegraph network in Persia had important

consequences on the political and cultural level, contributing to the appearance of

an integrated national arena.

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[33] The film archives of the late Qajar era are currently being processed and saved from the slow decay of time by a joint programme of the Institut Français de Recherche en Iran and Forum des Images in Paris. The first Qajar "movies", dating from the first years of the twentieth century, depict such scenes as fictious heroic hunts of the Shah against wild lions in the mountains neighboring Teheran, or comic fights during commercial negociations between archetype characters (the "Arab," the "Kurd," the "Armenian"). These first experiments, interrupted by the constitutional revolution, played an important role in the development of a modern Persian cinema in the inter-war period.

The Lessons from a Comparative Perspective on the Persian and Pre-Hamidian

Ottoman Reform Experiences

We should make the conclusion about political reforms in Persia that during the whole period, a genuine will of modernizing the country according to the European model existed in some political circles. But there never was a homogeneous social body holding an important amount of power in the institutional system, whose identity would have been linked with reforms as existed in the Ottoman Empire with the traditional, newly modernized, bureaucracy. The Persian reformers, however convinced or skilled they were, lacked the stable support of social forces that would have allowed them to resist the anti-reform coalitions. They did not constitute a coherent social group, sharing distinct material conditions as well as cultural and social features, like the men of the Tanzimat. But like the men of the Tanzimat, the Persian reformers lacked the will to base their modernism on an ideology more refined and appealing than practical utilitarism, seeking efficiency. Neglecting the widespread beliefs and cultural practices, both missed the opportunity to create the ideological conditions for the adherence of the whole population to their program. The Persian reformers in particular, focusing their attention solely on the institutional and material development of the realm, did not develop a strategy of cultural reforms which could legitimate their moves and enroll other social groups by changing their vision of the world. As a consequence, all of them, while in power, relied in the sole support of the monarch, quite unpredictable in his political attitudes and subject itself to the resistance of the vested interest groups.

In comparison, the Tanzimat reformers benefitted from two sets of favorable circumstances. First, in the Ottoman Empire a strong civil administration existed which endorsed naturally the official politics even while not understanding deeply the

underlying motives. Second, although the men of the Tanzimat did not make a concentrated use of culture to create social mobilization in favor of their political agenda, they nonetheless had more than a purely material and technical agenda. Their efforts, partial as they eventually were, were sustained by the hope to build an Ottoman identity, an allegiance of the subjects to the central government thanks to its good government. A new ambitious, loosely defined, civilization project existed at the government level: Ottomanism, a vision of fraternal coexistence and allegiance to the state of all the Ottoman peoples and creeds. However, this symbolic vision animating the top Tanzimat reformers was not, until the late 1860s, transformed into an effective ideological policy. No active cultural policy sustained this ambition, which was expected to result naturally from good government – understood in the classical, pre-modern, sense of technical and institutional administration. Governmental action was thus focused on material and institutional changes, in which domain it was in effect hampered by concrete adverse developments: war against Russia in 1856, turmoil in Crete, in Liban, and the disastrous economic situation of the early 1870's (a combination of drought and floods in Anatolia, and of the crash of the international stock exchange in1873, which resulted in the default of payment of the Ottoman debt).

On the cultural level, the results of Persian reforms during the Qajar period, and of Ottoman ones up to the end of the 1860's, also differed. Both in Persia and in the pre-Hamidian Ottoman Empire, government action affected the social underpinning of elite cultural life. The governments sponsored the import of western technologies and sciences, through their translation and adaptation to the local context for greater governmental and military efficiency, and the opening of imperial modern schools. In both countries, during the second half of the nineteenth century, western knowledge and the mastering of European languages, an experience – or better,

education – in Western Europe, became a social resource for political and cultural competition. Moreover, the Tanzimat reformers, helped by a more efficient government system, were successful in creating the base for secular legal systems and universal education. These were the two levers by which the central Ottoman government, starting from the 1860s, was able to affect popular culture in a way that was impossible in Persia even in the early twentieth century.

The comparison of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire and Persia with other pre-modern Muslim areas where no substantial political reform had been conducted, such as the Central Asian khanates eventually colonized by Russia,[34] show that the structural reforms these former conducted had decisive political and effects. The Qajar, and even more the Ottoman governments, had a tighter control over their population, national resources, and could to some extant formulate a foreign policy of their own. But beside the profound changes in social life implied by such moves and innovations as the extension of statutory courts (in the Ottoman Empire) and progress in communication (telegraph), neither the Persian reformers nor the Ottoman ones up to the end of the 1860's set up policies of cultural reform *per se*, of ideological mobilization of the whole social body through purely symbolic means.

Starting from the 1860's, the importance of an ideological undercurrent for political action became increasingly understood in the Ottoman Empire, Persia - and actually increasingly everywhere in the world. The cultural activity of the elite, from an encyclopedic enlightening effort through the import of western literature, progressively shifted to an attempt to re-appropriate western cultural techniques (theatre, novel, the use of a language close to that spoken in actual everyday life)

for creating original endogenous cultural products, increasingly involved in their own

local contemporary social issues. Politicized, combative newspapers suddenly

appeared and proliferated in Istanbul, staffed by a young generation willing to use

the pen to change their surrounding world by symbolic mobilization. The poet Şinasi

(1826-1871), having studied public finance and literature in Paris between 1849 and

1853, was an archetype and a predecessor of this new generation of intellectuals

dissatisfied by the Tanzimat's despotism and lack of ideological appeal. He co-

founded the first privately owned Turkish newspapers, the *Terjuman-i Ahval* ("the First

Translator"), whose first issue appeared in the fall of 1860. In 1862, he started on his

own publication, *Tasvir-i Efkar* ("the Mirror of Ideas"), which soon became a forum for

the expression of new literary as well as political ideas, advocating in particular the

right of "the people" to express their opinions on political matters. The increasing

politicization of culture by the new generation was not tolerated by the government.

On July 1863, just a day after he had published an article explaining the principle of

"no taxation without representation", Şinasi was dismissed from his post by order of

the sultan, for the official reason of "mentioning too often matters of state."[35]

Subsequently, the movement of reviving culture for the political empowerment

of the Ottoman Empire became the goal of a loose group, political opponents of

the official government, known as the Young Ottomans. This label designated a

group of intellectuals, disappointed children of the Tanzimat, who shared a common

political – cultural stance: the necessity of creating a link between the romanticized

classical Ottoman past and the contemporary idea of progress, between the

respect of the Islamist tradition and the appeal of European liberal ideas. Their

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[34] See Seymour Becker, *Russia's protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968)

[35] Şerif Mardin, *Genesis*, p. 254.

theoretical construction, which will be studied in more detail later on in this thesis,[36] was the first large-scale attempt in the Ottoman Empire to directly reform the deep symbolic structures of public life, to change the (educated) people's vision of their own world as a privileged lever of political action. The Young Ottomans were pioneers in fostering large-scale symbolic mobilization for political purposes; but in the late 1860s and early 1870s, the Ottoman government also started, to a lesser extent, to regard conscious cultural change and manipulation as a means of political action – especially interesting in a context of relative lack of material resources to sustain all the Ottoman imperial claims under challenge. In this perspective, Kamal Karpat forcefully demonstrates how the revival of the title of Caliph during Abdul Aziz's reign was the result of a combination of external pressure and governmental realpolitik, meeting providentially in a powerful Islamic symbol. The call for a Muslim geopolitical center able to challenge European global imperialism, which originated from Muslim peripheries such as Mysore (Southern India) and Ajteh (South-Eastern Asia), led the Ottoman government to rediscover the potentialities of the title of Caliph once attributed to the Ottoman Sultan.[37] During 1876-78 then occurred an unprecedented cultural confrontation, where merely Islamic and imported Western symbolic resources were used for the sake of political confrontation. After a chaotic period, the new government, controlled by the autocratic new Sultan Abdul Hamid II, continued and intensified the ideological use of culture. These are all the politics of cultural confrontation will discussed below.

In Persia, a comparable evolution is noticeable: first, modernization of the formal aspects of cultural products through direct Western influence, followed by a

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[36] See *infra*, p. 122-134.

politicization of their contents, directly addressed to changing their author's social

environment. Descriptive and critical writings from the very beginning of the

nineteenth century played an important role in this perspective. The earliest work to

report with admiration the progresses made abroad, *Tohfat ol-Alam* (praise of the

sciences), written in 1798 by Abdol-Latif Musavi Shushtari,[38] a kind of social and

political history of Persia and the world, was almost contemporary to the beginning

of the Qajar era (1796). In the following years, comparable travel accounts

flourished, becoming one of the significant channels of *marefat-e jadid*, "the new

culture," with in particular the writings of Hajji Mirza Abol-Hasan Khan, the first Persian

ambassador to Europe[39]. During the second half of the nineteenth century, travel

literature became even more voluminous and influential, with the participation of

Naser al-Din Shah himself as a traveler and reporter of life in Europe.

Essays with a more political content, presenting westernization as the remedy to

all Persia's ills, also appeared at that time, under the pen of liberal and reform-

minded statesman such as Malkum Khan (1833-1908),[40] Mirza Yusef Khan (Mostashar

al-Dowleh, d. 1896)[41] and Amin al-Dowleh.[42] A more radical cultural strategy of using

easily accessible western cultural formats for promoting social and political change is

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[37] Kamal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam. Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 2 "The Precursors of Pan-Islamism: Peripheral Islam and the Caliphal Center," pp 48-68.

[38] Mir Abdol Latif Jazayeri Musavi Shushtari, *Tohfat ol-Alam* (Bombay, 1846).

[39] For his works and some other such travel accounts, see Abbâs Eqbal, "Chand Safarnâmeh az Sofarâ-ye Irân," *Nashriyeh-e Vezârat-e Omur-e Khârejeh*, 1, no. 3.

[40] On Malkum Khan, his writings and his role in nineteenth century Persian history, see Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973). His writings turned on three themes: the adoption of Western civilization, secular reforms in justice and law, and the guarantee of freedom.

[41] In Particular, Mostashar od-Dowleh presented an adaptation of the French Constitution, reinforced by applications of Islamic traditions in justice and law, in his *Yek Kalemeh*. This book was to become the main guide for the secret societies who flourished at the end of the century. See Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), chap. 5.

to be found in the works of a Persian-speaking citizen of Russian Azerbaijan: Fath Ali

Akhundov (1812-1878), who took direct part in the politics of cultural reform in Persia.

In addition to numerous anti-clerical political tracts clandestinely cirulated in Iran,

Akhundov used plays, written between 1850 and 1855, to denounce the clergy, the

nobility and the wealthy middle class. His drama became very influential among the

Persian cultural elite, and his style inspired revolutionary intellectuals of the

succeeding generation.

Journalism was another way through which cultural reformism was defended

vigorously. Persia's first private newspaper, *Vatan* (Fatherland), was edited in 1876 by

Malkum Khan who developed very critical positions in his editorial of the first edition,

which led to the prompt ban of the paper. After this first experience, political press

became an activity of exiles, and flourished abroad: *Qanun* in Istanbul (edited by

the same Malkum Khan), *Akhtar* in Istanbul, *Habl ol-Matin* in Calcutta, and *Sorayya*

(replaced by *Parvaresh* in 1900) in Cairo, all of them whose works seem to have

circulated quite freely in Persia, in spite of the governmental ban.[43]

In Persia too, a category of politically oriented intelligentsia appeared, heirs of

earlier technical governmental reforms, willing to accelerate the impetus of social

change, and to extend it to far-reaching cultural changes. They too opposed their

government, but a theoretical distinction appears in the fact that less interest and

respect was shown to the State itself. For the historical reasons developed earlier,

other institutions than the government were equally important in Persian Qajar

society, the ulema in particular. It is interesting to note in this respect anti-clericalism

and atheism developed much earlier and were much more influential as an

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[42] Spending fifty years in the service of the Shah, Amin od-Dowleh also employed his pen on two
sharply satirical essays: *Safarnameh-e Makkeh* and his *Khaterat-e Siyasi*. See Bayat, chap. 5.

[43] See Edward G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry in Modern Persia* (Cambridge, 1914).

intellectual discourse during the nineteenth century in the Persian cultural arena than in the Ottoman Empire. Akundov's influential *Sa Mektub* (Three Epistles), considered by a late Soviet historian as "the most outstanding work of materialist philosophy in the East,"[44] condemned from Baku, as early as the 1860s all religions, including Islam, as "meaningless myths."[45] This writing inspired a great number of religious dissents and freethinkers, both in Caucasus and in Iran.[46] The ulema's alleged conservatism, as well as their actual contrasted behavior, and the opposition they engendered, will thus be given due attention for understanding the evolution of the social construction of reality in the late Qajar era.

Reformism, Reformers and Intelligentsia: The Importance of Differentiating Outward Positions, Actual Strategies and Effective Results

In the light of this account, a general comment should be made on reformism as a political and cultural stance. In our historical context – like in any other comparable situation where reformism is a major dynamic - the reformers, "in diagnosing the ills of their society and prescribing the cure, were usurping the moral and cultural authority of the established religious-cultural [and political] elites."[47] Michel Foucault, in his criticism of the enlightenment process in Western Europe, has shown the tight

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[44] V. Samedov, *Rasprostranenie Marksizma-Leninizma v Azerbaidzhane*, Baku, vol 1, 1962, p. 209.

[45] The first Ottoman writing, largely published, condemning plainly Religion was Tevfik Fikret's *Tarih-i Kadim* ("Old History"), written in 1905, which according to Niazi Berkes, "has not been surpassed by anything in Turkish in the severity of its moral condemnation of all the institutions of the past, chief among them being Religion." See Niazi Berkes, p. 300-302.

[46] See Mangol Bayat, chap. 2.

[47] Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), and especially his excellent introduction, pp. 1-17. As a matter of fact, the study of the political and cultural modernization in pre-soviet Central Asia has just started in the last few years, and benefits from the more important academic contributions made on similar dynamics in the Near East. In this sense, the few academic works getting published on Jadidism in

relationship between the fact of holding knowledge and that of exercising power.[48]

In this perspective, reforms politics are a double-level game. At a general level, a coalition is formed between different actors who feel that their system is being threatened and that only mutual action to change the nature of this system can preserve their own social position. This implies a redefinition of social mechanisms, of selves, of the world; in other words, a redefinition of culture. This coalition may encounter opposition from actors and institutions whose very existence is threatened by the revision of the social order. But on a smaller scale, even within the "reformist coalition," different actors may choose mutually excluding positions on the necessary re-definition of culture. In all cases, the project of changing culture or institutions being also a claim for power, a reformist stance is necessarily a conflicting one.

When reform is established as a government-sponsored policy, as was the case in the Ottoman Empire starting from the Tanzimat era, or is at least recognized as a legitimate policy by the political elite, then the distinction between "reformers" and "traditionalists" or "conservatives" does not help much in the analysis of the cultural struggles. In a reforming political system, such as the Ottoman Empire, the clash between different reform projects embodied by the aspiring "reformers" was as important a dynamic as resistance from the traditional elites in the name of the old system. Both categories may become eventually blurred in a reforming system when the "old" elites start to play the new rules of the game whereas the "new" elites

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Muslim Russia and Central Asia offer a quite inspiring, challenging and synthetical, perspective over the historiography of the nineteenth Ottoman, Iranian and Arab responses to European modernity.

[48] Michel Foucault, *Discipline et Punir. Naissance de la Prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). Michel Foucault's analysis of the interrelations between knowledge and power and criticism of modernity has inspired a large number of interesting works on such issues outside Western Europe. For a "foucaultian" study of the ability of Islam to chart its own path to modernity, see Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity* (Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 1997). If our conclusions are comparable, we do not follow foucaultian methodology in its impersonal neglect of the individual actor and dismissal of social conflicts.

mobilize some symbolic features of the old system for legitimizing their own innovative cultural and political offer.[49] In a system like Persia, where a strong coalition of reformist actors was not constituted, the blurring is maybe even more puzzling and indeed seems to have mystified a large part of the academe, as we shall see. The revision of the social order, which still is a strategy for some more isolated actors, then relies more heavily on legitimizing "traditional" symbols, whereas the actors willing to preserve the system relatively untouched or seek to return to its essence against the tide of the circumstances, may use some of the "modern" technical innovations in order to reach their goal of preservation - restoration of the old order, thus just helping to bury it completely.[50] The late nineteenth century Ottoman and Persian systems can be qualified as "reforming" in the sense that the result of the aggregation of the actions of the different actors was to radically change the social order. But as far as the actors of this change are concerned, we will therefore speak of "intelligentsia" rather than of "reformers," using the word in the broadest sense, leaving room for the analysis of all the potential contradictions within their ideas, or between the ideas and the effective actions.[51]

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[49] A classical, archetypical example of this "innovation through conservatism" is given by Meiji Japan, contemporary of our object of study.The parallel was indeed attempted in a collection of essays funded by the Ford Foundation: Robert. E. Ward & Dankwart A. Rustow, (ed.), *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964). Unfortunately, as one may have anticipated given the time and context of publication, the study is largely outdated due to its heavy reliance on the post-war optimistic model of an unilinear path to modernity, that both Japan and Turkey are supposed to illustrate as "succesful modernizing regimes."

[50] The very classical historical case of such a contradictory process, is the avent of the first stable Republican parliementary regime in France, in the early 1870s, as the result of the tactical institutionnal strengthening of the Parliement by the Monarchists who wanted to prepare the restoration and accidently held the majority in the parliement. In the case of the nineteenth century Middle-east, this disconnection between, not only the professed goals and the real ones, but also between the actual goals and the non-intentional effects of tactics mobilized to reach them, is rarely taken into account. The non-intended results of cultural politics will be precisely a privileged analytical tool of our demonstration.

[51] For the concept of intelligentsia, we avoid any materialist class analysis: contributors to reforming culture varied from the Monarchs themselves to middle-class or even lower middle-class background activists such as the journalists Dehkhoda, Jahangir Khan, Mohamed Reza Musavat, the Tarbiyyat brothers. See Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution. Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 9.

The intelligentsia in the reforming Middle-East was not moved by abstract ideas such as "liberty," "pan-Islam," "nationalism." But in their struggle for redefining the socially valued knowledge and the very rules of the social game, they imported, adapted or created such abstractions in order to impose their own cultural and/or political leadership. Political and cultural actors, in their struggle for cultural domination, should not be defined by their outward ideological stance, nor should we consider their formal statements and literary production as clues for identifying their identities in the social game. True, these ideological productions were not neutral and affected the whole cultural system, the system of symbolic opportunities for other actors. But what really matters for understanding who was who, is not the ideas but the social position and practices of their carriers. Therefore, in accounting for cultural and ideological changes, the historian has to distinguish not only ideologies, but also realities, different purposes being served by seemingly identical symbols and rhetoric.

In the light of these considerations on reformism, we are forced to conclude that the reformers we have described so far, the Ottoman men of the Tanzimat and almost all Persian reformers exerting political authority until the Constitutional revolution, missed to realize the realization of the cultural dimension of their political bid for modernization. However good politicians some of them were, they were not ideologists, and a part of their political failures can be explained by that inability to apply in the political realm the understanding that a society is not ruled only by objective and material interests but also by subjective, immaterial, emotional dynamics – what their European contemporaries called "civilization," and such an important spiritual institution in the nineteenth century Middle-East as Islam. To a large extent, these reformers excluded themselves from this universal language of social interactions. They were instrumental in changing the social underlying current of

cultural activities; cultural change itself was promoted by other actors who will, from now on, be the focus of our analysis.   42

CHAPTER TWO

DOMINATION DISCOURSES AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The cultural frameworks of both the Ottoman and Qajar societies were deeply affected by the domination ideologies constructed by their respective elites. The dominants' ideologies are actually that aspect of the early modern Middle-Eastern cultural life the most studied and well-known. It is known historical common wisdom to assert that the Ottoman reforms were "top-led," and that the cultural life in Qajar Persia was under the strict control of the powerful shi'i clergy. This section proposes to examine critically these two propositions in order to determine the role of the dominating elites in cultural change, and to prepare the analytical background for the next section, which will focus on the role of political confrontations.

<u>Culture, a Construction of the Dominant Elite</u>

The first studies on the dynamics of the constitution of political cultures, approaching critically the constitution of the norms and conceptual tools through which a given society understands its surrounding world, emphasized the importance of the social environment in which culture is formed; in other words, demonstrated the social bias in culture. Following Marx's emphasis on the determination of the whole social and cultural "superstructure" by the material "infrastructure," Gramsci argued that each social class creates its own "organic" intellectuals, instrumental in creating coherent class self-consciousness by legitimizing its material expectations and interests through an intellectualized historical discourse. A finer concept, more relevant to our present study, of the prevalence of the social context for cultural

production, is Bourdieu's "symbolic violence," which we find quite efficient to explain the mechanism of the spreading of systems of thoughts. Bourdieu shows that different actors, whether individual or collective, do not have an equal ability to formulate and export the beliefs that are necessary to legitimize their current position or claims. [52] Values, doctrinal constructions, and social theories are first developed in limited social environments. They are imposed to the whole society through the generalization in universal terms of this specific discourse, so that every single actor finds in it a positive value for himself (thus the universal concept of "liberty" will have a practical positive meaning for the intellectual, the capital owner and the industrial worker as well), and through the exclusion of the opponent cultural models, their "excommunication" (J. Habermas)[53] by adequate and relatively powerful social institutions.

Bourdieu's conceptual tools allow taking into account the social origin of culture, without remaining prisoner of an extreme materialist determinism, and paving the way for a certain consideration of a specific autonomy of the cultural field. The idea that struggle and competition prevail in the realm of cultural production is similarly the basis of Jürgen Habermas' useful concept of "legitimacy crisis", which happens when "the structural dissimilarity between areas of administrative action, and areas of cultural tradition constitutes then a systematic limit to attempts to compensate for legitimation deficits, through conscious manipulation."[54] This short theoretical overview shows culture as a means by a dominant social group (the State, the

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[52] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1993). The most comprehensive explanation of this concept is to be found in a book-interview: Pierre Bourdieu, with Loïc Wacquant, *Réponses* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), p. 116.

[53] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. translated by Thomas Burger (French Translation : Paris, Payot : 1978).

[54] Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 71.

monarch, the bourgeoisie, the clergy) to ground and protect its favorable position, by imposing a certain vision of the world, to the surrounding social elements.

Abdul Hamid II's Ideologization of Islam for the Secularization and Sacralization of Power

In the nineteenth century Middle-East, mobilization of Islam as a domination ideology reached its height in the Ottoman Empire under the reign of Abdul Hamid II. During his reign, Islam as not only a religious but also a political stance became an increasing source of inspiration for political action in the Muslim world, and even in the imperialist designs and colonial fears of European powers. In the Ottoman lands, as compared to the Tanzimat era, Islam also started to acquire a more militant meaning, which the monarch tried to direct towards active support of his rule and policies. The formation of culture by "symbolic violence,"[55] or an attempt to "excommunicate" competing visions of the world, is then best exemplified.

In order to understand the dynamics of cultural change by the hand of Abdul Hamid II's ideological policies, we shall proceed in two steps. First, we will examine the theoretical content of his legitimation discourse, and the social underlying he found to favor its diffusion. Second, we will study the Hamidian reconstruction of his social world to bring it in compliance with the ideological norm, demonstrating that ideology encompasses an ambition to social engineering beside cultural change.

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[55] As a matter of fact, Abdul Hamid II 's use of violence was not only symbolic, but also physical. The concept of symbolic violence still remains useful. The use of coercive force was then a means to achieve not only physical effects (as it had been the case during the suppression of the Janissaries), but even more to change the symbolic system underlying physical opposition to him. In that sense violence can be both "physical" and "symbolic".

Abdul Hamid II's Ideologization of Islam

Islam as a Potential Ideological Cement

The process through which the Ottoman monarch used and changed Islam and religious institutions in order to found the legitimacy of the Ottoman State, and within it his own rule, has been analyzed recently by Selim Deringil in his study *The Well-Protected Domains*.[56] The author's focus on *"applied* legitimation policies"[57] fits our present sociological approach of realities superseding ideologies. The author's argument is that a "legitimacy crisis" affected the Ottoman Empire at that time, based on both internal and external factors. The external one was the lack of diplomatic recognition by the European powers. The internal dimension "was the struggle to overcome a 'legitimation deficit' that accrued as the state permeated society physically and ideologically to an unprecedented extent." In a way comparable to another "imperial adjustment to the challenges of the times" (Russia especially), an effort was made to "create a modern secular state using traditional religious motifs and vocabulary." [58]

A century of military defeats against Austria, Russia and internal nationalist uprisings (often supported by foreign powers) changed the religious physiognomy of the Ottoman Empire. From 1876 onwards, even though significant Balkan provinces still remained under Istanbul's effective control, the loss of provinces with a strong proportion of Christians increased the relative importance of the predominantly

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[56] Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains. Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London & New York: Tauris, 1998).

[57] *ibid*, p. 2. Italic by the author.

Muslim Anatolian and Arab populations. This trend appears clearly in demographic terms (the percentage of the Muslims in the total Ottoman population increased from sixty-eight percent before the 1876 war to seventy-six percent afterward[59]). An important symbolic element which added to the new central role of the Muslim populations was the fact that Balkan Christians had played an instrumental role in the Russian victory and the subsequent onslaught of Danube Muslim populations, even though they had been the outward beneficiaries of a generation of Tanzimat reforms. In these circumstances, the Muslim element was now the symbolic heartland of the empire. The Ottoman Empire appeared to its Muslim population more than ever like a besieged Muslim polity threatened by hostile foreign Christian powers, and the lack of loyalty of its Christian subjects.

Moreover, internal economic developments combined with the Tanzimat juridical protection of the non-Muslim communities ushered in the emergence of a class of rich non-Muslim merchants and in a general increase of the welfare of the Empire's non-Muslims. This was a source of resentment for Muslim communities, whose economic position remained much more vulnerable. This hurt the general understanding of the *Sheriat* (Muslim law) that Muslims held a position of social superiority in the Empire, under the Sultan's protection.

What kind of consequences could this social resentment have on a political level? The Tanzimat reformers were convinced that they were empowered to a mission, that of saving the State, and that they were the only ones able to conduct it. In that sense, the mastering of the languages and technologies (or so it was perceived) of the Christian partner-enemies was an intellectual justification for the

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[58] *Ibid*, p. 166.

[59] François Georgeon, « Le Dernier Sursaut, 1879-1908 », in R. Mantran (ed.), *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), p. 525.

Tanzimat reformers to exclude *a priori* the majority of the population from any

political influence. But to an increasing extent, modernizing the country could not be

achieved single-handedly by the center: the improvement of the taxation system

and of the army required a certain level of participation of the social body. This

constituted an impetus for the political elite to take into account the popular voice;

Abdul Hamid II actually based his policies on the realistic consideration of the lower

social strata of the empire and the need to create a legitimation flow from them to

himself.

Beside a general wish for legitimacy, popular resentment started to become

increasingly visible, shaping violent inter-communal riots, which not only disturbed

civil order but could also threatened to become dangerous pretexts for European

imperialist intervention. The troubles in Damascus in 1860 offer a good example. The

account of the bloody anti-Christian riots by a local notable, Al-Sayyid Muhammad

Abu'l-Su'ud al-Hasibi,[60] allows us to understand the uneasy set of mind that the

Tanzimat had created among Muslims. It is worth quoting him at length:

> The Christians of Damascus used to be required to pay the *jizya* (special
> poll tax) and the *kharaj* (special land tax). They continued to do so until
> the Sublime Porte exempted them from the *Jizya* and the *kharaj*. [Then]
> the Europeans (*al-Faranj*) gained free access to Syria and began to put
> ideas into the heads of the Christians. They would tell them, for example:
> "The *Tanzimat-i Khayriya* [have made] the Muslims and Christians one, as
> God created them. Why should not Christians dress like Muslims?"
> [reference here is made to the traditional discrimination against the non-
> Muslims in dress, recently reinforced by Selim III]. So it came about that
> when a Christian quarreled with a Muslim, the Christians would fling back
> at the Muslim any insults the latter used, and even add to them. If they
> brought their case before the government it would favor the Christian ...,
> because of our kindness [as Muslims] to one another.[61]

The Christians' foreign connections were particularly offensive to the notable:

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[60] Kamal S. Salibi, "The 1860 Upheaval in Damascus as Seen by Al-Sayyid Muhammad Abu'l-Su'ud al-Hasibi, notable and later Naqib al-Ashraf of the City," in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (ed.), pp. 185-204.

> Every Christian had some relative who had acquired a foreign nationality, in most cases the French. Whoever had a claim against a Muslim would delegate it to one of these foreign nationals. If a Christian quarreled with a Muslim, regardless who the latter may be, he would say: "I am the subject of such-and-such a Power." This assertion often proved to be false. Rather, [the Christian in question] would be protected by a relative or friend [who had acquired the foreign nationality]; and the latter would send the *khavas* of the consul [to champion his case].

Al-Hasibi, in his manuscript, presents the 1860 troubles as a deplorable but understandable reaction against Christian insolence and ambition. Although the Ottoman government is not directly accused, the social changes introduced by the Tanzimat are described at length as the disrupting factor causing the troubles. In particular, the marginalization of the notables, clearly condemned by Al-Hasibi, is associated in this text with the non-respect of Islam.

The symbolic link between the foreign external pressure exercised by Christian powers and the local inter-communal tensions is later on clearly illustrated by al-Hasibi's account of the first Druze attacks of Christian villages:

> Even before Zahleh [a Christian town on the eastern slope of the Lebanon, approximately forty miles west of Damascus] was conquered, people [in Damascus] began daily to inquire: "Have they conquered Zahleh?" "Why have they not conquered it?" *It seemed to them to be a matter of reconquering the Morea.*[62]

The reference here is made to the loss of the Morea by the Ottoman Empire with the establishment, under the protection of the powers, of Greek independence. Local issues such as the increasing "insolence" of Christians in Lebanon were related in Muslim "public opinion" to the humiliations of the Ottoman Empire on the international scene.

Al-Hasibi's account helps us to understand the dynamics of the legitimacy crisis of the Tanzimat government at a local level. It is also a good starting point to

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[61] Hasibi's manuscript on the 1860 troubles, cited in *ibid*, p. 190.

[62] *Ibid*, p. 193. Emphasize by me.

understand the new pan-Islamic ideology of Abdul Hamid II, as an attempt to shape a new positive identity of the orthodox Muslims as subject of a powerful monarch, who would not accept any threat to his "Well-protected Domains."

Abdul Hamid II's new and more intensive demands on his population, requiring participation in the building and the defense of a modern empire, had to be justified by the construction of a certain world-vision which would make the new order as part of "the natural order of things," "things as they always have been." At that time, as the Syrian case illustrates, the current symbolic resources and the very structure of the Ottoman system imposed Islam as the one institution to rely on for this move. As Mardin explains, "it was from Islam that the Muslim Ottomans could draw the emotional resonance that could mobilize both the upper and lower classes. It was Islam that would provide the store of symbols which could compete with the national symbols of the Greeks and the Serbs."[63] Therefore, Abdul Hamid II was to mobilize massively Islamic idioms and motifs. To "mobilize" means to move, to transfer, according to one's needs and position. The process thus is not neutral on the mobilized objects, and a study of Abdul Hamid II Islamic ideology is also a study of how he changed Islam.

The Sultan Caliph's Islam

The (re)-appropriation of the millenary-old title of Caliph by the Ottoman sultan, its mobilization for the purposes of legitimating his dominating position, modified profoundly the meaning of Islam.

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[63] Şerif Mardin, *Religion*, p. 129.

Abdul Hamid II's faith is acknowledged to have been profound and sincere, and he considered that his authority as Sultan was of divine origin.[64] Nevertheless, consistent with the Ottoman political tradition that regarded government as an exercise in the manipulation of power relations decided and determined by the ruler himself, Abdul Hamid's internal and external policies did not stem from religious principles but from pragmatic state considerations.[65] The Ottoman sultan was one of the absolute monarchs of the nineteenth century empires, and like his Russian, Habsbourg, German or Japanese equivalents, understood the potential of folk culture for devising power-oriented strategies[66]. His enterprise of reconstructing Islam, and his use of the title of Caliph, were thus not primarily the result of his personal belief, but have to be analyzed from political perspectives.

Abdul Hamid II was Sultan of the Ottoman Empire between 1876 and 1908; a very troubled time to be Sultan indeed. Abdul Hamid II felt both his empire, and his throne, were under the threat of political circumstances. The very existence of the Ottoman Empire was no longer taken as granted, protected by divine providence – in 1878 the Russians guns could have been heard from the centre of Istanbul. The disastrous outcome of the 1877-78 war had shown that the very existence of the Ottoman Empire was under the deadly threat of internal implosion and foreign imperial ambitions, two trends actually re-enforcing each other due to the Powers'

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[64] Abdul Hamid II was the first Ottoman sultan to engage in writing personal political reminiscences, providing precise information on his private life and beliefs. See in particular Sultan Abdulhamit, *Siyasi Hatıratım*, ed. Ismet Bozdağ (Istanbul, 1974) – memoirs collected by his secretary Ali Vehbi Bey.

[65] A colorful demonstration of Abdul Hamid's practical secularism and pragmatism in political affairs is to be found in a conversation about export duties on alcoholic beverage between two officials and the Sultan. Eventually the export of wine was beneficial to the "state," even though the state was "Islamic" and he was the caliph. See Kemal Karpat, p. 156.

[66] Noting that the sultan's Turkish was reportedly "closer to the colloquial and free of the intricacies of the Ottoman spoken by the elite", Kamal Karpat argues that the general populist steak that characterized Abdul Hamid, "closer to the average Muslim Ottoman than to the upper-class elites", may have been "the result of the gradual penetration of the folk culture into the upper establishment."

interventions as "protectors" of the non-Muslim communities. Moreover, Abdul Hamid II feared the liberal constitutionalists that had engineered the deposing of his two successors, with the collaboration of the *Shey-ul-Islam* (highest Muslim cleric in the Ottoman system) and in the name of the "people". The 1876-1878 political crisis had dramatically familiarized the new sultan with these two dangers to his position: his political strategy was thus devised to keep at large the imperialist-secessionist ambitions on the one hand, and the Ottoman liberal opposition on the other.

Maintaining his domination was thus the motive behind Abdul Hamid II's cultural and ideological policies. Transforming Islam from a neutral social *medium* into an active political doctrine of patriotism and submission to the ruler was a breakthrough in the history of Islam. Initiated mainly by Abdul Hamid II, centered on his figure as Sultan-Caliph, it was nonetheless the logical consequence of a new specific configuration of the political scene during the years of his reign, and of the position of sultan. Not only was Abdul Hamid II the first sultan to have seen from so close, to perceive so clearly the powerful threats to his throne and empire, but thanks to eighty years of reforms and governmental centralization, he was also the first sultan to hold such powerful resources to impose his rule over society. Being the most powerful sultan ever, during the most dangerous era of Ottoman history, created a political structure where the Sultan Abdul Hamid II had both the incentives and the resources for a large-scale ideological reform aimed at strengthening both his throne and empire. The project of the autocratic leader to create a spiritual link between himself and his population, through the main intellectual resource available – religious discourse – was devised as an answer to all the evils casting a shadow over Abdul Hamid II's power.

See Kamal Karpat, p. 161, quoting Vambery from Mim Kemal Öke, Vambery, *Belgerle Bir Devletarası Casusun Yaşam Öyküsü* (Istanbul, 1985).

Abdul Hamid II's religious discourse was thus clearly political. Islam, the universal language of the Ottoman Empire, was to be filled with new political meanings linking its practice to a re-enforced legitimacy of the Sultan's role, protecting it against the surrounding political dangers. The Sultan himself saw Islam from this perspective, in relation to his political environment. Approaching religion from an international comparative perspective, he wrote: "The love which they [the Europeans] have for their motherland we [Muslims] nurture for our religion. Our enemies call the love for our religious fanaticism ... Prophet Muhammed's doctrine, to which we are attached with a profound love, defends equality among people, protects the weak, values the good and orders obedience to law. We are ennobled by the great love we feel towards our faith."[67] A central element of the theoretical re-construction of the Hamidian Islam, beside its "Ottomanization," was in fact an affirmation of its intrinsic superiority over Western, "materialist" civilization. The Ottoman Muslim subjects were now to be proud of their belonging to a long-standing brilliant civilization, and thus to obey their rulers and to resist the dangers coming from the western materialist world – were they moral corruption or military confrontation.

As we see, if the figure of Abdul Hamid II was central in the late nineteenth-century ideologization of Islam, the social and political conditions of his coming to power were crucial factors determining his subsequent policies. The theoretical construction of Hamidian Islam was a large-scale cultural reform of the traditional religious discourse, for the purpose of political legitimation.

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[67] Sultan Abdulhamid, pp. 24-25.

The Ottomanization of Islam

The Hamidian ruling elite discarded the relative ideological neutrality of the men of the Tanzimat, and engaged in an effort to create a sense of Ottoman identity among the population of the empire, especially its Muslim component, based on a revitalized, state-sponsored, version of the Hanefi *mezheb* (sect or branch of Islam) of Sunni Islam, in a proto-nationalist manner.[68]

The Caliphate was a most visible emblem of the Hamidian drive for Islamic legitimacy. It seems not to have been too important a matter during the pre-modern times, when among all the numerous titles conferred to the sultans, that of "caliph" had not appeared. The first official mention of it is to be found in the Treaty of Kutchuk Kaynarja (1774). The Ottoman diplomats, forced to accept for the first time the surrender of lands populated by a majority of Muslim to a Christian power, Russia invoked the position of the Ottoman Sultan as protector of all the believers to justify certain rights over the Crimean Muslims now transferred to Russian sovereignty, very much in the same manner as Russian Tsars claimed to be the protectors of Balkan Orthodox peoples. The title of Caliph was justified by the official myth that Selim I, the conqueror of Egypt, had received the mantle of the caliphate from the last Abbasid caliph in 1517.[69]

The systematic affirmation on the internal scene of the sultan as commander of the believers actually started in the last years of the reign of Abdul Aziz (1861-1878). Then, during the reign of Abdul Hamid II, there occurred an unprecedented self–

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[68] "The Ottoman state was in tune with world trends where, one after the other, empires borrowed the weapons of the enemy, the nationalists. What held true for Paris in the 1870s, also held true for Istanbul: the transformation of "peasants into Frenchmen" paralleled the "civilizing" or "Ottomanizing" of the nomad." Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains.*, op. cit., p. 67; the parallel is made here with Eugéne Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

conscious attempt on the part of the Ottoman state intelligentsia to recharge and redefine basic Islamic institutions, namely the sheriat and the caliphate, as the basis for a new imperial, national, identity. This official religious ideology gave the Hanefi *mezheb* a particular place as official belief (*mezheb-i resmiye*). The Hanefi interpretation of the caliphate most suited the needs of the time, recognizing a strong and able ruler as the legitimate sovereign of all Muslims on the condition that he protected Islam and upheld the sheriat, even if he was not from the original sacred Arab clan of Qureish. Intense efforts were made to impose the Hanefi School of jurisprudence throughout the empire and to "excommunicate" the other jurisprudences, whose interpretations were not so flexible concerning the identity of the caliph.

The new direct link between the Caliph - Head of State and his Muslim population also implied a re-definition of the legal content of Islam: the "Ottomanization of the sheriat." This was accomplished before the rise to power of Abdul Hamid II and was a legacy of the late Abdul Aziz era. A special commission directed by Ahmed Djevdet Pasha, an ulema-taught political heir of the Tanzimat who had already published the first Ottoman grammar, was given the task to codify all Islamic Law in 1869. To "codify all Islamic Law" was an ambitious rational-legal project, consistent with the bureaucratic tradition of the Ottoman Empire, but unprecedented in the Muslim world. The result of this work, the *Mejelle*, was published in 1876. It standardized and regularized sheriat rulings in the sense of a modern civil code. Openly based on Hanefi jurisprudence, it was intended to become the "source of reference to all officials who would thus be able to accord their practice

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[69] See Thomas Arnold, *The Caliphate* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 129-162.

with the sheriat",[70] as stated by Djevdet Pasha himself. The *Mejelle* was then intended

to naturalize the practice of Islam, throughout the empire, in the sense of the official

State interpretation. The new code was symbolically based on Islam; but it is

interesting to note that this move towards a State definition of Islam went directly

against the one very Islamic institution, the ulema, who had had the monopoly of

interpreting the numerous and confusing sources of the sheriat. From now on the

Muslim nation would follow instead the guidance of its Sultan-Caliph through his

administrative intermediaries, made into mechanical applicants of the rationalized

Ottoman "Islamic" civil code.

This redefinition of Islam was made by and for the political center, but was

possible only since a social underlying existed to relay it below.

<u>The Rising Middle-Class and the Written Media,</u>
<u>the Social Undercurrent for the Hamidian Ideology</u>

The means of diffusing the Hamidian ideology were quite diversified. The regime

developed and spread an official iconography throughout the empire by using the

space of public expression created by the building (or restoration) of small mosques,

clock towers, bridges and new administrative buildings throughout the empire, even

in rather small places, contrasting with the classical Ottoman tradition to retain its

presence in the main cities and regional capitals. Demirel points to a clear example

of this policy:

> One example of this "grass roots" message is the commemorative plaque
> reported on by the Vali [governor] of Baghdad, which was to be erected
> on an obelisk by the Hindiyye dam in the vilayet [province]. A fairly typical
> example of the genre, it bore the legend: "To commemorate the Holy
> Name of the Caliph and to furnish an ornament to His Eternal Power." The

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[70] Ali Himmet Berki, *Açıklamalı Mecelle* (İstanbul: Hikmet, 1992), p. 10.

> Vali specified that the text would be in Arabic, which indicates that the target audience was the local population, rather than a general statement of power, which would probably have been in Turkish.[71]

But the theoretical re-appropriation of Islamic symbols, its diffusion in the limited social area directly under physical state control, cannot explain alone the course taken by the extant of the Hamidian cultural reform, in particular its diffusion throughout the empire. Such a radical change in meanings of long-standing Islamic idioms could not simply be decided by the Ottoman political center, even though its influence over society had increased. The Hamidian project of the politicization of the Muslim population needed social partners to relay this new ideology beyond the governmental and administrative circles. This social underlying, or target, of Abdul Hamid II's symbolic violence, was the Muslim middle-class newly rising in the context of changed socio-economic conditions, made accessible to state propaganda thanks to the diffusion of the printed media. This section will thus shortly analyze the contribution of these elements in reforming religious discourse during the reign of Abdul Hamid II.

During the few last decades, under the theoretical inspiration of Marxist materialism, a number of historical studies have indeed focused on the cultural and political consequences of social struggles and changes in the pre-modern rural world. In particular, British Marxist historians have argued that ideas, values and cultural practices are not merely "superstructural" but an integral dimension of the "class" relations, including in the medieval rural world. In doing so, they bear the merit to bringing life to the rural world in historical analysis. The vast majority of the population living in a rural context, specifically peasants, from passive victims of changes originating from upper social classes, is thus changed into actors of cultural

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[71] Selim Demirel, p. 30.

change.[72] In the context of the Ottoman historiography, quite influenced by Marxist materialism,[73] the relationship between changes in land tenure and political and social change has been extensively studied. Heim Gerber, in his studies of *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle-East*, shows how deep social trends, the crushing of local notables by the central government and the application of the land code of 1858 (*Arazi Kanunnamesi*) resulted in the development of *de facto* private land ownership during the nineteenth century[74].

In these conditions, a provincial Muslim middle-class gradually emerged, freed from the local domination of the former ulema-ayan coalitions. This new agrarian "middle-class," of which contemporary observers – Ottoman as well as Western - were hardly aware, was increasingly engaged in small-scale commercial activity, in relation with the world markets: it constituted an Ottoman equivalent of the Russian *Koulak* (modest but propertied peasant, central in all Marxist discussions of rural Russia, finally "eliminated as a class" by Stalin), conservative in political and social manners, but attached to their relative autonomy, and with a "modern", *i.e.*, rational, economic mind. Kamal Karpat, in his recent study *The Politicization of Islam*, forcefully emphasizes the centrality of this new rural Muslim middle-class in the process of cultural reforms. The new rural Muslim Ottoman propertied middle-class, from a materialist perspective, can be identified as a "partner" for the Hamidian state, or at least an adequate social undercurrent, for redefining Islam in a way that could combine formal continuity with the legitimizing past, and the changed

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[72] See for example Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

[73] See Suraiya Faroqhi's "Introduction" to Halil Berktay, Suraiya Faroqhi (eds.), *New Approaches to State and Peasant in Ottoman History* (London: Franck Cass, 1992) pp. 3-17, for a critical discussion of Marxist theoretical influence in Ottoman historiography.

[74] Haim Gerber, *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle-east* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1987). On the same subject and with similar conclusions, see also Kemal Karpat, "The Land Regime, Social

conditions of their times. Such a relationship between the state and the empire's population was made possible by two links that developed in the nineteenth century, relating the cultural life of both the political center and the rural peripheries: Sufi orders and printed media. These interfaces were neither created nor perfectly controlled by the State, but the Hamidian regime was still quite successful in using these two new cultural carriers towards the greater number of the Sultan's subjects.

The Hamidian era saw a boom of religious orders (tarikat, "paths") and independent "religious professionals," half-beggar dervishes, journeying across the empire and beyond. Earlier analysts associated the activities of the tarikats with "a great traffic of healers, quack medicine men, breath-curers, and diviners."[75] Recent researches, however, emphasize the specific "revivalist" dimension of the nineteenth century tarikats: they "departed from [Sufism]'s early esoteric and pacifist views and adopted a social, communal, and populist understanding of the faith,"[76] "reaffirmed the norms set by the Quran in such a way as to re-introduce the traditional Muslim idiom of conduct and of personal relations into an emerging society of industry and mass communications."[77]

All together, the various elements of this new religious galaxy came to surround all strata of Ottoman society, basing their influence on their proximity with popular mysticism and philosophy, which, in Anatolia especially, had always been closer to

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Structure, and Modernization in the Ottoman Empire" in ed. William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (ed.), pp. 69-92.

[75] Niyazi Berkes, p. 259.

[76] Karpat, Politicization, p. 23. Karpat actually gives tarikats a primordial place in his analysis, affirming that "the last decades of Ottoman history cannot be understood properly without taking into account the revolution from below caused by the revivalist movements" (p. 20), which "represented a form of grassroots Islamic democracy." (p. 23)

[77] Mardin, Religion, p. 13. Mardin's analyses are very close to Karpat's, interestingly echoing him when he praises the subject of his study, Said Nursi, for "re-democratization" through revival of the traditional idiom. Both authors are very critical towards "Republican dogmatism" presenting any religious movement as necessarily backward and anti-modern, and both advocate a sympathetic re-appraisal of the religious factor in modern Turkish history. The main difference between them is a

heterodox Sufi orders than orthodox Islam. These new religious actors came to constitute a social sector autonomous from the official state ulema, with their own rules and hierarchy, still sharing the same basic Islamic idiom. They did not necessarily comply with the political wishes of the ruler. But Abdul Hamid II seemed to have been perfectly aware of this religious and social trend, which he quite successfully used for backing his cultural reformism. Because the orders and independent men of religion did not depend on the state for financial and organizational resources like the official ulema, the Sultan could not use direct authority and administrative control over them; but the sultan-caliph included them in his cultural project so that they could find a rewarding position, and back overall the Hamidian system. This is best illustrated by the welcome the religious "independent" aristocracy met, despite its occasional critical tone, in the imperial palace. A post-Hamidian era shey-ul Islam likewise witnessed that "in order to become a favorite of the Palace and Government, one had to enroll in the flocks of the religious orders."[78] Informal but clear support of revivalist tarikats such as the *Rifâi, Shâdhili* and *Nakshibandia*, as well as publicly close relations with some of the most prestigious dervishes, were means to bring the influential medium of Sufi and heterodox Islam into governmental orthodoxy; and to eventually sustain the caliph's symbolic supremacy.

The fact that the very orthodox caliph Abdul Hamid II associated himself with such theologically impure Sufi movements, in the continuity of a long-standing Ottoman tradition, illustrates the approach of religious stance in terms of political opportunity. Consolidation of the power based the Sultan's cultural and religious policy, following centuries of Ottoman practices. In this perspective the Hamidian regime clearly appropriated and beneficiated from intellectual innovations

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seemingly irreconcilable opposition between Karpat's materialist argument centered on social, economic and political issues, and Mardin's relatively more intellectual approach.

originating from outside the ruling class, namely the revivalist movements, multiplying due to the changed social conditions. The change in scale of Abdul Hamid II's cultural policies is not to be found entirely in his personality or upbringing, or even in the political events he went through. The Hamidian mobilization of Islam for a large part was also the echo of social and cultural changes affecting the vast social body of non-elite Ottoman Muslims.

The development of printed media, made possible through government reforms as well as societal changes, was closely related to this trend of the emergence of the middle-classes, throughout the empire, as a political force interacting with ideological mobilization. It is important to note that the modest but steady rise of the literacy rate among the Ottoman population should not be taken alone as an indicator of the social penetration of the printed media.[79] In order to accurately appraise the impact of books and periodicals over popular culture in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, one has to take into account the social dimension in which literacy took place, and the positions and interactions of those who read, with their local community. It is a commonplace of cultural studies to recognize that knowledge gives power and social influence to those who possess it; in nineteenth century Ottoman society, the new "modern" provincial notable brought in by commercialization of agriculture, who valued the acquisition of literate knowledge and beneficiated from the first developments in education made by the Tanzimat, was not an isolated individual. He belonged to a household, to a local community, for which his social elevation, associated with the mastering of literacy, was a source

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[78] Musa Kâzim, *Devr-i İstibdat Ahvali ve Müsebbipleri* (Istanbul, 1911), p. 29.

[79] The figure of 30,000 or 40,000 printings of *Basiret* in 1875, the most widely read newspaper of its time, is interesting as an indicator of the potential reading public for an Ottoman newspaper at the end of the *Tanzimat*. For a gross comparison giving figures a meaning, considere the weekly *Nature*, influential but elitist newspaper in United Kingdom, which in August 2004 printed 50,000 units - reported

of inspiration. Therefore, the modest rise in literacy witnessed during the Tanzimat era gave the written media a much larger social influence than the simple figures indicate, because it was geographically decentralized and associated with a positivist approach, because it empowered local "prescripters"[80] able to diffuse in their family and community the opinions forged through their readings. Western travelers' accounts inform us on this trend, when they describe for example how in provincial *Tchay Hane* (public cafés where men meet and socialize), reading of the latest newspapers by the local *okumush* ("learned", enjoying social authority) replaced, in the course of the nineteenth century, the long-established practice of traditional story-telling by troubadours. The following British consular report, evaluating in 1882 the development of an Ottoman public opinion regarding British foreign politics, is revealing of the revolution in popular printed media:

> Some year ago the Mohammedans were kept in ignorance of all political upheavings, and appeared indifferent to their results; but the progress education has made among them, the development of a native press, the introduction of western civilization, and the growing facilities of communications with the principal centers in Europe, have gradually awakened a spirit of inquiry among this people. They now take a keen interest in national and foreign political affairs, and follow up and ventilate events which affect their country and religion.[81]

In fact, during Abdul Hamid II's time, more and more books were printed,[82] new newspapers were founded, with an increasing effort to make them available to a larger public by using a simple language closer to the vernacular.

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to the population, both publications reach a similar penetration rate. Our figure of the printing of *Basiret* is taken from Kemal H. Karpat, *Politicization*, p. 120.

[80] In corporate marketing, "prescripter" designates the specific categories of individuals whose consumption tastes and patterns influence their direct entourage, and whose strategic commercial importance go much beyond their actual purchase power.

[81] Cited in Kemal H. Karpat, p. 152.

[82] Statistics are informative. As compared to the period 1860-76 (late *Tanzimat*), during the period 1876-1908 (Abdul Hamid's reign), the publishing of literature books was multiplied by 5 (one third of published books), the publishing of books on positives science, by 7 (40 percent of published books), and the publishing of books politically sensitive, on religion and government, by 4,5 (25percent of all books published). Source: Orhan Koloğlu, *Avrupa Kıskacında Abdulhamid* (Istanbul, 1998), p. 406. Both in

The Hamidian state intelligentsia knew the power of the printed media, and its potential for reaching a far broader public then ever before.[83] Abdul Hamid II was successful in making his religious ideology well-known throughout his empire and abroad thanks to printed books and press. Beside a severe censorship over books related to political and religious matters, the Hamidian regime engaged in a massive literary mobilization for the publication of pocket books, in a simple language, defending the official faith, and especially the identification of the Ottoman Sultan as the sovereign Caliph of all Muslims. From the various accounts available, it seems that the effort was quite successful in reaching the educated stratus of the population throughout the empire. The private libraries of local notables and officials in such an isolated region as Van in Eastern Anatolia gave due importance to this sort of official publications.[84]

Beside propaganda booklets, the Hamidian cultural ambition had to cope with the existing periodicals, which started to multiply in the 1860s. Some tensions existed, but overall, Ottoman newspapers, controlled but rarely initiated by the state, were also autonomous agents promoting and diffusing the Hamidian vision of the world in the empire and abroad, in some Muslim communities. Interestingly, the first really important Arabic newspaper to be published, *al-Jawaib* (the Answears), already

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their structure and dynamic, these figures are interesting. Politically sensitive books (which, because of censorship, can be supposed to be in fact propaganda books for almost all of them) represent a quite important proportion of the publications, but the public's interest in entertainment and even more enlightenment appears also clearly, illustrating the "modern" reading behavior of the Ottoman literate public.

[83] This understanding of the printed media as having a world-wide impact is illustrated in a memorandum written by Süleymen Hüsnü Paşa, a military officer-intellectual politician in Baghdad, advising the Monarch on how to fight the heterodox faiths. The Paşa recommended the writing of a *Book of Beliefs*, (*Kitab-ul Akaid*), to consist of fifteen chapters, each dealing with one unorthodox element. He intented them to be, not only the most obvious targets such as Christianism, Judaism and Chi'ism, but he also projected through his book to fight "the pagan practices of Indo-China" and "the new Philosophy" (*felsefe-ye cedide*) – for which the book would have to be translated into French. The project was not completed but is an indication of the new volontarist ideological stance of the Hamidian regime and intelligentsia. See Deringil, p. 49.

[84] Şerif Mardin, *Religion*, p. 76.

very well established when Abdul Hamid II rose to the throne, became a strong advocate of the Sultan's policy and claim to be caliph of all Muslims, whether they lived inside the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire or abroad.[85] The newspaper appeared regularly between 1860 and 1883. It was launched, at the invitation of the Sultan, by Faris al-Shidyaq (1804-87), an eclectic Arab intellectual of Maronite origin, who had converted first to Protestantism and then to Islam, and spent several years in Europe. The newspaper had a rich content on world politics and social criticisms of the Eastern countries, and seemed to have had an important influence over the opinion of the whole Arab-speaking world. During the reign of Abdul Hamid II the title was closely associated with the defense and the promotion of the official Ottoman position. Traveling in central Arabia in the 1870's, a European noted that *al-Jawaib* was known there:

> I marveled at the erudition of these Arabian politicians! Till I found they had a certain Arabic newspaper (which is set forth in face of the "Porte" at Constantinople). The aged editor was of Christian parentage in Mount Lebanon... [He] afterwards established himself at Stambûl; where he made profession of the Turks' religion: and under favor of some great ones, founded the (excellent) Arabic gazette, in which he continues to labor (in the Mohammedan interest). His news-sheet is current in all countries of the Arabic speech: I have found it in the Nejd merchants' houses at Bombay.[86]

Faris al-Shidyaq did not belong to the Hamidian administration or intelligentsia under the direct control in Istanbul. Therefore he did not support the Sultan's ideology because he was forced to; supporting the Hamidian enterprise was his choice as editor of an "excellent" Arabic newspaper. What is interesting in this specific case is that "state" propaganda was especially efficient since it was promoted by non-state, "private," actors, pursuing their own agendas. In this sense

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[85] About Faris al-Shidyaq and *al-Jawa'ib*, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (Oxford: 1962, Oxford University Press), pp. 97-99; and Karpat, *Politicization of Islam*, op cit., p. 124.

the late nineteenth century Ottoman regime can really be considered as an ideological regime. It created a symbolic system, which actors outside of direct physical control wished to endorse for their own particular interests, thus creating the basis of a much wider social mobilization and allegiance. Abdul Hamid II was certainly not liberal in political manners, but he was quite aware of the social dimension of his empire, and enjoyed a deep social support from key intermediaries, making possible the vast diffusion of his politicized Islam. In this perspective it is interesting to note the Sultan's ill-fated similar attempt to influence western public opinions through allegedly influential western journalists, consistently with his domestic "public relations."[87]

The Ottoman political center created, at least to some extent, the conditions for exporting its specific vision of the world to the Ottoman social agents, by presenting it as natural. Using Islamic idioms and motifs, the Hamidian regime changed Islam from an underlying element carrying all social interactions, to a pro-active political ideology that naturalized the sultan's specific political interests as universal (Muslim) ones. Istanbul, through "symbolic violence," moved towards building and imposing its own conception of Islam: conservative on the theological field, Hobbesian[88] on political matters, calling for an active obeisance of all Muslims to the political authority. The Sultan Caliph's Islam, relying on re-arranged old cultural resources, was successful in obtaining the support of key social intermediaries, religious revivalists and popular media, to reach the vast and diversified Ottoman population scattered

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[86] C. M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (London: n.d., 1923), 2, p. 371.

[87] See Karpat, *Politization*, pp. 134-135.

[88] Hobbes theorized the legitimacy of a violent state, of whatever regime, protecting the individual against his own oppressing tendency. In the Islamic context, hobbesian often comes to describe the current of thought legitimizing the non-Arab, freshly converted rulers appearing in the eleventh Century. The Hanefi mezheb, in the nineteenth century, was an archetype of an Islamic hobbesian system of thought.

over the Empire. This Ottoman-Hamidian definition of Islam was to become a main structure of cultural life in the Ottoman territories and the successor states.

Hamidian Islam and Social Engineering

The Hamidian mobilization of Islam was a cultural move in the sense that it attempted to construct new symbolic structures by using and altering already existing ones. For this reason, Abdul Hamid and his intelligentsia can be objectively considered as important cultural reformers, even though they are often labeled as "conservative" according to alien norm systems.

But symbolic structures, or social carriers of the imperial doctrine, are not the only ones concerned. Hamidian "culture," Hamidian Islam, was a *political* ideology. In other words, the alteration of symbolic structures had a meaning only because it went along with an active will of changing the social structures as well. In the case of a political ideology, the theoretical, theological, codifying efforts are connected to more concrete action strategies. A political actor who formulates a theoretical system of norms, basing a certain division of the real into "good" and "evil," thus makes a claim to act according to this separation, and in particular to change "evil" into "good". In the case of Abdul Hamid II, the "good" was the transformation of the loose Ottoman "institution community" into a more strictly integrated "institution society,"[89] where all actors would enter in a clear hierarchical relationship with the monarch and the central government, a watershed in the Ottoman political system.

Cultural reformism framed into political ideology is inseparable from the action strategies it makes available; in as much as the policies of the French radicals

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[89] "Society," as compared to "community", implies a more strict contractual relationship between its elements. See *supra*, footnote 9 page 9.

derived from the enlightenment theory, the new Hamidian Ottoman Islam is fully understood only from the perspective of the social engineering it went along: state proselytism, the construction of a comprehensive educational system, and the deconstruction of the ulema's role in public life.

Government-Sponsored Proselytism

Official Islam was more than a habit regulating day-to-day life, as it was still in practice for many local communities. This shift between "backward" religious practices and the new ideological foundations therefore led the state to apply an active proselyte policy towards Muslims themselves. It was no longer acceptable for the Hamidian state anymore that Islam consisted "of nothing more than something [local population] inherited from their ancestors" and that "Islam does not go much beyond their having Islamic names." This traditional, politically passive practice of Islam had to be replaced by "a consciousness of the honor of being Muslim."[90]

Here, in the "sweet tongue" of the Ottoman officials, one understands that the mentioned "consciousness" and "honor" of a Muslim is directly related with him fulfilling his obligations as an Ottoman citizen: merely paying taxes and enrolling into conscription. Echoing the terminology used by the officials of the French Third Republic, this necessary proselyte task was termed, in the case of the "Kizilbash"[91]

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[90] Deringil, p. 76.

[91] *Kizilbash* is the pejorative designation, in Turkish, of Alevis – a specific blending of pre-Islamic Turkish religious traditions with Islam, widespread in rural areas of Anatolia, affiliated to shi'ism. See for example Irène Mélikoff, "Bektashi / *Kızılbaş*: Historical Bipartition and its Consequences" in T. Olsson, E. Özdalga and C. Raudvere (eds.), *Alevi Identity. Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives* (Papers Read at a Conference Held at the Swedish Institute in Istanbul, November 25-27, 1996, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Transactions vol. 8, Istanbul, 1998).

population in Tokat, as "civilizing" (Ottomanizing) "simple village folk" by showing

them "the high path of enlightenment," that is, the Hanefi mezheb.[92]

The Hamidian state intervened actively in the Ottoman lands in order to

implement this "civilized" Islam. Several means seem to have been used when

applying this policy: a) while independent preaching was seen as dangerous and

therefore limited as much as possible, official preachers were selected from

prominent religious families and received a special four-years formation before being

sent to the provinces; b) proselytizing by the hand of militant religious orders close to

power, such as the Nakshibendia in the Balkans; c) the opening by the state of

Hanefi mezheb madrese (traditional religious school) and primary schools teaching

the official Hamidian history supposed to instill the feeling of obedience towards the

Sultan; and d) the summoning of unorthodox imams to be trained in the educational

system of the local provincial capital. In the case of a deep-rooted local unorthodox

faith, supported by a strong theological system, the "correction of belief" could

adopt some even more pro-active means, with the sending of an expeditionary

force using alternatively the carrot and the stick to "illuminate" locals "out of their

father's beliefs". In such cases, military officers sent by the center would try to force

the local community into conversion by a combination of coercive power and

various incentives, such as the construction of public buildings and the integration of

the resisting elites into the state apparatus.

Construction of a Comprehensive Educational System

Late in the nineteenth century, some Europeans in Istanbul found that, when in

the summer they wrapped white cloth around their straw hats as protection against

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[92] Deringil, p. 40

the heat, the common Turk suddenly became deferential, and regarded them as *okumush* (well-read, well-educated). Learnedness, it seemed, still resided in the turban.[93]

During the Hamidian era, education actually became a major field of application of the regime's ideological policy. The regime intelligentsia was aware of the importance of the issue for their *kültürkampf* ("cultural struggle"),[94] under the direct influence of enlightened thinking, reframed in Ottoman form and motifs. Memoranda sent by regional governors to Istanbul bear witness to this awareness. Osman Nuri Paşa, then governor of the Hijaz and Yemen *vilayets* (provinces), wrote that "the people of a country without education are like so many lifeless corpses, not benefiting humanity in any way."[95] Ömer Vehbi Paşa, a military officer sent in 1891-92 to the mountainous regions of eastern Anatolia and upper Mesopotamia to convert (to "hanefize") *Yezidi* Kurds and to enroll them in an auxiliary cavalry corps, after a display of brutal intimidation where several heads of local notables fell, wrote to Istanbul that as part of his "correction of belief" strategy, he intended to build six mosques and seven schools in Yezidi villages and five mosques and five schools in the villages of the Shebekli, all of whom had already converted to Islam.[96] During the Hamidian era, the construction of schools throughout the empire often appears as one of the main practical means used by the central power to change "simple folks who [could] not tell good from evil" into disciplined, civilized, reliable members of the "fundamental elements" (*unsur-u asli*) of the Hanefi Muslim population ready to participate actively in the Ottoman polity upon the request of the center.

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[93] Roderic H. Davison, "Westernized Education in Ottoman Turkey," in *Middle-east Journal* 15 no. 3 (Summer 1961), pp. 289-301.

[94] The German term refers to the drive towards combined nationalism and anti-clerialism in Bismarck's imperial Germany.

[95] Deringil, p. 98.

The educational policy of the Hamidian regime can be appreciated in both its qualitative and quantitative developments from the Tanzimat era. The Tanzimat reforms had already started to create the basis of a state-sponsored education system, with three levels: primary schools (*ibtidaiye*), potentially for the whole population; three-year high schools (*rushdiye*), supposed to form an intermediate educated level suitable in particular for fitting the posts of low-ranking bureaucracy; and high-level specialized *grandes écoles*, based on the French model, dating from Mahmud II's reforms, and forming the secular, westernized high bureaucrats. But except for the elite schools, this theoretical system was materialized with difficulty into reality. At the beginning of the reign of Abdul Hamid II, public education was practically almost non-existent except in government projects.

The schooling process acquired a whole new pace during the reign of Abdul Hamid II. The number of *ibtidaiye* increased from 200 in 1877 to 3,057 in 1893,[97] *rushdiye* from 300 in 1878 to 619 in 1907[98] and *idadi*[99], from 7 to 109 in 1906.[100] The construction of new schools became for the Hamidian regime one of the privileged ways to affirm its power in urban centers and more remote areas, occasionally to solve conflicts with local communities by granting them a highly desired access to modern knowledge, and on the whole to change in the long term the Ottoman population's symbolic world. For this reason, the Hamidian education policy cannot be understood as being just a systematic development of the existing institution, and attention has also to be paid to the cultural changes within the education field.

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[96] *Ibid*, p. 71.

[97] Bayram Kodaman, *Abdülhamid Devri Eğitim Sistemi* (Istanbul: Ötüken, 1980), p. 142.

[98] *Ibid*, pp. 156-167

[99] Provincial middle schools. The dramatic increase in their number is a clue to a new interest in provincial populations outside regional capitals.

[100] *Ibid*, pp. 137-203

The highest level of the education system created during the Tanzimat, the elite schools, was the least affected by the Hamidian Islamic intellectual mood. The relative autonomy conferred by the prestige of those institutions, combined with a center's greater concern for their efficiency over ideology, can explain why higher education institutions kept a strong European influence. Yet changes occurred even at this level. More religious instruction and a strict observance to religious obligations such as Friday prayers were introduced, on the ground that "the survival of the Sublime State depends on the preservation of the Islamic faith."[101] In the meantime, strict obedience to the sultan and to the state was emphasized, and instructors of the Civil Service School were ordered for instance to "take every opportunity to instill the sacredness of duty to the state, which must be the first thing in the consciousness of every civil servant."[102]

In comparison, the schools oriented towards "mass" education, primary and high schools, were more directly and deeply affected by the Hamidian re-ordering of norms and symbols. This can be explained by the fact that they were much less autonomous institutions than the old elite schools, and by their new importance as carriers of the imperial ideology to all the various categories of population and outposts of the empire. The Tanzimat-styled combination of Islamic and Western humanist approaches towards knowledge was replaced by the strictly Islamic state ideology. In idadis and rushdiyes at least, references to Western Europe were systematically suppressed throughout curricula contents, education materials and symbolic messages, to be replaced by Islamic and Ottoman motifs.

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[101] Memorandum from the Minister for Military Schools, Mustafa Zeki Paşa, to Yıldız Palace, February 1900, quoted in Deringil, p. 97.

[102] Circular from Ministry of Education, 6 January 1891, quoted in *ibid*, p. 96.

In an unpublished study titled *The Formation of the Standard Image of the Past in Turkey from the Tanzimat Era to the Early Years of the Republic*,[103] Hayrettin Kaya reconstitutes the Hamidian policy towards teaching history through the study of official curricula. The history curricula of primary and *rushdiye* schools are particularly helpful to understand the Hamidian cultural project. History courses appeared on the curriculum for primary schools only in the third year, for two hours a week[104]. The content of history courses in primary schools in towns consisted of the following items: "The tribe that our ancestors belonged to – The Place where they previously lived – Ertuğrul Bey[105] and his place of emigration – Ghazi Sultan Osman and all the sultans in the order of their succession to the throne up to Abdul Hamid II." The student then continued to learn history in the *rushdiye*. The first and second years were devoted to "Islamic history:" a traditional history of the prophets during the first year, and the succession of the first caliphs and the successive dynasties up to the Timurids during the second year. The final year of history consisted of a more detailed version of the Ottoman history taught in primary schools, emphasizing the political and military successes of the Ottoman sultans, with an interesting last section about "the great contributions of the Ottoman sultans to sciences, culture and arts,"[106] the only mention of scientific or any kind of change whatsoever. The Hamidian project of a profound cultural reform appears clearly in these curricula: the simple people – educated in the primary schools – were to identify themselves with nothing but orthodox Islam, whereas the *rushdiye* forming the Ottoman low level civil servants

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[103] Hayrettin Kaya, *The Formation of the Standard Image of the Past in Turkey from the Tanzimat Era to the Early Years of the Republic* (MA diss., Boğaziçi University, 1994), in particular pp. 19-28.

[104] History courses were simply absent from the curriculum of rural primary schools and only the history of Islam was taught in *Aşiret Mekteb*, the school created for the children of Kurd and Arab tribal leaders.

[105] Erteğrul Bey is a semi-mythical figure, father of Osman, the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, that Hamidian regime heavily used for propaganda purposes.

were to build a synthetic identity, in which the two main components were orthodox

Islam and adherence to a political tradition, that of the Ottoman State identified in

its glorious sultans.

Towards the Secularization of the "Islamic State" by the Sultan-Caliph

One of the main features of the Hamidian political practices, as the case of

education illustrates, was to build and develop secular social bodies to spread his

Islamic ideology. This apparently contradictory move is at first glance puzzling

concerning the role of Islam in political and cultural life, such a basic question as "did

it increase or decrease?" simply does not make sense.

Niyazi Berkes actually has pointed out in the introduction to his classic

"Development of Secularism in Turkey," the ambiguity of the term "secularism,"

especially in a non-Christian context. The concept tends to mean a general

separation of the religious domain from the worldly one; more specifically, in the

realm of political institutions. But Berkes reminds us that many other aspects and

social arenas may be at stake other than political institutions.[107] Pushing further the

analysis, Daniel Bell, a Harvard sociologist, warns against unilinear vision of secularism.

Arguing that *cultural* change arises in a very different way and follows a very

different path than changes in *political institutions*, he applies the term

"secularization" to institutional changes leading to the "shrinking of the ecclesiastical

authority in the temporal realm,"[108] and he distinguishes this from "profanation",

which applies specifically to changes in culture. Only by making this distinction, he

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[106] *Ibid*, pp. 25-27

[107] Niyazi Berkes, pp. 5-8.

asserts, can one explain the recurrence at different times of religious beliefs, moods, and revivals, possibly contradicting the institutional "secularization." By taking into account these two different patterns of change; in other words, the double process at work, institutional change (secularization) and change in culture (profanation), one can clarify and further understand the socio-cultural changes that occurred in the late nineteenth century Middle-East.

In the Ottoman Empire, Abdul Hamid II increased secularity while – or actually in the aim of – struggling against profanation. He reduced the influence of the religious social body over public life in order to exert more direct control over the sacred and the religious aspects of his subjects' lives. In other words, the wish of Abdul Hamid II to retain a monopoly over symbolic discourses related to the sacred, led him to foster secularization.

As a matter of fact, the secularization of the institution system in general, and the central administration in particular, had already gone a long way when Abdul Hamid II rose to the throne in 1876. The reforms initiated by Mahmud II, and after him by the men of the Tanzimat, all together had excluded the clerics as an institutionalized group from the administrative machine. The ulema themselves had not resisted this trend, and the high ulema had even brought their symbolic blessing to it. On this issue, Uriel Heyd's classical article on "the Ottoman ulema and westernization in the time of Selim III and Mahmud II" is still illuminating: the author shows that high members of the ulema did not constitute a social body highly differentiated from that of the high statesmen, and they were committed to the defense of the Empire and the *raison d'état* more than to enforce religious

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108 Daniell Bell, "The Returned of the Sacred? The Argument on the Future of Religion." in D. Bell (ed.), *The Winding Passage* (New York: Basic Books, 1980) pp. 331-32.

orthodoxy.[109] Mahmud II's state apparatus furthermore secured the ulema's conciliating position by launching a vast eradication campaign of the heterodox *Bektashi* order throughout the empire, strongly present amongst the Janissaries. Repressing the *Bektashi* order was thus for the state a means to disempower a dangerous faction of the population, while associating more closely ulema's interests to that of the state thanks to the designation and suppression of a common enemy. This policy is precisely documented in Ahmet Djevdet Pasha's official historical account, written during the Hamidian era,[110] and was certainly a source of inspiration for the Sultan-Caliph.

The analysis of the early legitimating of secularization policy by the ulema can actually be developed further. It appears that the civil government, while marginalizing the ulema as a collective political power by creating new secular institutions, gave individual ulema very interesting promotion opportunities within the framework of the newly secularized institution. In 1853, when twenty-five *rushdiye* were opened, although teachers graduated from the new teachers' colleges, it was still an *âlim* (Muslim cleric, singular of ulema), Vehbi Molla, who became the director of *rushdiye* education at the Ministry of Public Instruction[111]. Thus, in the new increasingly secularized administration, many positions were still given to high ulema connected with the Porte. This ambivalent situation can be understood in the framework of the traditional Ottoman social order, partly influencing the new institutions: for centuries, while elite education had been a State matter, educating

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[109] "When Mehmed Arif, the liberal seyulislam, was asked by in the privy Council for a fetwa legalizing a proposed innovation, he is said to have replied to the minister, 'Sir, don't ask our opinion on everything. If we are not asked, we do not interfere with what you are doing'." See Uriel Heyd, "The Ottoman Ulema and Westernization in the Time of Selim III and Mahmut II", in Uriel Heyd (ed.), *Studies in Islamic History* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961); pp. 63-96.

[110] Ahmed Djevdet Pasha, *Tarih-i Cevdet* (Istanbul 1309 [1891]), 2 vols.

[111] Faik Reşit Unat, *Türkiye Eğitim Sisteminin Gelişmesine Tarihî bir Bakış*, Ankara: 1964, Millî Eğitim Başımevi; p. 43. See also Mardin, *Religion*, pp. 105-109.

the vast majority of the (Muslim) urban population was the ulema's responsibility. In the context of the vast and profound social changes introduced by Abdul Hamid II, social and cultural inertia can explain that the management of the new mass education institutions was still, at least partially, conferred to cooperative ulema.

Nevertheless, this integration of ulema notables in the Hamidian administrative structure contributed to change radically the position of this whole social group, and overall to weaken it. These individual ulema, in the context of rapid institutional changes, converted their share of the collective capital provided by the prestige of belonging to the traditional-learned elite, into individualized purely relational and political capital, in order to enter into the new modernized institutional fields and adapt to the new rules of the current social game. It can be said that the high ulema hierarchy entered in a strategic bargain: renunciation of their collective political power based on the traditional knowledge of Islam and religious legitimating of secularist policies undermining their own institution for new individual career opportunities. This very interesting self-deconstruction reminds us that a collective organization should not be reified or essentialized: they are after all made up of individuals, who may at any time give up collective action for other strategies outside the group if their own interest is better fulfilled this way, thus provoking an "organizational suicide" very much on the model of the Ottoman ulema.[112]

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[112] In her authoritative article about Ulema' attitudes towards Selim III and Mahmut II, like most historians, Uriel Heyd fails to take into account the individual strategies of the members of an institutionalized institution. Therefore she has to explain this *institutional suicide* by a collective "lack of perspicacity" which "was, no doubt, due to their unbounded confidence in the superiority and eternal strength of their religion" because of which "even those among them who were aware of the decline or religion and the power of the clergy in contemporary Europe failed to draw the logical conclusion that modernization might lead to a similar result" for them. She does not think of the possibility that compromising with the reforming state could have been, on the contrary, the result of a perfect lucidity from the part of individuals more concerned by their own personal status than that of their collective identity. Uriel Heyd, "The Ottoman 'Ulemâ and Westernization in the time of Selim III and Mahmud II", in *Studies in Islamic History*, U. Heyd (ed.), Jerusalem: Magnet Press; p. 96.

These developments intervened during the reign of Mahmud II and the Tanzimat era. Abdul Hamid II found an already much weakened ulema institution, under the control of the political power as a result of the individual compromising of the higher ulema. The formulation of a strong Islamic ideology centered exclusively on the symbolic figure of the caliph encouraged him to strengthen and accentuate this trend. Obedient, bureaucratic medium-ranking ulema were still instrumental in spreading the Hamidian political and religious doctrine throughout the Empire. But the appearance of a high number of modern, secular-educated graduates from the specialized higher educational institutions allowed him to stop the Tanzimat tradition of staffing the high positions of secular institutions with traditionally learned personnel. The high religious positions themselves were managed by the monarch like all other government positions, in an autocratic way depriving them of any political autonomy. The very concept of "high ulema" did not even have a real significance under his reign, since neither a strong social body was existent in the pre-modern era, nor influential "converted" ulema individuals à la Tanzimat existed any more. On the other hand, Abdul Hamid II left the low-ulema: madrese staff and students, in a desperate status of material decay.

Overall, the new Hamidian ideological Islamic stance was applied through practical re-enforced secularization of the institutions and weakening of the religious social body, the ulema. The secularization of the institutions served the "sacralization"[113] of power.

The efficiency of the Hamidian strategy depended as much on conscious changes and manipulation of symbols as on these practices of social engineering.

Cultural changes are best promoted by social groups when they are related to practical action strategies. It is in this sense that Abdul Hamid II's regime developed an ideology: a twofold domination strategy, based on interrelated cultural innovations on the one hand, and applied social engineering on the other hand.

In a world perspective, the Ottoman drive towards secularization through manipulation of the clergy, or at least a part of it, was not unique. The early secularization of the education actually often came not from a strong anti-clerical or secularist party, but from strategies developed within the established religious institution itself. The best parallel with the Ottoman secularization by the caliph's monopolization of the public sacredness is with Japan at the same time, as exposed by Randall Collins:

> In the Meiji, the imposition of State Shinto was in effect a compromise, window dressing for nearly total secularization of education and the effective separation of state and church. It elevated the flimsiest and least organized of Japanese religions into a cult devoted solely to the emperor ..., while cutting off the Confucian schools of the intellectuals, and the Buddhism of the masses, from influence over state cultural policy. Here again traditionalist conservatism did not prevent massive structural innovation, and even provided ideological cover. [114]

Shi'i Mainstream Doctrine: the Dominant Defensive Discourse of a Divided Cultural Elite

Regarding the formulation of cultural norms and the definition of moral values guiding day-to-day strategies by the dominant group, late nineteenth century Persia offers a very different, yet comparable, situation. The "official" (elite) culture gave premier place to shi'ism; and unlike the Ottoman Empire, no major secularization of the political institutions occurred. Plus, the Qajar central government, held a more

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[113] By "sacralization" we mean here the contrary of "profanation", i.e. the symbolic strengthening of religious culture.

marginal position in the institutional balance. These considerations led most studies of

nineteenth century Persia to conclude to an overwhelming cultural, if not political,

domination of the shi'i clergy, preventing any important social and cultural change.

A fruitful critical re-appraisal of this standpoint, however, has been engaged, and

illuminates some important dynamics on how an elite domination culture can be

constructed without a strong integrating center, and still become the means of

radical cultural and ideological innovations.

Mainstream Historiography: the Ulema's Almighty Independence as the Explanatory Factor of Qajar Persia's Social and Political History

Mainstream historiography on nineteenth century Iran emphasizes the very

limited extent of social and intellectual change in Persian society. Still very much

under the influence of the orientalist system of thought and analysis, Persian

historiography thus misses the cultural creativity that can be ascertained from the

intense social changes and contests occurring outside the governmental field. Any

critical re-appraisal of Persian cultural history must start with a preliminary account of

this mainstream position.

Summary of the Mainstream Historiography on Cultural Change in Qajar Persia

Mainstream historiography presents the overwhelming influence of the

conservative shi'i clergy as a main explanation of the absence of important social

and cultural change. In particular, it is argued that shi'i ulema had developed a

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[114] Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press., 1998), p. 369.

doctrine of the illegitimacy of secular government until the twelfth Imam, the *Mahdi*, returns to this world. The Safavid dynasty, which imposed shi'ism as the official state religion, had been able to claim a holy lineage and to control the clergy. But the relatively recent Qajar dynasty, installed only from the very end of the eighteenth century, deprived of a strong administrative machine comparable to the long-standing Ottoman central bureaucracy, could not compete with such a deep-rooted institution as the shi'i clergy. In this vision, the shi'i ulema were a direct opponent to the worldly government, preventing any attempt of the state to interfere with their central position for every aspect of social life. They were thus a major obstacle to cultural, social and political modernization: the combination of a weak central government organized with no political tradition but that of tribal warfare, and of a powerful conservative clergy present throughout the empire and controlling closely social life, accounts for the very limited range of social change in nineteenth Persia. Ulema's social influence was eventually decisive in opposing the state, organizing the popular opposition to the Qajar rulers' corruption and submission to imperialist policies.

We will now examine the construction of these two consensuses on Qajar history: first, the confrontational nature of the relationship between ulema and the state, and the subsequent emergence of two distinct but interdependent centers of legitimate authority, religious (*din*) and temporal (*dowlat*, the same Arabic word than the Ottoman *devlet*[115]); and second, the role of the conservative ulema in leading a nationalist movement against the state and its pro-western policies.

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[115] See *supra*, p. 4.

<u>The Ulema and the State</u>

Contemporary studies of the history of modern Iran have focused on the issue of

state-ulema relations, stressing their confrontational nature. Hamid Algar, one of the

leading historians of modern and contemporary Iran, wrote the chapter on "Religious

Forces in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth- Century Iran" in the *Cambridge History of Iran*,

published in 1991. It can be considered as a good example of the mainstream

literature on the place of ulema in analyzing cultural change in Qajar Persia, and is

worth being quoted under this quality:

> The reign of Muhammad Shah (1250/1834-1264/1848) and Nasir al-Din
> Shah (1264/1848-1313/1896) saw a persistence and deepening of the
> opposition between ulema and state. ... the reign of the second witnessed
> the beginnings of that process of governmental reforms, foreign
> encroachment and westernization which was to threaten the whole
> traditional context of ulema thought and activity with destruction. [*then
> follows an account of the struggle for the highest clerical position to
> conquer more social influence and their adverse attitude towards the
> Shah*] It is against this background of growing ulema power and
> assertiveness that the participation of the ulema in the Constitutional
> Revolution should be considered.
>
> The Qajar period was not only one of great political importance for the
> ulema, but one in which their participation in the daily affairs of society
> was marked, the literature flowing from their pens proliferated, and their
> institutions of learning flourished. The ulema operated a juridical system
> which in many areas competed with that of the state, and their courts
> were often preferred to the secular jurisdiction as swifter in operation and
> more just in decision. Their seals were affixed to vital documents of every
> day life such as marriage contracts and deeds of possession, and the
> activity of the bazaar was quite dependant on their services. The
> residence of the ulema and the mosques over which they presided often
> provided refuge for those in flight from the provincial cities at times of
> instability, particularly in the interval between reigns.[116]

In this vision, the motor of Persian history are the *mojtahed*, shi'i clerics authorized

to exercise *ejtehad*, the interpreting of the holy sources in the absence of the

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[116] Hamid Algar, "Religious Forces in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth- Century Iran", in Peter Avery
(ed.), pp. 715-716. As a matter of fact Hamid Algar had already exposed his thesis in his *Religion and
State in Iran, 1785-1906* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

occulted *Mahdi*. Algar explains the constant political and social control of the shi'i

mojtahed with a doctrinal shift that had occurred in the opening decades of the

nineteenth century, the victory of the *Usuli* mezheb, which advocated an active

social and political role of the ulema, considered as the only institution benefiting

religious legitimacy.

> It may be thought that this extensive role of the ulema in nineteenth-
> century Iran would not have been possible without the triumph of the *Usuli*
> over the *Akhbari*. Devoted to a doctrinal purism, a narrowly literal form of
> devotion to the Imams, the *Akhbari* were bound to be defeated by a
> school that offered a living form of direction to the community. It is no
> coincidence that the period of *Akhbari* dominance came when the
> identity of Iran as a unified Shi'i state was cast into question. The
> reaffirmation of that identity was due at least as much to the *Usuli* as to
> the Qajar dynasty.[117]

Relating doctrinal struggles to political evolutions is a first attempt at relating

religious developments to the underlying social conditions of cultural activity. But in

this analysis local ideas and actors are reified to the extent that the social identity of

ulema is never questioned. Who were the individual members of this seemingly

almighty social group? How were they selected, what was the material basis of their

spiritual activity? To which extent were the most subtle doctrinal debates understood

by lower levels of the ulema, and actually guided their actions in their everyday

interactions with their social environment? All these questions remain unanswered,

and indeed unasked, so that it could be argued that "the monarch was theoretically

bound, no less than his subjects, to submit to the authoritative guidance of a

mojtahed and in effect to make the state the executive branch of the ulema

authority."[118]

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[117] Algar, "Religious Forces", p. 716.

[118] Hamid Algar, "The Oppositional Role of the Ulema in Twentieth Century Iran", in N. R. Kiddie
(ed.), *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle-East since 1500* (Berkeley and
Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), p. 235.

Most scholars, especially the ones benefiting from the highest visibility, followed this narrowed vision of the role of religion in Qajar society as a confrontation between state and ulema. Ann K. S. Lambton warns us that "it is impossible to understand the attitude of the Persian people to social change without some consideration first of the Shi'i doctrine towards the holders of political power," which "limited social and political change."[119] Collective action sociology, at the same time as these historical publications, analyzed the difficulties of any organization to retain its internal consistency and to mobilize its members, even when benefiting from the material and social innovations of the twentieth century in the field of mass politics.[120] Yet in Lambton's framework the Iranian pre-modern "ulema" is candidly seen as a homogeneous collective actor following blindly like one man the sophisticated doctrines elaborated by a handful highly learned clerics, already dead or living remotely in holy cities with no clear common interest shared with the lower ulema. Nikki Keddie similarly argues that since the religious leaders acted "consistently with the preservation of their own power" against the Qajar's early attempts to secularize institutions they traditionally controlled, "the threat of Western conquest or Western inspired secularization is the key to explaining this surprising 'radical' role for a traditional religious class."[121]

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[119] Ann K. S. Lambton, "Social Change in Persia in the Nineteenth Century", in *Qajar Persia: Eleven Studies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 194.

[120] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1978), is maybe the most comprehensive theoretical study of collective action. For a more historical perspective, see Annie Kriegel, *Les Communistes Français* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1968), p. 129-213, for an illuminating study of the sophisticated social technologies used by a modern mass party in order to create organizational homogeneity, and they way they are challenged or retain efficiency during a major political crisis.

[121] N. R. Keddie (ed.), p. 227

<u>Social and Cultural Change Induced by the Ulema's Opposition to State-Sponsored Foreign Intervention</u>

Since the ulema, reportedly blessed by their superior legitimacy and subsequent popular support, "could frequently impose their will on a government"[122] and oppose any reformist bid, the social and political changes that actually occurred – and scholars must find explanations for the constitutional revolution of 1905-11 - must have come from outside Persia. Because of the institutional immobility provoked by ulema-state opposition, and given that anyway the "dominant feature" of Persia "since the fragmentation of the Abbasid empire" (tenth century) is "continuity in political and social life,"[123] the few changes occurring in the nineteenth century cannot be explained in any other way than a direct influence of foreign actors, the European powers.

The main argument, consistent with the previously exposed premises, is that the ulema's opposition "reflects ... clerical suspicion and distrust of Western influence and secularization."[124] The impact of western imperialism, especially English and Russian ones, account for the rise of the ulema in the defense of Islam and the nation. In assessing the ulema's role in the political struggles of the late nineteenth century, historians tend to depict them as initiators of the popular revolts against the shah's policies in the 1880s through the 1900s, engaging in a national struggle against the semi-colonized state, and through it, the foreign powers.

This analysis relies heavily on the most important primary source for the constitutional revolution, the *Tarikh-e Bidari-ye Iraniyan* (History of the awaking of the

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[122] *Ibid*, p. 213.
[123] Ann K. S. Lambton, p. 194.

Iranians) written by Mohammad Nazem-al-Islam Kermani,[125] which describes in detail how the higher ulema supported the constitutional movement from the start. But the analyses drawn from this source have generally marginalized the author's vibrant description of the decisive engagement of the unorthodox, lower echelons of the religious hierarchy.[126] The mainstream historiography on Qajar Persia is thus guilty of major methodological mistakes from both a historical and sociological point of view. The "heroic illusion"[127] of most historical studies give an exaggerated importance to the most visible figures (the Shah, the high ulema), and fail to take into account the structural complexity and contradictions present in such a loose body as the shi'i clergy and their consequences on social and cultural change.

Towards an Hypothesis on the Centrality of the Radical Shi'i Ulema in Cultural Change

Our own methodological choices actually give support to a critical approach to this historiography. In particular, since the Ottoman and Persian governments shared the political power with the other agents of the whole "institution community," this heavy emphasis on the conflicting duality of state/ulema becomes less relevant, and new perspectives on a more peaceful bargaining process can be thought of, in the

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[124] N. Calder, "Accommodation and Revolution in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence : Khomeni and the Classical Tradition," *Middle-eastern Studies* 18 (1982), p. 7.

[125] Nazem-al-Islam Kermani, *Tarikh-e Bidari-ye Iraniyan*, 3 vols. (Teheran: 1967, Bonyad Farhang-e Iran).

[126] See Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, pp. 5-6.

[127] "On appellera 'illusion héroïque' celle qui procède de l'idée que les périodes de crise politique s'opposent aux conjunctures routinières ou stables en ce qu'elles relevent davantage que ces dernières d'une analyse décisionnelle, analyse privilégiant le choix et, plus généralement, l'action des individus ou des groupes. La logique de cette illusion – et c'est ce en quoi elle représente un obstacle – conduit à une disqualification a priori de tout examen des processus de crise politique en termes de 'structures'." Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des Crises Politiques* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des

framework of a more or less consensual system linking the high ulema and lay politicians. Meanwhile, the case of the Ottoman ulema, divided between a high clergy supporting state's secularization on the one hand, and the lower ranks victims of the former move on the other hand, reminds us of the possible divisions within the clerical group itself, and has shown the shift between ideological discourses and applied strategies.

In the case of Iran, our hypothesis is that the situation was the exact contrary of that in the Ottoman Empire. In both polities, the higher ulema had a social position close to that of statesmen. But the contradiction between the secularizing policies of the Ottoman government and the Qajar's rather conservative political stance ushered in diametrically opposite results as far as the ulema's strategies are concerned. The Islamic idiom used in most social interactions, which served the higher Ottoman ulema to undermine their own institution for greater individual profit, was on the contrary instrumental for dissident clerics in Iran to contest the prevailing social and political order and the merging of the higher ulema with the state. The radical category of the lower ulema was in Iran the one social group developing social criticism and cultural reforms politics under the name of a return to "true" religion. Higher clerics, on the other hand, did not play a role of their own in the social and political struggle; they were merely a powerful symbolic position that all other actors: the Monarch, foreign consuls, and radical lower ulema tried to mobilize in their own interests.

In that sense, the consensual Islamic shi'i doctrine is proposed to be understood as a doctrinal protection for the two opposing components of the ulema, threatened otherwise with implosion by their worldly conflicts. The relationships with

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Sciences Politiques, 1986), p. 78-81. See also Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "La crise et l'historien", *Communications*, 25 (1976), p. 29.

other social groups was made especially important by the ulema's lack of cohesiveness and the impossibility for individual clerics to find any decisive support from their pairs, more often rivals than allies. Both the mainstream and radical ulema, even though they opposed each other, thus needed to keep their privileged clerical position towards the rest of the society. Thus for exactly opposite aims, they maintained an elite ideological discourse around shi'ism, concealing to their compatriots, and incidentally to some contemporary historians, the profound divisions that opposed them.

These internal struggles protected by a common ideological reference is best understood during political crises, when the actors' actual strategies are practiced with less disguise. We shall therefore now examine the major political crisis of the Tobacco Protest, in 1890-92, with both a critical perspective over historiography and the support of our methodological resources, in order to test our hypothesis concerning the marginal role of the higher ulema, and the crucial role played by radical religious dissidents.

The Tobacco Protest: Re Appraisal of the Political Role of the Persian Ulema

The massive protest that occurred in 1890-1892 against a governmental project to concede to a British *régie* the monopoly over domestic and export tobacco markets was a major political event of the late nineteenth century Iran. As all major political crises, it affected all the different social fields and actors. Therefore, all the main political forces present on the Persian political arena took position, moved and reacted according to their interests and means of action. We will presently provide a factual reminder of the event, before to analyzing more specifically the position, discourses and strategies of the higher ulema during the crisis, and the role of

religious dissidents in radicalizing the contestation and creating new doctrinal developments.[128]

The Tobacco Protest, A Major Political Crisis

As a methodological gateway towards Iranian politics, the Tobacco Protest has been studied extensively by historians. It is thus possible to present here a short summary of the event on the basis of the factual historiographic consensus.

The Shah conceded a complete monopoly over the production, sale and export of all Iranian tobacco to a British subject in March 1890. Later that year, *Akhtar*, a newspaper published in Istanbul by the Iranian community published a series of articles attacking the concession. The Persian residents in Istanbul were mainly traders, made familiar with modern communication means by their staying in Istanbul and worried by this concession. It was actually the first time a concession given to foreigners dealt with an economic activity already widely developed by Iranian businessmen and profiting many landholders, merchants, shopkeepers and exporters. Massive protest indeed began in the spring of 1891. Beginning in Shiraz, it spread throughout the country, with demonstrations where merchants and the ulema played an important role. In November 1891, the *mojtahed* of Isfahan initiated the boycott of tobacco, which was to be reportedly declared general a month later by Mirza Hasan Shirazi, the highest ranking cleric residing in Samara, Iraq. The boycott, supported also by Mirza Hasan Ashtiani, the *mojtahed* of Teheran, was general: even the Shah's wife and non-Muslims followed the clerics' opposition, supported now also by the Russian diplomats. The Shah first tried to reach a

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[128] The theoretical inspiration of the following analysis is merely provided by two major studies of collective action and political crisis: Charles Tilly, and Michel Dobry (unfortunately unavailable in English;

compromise by suppressing only the company's internal monopoly, but neither this nor physical repression succeeded to stop popular mobilization. The Shah eventually canceled the entire concession in early 1892.

The movement was the first successful mass protest in modern Iran, showing a coalition of ulema, modernist reformers, merchants, townspeople against the government. In particular, the outward position of the higher ulema, relayed with by telegraph, played an important role in framing and providing its meaning to the movement. The ulema were at the center of the process, and their messages, or supposed so, had momentous effects on how the other actors perceived the situation and made their own decisions. During such political crises the role of Islam as the universal language, acting as the only common idiom understood by every one, holding the potential to give a meaning to a confused situation that even non-Muslims would follow, was crucial. Therefore the positions and strategies of the higher ulema were a major factor in shaping the movement.

The Higher Ulema and the State

The historiographic debate begins when we start questioning the ulema's positions and strategies. Both Western authoritative studies of the régie, published almost simultaneously in 1965-66 by Ann Lambton[129] and Nikki Keddie,[130] argue that "the movement had demonstrated how the leading ulema, from their position of relative impunity, could mobilize both the resentment and the religious feelings of the

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see *infra*, pp. 136-38, for a synthesis of Dobry's contribution to the understanding of political crises).

[129] A. Lambton, "The Tobacco Regie: Prelude to Revolution," in *Studia Islamica* 23 (1965).

[130] N. R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-92* (London: Frank Cass, 1966).

masses."[131] In a more recent study, Feridun Adamiyat, on the basis of the same British documents completed by more Persian sources, recognizes the strategic contribution of the leading ulema Ashtiani and Shirazi, but insists they were not the leaders of the collective action, only the followers of the merchants and the crowd.[132] In fact, Persian archives neglected until then show that the ulema in Iran, and Shirazi himself, were at first unwilling to raise the banner of revolt, that many ulema refused to join it to the very end, and more important, that their participation depended on local politics and relations with other actors. The high ulema were somewhat powerless to control their own messages and symbolic participation in the movement. It appears that several groups were constructing, presenting what "had to be" the ulema's position, and were successful to impose this view on the demonstrators. Once such a social construction of the ulema's position was imposed, the ulema themselves were bound to it if they wanted to retain their social charisma and subsequent privileged position. The merchants, court factions opposed to the current government, radical lower echelons of the ulema wishing to challenge the mojtahed's supremacy, foreign diplomats, and to lesser extent liberal reformists, were the interested parties who participated in the struggle for constructing an ulema position consistent with their interest in opposing the state and the concession.

A good illustration of this dynamic is given by the decisive *fatwa* (juridical decision based on the application of religious law) that led to the generalization of the protest from a matter concerning solely merchants, to the mobilization of the whole "nation." The fatwa attributed to Shirazi, banning the consumption of tobacco, had in fact been forged by merchants, Qajar politicians opposed to the

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[131] *Ibid*, p. 133.

[132] Feridun Adamiyat, *Shuresh bar Emtiyaznama-ye Regi: Tahlil-e Siyasi* (Teheran: Payam, 1981).

government, and the pro-Russian minister of foreign affairs;[133] it was propagated in

Teheran by the radical ulema, despite ineffective official denials of the official

mojtahed of Teheran. The "leading" ulema were actually under the fear of popular

retribution, and they were even attacked or threatened on some occasions.

Because the ulema lacked direct physical resource – and even the modest Shah's

imperial guard was hardly a match for the demonstrators – they were forced to

avoid any direct confrontation with the mob, and did not take public position that

could arouse the crowd's anger. In these conditions, individual ulema's participation

to the movement appears as it really was: individual strategies for retaining a social

authority challenged by the street.

The higher ulema were actually quite worried by this course of action, and seem

to have been closer to the State than wishing to oppose it. Ashtiani reportedly

conceded to the Shah: "If I made peace before receiving all the guarantees I

demand, the people would put a cord around my neck and lead me before the

door of the Russian Legation to implore aid and protection."[134] In the meanwhile, in

his correspondence with both the Shah and the government, he kept on expressing

his belief in the state as the protector of religion. Only when the Shah accepted to

revoke the concession in its entirety could the ulema make use again of an extent of

tactical autonomy. Interestingly, Ashtiani then worked out to demobilize the crowd:

he immediately left the ban, withdrew his demands for the cancellation of all other

concessions granted to foreigners, and advised Shirazi to follow this course of

moderation.

The most visible *mojtahed* had been brought as "leaders" of the movement

largely against their will, and did not consciously oppose the state as it is often

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[133] *Ibid*, pp. 74-75.

thought, and rather seem to have shared the same concern with the Shah about the weakening of the two mutually dependent centers of authority: state and religion. The religious authority of the highest *mojtahed* was severely challenged from within their institution, and in as much as the Qajar shahs needed the goodwill of the ulema, so did the *mojtahed* need the physical support of the state. The Tobacco Protest thus should not be thought as a confrontation between a proto-nationalist clergy opposed as a whole against the corrupted state, but rather as a challenge from the discontented masses, including radical lower clerics, against the existing institution system where the state and higher clergy were indistinguishable in their susceptibility to court and foreign intrigues. There was no group homogeneity among the ulema: various, often conflicting views could be propagated by individual ulema competing with one another to impose upon the public their acquired opinions. In particular, the pressure of a portion of the lower ulema, more radical in their protest and successful in mobilizing mass protests, was decisive in banning any collective strategy from the higher ulema.

The Tobacco régie thus shows that the strategic symbolic resources related with the position of higher ulema was never used for a conscious group strategy. The ideological discourses originating from its ranks only denote individual strategies for keeping a socially and materially rewarding position, while they were brought in the political arena by forces they did not control. Some of the most important of such politicizing agents were the radical religious dissenters, whose game during the crisis we will now appraise in detail.

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[134] Cited in Keddie, *Religion*, p. 106-7.

<u>The Radical Religious Dissidents During the Tobacco Protest</u>

Clerics located at a lower rank than the chief *mojtahed*, holding radical political views, played a major role in structuring the protest movement, and in increasing the intensity of political confrontation. These religious radicals were composed of famous, long-standing opponents located in places of exile, mobilizing in Iran among lower clerics organized in efficient but informal networks, and eventually forcing the Iranian *mojtahed* to adopt an outward radical stance.

The mobilizing center and source of ideological resources for the religious radicals can be identified as two political opponents: Malkum Khan exiled in London, and Al-Afghani in Istanbul, working closely together and with other religious dissidents. They were actually the first to enunciate the claim for a greater ulema participation in Iranian politics, supported by the idea that the *mojtahed*'s authority, by divine right, overruled the shah's. In 1892, while no high-ranking cleric in Iran had ever developed a claim to political authority, Afghani in his disciples used this idea as an incentive for the quietest, apolitical religious leaders living in Iraq and Iran, trying to convince them to "assume their responsibilities as leaders of the religious community" by opposing the Shah and the régie. Malkum Khan elaborated the theoretical aspect of this theocratic claim in issues of his newspaper, *Qanun*, precisely during the crisis.[135]

These doctrinal debates were in fact expedient ideological tools aimed at forcing the implication of the Tehran *mojtahed* into the contestation, for attaining a

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[135] See Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 55. Nateq Homa, "Ruzname-ye Qanun: Pish Daramad-e Hokumet-e Islami 1890-1903", in *Dabira*, vol. 4, traces back the ideological origin of the late twentieth-century Islamic Republic in Malkum's writing. The author may be considered as overlooking the historical and social context of Malkum's writings, who did not call for such a theocracy; but this is also an interesting demonstration of the transferability of one's cultural production out of its original context, and the paradoxes of often unintended developments of the intellectuals' constructions

purely political goal: the rehearsal of the Qajar order. It should be kept in mind for that matter that the premier ideologue of the *mojtahed*'s supremacy, Malkum Khan, was an Armenian-born Muslim convert lay politician, whose public liberal, anti-clerical positions had forced to exile.[136] Al-Afghani, known as a charismatic champion of Islamic political unity against Western imperialism and despotic rulers, was not interested in theocracy either:[137] he actually instructed his disciples "to cut the head of religion but with the sword of religion."[138] The exiled dissidents believed that the high-ranking Persian ulema, if properly set up in an adequate ideological construction, could be the unwilling instruments of a larger popular unrest threatening the whole socio-religious order.

Al-Afghani had recently visited Iran, in 1886-87 and 1889-90. These two stays had allowed him to regroup his followers in Iran into a secret society, though officially adhering to his pan-Islamic ideal, in fact nationalist oriented, working to reverse the Shah and the Qajar monarchy. The members of this association, quite influential ulema in direct conflict with the established *mojtahed*, had remained in close contact with their leader in Istanbul. Through this underground extremist networks, the ideological and mobilizing center constituted by Malkum Khan and Al-Afghani effectively affected the course of events in Tehran. They helped in smuggling and distributing in Iran opposition newspapers and pamphlets printed abroad, and preached for the revolt in their mosques, radicalizing the urban middle-class mob of

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through partisan appropriation. See *infra*, p. 134-151, for a case-study of cultural fluidity during the 1876-78 political crisis in İstanbul.

[136] See *supra*, p. 36, for more details on Malkum Khan.

[137] See *infra*, p. 169-71, for more details on Al-Afghani.

[138] Cited in Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London, Frank Class: 1966), pp. 44-45.

the Tobacco protest.[139] Al-Afghani and Malkum Khan's ideologization of the protest, widely advertised in Tehran through their secret networks, used the social and commercial discontent to create a larger religious and nationalist movement. The radical elements present in Tehran were most decisive during the three-hour-long riots that erupted in Tehran on January 4, 1892: pamphlets posted on the walls and leaflets distributed in the streets threatened to shed the blood of the "tyrants," be they crowned or turbaned. The religious profile of the activists can be determined by the information we have on the two of them who were arrested: both were accused by the authorities to be Babi, heirs of the religious revolt of the mid-nineteenth century.[140] As noted previously, due to the lack of coercive force to oppose it, the unruly mob frightened both government officials and religious leaders, and imposed a radical line to the mojtahed. Ashtiani, fearing more extreme developments, thus entered in negotiations with the government to cancel the régie, while coopering to restore order in the capital.

As a conclusion of this study of the Tobacco Protest, three main points should be underlined. First, the higher echelons of the Persian ulema, holding religious authority and positions close to the political power, were highly visible and powerful symbolic resources, but not independent actors of the political crisis, and their vast social influence could be used by third parties. Radical religious dissidents, aiming at curving or suppressing the supremacy of the established ulema, were important agents of the political confrontation through invoking Islam and the ulema's responsibility. Finally, the doctrine of the *mojtahed*'s superiority was paradoxically the result of the very same political radicals who generally opposed the cooperative

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[139] See N. R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din 'al-Afghani': a Political Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 197-199.

[140] Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 56. On the Babi revolt, see *infra*, pp. 105-110.

tandem mainstream ulema-Qajar state. These outlines draw the general framework for the analysis of the evolution of the shi'i religious discourse in the late nineteenth century: a domination doctrine shared and used by two conflicting social groups, the established *mojtahed* and their radical dissidents.

The following sections will engage in more detailed analyses of the discourses of these segments of the Persian ulema. We will first examine the construction of the mainstream *mojtahed*'s defensive doctrine, along with the strong doctrinal opposition it was supposed to oppose. The radical cultural innovations brought in under religious garb by religious dissidents made possible by the lack of cohesiveness of the ulema, will be the focus of a later section.

The Iranian Mainstream Ulema's Doctrine

The Hamidian political elite made specific use of the old Islamic idiom to create a symbolic world where their domination would be justified. This discourse was also an ideology because it was closely linked with a set of action strategies actively applied over society, with the purpose to change it, to bring it in compliance with the Hamidian theoretical definition of the world. In terms of social dynamics, the Hamidian religious ideology was thus very close to that of the French secularized spirituality of the enlightenment basing Paris' assimilation policies, in spite of all the differences concerning the intellectual origins of these two official discourses, prophetic revelation versus discursive philosophy.

In Iran, the use of the religious idiom was dominated by a specific social group, the shi'i *mojtahed*. In Iran too, a certain theological construction was made up from the religious idiom to naturalize the ulema's position in the current institutional framework. But in Iran, unlike what happened in the Ottoman Empire, the social

group that benefited the most from symbolic violence, the mainstream ulema, was unable to use religious discourse as a basis for any sort of consistent, conscious policies, because it lacked an internal mobilization center recognized be the various clerics, all of them engaged instead in local political struggles and faction maneuvers. Actually, the collective action capacity of the ulema, quasi non-existent, could not go further than re-enforcing their loose discourse when it was frontally threatened, like during the Babi revolt. Their religious discourse, when compared with the Hamidian one, can be best described as "passive," for that it was not related to a project oriented towards changing society, it did not encompass practical means for political action. The Iranian elite religious culture was not ideological *per se* like in the Ottoman Empire.

The present section will be concerned with studying the social basis of the Iranian mainstream ulema's religious rhetoric. We shall se how the legacy of a century of political chaos and the nineteenth century-socio-economic conditions created a decentralized religious community, combining intellectual autonomy with internal divisions and material dependence on various external forces. These historical conditions allow the contextualizing of the "official" shi'i religious discourse, in all its vagueness and permeability to external agents.

The Legacy of a Century of Political Chaos and Warfare

Under the patronage of the Qajar tribe, nineteenth century Persia enjoyed a state of relative internal peace. But the social structures of Iran had nonetheless been deeply affected by the almost continuous state of warfare that had prevailed in the eighteenth century. After the Afghan armies brought down the Safavid dynasty (conquest of Isfahan in 1722), until the coronation of the first Qajar Shah in

1796, military competition prevailed between rival tribal forces for the conquest and the preservation of the throne[141]. Strife and anarchy meant that local powers organized themselves and social forces forcedly conquered autonomy from any form of institutionalized central authority, be it governmental or religious.

This historical legacy had two important, and partly contradictory, consequences on our concern, the position of Iranian ulema as cultural elite. First, the ulema imposed themselves in the day-to-day social interactions as the one institution other actors could rely on, rather than the government. Therefore continuous warfare and least civil disorder increased the ulema's overwhelming social presence and symbolic importance. Second, with the growing importance of local governments and the rupture of communications between the provincial centers, the hierarchical organization of the ulema was severely hampered. The provincial ulema, while becoming increasingly involved in local social and political interactions, became virtually independent of any form of central control.

This historical legacy caused the appearance of religious circles in the provinces that rarely coordinated their policies with the religious leaders in Iraq and Tehran. The socio-economic underlying of those religious peripherical actors made them generally dependant on non-religious social factors to an extant that prevented any strong collective interest to appear in the ulema as a whole, and therefore prevented any integration of the clerical institution at a nation-wide level.

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[141] P. Avery and alt (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran. Vol. 7, from Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 3-103.

The Socioeconomic Limitations to the Ulema's Authority

The financial independence of the clerics has indeed often been stressed as the economic factor explaining the alleged authority of the ulema, as constituting an effective counter-power against the state. Whereas the Ottoman ulema had been politically and financially bound to the government since the creation of the system, the powerful ulema created by the Safavid dynasty in Persia survived when its political sponsor was being smashed by the ravages of war. The economic spheres of the state, and of the religious leaders, it is argued, were independent from each other, allowing the ulema to constitute a competing center of power. Said Amir Arjomand, in his study *Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, holds the position that "the separation of political and hierocratic domination in nineteenth-century Iran was made possible by the financial autonomy of the hierocracy, and by its appropriation of extensive judiciary functions that were independent of state control."[142] A careful study, with the support of a comparative perspective with the Ottoman Empire, leads to a critical re-appraisal of this affirmation.

A comparison of the social context of the ulema's activity in the Ottoman and in the Persian empires partially confirms Arjomand and the other historians of Qajar Persia: the Persian ulema can be considered as a social sector different, separated from their state. While the Ottoman ulema, since the beginning of the Ottoman system, were bureaucratized by the political power as an administrative body whose material existence depended from public finance, the Persian ulema had no

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[142] Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam. Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 230-231. The following of Arjomand's discussion on this socio-political issue remains theoretical, based exclusively on textual interpretations of doctrinal books.

financial or organic link to the central state. The Ottoman ulema waited the granting of official positions by the central state administration, but the Persian clerics imposed their social and religious authority amongst local communities through their own means and policies. Whereas an early nineteenth-century Ottoman *kadi* (religious judge) was bound in his decisions to a jurisprudence guaranteed by his strict administrative hierarchy, going up to the Shey-ul-Islam designated by the Sultan, a contemporary Qajar mojtahed was in himself an autonomous source of religious and legal authority, free of any institutionalized administrative control. The comparison of the institutional situation of the Persian and Ottoman ulema shows that the mainstream historiography of the Persian ulema is thus relevant in pointing out the autonomy of Qajar clerics towards their state. Unlike its Ottoman neighbor, the Qajar state could not command the ulema, could not control its cultural and legal production.

But the fact that the ulema's sources of income were not state stipends, as in the Ottoman Empire, did not yet make them independent from the surrounding political conditions. The Persian ulema's organic autonomy from the state is not enough to sustain the argument that it constituted an independent power. Two sets of reasons undermined the "hieoracracy's" political authority: its lack of control over financial resources, and its lack of cohesiveness. Private estates, religious endowments, commercial investments, religious taxes, and followers' donations in cash and property were all sources of revenue available to the ulema that were almost never legally owned by the state. But the Qajar political system should not be seen as a modern state strictly defined in contractual terms, with a clear delimitation of its functions and endorsements, of private and public sectors. In Qajar Iran,

characterized by patrimonial politics,[143] the distribution of sources of income, even outside the state, was a very political matter, the focus of most of faction rivalry. In this context, no judiciary function or privilege could protect them from the crude coercive force exerted by political factions, be they notables or local members of the Qajar household. The various competing political actors could use the organization of social life in terms of client-patronage relationships to profit from these sources of income, without being the legal owners.

Local political elites considered as their unquestionable right the transfer trusts to whomever they considered relevant, through official proclamation or just, as was often the case, by the use of coercive means. Even from a "juridical" point of view, designating the Imam-e Jom'e (a city's most important preacher) was a prerogative of the political authorities, who used this right to favor their protégé, and gained clerical support in return. Qajar sources "provide ample evidence of the financial precariousness of individual ulema, and of their shaky hold over mosque and school endowment. Often Qajar princes and monarchs, provincial governors, and rich individuals would found mosques and madrese and entrust the administration to their loyal and favorite clerics."[144]

The Tehran or provincial ulema willing to maintain a high socio-religious authority were therefore condemned to enter in the logic of political and social competition along with the other local elites, be they political or commercial, in order to secure the social and financial resources necessary to their status. The dependence of the individual ulema upon socio-economic resources they did not have a firm hold on explains that individual ulema developed strategies according to their own

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[143] For background of the Persian elite's attitude towards "private property," see our discussion in introduction of the structure of Qajar state as a "combination of patriarchies under one suzerainty," supra, pp. 5-7, and footnotes 4 and 5.

particular interest, before to think of the collective interest of the whole ulema. They were indeed in a state of practical competition with one other to secure or retain these trusts. In this competition, even the few ulema who refused to bargain with political actors and relying solely on non-governmental sources of income, were not immune from financial hazards. Given their involvement in non-religious affairs, the consideration of a *mojtahed* in a local community did not depend only on his religious piety and scholarly reputation: the establishment and the maintaining of a classic patronage system, the support of followers and supporters, were key factors in being able to raise funds. High-ranking clerics, or those who aspired to be so, had to create a whole court system around them, including assistants, admirers, bodyguards and even private "armies."[145]

Religious life was necessarily political, and the ulema relied heavily on local social conditions for their symbolic position, when they did not become involved directly with the central government. The absence of an administrative organization of the ulema with a clear center, their dependence upon external socio-economic support, did not make it possible for the shi'i ulema to constitute a homogenous organized interested party in Persian politics. Institutional interest, as opposed to individual one, seldom determined clerical policies, and the religious hierarchy neither had a hold over the clerics nor could it protect them from the central government when the latter was displeased. Therefore we can characterize ulema's participation in the central political life as anarchic, volatile and realist.

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[144] Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 14.

[145] Beside Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 14-16, see Moojan Momen, *An introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 206-207.

Anarchic

"Anarchic", in the scientific literature on international relationships, designates the absence of central authority in inter-state relationships, which may go along the acceptance of a certain set of agreed rules by the actors.[146] According to this definition, the ulema were an anarchic institution. Its absence of bureaucratization, the individual independence of each cleric relying on his own resources, prevented the apparition of any hierarchical center. The so-called *marja'e a'lam* was supposed, in the official *Usuli* jurisprudence, to be the head of the ulema, but no practical procedure could be established to select the holder of this position.[147] Fierce rivalry between several candidates generally prevented a consensus to appear naturally in the ulema community. When the post was actually filled, the *marja'e a'lam* rarely exploited his title to press his opinion on lower clerics, who may not have followed him and then challenged his very weakly institutionalized position. The ulema should not be considered as an organized institution with a leadership, shared interests and collective action. The high-ranking ulema participated in politics on an individual basis and interacted largely with lay statesmen, Qajar notables, and increasingly foreign diplomats, according to their personal interests.

Volatile

Political alignments and alliances with non-religious politicians had often an ephemeral nature, centered on a short-term goal. For instance, during the ministry of

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[146] See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

the reformer statesman Mirza Hosein Khan Moshir al-Dowleh, a prominent *mojtahed*, Mirza Mohammad Saleh Arab, sided with the Qajar prince and governor of Isfahan, Masud Mirza Zell al-Sultan, against the Premier, before accepting gifts and switching to the latter's camp to intrigue against his former ally. The "faction playing," transient intrigues between political parties for the distribution of highly-rewarding positions, was the main motive for high ranking ulema to participate in Qajar politics.

Realist[148]

Again we borrow this notion for the field of the theories of international relationships, where it describes the only true rationale of the states' foreign policies as being the research of their interest, as opposed to the analysis of the world as an international society moved by the research of global well-being. When developing strategies and coalitions for the conquest of symbolic and social reward, individual ulema did not act under the influence of theoretical or ideological considerations as some historians assumed, nor or group long-term interests like for instance the Ottoman bureaucracy, but immediate efficiency. For this reason and because of the lack of cohesion, high-ranking religious leaders often supported, or were compelled to support, governmental policies. Whatever its theoretical legitimacy was, and however feeble its material presence, the Qajar household was still effectively the most important distributor of rewarding positions, and the most powerful coercive institution, the only one that could protect the mainstream ulema from the numerous movements of radical doctrinal reforms attempted along the nineteenth century.

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[147] See A. Amanat, "In Between the Madrasa and the Marketplace: The Designation of Clerical Leadership in Modern Shi'ism" in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany: SUNY Press ,1988), pp. 98-102.

[148] See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading: 1979, Addison Wesley.

The higher ulema navigated in court factions, supporting or opposing specific

government, but did not raise the standard of revolt against the state as a whole.

In spite of their institutional and financial autonomy from the central government,

the Qajar ulema were therefore unable to constitute a coherent center of power

competing with the state.

Tradition of Socio-Political Dissent: The Era of Doctrinal Challenges

At this stage, understanding the social and political context of the Persian higher

ulema requires a description of the doctrinal dissent that threatened it. The

nineteenth century shi'i order was under the pressing challenge of concurrent

religious systems, originating from its own ranks, but calling for a global re-

organization of the social, political and religious order. As we shall now see, these

different movements varied considerably, but all of them were based on a very

strong anti-clerical stance, a radical theological criticism of the leading shi'i clergy.[149]

The historical importance of these protests has often been totally dismissed by

historians, paying too much attention to those movements more easily traceable:

doctrinal debates of the higher mainstream shi'i clergy, and crises related to the

penetration of the Western capitalist system. Mainstream Persian historiography thus

neglects the depth and significance of the popular revolts predating foreign loans

and the expansion of foreign trade in the country. In his convincing and

documented study *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of

1905-1909*, Mangol Bayat reminds that:

> The chief problem of the conventional interpretation of the [Persian
> constitutionalist] revolution lies in the dating and tracing of the origins of
> the movement in the last decade or so of the nineteenth century, when a

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[149] See Bayat, *Mysticism*.

European presence was initially felt, and in the diagnosis of the social and political malaise of the time as a symptomatic reaction to European imperialism. ... It fails to recognize the depth and significance of the popular revolts that exploded prior to those seen in world headlines in the 1890s and early 1900s. Though popular unrest was expressed in a variety of forms and was a response to a multitude of causes, religion and religious institutional issues often lay at the core of the movements of revolt, providing both the target and the justification, the means as well as the ends, the root and the purpose itself.

While mainstream Persian shi'ism dominated Iranian pre-modern thought, it accommodated novel, sometimes radical, ideas and ideologies constructed and widely diffused by lower religious men revolting against the conservative views of the socio-cultural establishment.

A comparative perspective with the Ottoman Empire may again prove useful to better understand the dynamic of these religious revolts. In both empires, the early nineteenth century was a time of doubt of the traditional institutions. Amongst some educated circles as well as the whole population, a feeling of cultural stagnation or decline, in relative terms with the infidel Europe whose political and economic aggressiveness kept on increasing, called for changes. In the Ottoman Empire, the long-standing administrative machine concentrated the focus of attention as the strategic institution that could rejuvenate the Ottoman splendor. Intellectuals, reformist politicians or opponents, and even "conservative" opposition, framed their ideology and strategy around the question of administrative and governmental reforms.

Meanwhile, in Qajar Persia, at least in the first half of the nineteenth century, the one strategic institution was the clergy. More than the government, which was the prize of tribal warfare and had been controlled by four different dynasties in less than a century, the religious establishment could appear as the one focus of attention through which the social world could be changed and renewed. The Shi'i clergy had somehow united the various populations of Persia during the Safavid era, and had

emerged from the chaotic eighteenth century as the basic organizer of social life across most of the empire. In spite of all its lack of political cohesiveness, the shi'i clergy was in Persia what the State and its overwhelming administration was in the Ottoman Empire: the perceived lever of intellectual, social and political change.

Without entering into detailed doctrinal considerations, it will therefore be useful for our demonstration to characterize shortly the three main movements, with regard to their conceptions of the social world and of the leading shi'i clergy. First, the *Shaikhi* school funded by Shaikh Ahmad Ahsai (death 1826), continued a theological lineage of a rather philosophical and mystic approach to shi'ism, by asserting the supreme mystical leadership of one individual, the "perfect Shia", "Gate" to the Imam's knowledge. This movement called for a radical doctrinal reform, but was still politically and socially conservative, reinforcing the traditional elitist conception of knowledge and leadership.

The next important movement of radical doctrinal contestation was Babism. in 1844 a young Merchant from Shiraz, Mirza Ali Mohammad, known as the Bab, (1819-1850), founded a religious movement of revolt against the teaching and leadership of the high-ranking Shi'i ulema. It marked the beginning of radicalization and socialization of religious dissent. The movement transformed some of the ideas of different schools of Shi'i thought, considered unorthodox, into a concrete program of action against the dominant authorities, the mainstream ulema and the state. The strong secularist stance implicit in the Babi system, which aimed at destroying the clerical hierarchy and its power by declaring its position obsolete, or unlawful, and its function taken over by laymen, proved to be extremely appealing to those members of the religious institution who opposed the overwhelming authority of the mojtahed. After the death of the Bab, those who remained faithful to the militant spirit of

original Babism, known as *Azali* Babis (or simply *azali*), concealed their faith and mixed up with other religious dissidents and lay liberals.

But the majority of Babis followed the leadership of Baha'ullah, who transformed primitive Babism into a universal faith, opening a fourth era of prophetic revelation. The new religious doctrine consisted in an original and creative attempt of developing a millenarist, spiritual, yet evolutionary approach towards issues and problems of the modern era: secularism, constitutionalism, international cooperation, humanism, and gender equality.[150] Thus, similarities between Bahaism and the contemporary Young Ottoman's ideology are striking;[151] both represent a second stage of cultural contacts with the Western enlightenment world, when blind imports were replaced with synthetical efforts.

These socio-religious systems had a powerful appeal to large portions of the Persian populations, especially educated propertied middle-class and lower echelons of ulema, both social categories disadvantaged by the Qajar model of state - high ulema coalition. In particular, in the transition years between the reigns of Mohammad Shah and Nasir al-Din Shah(1848), large-scale popular revolts based on Babi radicalism represented a serious threat for the dominating institution community. Historians of Persian history, focusing on changes happening in the dominating institutions and the "modern" social movements such as the Tobacco Protest, tend generally to underestimate the importance of those bloody struggles which brought a state a civil war to the country, traumatized the dominating institutions, and affected deeply Persia's subsequent cultural and political life.

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[150] See Juan R. I. Cole, *Modernity and the Millenium, the Genesis of the Baha'I Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle-East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). The author provides interesting information and analyses with a rather intellectual focus, although the author's insistence on the western modernity of Bahaism tends occasionally to be detrimental to the scientific analysis.

[151] In fact Young Ottomans and Bahais reportedly came into contact and interacted intellectually during their respective exiles in Akka, Rhodes, and other Ottoman peripheries, in the 1870's. *Ibid*, p. 77.

The history of these mid-century-Babi revolts still has to be written, for little is

known of their precise dynamics. The little known seems to demonstrate the

importance of these uprisings, in both ideological and social perspectives[152], as

illustrates the following account a revolt in Mazandaran, northern Iran, occurring

during Amir Kabir's regency:

> At the time of Nasir al-Din Shah they gathered to constitute an army of
> 1200 and came to defend a fortified position located four *farsang*[153] south
> of Balafrauch. Once there they announced the destitution of the Qajar
> dynasty and the Bab's kingship, whom they had freed from jail. In a short
> time the almost entire population of this province adopted the new
> doctrine, the threat became evident, and the Persian government had to
> send 10 000 men to suppress them, exalted by the [unclear], the Babis
> held their position and resisted during nine months to all the attacks,
> realizing every day deadly counter-offensives which soon accounted for
> the loss of one third of the attacker's force, but re-enforcements arrived
> and the siege continued with a new vigor, and after having eaten up to
> their shoes' leather, the defenders listened to the propositions of
> compromise that had been offered them since the beginning of the
> confrontation. ... The Babis surrendered but just after having deposed their
> arms, they were butchered and very few succeeded to escape.[154]

The role of the state as guardian of the official faith appears without ambiguity in

this account. Massive coercive force finally suppressed the socio-political threat

represented by the doctrinal reforms. After the violent civil disorders marking the

beginning of the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah, they were no longer a force as political

programs of toppling the institutions. But radical activism, re-integrated in formal

compliance with the system, did not disappear. Azali Babis in particular, less

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[152] E.G. Browne, in his *Materials for the study of the Babi Religion* (Cambridge: 1918, Cambridge University Press), offers some documentation; but unsurprisingly the focus is on theological textual analysis and gives few hints on the social dynamisms of Babism. Moojan Momen, *The Babi and the Baha'i religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: G. Ronald, 1981), gathers interesting first-hand accounts.

[153] A farsang is generally understood as the distance made by an equipped donkey in one hour, between 4,6 and 6,4 kilometers.

[154] The author was a military advisor of the Persian Government and seemed to have been generally well informed of military issues and developments. Ferrier to Général de la Hitte, 21 fev 1850, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, C.P. Perse, Vol. 24, cited in Caroline Dispagne, *Les dépêches diplomatiques françaises concernant les religions bábíe et bahá'íe au temps du Báb et de Bahá'u'lláh: 1844 - 1892* (Maîtrise diss., Université de Paris IV, Paris-Sorbonne, 2001).

numerous than Bahais but more present in Persian political and social life, were to become some of the leaders of the secularist movement under a religious disguise, as a later section on political subversion will demonstrate.

Overall, dissents and revolts had two important consequences. First, the continuous adversarial stance originated within the religious institution and directed against its high-ranking leaders was eroding the base of clerical authority in society, and paved the way for more secular anti-*mojtahed* discourses. The evolution of the anti-*mojtahed* discourse at the end of the end of the nineteenth century was rooted in this tradition of doctrinal reforms; it will be studied in detail in a following section, focusing on resistance movements.

These radical doctrinal contestations also deeply affected the mainstream ulema. In spite of their inability to constitute a cohesive political force, the religious establishment reacted to these contest from within by developing a sophisticated religious rhetoric allowing them to retain their position, and to secure the state's or popular coercive support in order to oppose the continuous religious radical heterodoxy. The conditions that allowed the higher ulema to retain their dominant position will now be studied.

Domination of the Mainstream Shi'i Doctrine

The Iranian ulema were not an important collective political actor. They did not constitute a united group and were sensitive to mobilizations from external actors. Moreover, they were the target of radical dissents from their own institution. But whatever anarchic, volatile and realist they were in politics, the mainstream ulema were still a clearly identifiable group in Persian society, holding a privileged position, and retaining the legitimacy to build the dominant religious discourse, and to spread

it through their extensive presence in social interactions. The ulema were not in the position to construct a collective religious ideology since their applied worldly strategies often conflicted with each other. Nevertheless, or precisely because of this collective practical inconsistency, the ulema were at least respectful to a certain set of religious motifs and rules of behavior that justified their existence. This basic "theological set" defined their position in society, with the crucial support of the coercive state against religious revolts. The Persian mainstream ulema were neither a homogenous social category, nor a collective political actor, but a cultural community. The common point between the various Iranian ulema was their sharing a theological discourse encompassing a certain vision of the world, justifying the symbolic position they held in Persian society and especially their status as the guardians of Islam, the "universal language," in spite of all their strategic social and political divisions. Considering the historical and social context we have characterized so far, we will now briefly study the doctrinal construction of the dominant shi'i clergy, before to question the social strategies that it made possible for the anarchic, volatile and realist religious leaders.

On a theoretical level, there existed an elaborated theological construction justifying the position held by ulema in the nineteenth century Qajar Iran. The very existence of shi'ism was based on denying religious legitimacy to the Sunni Caliphs and their successors – up to Abdul Hamid II. Mainstream shi'ism then made a cleavage between various unorthodox branches and "twelver" shi'ism according to which the twelfth Imam, legitimate successor of the Prophet, source of the religious law, had occulted from this world. The main issue of shi'i doctrine, the space of intellectual attention, was thus focused on how to organize religious and social life in the Imam's absence. Although theological disputes over this question were constant;

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the domination of the *Usuli* doctrine, which brought a theological legitimacy to the increasing social influence of the ulema.[155] Although the concurrent mystic-oriented doctrines won partisans in the theological centers, *Usuli mojtahed* won greater social influence in the chaotic eighteenth century Persia through their expertise of practically oriented jurisprudence and religious law. In the Imam's absence, His opinion concerning social organization could be found by the practice of *ejtehad* (the effort exerted by a competent cleric to determine with certainty the Imam's opinion when it is not explicitly asserted in the holy sources). The *mojtahed* (*ulema* competent enough to practice *ejtehad*) were thus to lead the religious community for all practical social issues.

The organization of the ulema described by the *Usuli* mezheb consisted in a decentralized, collective leadership. Various doctrinal elements thus precisely justified the kind of social and political practices described above. A single *mojtahed* was not recognized as a legitimate source of *ejtehad*, but the *mojtahed*'s consensus, though theoretically disregarded as a proof in itself (since authority lies not in the person who reveals the Imam's opinion but in the opinion itself), came to be accepted as an evidence of the proof. Meanwhile, because nobody but the Imam can claim infallibility, *ekhtelaf*, or divergence of opinion in legal matters, was recognized, thus allowing a decentralization of leadership.[156] A *mojtahed*'s legal pronouncement could not be legally binding to individual followers, who were encouraged to choose their own source of *taqlid* (source of divine inspiration to be imitated): this doctrinal point naturalized even more the patronage system and

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[155] See also *supra*, p. 81.

[156] It should be noted on that subject that the Arabic word *ejtehad*, in philosophical terms, is used for the concept of individual freedom of choice.

constitution of local religious circles within a general, legitimizing doctrine. Overall the *Usuli* School of jurisprudence created a very complex theological system which practically made possible the appearance of collective though highly decentralized leadership of co-opted *mojtahed*, intellectually autonomous from the State, but deprived of collective organization. The *Usuli* discourse exactly matched the social reality of the Iranian mainstream ulema of the nineteenth century as a decentralized and conflicting group, unified only in its claim to the religious leadership of the community.

The *mojtahed*'s authority lied in a sophisticated religious discourse, integrating several contradictory elements in a balanced and consistent theological system that combined intellectual refinements with practical fluidity. Certainly it was a key resource for the social success of the *mojtahed* as a whole, in spite of their lack of real social and political unity. However, the intellectual and theological relative merits of the *Usuli* doctrine shall not be an explanatory factor enough: the mechanisms of imposition of this doctrine on the social body have to be questioned as well. On a practical level, what kind of social mechanisms did *Usuli* ulema rely on for assuring their domination of Persian cultural life in the nineteenth century?

Hamidian Hanefism was part of a whole ideological system that made of the religious discourse an action guide for the power structure: the monarch, the Hamidian intelligentsia, the bureaucratic machine. For these actors, the religious discourse, more important than being a nice intellectual construction, can be described as a "practical handbook of the right methods for saving a threatened empire." When compared with Hamidian ideology, nineteenth century shi'i doctrine appears much less rich as a political ideology. The political power was a subject always avoided in the doctrine, concerned solely with socio-religious power. Whereas the theory of the caliphate and shariat state gave Ottoman bureaucrats

the ideological means for writing such a rationalizing system of legal code as the

Mejelle,[157] in nineteenth century mainstream shi'i doctrine the notion of shar'iat state

remained an ideal, "visionary and apocalyptic,"[158] unattainable in any foreseeable

future. The political aspects of the religious law could not be implemented in the

absence of the Imam, and mainstream Imami jurisprudence did not develop into a

concrete theory of government. On a practical level, the action strategies related

with this doctrine were thus purely negative and passive. They were twofold: a status

of symbolic impunity in political intrigues, and a possibility to excommunicate and

physically suppress radical opponents.

The Imami doctrine created privileged conditions for the mainstream ulema to

enter into faction playing. It drew a clear distinction between the ulema, enjoying a

blessing religious legitimacy thanks to their spiritual proximity to the Imam, and the

state, a purely worldly contingency. In practice, this theoretical distinction was not

turned by higher ulema into a theory of the illegitimacy of the state. As seen

previously, the state effectively represented a necessary political and economic

underlying for individual ulema's social strategies. Therefore Imami jurisprudence, as it

was constructed by mainstream religious leaders, generally advocated

accommodation of de facto political power and recognized the worldly state as a

necessary part of the social order sanctioned by religion. The theological monopoly

of religious legitimacy the ulema held allowed them to enter into faction playing,

converting their spiritual holiness into much needed material resource while retaining

their symbolic identity as purely spiritual authorities. In that sense, shi'i discourse gave

the symbolic and practical means for individual ulema to enter into political intrigues

under a theological disguise.

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[157] See supra, pp. 55-56.

The second purely negative means of action linked with shi'i official doctrine was decisive for nineteenth century Persian cultural history. Social and political homogeneity of the *mojtahed* was all but possible in orthodox shi'ism, which actually justified internal divisions. But on the opposite, the pragmatic recognition and the subsequent support of the coercive sate, combined with the doctrinal monopoly of *ejtehad* and *ekhtelaf* (right to divergence of opinions) claimed by *mojtahed*, paved the way for the use of physical violence against any actor threatening the symbolic world created by the mainstream ulema and shared by the state's official. The duo made of the government and mainstream ulema never launched proselytism campaign over Persian population, but the accusation of *takfir* (unbeliever) was extensively exploited to designate individuals and groups who opposed the symbolic construction of the ulema, as a prelude to physical coercion by followers or by the state. Here the privileged links existing between *Usuli* ulema and their social and political environments, as compared to their doctrinal enemies, appears as a decisive resource for symbolic violence: the accusation of *takfir* alone remained without effect if not accompanied by state and/or popular coercive support. Although unable to achieve collective unity for developing group strategies, the mainstream shi'i ulema had the ideological ability – doctrinal and practical – to mobilize external physical violence against actors creating symbolic threats to their collective identity. After the violent repression of the Babi revolt, fear of *takfir* indeed became a major feature of cultural change politics, and deadlocked any far-reaching direct doctrinal reform of the official religion.

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[158] Calder, p. 7.

Thus shi'ism was the official religious discourse, but was not a political ideology in nineteenth century Persia.[159] Besides building a refined doctrine for their theological community, the shi'i ulema had no cultural claim, did not project to rebuild the whole society according to their own vision of the world. Moreover, as we have seen when studying the Tobacco Protest and the dynamics of political participation of Persian ulema, the Iranian clerics could be mobilized by external actors who wanted to act under the cover of their symbolic blessing. Divided by factional disputes and personal rivalry, benefiting from a certain level of individual autonomy, the *mojtahed* did not use their privileged status as interpreters and guardians of the holy law, their influence on the masses of the believers and to shape opinion public for their collective interest, did not have any global political program. Rival political factions could actually seek their individual support to use their mobilizing power according to their agenda. In that sense, the elite culture of the relatively politically backward Qajar Persia, paradoxically offered many more opportunities to cultural change than the strict ideological disciplining of the Hamidian state. The shi'i radicals, in particular, at the end of the nineteenth century, engaged in radical cultural reformism by outwardly using the official religious rhetoric.

Provisional Conclusion: The modernity and Fluidity of Religious Conservatism

Beyond these crucial differences, both Ottoman and Persian "official" elites produced a world vision that would naturalize their position, and would present their specific interests as the whole society's general interest. Both these orthodox

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[159] Here we understand the dangers of essentialized approaches towards religious discourses, since in other times Iranian shi'ism encompassed a practical guide for social and political radicalism: social and religious rebellion against the Sunni ruler during the Abbasid caliphate, utopian revolution in 1979. The contrast between these uses of shi'i doctrine for mobilization and revolution of those times, and the

discourses relied on a sacralized past but effectively created opportunities for social and cultural adaptation to the changing conditions of the nineteenth century. At the first level, they consisted in recycling old symbolic and intellectual resources to produce new cultural systems, self-consciously changing and adapting to new social and political conditions of their authors. At a wider level, they paved the way for technical practices. In the Ottoman case, the traditionalist religious discourse itself promoted centralized social and political modernization, whereas the non-ideological Persian shi'ism was a discourse available for an actor willing to justify in theology any political bid. Religious conservatism was a fruit of the impact of modernity in the Ottoman Empire and Persia. It opposed modernization only in symbolic terms, while actively contributing to shaping it.

Religious conservatism is a contradictory discourse. For all its claim to respect the purity of a one sacred holy past, it is also fluid. It is constructed by a small category of actors, according to their specific position in the social arena. The sacred past is for a large part a contemporary re-construction of their own, affected by the concrete needs and challenges they have to meet. Religious conservatism is a discourse of adaptation.

This leads us to a second important remark regarding the Ottoman and shi'i domination discourses. Both the specific hamidian and *Usuli* arrangements of Islamic motives, associated with concrete social mechanisms, allowed the Ottoman state and the mainstream shi'i clergy to adapt in order to maintain their domination. This assertion actually means that the dominant cultural elites themselves should not be seen as the sole sources of their symbolic domination. Their discourses were very

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purely defensive shi'ism of Qajar higher ulema, illustrates the primary importance of the social position and underlying of the producers of culture and doctrine.

much constructed out of their will, as reactions to threats originating from third actors, or as a recycling of an opportunity incidentally brought in by some other development. In simpler words, the dominant groups did not "dominate" so much. The official cultures of the late nineteenth-century were merely produced by Abdul Hamid II and shi'i high clerics. But we have seen in details that these two actors, hamidian intelligentsia and mainstream shi'i clergy, were actually predominantly concerned by defending themselves against rising and very concrete threats and challenges, using as they could the resources they found on their way.

Abdul Hamid II met the revivalist movements and a conservative agrarian middle-class calling for a greater state involvement; the whole Ottoman Muslim population and societies actually waited for the state to ensure its central role in ensuring the welfare and security of the community against new confusing adverse developments. Social construction by external factors of the shi'i mainstream doctrine is even more obvious: deprived of central authority, the higher ulema and *mojtahed* kept their privileged position only by respecting a specific religious doctrine reflecting their social and political features: lack of cohesiveness, dependence on factional struggles, need to find allies against the radical challenges of religious revolts. The violent religious troubles of the mid-nineteenth century, in particular, demonstrated the the mojtahed's common interests with, and dependence on the state, to maintain the *statu quo* against radical dissidents. The nineteenth century-dominant elites, the Hamidian intelligentsia and shi'i high clergy, have often been presented as the running factor of any change in their societies, in a kind of "oriental despot" paradigm conferring all powers to the most visible leader. We have seen that on the contrary, the dynamic of their dominations resulted for a large part from the structures of threats and opportunities other local actors imposed to them.

In that sense, the very assertive power and symbolic violence linked with those orthodox cultural constructions are an evidence of some degree of resistance. The politics of cultural change were oppositional in nature, especially in the context of nineteenth century Middle-East where the central elites had to negociate their domination with both a complex array of decentralized powers and new political competitors, namely the European powers. Therefore we shall now turn our focus of interest towards the oppositional dynamics of cultural change in the early modern Ottoman and Persian worlds.

CHAPTER III

RESISTANCE CULTURES AND IDEOLOGIES

Hamidian hanefized Islam and Shi'i doctrine were two domination discourses, created by elite to legitimate their domination. The founder of a scientific approach to legitimacy, Max Weber, argued that legitimacy discourses are not constructed by dominating actors to convince those who are dominated of the legitimacy of the inequalities, but for the sake of self-justification of their own dominant position. Later sociological researches as well as historical evidences refuted this assertion: the dominated, the oppressed, play an important role in shaping their own symbolic world. According to Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, religion can not be the "opium of the people:" whatever the belief is, the dominated one does not ignore his being under domination. The elite does not try to occult its domination, but on the contrary claims, explicates it, makes it plain as a part of the natural order of things. The system that makes possible for the elite to impose its domination over a society lies not in the hiding of the power relationship, but in that dual movement of cultural legitimating and practical efficiency. The belief naturalizing the elite's domination is accepted by the dominated ones, not by act of naiveté, but because it provides a global, cosmic rationale to their daily experiences and sufferings. Meanwile, this cultural construction is related to concrete social structures and practices of social exchanges which allow a smooth functioning of society and makes it possible for the individuals to accept the belief as really part of the natural order.

The combination of both the symbolic and the practical levels, creates the world in which dominated groups and individuals can determine their own strategies, accept their status of dominated as long as no better alternative exists.

We have seen in the previous section how Islam was exploited for articulating these two levels of a domination culture in the nineteenth century Middle-East, creating two different models of symbolic violence: the active Islamic ideology of Abdul Hamid II, and the passive, or defensive, shi'i doctrine of mainstream Iranian ulema. But so far we neglected to take into account the development of strategies from the dominated.

Michel Dobry, in his analysis of the cast system in India in Sorbonne lectures of political sociology, observed two main dynamics of modernity that undermined and de-structured the traditional organization of society along the cast divisions, legitimized by a religious discourse.

First, the appearance of "universal markets" where actors are accepted without consideration of their other personal features than the one criterion of this market. An obvious example is provided by the modern economic markets, where the agents are defined only according to their offer and demand of one good or service, whatever other social criteria may define them.[160] Beside, in the case of India, the electoral market was also of chief importance. The development of mass levy and eventually of universal conscription was another of these dynamics that had prevailing roles in our context. Overall, in a modernizing society, the individuals increasingly enter into social interactions where their symbolic identity is non-relevant.

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[160] For a historical analysis of this process in Europe, see Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol 3, eng. transl. (New-York: Harper & Row, 1982). Post-apartheid South Africa offers a good laboratory of this disintegrating effect of economic liberalism on institutionalized segregation of social groups along a "natural inequality" ideology. The emergence of a black African high bourgeoisie mixing with the richest Afrikaners is paralleled with the apparition of impoverished Afrikaners in what were previously pure black ghettos.

"The era of mass politics" is the term most preferred by historians to describe this

trend, although it goes far beyond the scope of politics.

The other important dynamic is the division of society into differentiated fields.

The fields are the social institutions related with those universal markets (for example,

the cultural field is the one social arena where actors produce and exchange

cultural goods and rewards).[161]

What were then the extant, and the consequences of the increasing inclusion of

individuals in social interactions disregarding their symbolic identity? To which extent

did the advent of modernity, far beyond the control of central elites, undermine the

latters' dominant religious discourses and made it possible for resistance discourses to

develop?

The Young Ottomans and the 1876 Crisis in Istanbul: Cultural and Political Confrontation

Selim Deringil's study of the Hamidian pan-Islamic ideology, which we have

partly followed in the precedent section, is illuminating for the understanding of the

heavy structure of the Ottoman cultural life during the reign of Abdul Hamid II.

Indeed, the author insists repeatedly on the similarities between the Ottoman

legitimation and those of other autocracies located outside of the then world power

center, Western Europe.

> There are many common themes linking the cult of emperor shared by
> Ottomans, Austrians, Russians and Japanese. The Russian Tsars from
> Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855) onwards tried to forge a direct link with their
> people by using a "synthesis of Russian myths" in which 'official Orthodoxy

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[161] For a historical survey of that process in Europe, see *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Charles Tilly (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). A more theoretical framework is exposed by N. Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

serv[ed] purely a state function". This was precisely the way official Islam was seen by Abdul Hamid II.[162]

Such an international perspective helps to locate the Ottoman cultural and political changes, in the framework of the struggle for peripheral polities against the West-European center's political and economic pressures exercised on them, echoed by increasing nationalist dynamics. But if a comparative perspective gives clues, it does not explain. It is not because other autocracies used increasingly proto-nationalist ideologies based on spiritual institutions, that the Hamidian regime did - indeed the Qajar monarch acts here as the exception that confirms the rule, and leads to question the internal sources of the hamidian ideology. In that sense, Selim Deringil's analysis, however interesting about the structure, remains static, in the sense that he does not offer a study of how the system he described came to be.

The understanding of the dynamics of cultural change in the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire goes beyond describing how the symbolic and material of the Hamidian world worked out all together. This section will present an effort to show how local conflicts, in a time of political and cultural fluidity - when structures lose their solidity and can be modified – ushered in the Hamidian specific version of Islamic ideologization.

Moral Crisis and Opposition Ideologies

The genesis of the Hamidian ideologization of Islam draws its origins from the social, political and cultural tensions created by the Tanzimat era. A state-centered approach reveals that the men of the Tanzimat had not taken an active stance towards cultural change. But the structural changes they introduced in the Ottoman

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[162] Deringil, p. 17. In this paragraph Deringil quotes Michal Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People. Studies in*

Empire, or which occurred spontaneously under their rule, were to change the conditions of cultural production anyway. Their modernization of education structures, linked with the relative democratization of the printed media, was to allow a strong resistance culture to appear, embodied in a new social elite, directly interested in radical political change.

The Social Carrier of the Resistance Culture: The Bureaucratic Component

The high bureaucracy created by Mahmud II was empowered to reform the institution system of the Empire. Beside technical reforms aimed at various external institutions, high bureaucrats changed their own institutional basis to stabilize their new power. Formal recruitment procedures, individual rights for life and patrimonial property, and informal co-optation practices for the most rewarding positions, allowed the new technocratic, culturally westernized, elite to create a permanent monopoly of the executive positions. Below, a legal-rational system filled the lower echelons, based on successful education and promotion during the course of governmental career, limited to lower levels though.

Therefore the administrative machine bore a serious contradiction within itself. It shaped a social body of secular, modernly learned bureaucrats whose position would teach them to value practical efficiency as a criterion of social value; in the meanwhile, the practices of the bureaucratic elite contradicted the basic values of the system, since the most rewarding positions were distributed on a purely patrimonial basis among a closed group of favored families. A contemporary German observer thus witnessed that:

Russian Myths (New Haven and London: 1961), p. 151.

> The world of Ottoman state servants constitutes a closed society ... The Bureaucracy is not anymore primarily recruited as in the earlier times from the entire Empire but much more from a narrower circle of civil service families ... The son of the government employee naturally steps again into the service of the state. Entrance and success are made easier through the connections of the father.[163]

Literate and acquainted with new, modern, ways of expression, this social group developed a strong resistance culture through poems and other forms of literary allegoric social criticisms.[164]

The Social Carrier of the Resistance Culture: The Ulema Component

In comparison to the lower bureaucrats, it is somehow difficult to appraise the social experiences of the lower ulema and the *softa*,[165] the students of religion aspiring for the position of *âlim*. The cultural practices they were familiar with, based on their traditional learning, were still pre-modern in the sense that the dominated categories could not participate equally into cultural life. Therefore, Uriel Heyd points out that although "many ulema in the lower ranks remained extremely hostile to European innovations," their opinions "cannot be adequately studied, since very few of them dared to express their views in writing."[166]

However, Şerif Mardin, for studying the later Tanzimat period, cites a pamphlet written by an anonymous *âlim*, expressing an interestingly clear opposition to the Tanzimat administration:

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[163] Murad Efendi [Franz von Warner] *Turkishe Skizzen*, Leipzig: 1878, Verlag der Durr'schen Buchhandlung for the 2nd edition; cited in Mardin, Genesis, p. 122.

[164] Mardin, *Genesis*, pp. 107-133.

[165] The *softa* pursued their studies over a long period of years, often living in very difficult conditions, unmarried, before to be able to obtain a remunerative post. In the 1830s and 1840s the total of medrese students in the capital was estimated at about five thousand by a British observer. Ch. White, *Sketches of Turkey, Three Years in Constantinople* (II, London: n.d., 1845), p. 217.

[166] Heyd's article focuses on the reigns of Selim III and Mahmut II, but her point remains relevant for the Tanzimat era. Uriel Heyd, *Ottoman ulema*, p. 68.

> These men are not clerks, but ignoramuses [textually not people who write but people who erase: *musannif değil, muharrif...*]. Only those that come from the ranks of the ulema deserve to be called clerks. An understanding of science ['*Ilm*': there is a play here on the word *âlim*, the singular of ulema, which textually means 'a student of science' but was the term used to describe 'a doctor of Islamic law'] is acquired only through years of study and exertion in the *madrese* [religious schools]. These men are just ordinary scribes. They are men whose drunken souls have seized on the present opportunity and been spellbound by the spoils afforded by the state. And the gold which they are allotted every month and which they steal whenever they find the opportunity, provides the glitter of their countenance which impresses millions of imbeciles[167]

This social critique is supposed to express, for Mardin, the "similar [to intermediary and lower bureaucrats] loss of status, ... caused by three developments: the secularization of the machinery of state, the secularization of the judiciary, and the secularization of education."[168] Obviously the lower ulema were uneasy with the institutional suicide decided by their leaders, since they did not have the chance to re-locate themselves in the new modernized institutional framework.[169]

But this purely materialist explanation seems not to be sufficient. The ulema was not a purely functional social body based on technical efficiency and material realizations like the bureaucrats; their vision of the world, or their place in it, was framed in more abstract, spiritual terms, which cannot be totally discarded to understand their culture of resistance. An anthropological approach of knowledge and social authority in the pre-modern-Ottoman Islamic society can give us clues to the cultural dimension of lower ulema's social unrest.[170]

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[167] Mehmet Kaplan, "Tanzîr-i Telemak" [İstanbul Universitesi] Edebiyat *Fakültesi Türk Dili ve Edebiyati Dergisi* (1948), III, 1-20; cited in Mardin, p. 128.

[168] Mardin, p. 127.

[169] See *supra*, pp. 75-7.

[170] The following discussion of the shift in social recognition of knowledge owes a great debt to Adeeb Khalid, especially his first chapter, "Knowledge and Society in the Nineteenth Century", pp. 20-44. See also Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus: 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

The ulema constituted a cultural elite, basing their social identity on: a certain vision of the world, a special position in this world, and a specific definition of the socially valued knowledge.

The traditional world in which the ulema evolved was a world of oral, interpersonal interactions, which constituted the basic social features of the whole pre-modern Ottoman social life. Knowledge and professional skills were acquired in face-to-face interactions, in the practical context of work, under the patronage of an older, experimented one.[171] The guilds were loose institutions, webs of interpersonal relations linked through a consciousness of a corporative interest, which organized this transmission of knowledge: the apprentice was subordinated to a master (*ustad*) according to a sacralized hierarchy, ensuring the preservation of knowledge. Ulema, were one of these institutions, with a somewhat particular function: their professional activity was to preserve, to control and to transmit the "universal language" of the whole system, Islam.

This formal function of the ulema gave them a peculiar position in the community of institutions: they commanded over the transformation of the Islamic idiom into a practical language applicable to the concrete social and political world. They thus could define the most valued knowledge, as the ones taught in their own corporative learning institutions: the *madrese*.

The *madrese* was thus the sites where officially valued knowledge, convertible into social authority in the traditional society, was defined. It is important to characterize this knowledge and its transmission to fully understand the dynamic of protest of the lower ulema throughout the nineteenth century. There, in a dialogic interaction with a recognized scholar, the student acquired mastery over a number

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[171] On the importance of face-to-face encounter for intellectual innovation, see Randall Collins.

of texts defined locally as the correct Islamic tradition, with an emphasis on practical juridical matters. Although this knowledge existed in written form, it was transmitted orally. As numerous scholars have noted, the Islamic pre-modern tradition of learning was marked with a profound distrust of the text to convey the author's intention. This could only be learned from the author himself, or through a chain of transmission going back to the author.[172] Beside the textual - but orally transmitted - knowledge, *madrese* education transmitted a certain code of conduct, *adab*, a code of conduct for using properly idioms and motifs while engaging in any social exchange. *Adab* made it possible, together with formal knowledge, to ascertain the claim for cultural domination in a society based on inter-personal, oral relations.

It is this whole symbolic and social construction which was directly threatened, systematically deconstructed, by the Tanzimat structural changes. Under the threat of military foreign domination of the whole Ottoman social world, the traditional madrese knowledge was suddenly depreciated as devoid of practical efficiency. A new cultural system was gradually constructed, built on principles radically different from that of the ulema: impersonal, mechanistic, based on the self-sufficient power of the written, merely based on eighteenth century Western enlightenment idiom.[173] The new cultural institutions, created beside madrese and the ulema for the legitimate goal to save the empire, thus undermined the ulema's symbolic universe. The above cited pamphlet is best understood if one reads it with the cultural categories specific to the ulema: the bureaucrats could not hold real knowledge and be more than simple "scribes" since they had "erased" the inter-personal lineages to charismatic sources of knowledge for acquiring an unjustified social reward.

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[172] See Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State, Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), in particular pp. 25-26, 92-94.

[173] See Mardin, *Religion*, pp. 8-15.

In this context one should not be surprised that lower ulema, who were socially and culturally marginalized by the reform movement, did not accept the rules of the game: their cultural opposition did not use the very cultural practices opposed to them such as printed press. Instead, their integration into informal, oral relations with their surroundings, their mastering of the "universal language" of the Ottoman Muslim society, gave them a more volatile but momentous mobilizing power that appeared more clearly during political crises. During the first "constitutional revolution," which we will study in detail below, the lower ulema were reportedly one of the main collective actors opposing the constitutionalists on a cultural basis, through pamphlets, meetings and agitation among the madrese students.[174]

The Tanzimat structural reforms, devoid of any ideological justification, made it possible for the parallel development of two resistance sub-cultures possible, embodied in two different social groups: the dominated bureaucrats and the ulema. These two used totally different means of expression and theoretical justification of their grievances.

However, a small group of individuals belonging to both categories, with a majority of bureaucrats though, realized the ideological potential of a theoretical merging of both discourses. The Young Ottomans, a group of political opponents to the men of the Tanzimat, were to construct a sophisticated synthesis of the symbolic capitals of both the dominated bureaucrat and the ulema.

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[174] Berkes, p. 236.

The Young Ottoman Thought, an Ideology?

Under the patronage of a rich member of the khedivial family of Egypt, a group of opponents belonging mainly to the dominated bureaucracy, but with a notable clerical participation and influence, was formed in Istanbul in the late 1860's, later on moving to Paris and then to London. From there, they spread their ideas to Ottoman elites through several publications such as HIn as much as the Young Ottomans did not constitute a centralized, coherent organization, their system of thought is full of ambiguities and contradictions, and was never exposed with the concision and the clarity of the Hamidian state ideology in propaganda booklets. The means of action required to implement the proposed changes were not agreed on and never explicated. Nevertheless, it is a crucial stage in the history of the politics of cultural reform in the nineteenth century Middle-East: it is the first time a group of activists elaborated a theoretical system aimed, not at explaining and legitimizing the existing power relationships, but on the contrary to change them. For the first time, a group of actors consciously used cultural and symbolic re-organization of the social world as a preliminary to concrete political action. Their struggle against the Tanzimat state, using both cultural reform and political conflict, determined the ideological conditions of the subsequent decades.[175]

As modern-educated, western-influenced political opponents of a technocratic dictatorship, the Young Ottomans not surprisingly based their ideology on political liberalism. They advocated a constitutionalist regime based on people's sovereignty.

But, sensitive to increasing European economic domination and infringements of Ottoman political sovereignty, they opposed the Tanzimat dynamic's reliance on

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[175] The following analysis relies mainly on Mardin, *Genesis*; and Berkes, pp. 201-252.

European powers to implement technical reforms, and blind copying of Western

institutions. The dualism created by institutional import of western techniques and

ideas without adapting to the Ottoman culture was accused of giving the impression

to both internal and external actors that the Muslim Ottoman culture was essentially

unable to find its own way to modernity. This in turn had two dangerous

consequences: it encouraged more foreign intervention, and undermined loyalty of

internal communities – in particular the *millet* – to the Ottoman system. Westernization

per se was not the object of criticism, but the marginalizing of the former cultural

system embedded in the ulema's resistance culture was condemned.

Instead of the classical Ottoman dualism characterized by a clear cut between

the state's secular administrative traditions and the ulema's Islamic identity, they

wished to confer to the Ottoman Empire a revived political personality, while

integrating modern political and technical innovations originating from Western

Europe.[176] Therefore they engaged in a very ambitious theoretical effort to reframe

Western political liberalism in the intellectual categories of the Ottoman Islamic

political culture, with the goal to establish a new spiritual link between the

government and its population. This new Ottoman patriotism, expressed with a

romantic emphasis remnant of contemporary nationalist movements, including those

which threatened the Empire, was to combine the two apparently contradictory

principles, Muslim cultural "nationalism" and a fusion of the different religious *Millets*,

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[176] See R. Collins, p. 369-374 for the account of the similar process in Meiji Japan, namely the second generation of intellectuals suddenly exposed to a rich foreign intellectual lineage. Interestingly enough for our topic, the author notes that "When we compare [Meiji Japan with] other periods of world history when the ideas from a deep intellectual lineage are imported into another region, the striking feature of Meiji Japan is how brief was the period of subservience to foreign imports. Such periods (early medieval China under Indian Buddhist imports, Renaissance Europe under the revival of classical antiquity) typically take some four to six generations before indigenous creativity takes off." (p. 372). The author then later on proposes an explanation that strikes by its applicability to our subject: "Buddhist philosophy, long since stagnant, suddenly revived... What had happened was that Japanese Buddhist sojourners in the West had discovered that they had something to offer European and

under the banner of Ottomanism. In this sense Young Ottoman thought sought an answer to the secessionist movements gaining influence amongst the non-Muslim subjects: all communities were to be united by the common love of a shared fatherland, and by a just and representative government.

The Ottomanization of political liberalism merely meant it being fused with a reconstructed Islamic cultural legacy. Integrating the religious discontent with the Tanzimat, Young Ottoman ideologues re-articulated the very nature of Islam to make it compatible in its essence with their contemporary world. Integrating Islamic idiom into modern cultural structures, they developed a twofold argument for merging political Islam with the liberal representative principle.

Whereas Western political philosophers needed to found their theory of the representative principle on dubious speculations on a supposed "natural law", Islam was the revealed "ultimate criterion of the truth". Therefore sheriat – very loosely approached for this matter - would give a strong moral basis to popular sovereignty, a definition of the abstract good which any legislator needs as a supreme principle for determining the good and bad.

Moreover, not only Islam would revitalize Western political liberalism, but constitutionalist representative government was actually the essence of the Islamic political thought. Constitutional government, implemented by a consensus (ijma) of the community (ümmet), was not an illegal innovation (bid'at), and the concrete import of some technical western forms of government was permitted since the provisions (ahkâm) of the sheriat were capable of alteration in accordance with the requirements of the time.

American sophisticates" (p. 450). See infra, pp. 166-176, for a general approach on the intellectual interactions in world metropolises.

On non-political matters, western civilization (*medeniyet*) was in general admired, but with a distinction between the "good" aspects of western civilization, beneficiary for the welfare of nations (such as industry, technology, economy, the press, and education) and the "bad" ones (those which had brought a violent economic and political penetration of the West in the Ottoman society, and the lack of morality in the relationships between men and women), which were to be replaced by sheriat principles. This demarcation, impossible to define with certainty, was to be mobilized again and again by intellectual heirs of the Young Ottomans to justify very different, often contradictory, cultural and political standpoints. In any case, their ideology contrasted with the undifferentiated admiration for anything western of the men of the Tanzimat, which made it difficult to legitimate the concrete mixing of systems and the refusal of political liberties.

Beside this attempt at an intellectual synthesis between Western liberal philosophy and Islamic idiom, to what extent was Young Ottomanism a political ideology? Discussing the differences between the religious discourses of respectively the Hamidian state and the Persian shi'i clergy, we have established that a political ideology was a discourse *plus* a practical means of action guiding the actors in the course of political struggle. Young Ottomanism, with all its theoretical refinement, was somehow limited in this matter. Nazım Kemal developed a practical thought, when he compared the different European constitutions, and determined that the French one (the Second Empire's – the least liberal actually of the constitutions he compared) suited the Ottoman Empire the most, and laid down the outlines of an Ottoman constitution and of the institutions needed to implement it. A juridical practical thought thus existed, but no practical political strategy, no theory of revolt or direct confrontation with the authorities. The Young Ottomans were pure cultural reformists: the only means they had for mobilizing for political change were their

pens. Unlike most political opponents in exile, no organization structure was created to give a material support for political action.

Such a purely cultural militant activism, devoid of concrete means of action, can still have a momentous effect on the political, and thus social, scene. Our hypothesis is that ideas are volatile in time of political fluidity. New political concepts can move very quickly during political confrontation, when all actors look for intellectual resources in order to, first, understand the confused situation, second, shape it according to their own will. The absence of material resource such as an organization or coercive force by those who generate political concepts is even an impetus to cultural creativity in time of crisis, since the authors of cultural reform are deprived of any control over the theoretical objects they have created.

This hypothesis of ideological innovation by exploitation of others' volatile ideas during political confrontations can be best verified, in the Ottoman context, during the crisis of 1876.

From Liberal to Autocratic Constitutionalism, 1876-78: Cultural Fluidity and Ideological Innovation in a Context of Political Confrontation

Political and Theoretical Background: the Symbolic Centrality of the Constitution

Political Background

The years 1876-78 saw one of the most serious crises the Ottoman Empire had ever experienced. In a deteriorated economic situation, a large-scale rebellion of Christian peasants developed in the Balkans, especially in Bulgaria. In this

inflammatory situation, Serbia declared war in June 1876. The Bulgarian rebels and Serbian army were no match for the reformed Ottoman army, but the local crisis had international repercussions. Politically isolated, threatened by pan-slavist Russia, the Ottoman Empire had to accept a conference in Istanbul in December of the same year to solve the so-called "Eastern Question."

Meanwhile, the internal scene evolved quickly, too. The most prominent men of the Tanzimat had died in 1871. The general moral crisis of the Empire, accentuated by the default in the payment of the external debt, and the provocative megalomania of Sultan Abdul Aziz, had created an atmosphere of crisis in Istanbul as well. In this general political chaos, a group of politicians influenced by the Young Ottoman ideology, led by the prominent reformer Midhat Pasha, carried out a *coup d'état* on 30 May 1876 and deposed the Sultan, with the expressed intention to promulgate a constitution and convoke a Parliament.

The following months saw bitter political struggle, with ambiguous results. Murat V, the sultan brought to the throne by the constitutionalists, deceived them and had anyway to be deposed for mental insanity, on 1 September 1876; whereas the new sultan replacing him, Abdul Hamid II, maneuvered adroitly between the different political factions to re-enforce his own hold of power. The Constitution, much more authoritarian than the initial project, was promulgated the day of the opening of the international conference. But the promulgation did not have the appeasing effect on the powers Midhat Pasha thought it would have, and Russia declared war on 24 April 1877. The parliament, urgently elected in a war-torn country, convened in March 1877. After a formative experience of parliamentary debates, the parliament was prorogated indefinitely by the Sultan on 14 February 1878, while the Russian army camped at the gate of Istanbul. After having signed a peace resolution that was an unmitigated disaster for the Ottomans, Abdul Hamid II

then began an autocratic reign, retaining many ideological elements from his constitutionalist enemies he had eventually crushed.

These few months of intense political crisis in Istanbul, with a tormented war background,[177] from May 1876 to February 1878, saw radical political and ideological transformations. A finer analysis of these dynamics should allow us to illuminate further the politics of ideological and cultural change in the specific condition of political crises.

Theoretical Background

Political crises have recently been the focus of interest for political sociologists. Originating from the comparative study of revolutions, they analyze the numerous political crises of the twentieth century to understand the dynamics of sudden structural changes, with an empirical emphasis on the spectacular and well-documented French, Italian, German, Russian and Iranian cases. Some results of these researches can prove fruitful for our present study.[178]

The first of these concepts is that of "political fluidity". In the usual situation (*conjoncture routinière*), social life is organized along several autonomous social sectors, each of them gathering social actors for the distribution of a defined social reward (political capital – power - in the political sector for example). These sectors are quite autonomous from each other: laws, esoteric languages, local cultures, specific issues make the interactions within a sector usually autonomous from what happens in the other sectors. During a political crisis, this autonomy decreases and

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[177] For an informative analysis of the politically destructing consequences of modern warfare, see the analyses of Eliot Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1873-1871* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

[178] This synthesis is based on Michel Dobry.

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tends to disappear: a move within a local area of the social system is immediately interrelated to all other positions. Thus the military situation on the front, because there was a political crisis, had immediate effects on the actual problems and opportunities of Istanbul politicians. Resources present in one sector only (Young Ottoman ideology was limited to a small circle of exiled opponents) could be mobilized out of their specific location and affect every one (in the autumn 1876 most public discussions in Istanbul were concerned with "constitutionalism," a concept largely unknown just a few months before).[179]

"Tactical uncertainty" (*incertitude structurelle*) is a second helpful sociological tool for the analysis of political crises. Because local issues of the usually autonomous fields get generalized, usual practices based on the sectors' autonomy lose their efficiency. Political action, tactical moves, become less certain. The situation is not easily understandable by the actors and tactical moves are thus more difficult to decide (Murat V seems to be a perfect example of an extreme victim of tactical uncertainty, but even Abdul Hamid II's tactical cautiousness during the crisis is ascertained).[180]

Finally we will use here the concept of "symbolic focus" (*saillance situationnelle*). Consequence of the tactical uncertainty, all the actors involved in the crisis, look for a clear powerful symbolic focus, meaningful in their culture, in order to understand what is happening and to have a lever of action. In 1876-78, the internal political struggle, involving many different actors and issues, came to focus on the question of the Constitution: the question of whether to promulgate it or not, and then of its content, became for all the actors the key of understanding the situation and of intervening.

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[179] Berkes, p. 236.

This last point actually gives a due importance to the cultural environment of the political crisis, and provides a first clue on how cultural structures are mobilized and changed rapidly in the context of a political crisis. With this analytical framework, we can now examine in more detail the dynamics of ideological innovation and cultural struggle during the first Constitutional Revolution. Our matter here is to see how a resistance ideology of political liberalism against bureaucratic tyranny, actually contributed *mutatis mutandis* to the foundation of a domination ideology for an absolute autocrat.

From Young Ottoman Liberal Constitutionalism to Hamidian Constitutional Autocracy

The Young Ottomans, through simply cultural activism, succeeded in mobilizing important statesmen for the constitutionalist cause: the renowned governor Midhat Pasha and the chief of the armed forces Suleyman Pasha. The Ottoman Empire was at a time of deep moral crisis: for the structural reasons linked to the contradictions of the Tanzimat, and because of the more immediate threat of the Balkan revolts. Therefore the intelligentsia and the politicians needed to inject the Ottoman polity with a new energy, a new guideline for action. In this context, the influence of the Young Ottoman thought appears to lie more in an ideological demand on behalf of the Ottoman political elites than in the intrinsic qualities of the Young Ottoman ideology. At the time of the coup d'état, given the ideological passivity of the Tanzimat system, Young Ottoman constitutionalism constituted the only intellectual construction claiming to link Ottoman identity with means of actions in the modern political world.

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[180] *Ibid*, p. 231.

For this reason, Young Ottomanism had a momentous agenda-setting influence: it gave every one a discourse, based on a common classical idiom, to analyze the situation and express one's position. This agenda-setting influence consisted in bringing constitutionalism as the main issue of political life, at a time when it seemed that new solutions had to be found; but the vagueness of the practical means of implementation and the absence of any influential political organization emanating from the ideologues, made it possible for opponents of Midhat to enter in the constitutionalist agenda, without yet accepting it as a concrete program. Thus, a week after Murat V's accession to the throne, religious, administrative and military dignitaries accepted Midhat's idea of a meeting to discuss "whether the introduction of a constitutional regime would be preferable or not," but fiercely opposed constitutionalism, arguing of its incompatibility with Islam. The success of the Young Ottoman thought was thus paradoxical: it imposed itself as the only ideology (a vision of the world linked with levers of action) available to all political actors, including the majority of which were actually opposed to its implementation. The latter thus used the categories and mental constructions of the Young Ottomans, to progressively compose an ideology of their own, opposed to Midhat's liberal constitutionalism.

Until September 1876, attention focused on whether to introduce a constitution or not. Obvious institutional interests drove the political notables, unwilling to deal with an unpredictable elected assembly, to their anti-constitutionalist stance. However, the confrontation was arranged in the one common language and analytical framework that Young Ottomans had given them: the compatibility, or not, of constitution with the essence of Islam. On July 15, in a Grand Council discussing again of the necessary reforms, a member of the high ulema supported Midhat by citing the Quran and the *hadith* (accounts of the Prophet's words and

acts – the other source of religious law in orthodox Sunni Islam) to show that Islam was compatible with constitutionalist rule; in fact, it had even enjoined it. But the majority of notables found it an easy way to answer that an elected assembly where non-Muslims would be present would by nature create legislation violating sheriat. In these times of crisis, because of the ideological nature of political confrontation, the reconstruction of what was the essence of Islam thus gained momentum, in a way quite similar to the intellectual reform of the Young Ottomans, but denying its main conclusion. The opposition seemed unsolvable.

In September, a new move was made to accommodate Young Ottoman's ideology to political conservatism, when Abdul Hamid II, who had exploited the constitutionalists' support to accede the throne, shifted the space of ideological attention from "whether to have a constitution or not?" to "what content for the constitution?" In a time of political deadlock fueled by ideological tension, the best position in the political arena is that of synthesis, giving pledges to both parties. Thus Abdul Hamid II retained the support of the authors of the coup's support since he was their only support; while to the high notables, his conservative general outfit acted as a guarantee. The general context of political crisis, the interference of Western diplomats, and ideological confusion favored Abdul Hamid II's position as the only actor who remained in contact with all the distinct factions. An historical perspective shows the tactical efficiency of the charismatic-synthetical strategy during severe political crises: Hitler in 1933, De Gaulle in 1958, Khomeyni in 1979, all imposed their individual charisma by exploiting ideological confusion to present themselves as the only figures offering an acceptable answer to rival,

uncompromising factions.[181] Gaining a universal support during the crisis, they successfully used this tactical ephemeral support in a time of fluidity of the structures, to appear as the only compromise possible, and eventually shaped political institutions and ideology with a combination of the elements available - in a new way that would confer them a structural unchallenged power. In other words, Abdul Hamid II's rule, like that of all charismatic rulers, would be based on the fact that he appeared as the most relevant provisionary solution in a situation of crisis, a situation he would exploit to change irreversibly the political and cultural structures.

Abdul Hamid II's charismatic strategy was thus based on his ability for compromise and for relevant synthesis in a context of ideological confrontation. The Young Ottoman ideological package was not rejected but re-organized, using the vagueness of some of its elements and the semantic fluidity of the time. A good example is given by the way the key-term *meshveret* (consulting body) was mobilized by the Young Ottomans, and then used during the political crisis, for creating the Hamidian charismatic compromise. Traditionally, *meshveret* referred to the practice of inviting advisors and specialized councils to participate in the political decision-making process. The Young Ottoman ideologue Namık Kemal had used the combined term *usul-u meshveret* to mean "constitutional regime," based on popular sovereignty. In the large convention held on September 26 1876, the pro-constitutionalist âlim Seyfeddin argued that *meshveret* was in accordance with Islam, using a number of hadith and Quranic injunctions to support his claim: "and consult with them upon the [conduct of] affairs" (*washâwir hum fi'l'amri*, Surah III, verse 159), "and consult together in kindness" (*wa'tamitû baynakum bi-ma'rûfin*,

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[181] Our conception of political charisma as situational, exposed for example by R. Theobald in "The Role of Charisma in the Development of Social Movements," *Archives de sciences socials des religions*, 49 (January-March 1980), p. 83-100, opposes a more classical one based on the personal qualities of

Surah LXV, verse 6).[182] This was a very classical example of deriving justification for a modern political strategy from traditional intellectual resources.

But this revival of Islam by the advocates of western liberalism, gave the ideological tools their opponents would use to finally defeat them. In the case of meshveret, we notice two symbolic resources anti-constitutionalists used to transfer the ideology to their advantage.

First, the verses quoted by Seyfeddin to demonstrate the Quranic injunction to representative democracy, were in fact parts of longer verses neither of which has any relevance to the form of government or to politics in general.[183] The practice of dissecting the Quran to legitimize an innovation, allowed the ulema to mobilize their own theological knowledge to oppose it if it was contrary to their interests, in consistency with their religious education and mastering of religious rhetoric. All along the crisis, the fact that the space of ideological attention focused on the question of compatibility of a constitutional regime with Islam, gave high clerics an unexpected political influence, valued again the old-fashioned madrese knowledge in political debates, and finally made of *meshveret* an ambiguous semantic resource both sides could use.

Moreover, this was even re-enforced, for the advantage of the Hamidian compromise, by the relationship between the term *meshveret* and a long-standing Ottoman state tradition of the use of consultative bodies. Even before the beginning of reforms, the central government had various means at its disposal for gathering information, opinion, and counsel. Mahmud II and subsequent reformers had then

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the charismatic leader, presented by A.R. Willner (ed.), *Charismatic Political Leadership: A Theory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[182] Berkes, pp. 232-234

[183] The verses deal with God's approval of the prophet's leniency towards deserters, and the just treatment of divorced women.

multiplied the counseling bodies, for the sole purpose of governing more

efficiently[184]: *meshveret* was part of the Ottoman political culture as a means for the

sovereign to increase its hold over society.

The Islamic holy text and the Ottoman political traditions, implicitly present in

every use of the term *meshveret*, contributed to the term's vagueness.

Abdul Hamid II could thus accept the rule of meshveret, without actually

compromising himself in a precise, well-defined political position. Overall,

Abdul Hamid II let the constitutionalists chart a constitution in the tense context of a

very intense political confrontation, using the pressures of events to change only

crucial technical details so that the promulgated constitution would ensure his

personal power.

In his position of arbiter between Tanzimat-like statesmen and liberal

constitutionalists, the new sultan was in a position to benefit from both sides' supports,

and thus change radically the ideological scene by merging whatever elements

were benefiting him. Borrowing the support of *meshveret* and the revival of Islam

from the liberals, combining it with the strong monarchical institution conservatives

wished to preserve against any form of representative body, he maneuvered adroitly

to progressively shape an ideological and institutional framework based on his figure.

The very last days before the international conference were crucial, when Midhat

Pasha insisted the constitution should be promulgated in order to get Western

Europe's support against Russia. Until the very end, Abdul Hamid II played one

faction against another to increase his personal authority and shape a constitution

giving him almighty powers. The last day before the conference, its very

promulgation was still questioned one last time by Djevdet Pasha in the Counsel of

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[184] See Roderic H. Davison, "The Advent of the Principle of Representation in the Government of

Ministers: Midhat Pasha, appointed premier three days earlier, was thus forced to accept an article giving the monarch unchecked right to send to exile any of his subjects. After the disastrous conference, military, diplomatic and financial troubles, the absence of actual Western support for a liberal Ottoman regime, which had been a decisive argument in the hands of Midhat Pasha, finished changing the regime born from a "constitutionalist revolution" into a "constitutional absolutism." Midhat Pasha was legally exiled, on the basis of the article he had opposed, even before the parliament convened.

The Reason for the Defeat of the Young Ottoman Ideology

The political defeat of Young Ottomanism reveals its lack of practical thoughts of action technologies. Let us use an extreme comparison to make our point understood. The Russian socialist exiles in Europe, while developing important theoretical innovations to accommodate nineteenth century "German" Marxism to early twentieth century-predominately rural Russia,[185] had linked these doctrinal efforts to a concrete "revolutionary science," and actually their organizational splits while in exile were often fought over the practical strategy to be applied more than on questions of principles. This practical guide for actions, which gave individual militants or followers a clear understanding on how to behave, made it possible for the tiny Bolshevik faction, in spite of very limited resources – no popular support, a handful of riflemen - to be efficient in the extremely confused situation of the 1917

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the Ottoman Empire," in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (ed.), pp. 93-108.

[185] Vladimir Illitch Oulianov "Lenin", *Imperialism, supreme stage of capitalism*, 1916. His genius was to adapt Marxist theory to the situation of backward countries, in an analytical framework still mobilized today.

autumn in Russia[186]. By comparison, the Young Ottomans lacked an interest for actual politics. At the time of the coup organized by Midhat, no concrete potential course of action existed other than the traditional reliance on the goodwill of a new monarch replacing the deposed one.

The Ottoman constitutionalist experience of 1877-78 remains a milestone in Middle-Eastern history, and represents an important development even in world perspective. It thus deserves to be carefully examined. Most political ideologies rely on a claim from the ideologues to act, not in their interest, but as spokesmen of a large community charged with spiritual value: the "people" (radicalism), the "proletariat" (bolshevism), the "nation" (nationalism), the "pure race" (national-socialism), the "true believers" (Islamism),... That these imagined communities actually existed and supported the ideologues is not the point, and indeed such vast categories can be nothing but symbolic fictions exploited by their self-proclaimed representatives. However, for political efficiency in time of political crisis, the imagined community can not remain a pure concept, and there is a need of some kind of a symbolic institutional link between the ideologues and their imagined community.

To pursue our comparison, the Bolsheviks were further away from the social realities of the Russian workers than the Young Ottomans were from the sufferings of the traditional cultural elites. But the Bolshevik action strategy means included the constitution of a simple institution charged with theoretical legitimacy, the soviets, which symbolically created the illusion of their representing the "proletariat," and even individual workers would come to believe they belonged to this imagined community and thus obey their local soviet on the basis that it had freed him from

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[186] See Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: 1990, Knopf).

"class exploitation." The mixing of refined theoretical construction and practical simple institutional techniques, encompassing limited but highly focused coercive force, therefore allowed a rapid mass mobilization by the Bolshevik party, despite its extreme material and human poverty.[187]

The parliament can be considered as a link between Midhat Pasha's faction and their community, the "Ottoman Nation." Actually, it was the very conviction of the constitutionalists that a body representing "the people" would create, by the sake of its single presence, a new irresistible political force, and would usher in a new political era. A manifestation of this faith in the idea of a parliament as a general remedy was the "Manifesto of the Muslim Patriots", issued anonymously in March, 1876. It argued that a consultative assembly might begin with limited powers, but "may eventually grow to be somewhat like the English parliament", representing all races and creeds in the empire, thus curing "financial irresponsibility, autocratic government, and European pressure and intervention."[188] The constitutionalist intelligentsia relied solely on the elected assembly, as a direct link to the Ottoman Nation, to constitute an effective political force in the political turmoil. The parliament that effectively gathered for almost a year (March 1877 - February 1878), as far as its internal functioning is concerned, was to fulfill their hopes. Despite the peculiarities of the improvised electoral law (based on the *vilayet* councils) and official pressures in the elections in many districts, the deputies who were chosen exhibited an amazing degree of independent thought and constructive criticism of government. The individual deputies only occasionally spoke as Christians or Muslims; in general, they

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[187] For a study of social history on 1917 in Russia developing demonstrating these points, see John L. H. Keep, *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1975).

[188] Published in *Stamboul*, June 2, 1876. Midhat Pasha is obviously suspected to be the principal author. See Roderic H. Davison, "The Advent", p. 106.

spoke as representatives of Ottoman interests, very much like in the Young

Ottomans' most optimistic political dreams.[189]

However, the sole Constitution and Parliament could not work as the

Constitutionalists' "soviets," practically linking them with their imagined community.

When Midhat Pasha, the driving power behind the 1876 Constitution, was arrested in

1877 by Sultan Abdul Hamid II, he emphatically warned the officials who came to

take him away that the "nation" (*millet*) would rebel when they learned of his

arrest.[190] But the nation did not materialize, neither to oppose his arrest, nor to defend

the parliament a year later. Actually no parliament could impose itself in modern

history if it did not enjoy the support of non-legal, social resources ensuring its physical

protection against reactionary actors: the *sans-culotte*, a politically active bourgeois

"class," the state machine itself, or armed secret societies. The Young Ottoman

faction, holding a theoretical and utopian conception of constitutionalism, missed to

realize that a parliament, as a purely spiritual link to the "people," lacked in itself,

without any intermediary anchored in the current social realities, the ability to bring in

the "people" as an effective political force. In practical terms, political

representation cannot be implemented without a strong underlying collective action

ability, which the constitutionalists totally missed and neglected, both in exile and in

Istanbul, before and after obtaining their legal victory of getting the constitution

promulgated. The dramatic failure of the constitutionalists to meet the realities of the

"nation" can be identified with the perspective offered by the only effective attempt

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[189] See Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), for the analyses of some debates.

[190] Karpat, *Politicization*, p. 119.

of a pro-constitutionalist collective action, Ali Suavi's stormy and failed coup shortly after the suspension of the parliament and constitution, on May 1878.[191]

Ali Suavi (1838-1878) was a radical cleric, traditionally educated, but who had developed sharp liberal ideas. He called for the coming of a new political order based on enlightenment, rule of law, and the necessary equality of view between the government and the people. He joined in 1867 the circle made by the Young Ottomans led by Namik Kemal in Paris, but split from them after they accepted financial assistance indirectly originating from the Ottoman official intelligentsia. Their theoretical goals were very close, but the financial dispute however revealed a deeper disagreement between Namik Kemal's reliance on government and state power, against Suavi's belief in direct mass action by the community. He became from then on largely isolated in his intellectual community, where he was denounced as an unstable trouble-maker. In fact, Suavi's radical activism ushered in the most serious consciously engineered threat to the nascent Hamidian despotism. On 20 May 1878, he gathered a few hundred refugees fleeing from the Balkan wars, and launched an unexpected attack on the Tchiragan Palace in order to free Murat V and bring him back to the throne in place of Abdul Hamid II. The plan failed and Suavi was killed in the melee.

It is difficult to gather enough information to judge the tactical feasibility of his enterprise, although it seems quite desperate. Anyway the importance of Suavi's ill-fated passage to action lies somewhere else than in his retrospective thin prospects of success. His political isolation amongst his own political faction along with his preference for effective collective action over purely intellectual change acts as a revelator of the failure of the first constitutionalist "revolution." Suavi appears actually

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[191] The following account relies on the opposite but complementary analyses made by Karpat,

to have benn the only pro-constitutionalist politician to have developed a tactical approach to the "people" along with liberal intellectual constructions. In the 1860s, he used his teaching position in a rushdiye and preaching at the *Yeshiloglu* Mosque in Filibe (nowadays Plovdiv in Bulgaria) to spread his political criticism of absolutism of backwardness of the ulema. He reportedly attained great popularity established a "communal organization", which led the government to dismiss him from his job for "instigating people to revolt". Interestingly enough, his followers in his coup attempt a decade later came precisely from this region, with the first accomplice being, for example, Hafiz Nuri, a former leading *âlim* in Filibe. The presence in Istanbul of his former followers from the Balkans was without doubt a providential opportunity for Suavi; but it is still very interesting to note that he could mobilize during the crisis the social network he had constituted years before, showing remarkable ability for consistent collective action over time and sense of tactical opportunism. His articles before, and even more, during the crisis, show a great concern for practical political efficiency. He wrote in a very simple, direct language, easily accessible to the masses unfamiliar with the elite Ottoman, using the printed popular media to reach as large as possible a political mobilization of the masses. The day before his coup, he published an article in *Basiret*, the then-leading newspaper,[192] calling the "people" to assemble the next day to hear a very important message and find a quick solution to the country's problems. Overall, it appears that Suavi used both his social charisma in face-to-face encounters, and the new popular media, to achieve effective collective action materializing his political convictions. The research for concrete revolutionary actions capable of sustaining a radical oppositional stance was unique in Ottoman history, and Suavi remained an isolated case until the early

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Politicization, p. 128-131; and Mardin, *Genesis*, pp. 360-384.

twentieth century. His contemporaries were actually scandalized. During a time of political crisis where Abdul Hamit II was resolved to use any political resource available to him for consolidating his position, Ali Suavi was the only opponent ready to resist him by any means, and to constitute the embryo of a practical, approach to the "people," giving this theoretical concept a social physical form thanks to effective mobilization and tactical opportunism. In this perspective, Ali Suavi appears as an ill-fated predecessor of the later religious and lay radical dissidents of the early twentieth century constitutional revolutions, constituting secret networks for materializing their theoretical doctrines into their political environment.

By contrast, the Young Ottomans' meaningful and powerful intellectual resources, unrelated to any effective political strategy, constituted an open "ideological *bazaar*" for all actors to develop their own discourse, rather than a theoretical basis for them to seize and keep power. Deprived of any tactical protection of their ideas, having not developed an organizational structure ready for coherent political action, the Young Ottomans then paradoxically contributed to the construction of an Islamic autocratic ideology. The Young Ottoman system of thought brought to the Ottoman political arena a whole new articulation of the old idiom for developing new political strategies that they could not control, and would usher in thirty years of Hamidian absolutism.

Cultural change appears to be full of irony. We had seen how religious conservatism had been the carrier of secularist modernization; we have just seen that brilliant liberal thinkers and reformers can be the unwilling ideologues and creators of political absolutism. Immaterial and versatile, ideas and cultural resources

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[192] See *supra* note 79 p. 61. *Basiret* was closed and his director exiled after the failed coup.

can prove indeed quite deceiving for their own authors. Not only in the central political arena, but in the dominated peripheries as well, cultural and ideological change occurs following political confrontations.

Resistance in the Power Interstices and the Modernization of Local Political Cultures

From the political struggle in Istanbul emerged the Hamidian regime. Focusing on power relationships and construction in the center of the Ottoman political power allows us to determine the genesis and the dynamic of this regime, its Islamic ideology, centralizing and secularizing strategies. To understand how those affected local social lives and culture, we need now to move our focus of interest to the peripheries, to rely on other types of resources: local and rural histories. The Syrian Hawran highland around Damascus is a case-study that can help us draw a more complete picture of the relationship between political, social and cultural changes. In particular, they illustrate how the political interstices created by the local dysfunctions of the Hamidian state were filled by local resistance cultures.

The Hawran, Case-Study of Local Resistance to the State Ideology

The severe financial and economic crisis striking the Ottoman Empire in the early 1870s, among other factors, had created the conditions for Abdul Hamid II to seize power. But it also impeded his regime's project of reengineering society by ottomanizing various communities of the empire.

The region at survey here, the Hawran[193], is a significant hinterland of Damascus, populated by Arabic-speaking cereal cultivators. For practical purposes, the Hawran can be divided into two areas, geographically and sociologically distinct. The plains were inhabited by Sunni wheat cultivators, under direct control of Damascus urban elites. Bedouin nomads dwelled there too, providing the Hawran with livestock, often functioning as harvest guards and grain transporters. The second area was made of mountains, inhabited by Druzes and Christians (mostly Greek Orthodox but including some Catholics as well). The Druze *shaykhs*, religious leaders and quasi-feudal chieftains, constituted leading local political forces, mobilizing the communities against the attempts of state and urban elites to control the area.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the traditional exchange pattern of resource autarchy among bedouin, mountaineers, and plainsfolk, was increasingly displaced by production for export. Following the bloody troubles of 1860, a cartel of state-sponsored damascene merchants appeared, acting as intermediaries between the world markets and the Hawranite peasants. These merchants had largely relied in the local government authorities for penetrating the hinterland's economy in spite of the presence of the quasi-feudal rural chieftains.

The late 1870s saw dramatic changes in the Hawran, linked to economic and political developments. The great depression and the opening of the Suez Canal provoked a slump in the market price and the progressive disintegration of the Syrian grain export economy.[194] The year 1879 was a turning point for another matter: in

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[193] The following account is based on Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, "Violence in Rural Syria in the 1880s and 1890s: State Centralization, Rural Integration, and the World Market," in Frahad Kazemi and John Waterbury (ed.), *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle-east* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991). The Hawran correspond to the today economically depressed area at the intersection of the Israeli, Syrian and Jordanian borders.

[194] For background information on the growing integration of the Ottoman agriculture in the world market, see Şevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820-1913: Trade, Investment and Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also Linda S. Schilger, "The Grain

that year, the Ottoman central government, trying to rationalize and centralize its

fiscal system, introduced direct taxation over the local depressed grain economy.

Economic depression and attempts from the state at controlling economic and

social life were both to increase in the next decades, producing new tensions

among local actors, and between them and the state.

Phase One: The Disruption of the Local Balance of Power (1879-1895)

During this period, the new adverse economic and political conditions fueled the

competition between the different local factions for the increasingly scarce

resources. Struggles and raids between rural factions became common, with often,

but not always, a confessional dynamic of opposition between the Sunni and the

Druze. The control of the hinterland by Damascus was uneasy. Small forces of

Ottoman troops occasionally participated in the skirmishes. But they were unable to

achieve decisive political result, mainly because of their remaining involved in a

changing alliance system and because of lack of financial means that limited such

initiatives, or interrupted them half-way.

In spite of the announced implementation of direct taxation, in effect a

coherent taxation system could not be implemented. At first, the government

vacillated between traditional tribal, war-mongering, tax-farmers, a second echelon

of intermediaries, and direct taxation. Between 1887 and 1889, the total

disappearance of the profit margin in grain trade worsened the situation. Factional

violence intensified, all commercial economy was disrupted, so that no taxation

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Economy of Late Ottoman Syria and the Issue of Large-scale Commercialization," in *Large-scale Commercial Agriculture in the Ottoman Empire*, Faruk Tabak and Çağlar Keyder (ed.) (New York: SUNY University Press, 1991).

system could be applied, except for extortion by the use of direct physical violence. The provincial government was almost totally devoid of material means.

The government then launched a new comprehensive policy of trying to establish direct relations with the peasantry, without the urban or feudal intermediaries. In 1890, a peasant radical "communard" popular revolt had tried to create a peasant power by gaining freedom from both urban merchants and feudal chieftains. The movement was finally suppressed by Ottoman troops, but discarding the merchant and chieftain intermediaries for the peasants became the consistent Ottoman policy for the next few years. The first and most important step was realized in 1893, through a large-scale attempt at registering the lands to establish further privatization and determine fiscal assets. But the shaykhs' resistance and the use by the local government of indiscriminate violence against them, the peasants' refusal to pay direct taxes in a context of economic depression, tended to re-enforce communal solidarity between the peasants and their shaykh. This trend was even strengthened by the misuse of symbolic policies and corruption of the officials on the spot.

Finally, as a result of adverse economic conditions and political mismanagements, the policy of establishing a direct relationship with the peasants was a failure. The peasantry and feudal religious leaders were brought together. Damascus elites, excluded from the rural life by this policy, started resisting the state on fiscal and political matters. The empty treasury made the provincial government inconsistent and unable to perform its basic mission to assure protection against various raids and organized banditry. The social organization of the political economy of the Hawran had been disintegrated by both political and economic developments, and the Hamidian state did not have the means to impose the most basic elements of its policy.

Phase Two: Confrontation between the State and the Peasantry (1895-1900)

Faced with the virtual absence of provincial government, Istanbul invested in the region to re-affirm its rule. A new administrative sub-unit, a *sanjak*, was created in the remote south and its positions filled with local notables. A new railway and several more military bases were constructed.

Meanwhile, facing worsened economic situation and unable to meet the taxation demands of the provincial government or the contractual commitments to the urban merchants, Sunni plain cultivators started to abandon cultivation and to migrate to the remote hills inhabited by the Druze and the Christian populations. They could seek refuge there from both the government and the agricultural contractors.

By 1895 it became clear to the Ottoman officials that the policy of relying directly on the peasants did not work out, while the alienation of urban merchants, whose commercial interests had been supported during the Tanzimat, proved increasingly harmful. Istanbul decided on a shift of policy. In early 1895, the Ottomans, confident in their new military logistics, decided to launch a vast military campaign to break peasants' resistance and regain confidence from the urban population. Symbolizing both Hamidian ideological underlying and alliance with urban notables, a fatwa was launched by Damascus ulema against the Druze, presented as sole responsible the peasants' resistance.

A force of 30,000 soldiers was sent by train to the mountainous area. But due to a mysterious plague (had the water in the railway's water towers been poisoned?) and the endemic quasi-nonexistence of budget, the authorities had to interrupt the campaign before it had even started. Conciliatory deals were made by the Ottomans with the Druze Shaykhs. However, during the latter's stay in Damascus, they were violently attacked by unleashed, pro-governmental urban Sunni factions,

who disregarded completely the guarantees given by the government to the Druze. As a result, inter-communal strife developed in the region, while the Druze staying in the hilly areas mobilized support from Druze communities further west.

In this context a new government campaign was launched in June 1895. This time ephemeral but violent operations were actually conducted against the Druzes. The Ottoman forces could display their military superiority and exercised some retaliation on Druze communities. However they were unable to defeat the Druze rebels, still defending in the hills. When at the end of the year the government disbanded most of the force for lack of fund, panic spread in Damascus. The notables organized their own urban militia for fear of a Druze counter-offensive, which did not materialize.

During the year 1896, the situation remained calm but tense. Druze rebels holding the hills proclaimed to oppose solely the Ottoman rule and to protect all grain merchants and peasants seeking refuge there, while the Sunni peasants still present in the plains bore a very heavy fiscal burden, unable to resist this time. In 1897, before the harvest, they massively migrated into the hills to constitute an inter-communal peasant resistance, organized around the Druze shaykh, against the coalition of the Damascus elites and the Ottoman authorities.

Facing this radical situation, the central government finally renounced its centralization schemes. It released the central government of instituting direct taxation, while the economic situation was improving and would allow traditional tax-farming to regain some efficiency. By order of the sultan himself, in April 1900, the Ottoman authorities capitulated totally: they offered the rebels a general amnesty, dropped demands for past arrears, and recognized the Druze shaykhs by giving them rewarding positions in the administration. The new Ottoman governor even

held a banquet welcoming back the returning Druze shaykhs who had been sent

into exile during various confrontations.

Appraisal of the Cultural Changes in a Conflicting Rural World

Limits to the Ottomanization of the Rural Peripheries

This account of twenty years of conflict and resistance calls several observations

and analyses on the dynamics of cultural change in the rural areas of the Ottoman

Empire, on the resistance cultures created by the practical malfunctions of the

Hamidian system.

A first question to be asked is the typicality of the case under study. Nothing tells

us that the centralization drive provoked such strong reactions in other provinces. The

situation in the Hawran was indeed quite peculiar, given the specific religious and

geographical configuration. Yet, a cautious but general analysis based on the

Hawran case can be justified on two grounds. The first one is theoretical. The

question of the typicality of a particular situation is a recurrent issue in the social

sciences, and has been already raised in history, in particular with the micro-histories

such as Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou*.[195] Influenced by social anthropology, this field of

history insists on focusing on local issues and situations as a methodological "social

microscope"[196] of a broader reality. In this perspective, the exceptional character of

a situation may even increase its relevance as an object of study, for that it shows

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[195] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou : Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324* ,
eng. transl. Barbara Bray (London: Penguin Books, 1978)

social mechanisms failing to work: open conflicts may reveal social tensions which are present at all time but only visible on occasion.

So far for the theoretical justification; in our case, the interest of the Syrian case relies also in the fact that evidence show comparable situations in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, especially on the peripheries. The following extract from the *Bitlis Gazette* of October 17, 1889, describes a similar situation in Eastern Anatolia, making explicit the contrast between the Hamidian imagined world and the social reality:

> When Sassoun Caza is spoken of, most of our readers would doubtless think of a well-ordered place where the inhabitants are blessed with the advantages of civilization.
>
> In respect of this caza, though it is hoped that under the Sultan's auspices the order, tranquility, and civilization imagined by our readers, who are ignorant of local conditions, will be established – yet its present condition is entirely wanting in such order and civilization.
>
> ... If, on account of its mountainous situation and remoteness, Sassoun has remained quite obscured from the rays of careful attention, inspection, and reform, no less that which depends on the light of prosperity – education – entirely failed to penetrate.[197]

This article shows at least a partial symbolic success of the Hamidian regime; the readers of the *Bitlis Gazette* are believed by the author to have perfectly integrated the official discourse, in which the empire benefits from "order, tranquility and civilization." But our journalist, seemingly very disappointed, had to disappoint his reader. The Hamidian world *was* a fiction – for Sassoun Caza. As it was for the Hawran. And so many other rural peripheries....

When speaking of cultural developments, the focus is generally put on ideas. The political and social context, as we have seen, is equally important. The Hawran case-study shows us that the economic situation can also have far-reaching

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[196] Peter Burke, *History and Social Change* (Cornell University Press: New York, 1992), p. 38. For further discussion, illuminating although somehow outdated, see also K. Thomas, "History and anthropology," *Past and Present* 24 (1963), pp. 3-24.

[197] *Bitlis Gazette*, on 17 October 1889, reproduced in Şerif Mardin, *Religion*, appendix, p. 253.

consequences. The reign of Abdul Hamid II is crucial in this perspective. As the development of the merchant cartel in the 1860s illustrates, Tanzimat reforms have already had an impact on the social organization. But still along a traditional Ottoman pattern of regional political management, decentralized: the provincial government co-opted the local elites whose interests were the closest to that of the state, avoiding direct intervention in the local social games. Such a rule was flexible and limited the visibility of the state's presence, as well as its control over local issues.

On the contrary, the strong drive towards centralization, made of the state a direct social partner, favorable or not, to every individual in the community. According to the previous account, it is obvious that there is no individual life in the Hawran between 1880 and 1900 which was not affected by the government's actions. This was an absolute new trend: the Hawran was in state that we may call "political virginity," the local community was not involved at large in global, permanent political game. Centralization is, in this perspective, an act of sudden politicization of the local life, a move that will integrate local life into the world of greater politics. Again the concept of fluidity is useful for understanding this move: the specific, particular, accidental conditions in which this political integration happens, in which "political virginity" is taken away, shapes on a long-term basis the new political culture of the community.

In this sense, the apparent semantic rigor of such a word as "centralization," although a relevant concept in the Hawran case, is a very dangerous conceptual trap since it obliterates the importance of the peculiar conditions in which it was implemented, the very different patterns it may take. Mass political integration of the local community created a social and political crisis, not because of centralization itself, which was sometimes desired by some local actors (the peasants' commune revolting against the shaykhs in 1890 called for state intervention), but because of its

concrete conditions. These were short-lived problems, such as a temporary economic crisis disrupting the whole grain economy and thus intensifying social tensions. But such short-lived problems linked with the emergence of a new institution, such as the centralized Ottoman state, came to finally determine the attitude of the local community towards the new institution on a permanent basis. The simultaneity of the great depression and the drive to centralization was an accident, but because centralization entails permanent structural changes, the effect of the tensions then created were to shape durably local political culture, even once prosperity eventually came back. This is why, similarly as for the political struggle in Istanbul, the immaterial aspect of the state ideology cannot, analyzed alone, account for much.

The success of Hamidian ideology to rally or not the Hawranite population and Damascene elite to his political project did marginally depend on the theoretical appeal of his caliphate theory, and doctrinal relationships with Druze shi'ism. Instead, the social and political game linked with the import of ideology and mass political mobilization that went with, are determining factors for analyzing local cultural change under such an ideologue regime as Abdul Hamid II's.

In our case-study, local conditions turned state centralization into a social apocalypse that rallied the whole rural world against the state, and its urban allies, until the scheme was abandoned. The following categories of adverse factors can be identified as the causes of this failure: first, the deteriorating economic conditions that disrupted tax collection just when direct taxation was implemented; second, the alleged corruption and tactical confusion[198] of local Ottoman officials; third, the lack

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[198] Ottoman officials were often alleged to get corrupted, although none of these charges has been clearly confirmed by the archives. Tactical mistakes are more obvious, such as the conduct of a retaliation expedition by Circassian Ottoman troops against the wrong community. See L. S. Schilcher, "Violence," p. 65 and p. 69.

of clear military domination over the province and the subsequent inability to both

protect loyal actors and enforce decisions against resisting ones; and fourth, the

existence of an unorthodox religious community, geographically protected, with a

religious-political leadership capable of collective action.

Beyond the Syrian highlands, the conjunction of these factors was not

uncommon in the Ottoman Empire, and more monographic regional studies would

probably reveal comparable dysfunctions in centralization, in other rural

peripheries.[199] Another array of weakening factors of the state ideology is also to be

found in a wholly different context, that we will only mention in passing now: the

globalized port-cities of the empire, such as Izmir and to some extent Istanbul itself,

where a local culture of modernity existed among the non-Muslim merchant

communities, whose features were almost opposed to the centralizing stance and

Islamic religious conservatism of the regime.[200] Similarly, it would be interesting to

explore the detailed conditions of political and social life during the nineteenth

century in the various, contrasted peripheries of the Persian empire, to understand

the social changes beyond the spectrum of central politics; but the realization of

local monographies has not yet started for Qajar history, and it is very difficult to

assess the penetration of central issues and concepts in such regions as

Baloutchistan, Loristan, Kurdistan. The continuation of strong tribal nomadic political

entities is attested thanks to their decisive participation the central political arena,

especially with the *Bakhtiari* tribal force's intervention for restoring the constitution in

1909.

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[199] Selim Demirel gives a few hints of comparable developments in various locations, in his section "'To Enjoin the Good and to Forbid Evil': Conversion and Ideological Reinforcement," pp. 68-92.

[200] See Ç. Keyder, E. Özveren and D. Quataert, "Port Cities in the Ottoman Empire," *Review, Fernand Braudel Center* 23 (1993), pp. 519-58; the authors hold the almost opposite view that the local social networks and cultural features could merge into a cosmopolitan civil society.

What were the consequences of political resistance by local communities on cultural changes? A important observation, is to note the negative effect of local resistance: the state ideology failed to be implemented and the Hamidian social re-engineering of an Ottoman Islamic obeying nation was blocked by these practical obstacles. In this view, we believe that alleging "Ottomanism" to have been "utopian" and unrealistic – as compared to later Turkish nationalism – is anachronistic and mistaken. The idea of creating an Ottoman nation was not in itself the problem – peoples and cultures were equally diversified in late eighteenth century Russia and France, for instance. More than Ottomanism itself, the obstacle lay in the social, political and economic conditions of the empire at the end of the nineteenth century, creating adverse factors for *any* state ideology to be efficiently applied. One can only imagine the frustration of the Hanefi sultan, so intensely committed to his civilization task, when he himself sent the order for the local government to capitulate in the face of peasants and shi'i tribal leaders who had defeated his schemes for twenty years now.

Genesis of New Local Political Cultures

But the contribution to cultural change of the twenty years of violence in the Hawran is not limited to a purely negative one, sabotaging the centralized modernization scheme wished by the Hamidian state. The state, which was until then a distant entity for most Hawranite peasants, had now become an immediate concern, a source of threats and opportunities (seemingly more the former than the latter). Direct taxation and attempts at conscription imposed the state as a bargaining partner for every individual; they had to take position on these two universal state requirements. In this sense, even though direct rule was not

established, the political consciousness (the end of the political virginity, but not necessarily the loyalty) of the peasantry was a result of these conflicts. The increasing politicization of everyday life also changed the nature of the local actors, the Damascene elites and the Druze shaykhs.

It is our argument here that the Hawran conflict tends to demonstrate that the new decentralized but modernized political life weakened the urban, long-standing notables, favoring instead the rural Druze shaykhs. This standpoint is formulated in the context of a fertile field of Ottoman historiography: the study of local elites in the Arab provinces. In particular, Albert Hourani's "notables paradigm" has been very influential on a number of social monographic studies of Damascus and other Arab cities.[201] Focusing on the Tanzimat era, Hourani argues that local notables, in spite of their struggles, shared a strong sense of local identity and responsibility as political intermediaries between their community and the central state. However, Hourani's *ayan* school has been recently cautiously criticized for its "top down" approach toward history by placing the notables at the center of discussions of Ottoman Arab cities.[202]

The taking into account of the city's hinterland and the consideration of the entry of masses into politics lead us to follow this revision of Hourani's urban notables paradigm for the post-Tanzimat period. Rural actors, and the peasants themselves, became important actors of the local political scene. The local political culture seemed to have evolved towards a decline of the "politics of notables" while the

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[201] Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (ed.). Karl Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1758* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1980); and Philip Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus, 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), are good instances of local studies elaborated upon and confirming Hourani's archetype of a politically active indigenous elite.

[202] See Philip Khoury, "The Urban Notables Paradigm Revisited," in *Villes au Levant: hommage à André Raymond*, a special issue of *La revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 55-56 (1990), pp. 214-27.

state's centralization and modernization schemes increasingly integrated the individual peasants into political transactions. When the state finally gave up its direct rule, the Ottoman authorities did not act through the Damascus notables and merchants like they used to during the Tanzimat. These old elites had a privileged position in the pre-modern, patriarchal, indirect political game. But the twenty years of tension in the rural hinterland of Damascus, even though it did not usher in state centralization, definitely introduced modern patterns into local political life. The ability to mobilize not only a few influential and prestigious actors, but impersonal rural masses, became a key resource. The urban notables, whose authority relied more on traditionally valued lineage, were then replaced as centers of the local political life by the rural political and religious leaders, whose quasi-feudal identity gave paradoxically a privileged access to massive mobilization through their deeper integration in rural social networks.

In the absence of intellectualized nationalist ideologies, which did not develop in the Arab world before the outbreak of the First World War, impersonal and extensive networks of grassroots religious community leaders were the best located to play the modern political game, to lead the resistance against the centralizing state. It is particularly significant in this perspective to note that the Hawranite Druze shaykhs were successful in calling their co-religionists from the western provinces for support in their anti-Ottoman guerilla warfare; their practical efficiency as leaders of the collective action eventually got them the support of Sunni plainsfolk and bedouins.

The following observations can thus be drawn from our analyses: the peasant-state confrontation marginalized urban notables, while empowering the Druze quasi-feudal chieftains, and identities and networks based on religion were crucial in the creation of new extensive mobilization networks, and were re-enforced by them.

Overall, we can conclude that the resistance against the Hamidian civilizing mission modernized the local Hawranite political culture, but in a specific, local way: integration of the rural masses into political activity, and re-enforcement of ultra-local cultural, religious and political actors against the more cosmopolitan urban elites.

From Cultural Profanation to Political Subversion: Towards the Constitutional Revolutions

The domination ideology of the Hamidian regime failed to conquer the whole social universe of the empire as it intended. The weakness of its material and social underlying, most critical in the peripheries, allowed regional resistances and competing local political cultures to develop.

But resistances were not only local and passive. Constitutional revolutions erupted in both the Ottoman Empire (1908) and Iran (1906), and were both successful in imposing a radical change of the political system, and to open a new era of political discourses. The revolutionary events *per se* and the political and cultural consequences of the constitutional revolutions will not be studied here. But cultural confrontations and innovations that prepared them deserve our attention. The crisis of 1876-78 in Istanbul had its ideological roots in the moral crisis of the Tanzimat era. Similarly, these constitutional revolutions spectacularly reveal to all observers, contemporaries as well as historians, that the dominated groups were able at the turn of the twentieth century, to construct resistance ideologies. Our analysis of the politics of ideological opposition in the early Middle-East will be developed in two stages. We will first study the dynamics of cultural profanation of the idiom and symbols of the dominants' discourses, located in the geopolitical peripheries. We will then focus on the political subversion dissidents conducted in the centers of power.

Cultural Profanation in the Geopolitical Peripheries

Daniell Bell's distinction between secularization (separation of the political institutions from the religious ones) and profanation (cultural loss of influence of religion) shall be used once more here, but freely applied here to the dominant ideologies rather than to religion *per se*[203]. This section will analyze how cultural émigrés profaned the Hamidian and mainstream shi'i discourses, and re-exported this profanation from their exile back to the political center.

Exile and Restructuring of Intellectual Networks in Cultural Metropolises

The Cultural Metropolises

Both the Ottoman and Qajar regimes used symbolic violence to "excommunicate" explicitly adverse discourses. Cultural innovation using the Islamic idiom was banned from the Ottoman and Qajar capitals and other politically central locations. As we have seen, local resistance cultures could yet exist and be created by specific circumstances; but they were not *culturally central*; they were confined to a peculiar place and could not be mobilized for confronting the dominant ideology in its own geopolitical center. Neither the Hawranite nor the Armenian merchant's "political" culture could be of any means to topple the tenor of the central political power, they simply partially infringed its power. But more central cultural resistance such as debates on the legitimacy of Abdul Hamid II's claim for

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[203] See *supra*, pp. 73-4.

caliphate ,or reform of the established shi'i doctrine, could not be tolerated by the dominant elites.

Direct cultural confrontation was then re-organized from exile. The prominent opponents of the Hamidian and Qajar systems left, intentionally or not, the political centers. Their destinations, where they were not controlled by the state, were places giving them the resources to develop and diffuse their counter-ideologies. In this perspective, we can formulate the general hypothesis that a center of cultural-political exile is characterized by the co-existence of three factors:

First, freedom of public expression. The political conditions of the place of exile must allow freedom of speech of the exiled. This implies political practical independence from the political center targeted by the opponent in exile. Local political agenda, ushering in cultural pressures and opportunities for the exiled, are not neutral either: thus the question of the Caliphate was more especially debated in British Cairo, under the influence of British oriental policies aimed at undermining the Sultan's influence

Second, the existence of local cultural resources. On a logistical level, this implies adequate material underlying for the exiled intellectual's cultural life (specific economic resources available to the intellectual and general material conditions of culture production). On a symbolic level, local cultural resources consist in the integration in a network including other intellectuals, belonging, or not, to the same political arena. Finally, the place of exile, its sensual and cultural specificities, are also important for that they contribute to shape to some extent, more or less consciously, the intellectual's cultural construction.

Third, accessibility to the homeland. On a logistic level, the location of exile must offer the material conditions for re-exporting the ideological products. On a symbolic level, re-export is facilitated by the cultural prestige of the place of exile, from which

the exiled partly beneficiates (this trend favors globalized, distant world cultural capitals). On a logistic level, re-export is facilitated by the intensity and affordability of trade and migration flows between the place of exile and the homeland (this level favors trading centers of neighboring countries).

It is important to note that since the value of an exile location changes with the intelligentsia's political homeland, the different centers of exiled activism do not have the same "cultural hinterland," the intelligentsia's homeland represented in that center, and framing its cultural life.

The late nineteenth century offered to the Iranian and Ottoman ideological opponents a number of relevant places for their cultural fight. Following our analytical framework, we can draw geography of cultural innovation for the ideologies of resistance oriented against Istanbul and Teheran. From East to West, British India port-cities, Baku, Cairo, Istanbul,[204] Paris and London appear as the prominent metropolises of the late nineteenth century Muslim intellectuals. This geography itself draws an other picture: that of interrelated networks of intellectuals, exiled politicians, benevolent cultural sponsors, ideological crusaders, coming from the Ottoman Empire and Persia as well as other spots of the Muslim world, engaging in their respective political strives, but also creating altogether a new autonomous cultural life of its own, engendering further creativity by new intellectual oppositions within the exiled community. The exiled intelligentsia became to various extant cosmopolitan, partly autonomous in their cultural life from the political issues related to their homeland. Still, the new autonomous cultural categories created by the cosmopolitan intellectuals for the sake of cultural reward rather than political change in their homeland could be re-imported for political struggle.

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[204] Needless to precise, except for Ottoman opponents.

The Cosmopolitan Muslim Intellectual

When speaking of cosmopolitan Muslim intellectuals, one figure imposes itself, who sojourned in all the places aforementioned and others, who illustrates in himself all the theoretical trends exposed: Jamal al-Din Asadabadi "Al-Afghani"[205]. He seemed to have been everywhere and all the subjects current during his active lifetime, many of them are way beyond the scope of our study. He was instrumental in fomenting troubles during the Tobacco Protest in Teheran, in trying to reach a compromise between the colonial English Egyptian authorities and the *Mahdi* movement in Sudan, in defending religious orthodoxy against "materialists" in Istanbul. He engaged in controversy with Ernest Renan in Paris, denounced the heterodox *Ahmedi* movement in India, and taught the future nationalist leaders of Egypt in his private home in Cairo. He was the prototype of the cosmopolitan Muslim intellectual and politician engaged in a combined theoretical and practical effort to change the Muslim world and the visions of it, both in among his co-religionists and Western Europeans. We will not recount here his chaotic life and contradicted realizations, but isolate two aspects of his activism for further understanding the politics of cultural reformism in the cosmopolitan metropolises of the Muslim world.

The first was, as Nikkie Keddie observes in her biography, that Al-Afghani's defense of Islam had "very little content that can be called religious" but was "designed rather to create political unity and solidarity."[206] Generally, the very experience of exile has it that exiled intelligentsia develop a sense of their own

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[205] Being a native Persian speaker but engaging actively in the cultural and political life of Sunni Islam, Jamal al-Din emphasized supposed (reportedly fake) Afghani origins to avoid being denounced as a Persian shi'i. For Al-Afghani's life and political career, see three outstanding works: Elie Kedourie, Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Janal ad-Din 'al-Afghani* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968); N. R. Keddie, *Sayyid.*

[206] Keddie, p. 195.

identity, of their culture, as a subjective reality that can be exploited and mobilized for political, ideological schemes. The international context of the late nineteenth century reinforced further this trend for the cosmopolitan Muslims, since Western Europe's orientalist discourses and related imperialist policies stressed even more the peculiarity of the Islamic world in purely political terms, and the necessity to defend Islamic "culture", "civilization", rather than religion.

The second noticeable point concerning Al-Afghani is how little he wrote, and yet his symbolic, political and intellectual impact was considerable.[207] Apart from political articles, a few slight works expressed his general ideas: a refutation of the materialists, a reply to Renan's lecture on *L'Islamisme et la science*, and the leading articles of *al-'Urwa al-wuthqa*, an Arabic militant newspaper published from Paris. But he was eloquent, knew many languages, engaged constantly in debates, sent private letters to Persian ulema in times of crisis, and gave informal lectures at his home. The success of his intellectual influence did not lay in his rather limited written legacy, but in his ability to create and penetrate networks, to have followers, or to be at the center of a controversy against another renowned intellectual. Therefore intellectual networks, more than abstract ideas, are the key to analyzing the politics of cultural reforms and their outcomes.

The cosmopolitan Muslim intelligentsia, in their wish to profane their homeland's dominant ideology and to gain cultural capital among their follow politicians and intellectuals, developed a constituted a globalized network. This cosmopolitan

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[207] He is still an important element of the official history curricula in Arab countries up to the Maghreb, as a prominent intellectual of the "Arab renaissance".

network was focused in a few distinct cultural centers that we shall now briefly study, in order to characterize the politics of ideological profanation from cultural exile.[208]

Istanbul, Cairo, Baku, Paris and London, Metropolises of the Muslim Ideological Profanation

Istanbul, the Center of Political Pilgrimage for Non-Ottoman Muslim Intellectuals

Istanbul was an important cultural metropolis *par excellence* for intellectuals, merchants, diplomats and all kinds of travelers from Muslim countries outside the Ottoman Empire. As the capital of the most powerful Muslim independent polity and siege of the caliphate, as a case-study of the benefices of well-conducted reforms, and beneficing from a long-standing pre-Ottoman prestige in the Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern country, Istanbul was the destination of political and cultural pilgrimage for many.

Abdul Hamid II encouraged this trend. In his attempt to portray himself as the Caliph of Muslims from all over the world, he paid special attention to receive important visitors from the rest of the Muslim world. The Caliph's guests or friends in Istanbul included Malkum Khan, the future reformist Iranian Prime Minister, Al-Afghani, Khayr al-Din, a prominent statesman who had fled from colonized Tunisia, and Rifat, a leader of the Bukharan *Jadid* (reformist) movement. But this hospitality was highly selective and political considerations could always lead the Ottoman government to suddenly deny its tolerance for exiled intelligentsia. Istanbul contributed to the export

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[208] These networks, as far as our research goes, have never been studied systematically with this multi-cultural, geographical stance. T. Zarcone, F. Zarinebaf-Shahr. *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul* (Istanbul-

of the Ottoman model of reform (through *Akhtar* for example, a pro-constitutionalist Persian paper published in Istanbul and influential among the merchant community, mainly Azeri). But due to the Hamidian cultural deadlock, it did not constitute a place of intense reformulation of social and political issues like other such metropolises.

Cairo, the Capital of Modern Arabic Thought

Under the practically independent Khedival regime and British occupation, Cairo became the siege of a flourishing Muslim-Arabic revival thought.

The Cairo court constituted a political counter-weight to Istanbul in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, the structural reforms in Egypt had actually represented a direct threat to the Ottoman Empire, and an impetus for comparable moves. Mehmed Ali, the architect of the rapidly modernizing Egypt, had thus created the political and material substructure for a concurrent cultural center to Istanbul to appear within the Ottoman world. Because of geographic and linguistic affinities, the modernist Arab intelligentsia, in particular, gathered in Cairo. A whole lineage of thinkers of the place of Islam in the modern world appeared, using discourses and categories inspired by, but different from, those used in Istanbul. A critical thought was developed about such a vital component of Abdul Hamid II's political ideology as the Caliphate, for example. An other ideological profanation current in late-nineteenth century Cairo intellectual circles was the call for the re-opening of *ijtihad* (interpretation of the Quran and *hadith*), closed in orthodox Sunni jurisprudence. Beyond the wish for modernizing the

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Téhéran : IFEA/IFRI, 1993), offers a monographic study of one exiled community of Ottoman Istanbul, the Iranian one.

cultural content of Islam, the call for *ijtihad* was a direct attack toward Hamidian ideology based on orthodox religious conservatism and dogmatism.

British occupation did not bring an end to the local cultural creativity, but changed it qualitatively. The influence of British orientalists (James Brown and his *Future of Islam* called actively for an Arab Caliphate) and of the anti-colonial struggle contributed to foster Egyptian and Arab nationalist ideologies.

Baku and Persian Azerbaijan, the Three Worlds Crossroad

To a large extant, Baku came to play a role comparable to Cairo for direct profanation of the Persian dominant elite discourse. However, the political conditions were very different. Baku was not the center of a competing Muslim polity, but the local intellectual scene beneficiated from being the meeting point of the three main cultural areas of Muslim cultural reformism: the Ottoman, the Persian, and the Russian ones.[209] The issues, categories, ideological products of all these three large and rich cultural hinterlands flowed into Baku's cultural life. Local conditions were also decisive for fostering a creative cultural life. Political domination by the Russian autocracy encouraged local Muslims to develop a non-political cultural resistance ideology. Furthermore, the oil boom that happened in the second part of the nineteenth century made it possible for a bourgeois Muslim class to appear, with extensive economic resources, who were to give decisive support to local and exiled intellectuals.

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[209] In tsarist Russia, Muslim intellectuals developed a very sophisticated discourse calling for a secularist 'national' renewal of their culture. See A. Benningsen and Ch. Lemercier-Quelquejay, *Les Mouvements Nationaux chez les Musulmans de Russie* (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1960).

In this context, local Azeri and exiled Iranians developed a far-reaching anti-clerical, even atheist discourse.[210] A social critique of the clergy and of cultural life's domination by religion in general was articulated through publications, plays, pamphlets, novels, and the emergence of the first nascent Muslim Communist organization. The absence of modern state control in Persia and the intense social and economic links with neighboring Iranian Azerbaijan and its prominent regional capital Tabriz, allowed a flow of cultural import from Baku towards Iran. Evidence shows that this trans-Caucasian connection was pivotal in profaning the shi'i socio-intellectual domination and creating the underground conditions for the constitutionalist revolution of 1906.[211]

Western European Capitals: the World Culture Capitals

Paris, London, and to a lesser extent other Western capitals played pivotal roles in the formulation of creative new political ideologies for the whole Muslim world. Paris, especially, was then a world cultural capital: the Ottoman and Persian intelligentsia increasingly engaged in cultural and educational trips, and their *seyahat name* (travel accounts) often became the carriers of radical social critique of their own society. In Iran especially, this literary genre contributed greatly both in volume and quantity to the general literary florescence.

Moreover, Paris and London became the main centers for networks of political opposition. Local cultural life was quite autonomous from political conditions, and intellectual creativity encouraged by the cross-meetings of intellectuals with very different background. The opposition between Ernest Renan and Al-Afghani about

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[210] See *supra*, p. 37.

the capacity of Islam to engage in modernization, and the defense of the latter of Islam as a civilization, was one of these specifically intellectual oppositions that shaped local constructions in all Muslim circles. The intellectual interactions between the exiled Muslim intelligentsia and the western orientalists or general intellectuals contributed for a large part to provide Ottoman and Persian ideologues with wholly new idioms, such as pan-Turkism and holist sociologies leading to nationalism, which would make possible to discard Islam as the universal language of cultural and political life. The extensive political and cultural penetration of Western Europe in the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and actually, the whole world, greatly facilitated the re-export of these radical ideological innovations back to the political homeland – free-masonry networks, in particular, were a privileged carrier of profanation discourses.

The Young Turk movement, and the extensive network of secret societies devoted to radical cultural and political changes in the Ottoman Empire who played a pivotal role for the constitutionalist revolution, were a manifestation of the impact of these globalized cosmopolitan intellectual networks reformulating ideologies in the cultural metropolises located outside the Ottoman and Qajar territories.

Political Subversion in the Political Centers

Yet ideological profanation at the peripheries could not be effective without political subversion in the political centers.

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[211] See *infra*, p. 190-192.

<u>Shifts in Time-Framing: Evolutionary, Eternal and Revolutionary Futures of the</u>

<u>Ottoman Empires</u>

Time-Framing of Intellectual Discourses and Political Action

Various religious discourse and political ideologies use very different underlying premises and foundations, and differ in their paradigms, images mobilized. But any constructed discourse, doctrine or theory related human life and society, has to locate itself relating to time. Whatever the detailed content of a discourse is, it encompasses a certain relationship to time. Time is one of the most basic elements of the physical world we feel and understand; it is also linked to most spiritual considerations locating prophetical revelations, lost or promised paradises, in a mythical time lane. It is the base of any political ideology, oriented towards changing the present world, to define the temporality of this change. Islam is a "universal language" for Muslim polities; we can consider time as a "universal paradigm." Any constructed discourse, whatever abstract or practical, will propose its own conception of temporality, as well as will any collective or individual strategy necessarily locate its action in a given time-schedule.

Therefore time-framing is the level where all discourses, practices and strategies meet each other. For the historian of cultures and ideas, this proposition has two methodological implications for analyzing the social dimensions and effects of theoretical doctrines and discourses.

First, time-framing can be approached vertically. It is one of the most important intellectual dynamics through which a theoretical construction is related to individuals' life and to the realm of social change. For instance, in his classical study

of the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism, Max Weber has

demonstrated how the specific temporality of divine salvation in Protestant ethics

has made it possible for capitalist modes of thought and behavior to appear in

Western Europe[212]. Stalin's motto of "construction of the socialism" is another

interesting example: it called for intense mobilization today, by postponing the

realization of the Marxist utopian promises to a for ever approaching tomorrow -

Marx and Lenin had both presented the utopia as immediate after the victory the

socialist revolution, whereas the social reality of post-revolutionary Russia was all but

utopian[213]. In other words, time-framing is a basic mechanism for changing a

theoretical construction inclined to abstract spiritualism, into practical action

strategies.

A horizontal approach towards time-framing of discourses and ideologies

outlines the differentiation strategies within a given time and cultural arena. Time-

framing is one of the main means of intellectual differentiation for conflicting

discourses within a common culture where discourses are more often than not based

on the same idiom and cultural references. Cultural and ideological opponents to

the dominant discourse within their community, often uses a shift in time-framing to

challenge the dominant position. This paradigm was recently developed in the

context of the politics of cultural reform in Central Asia. Franz Wennberg shows how

opposition between old elites (*Qadimi*, lit.: old) and the reformists (*Jadid*, lit.: new)

was based primarily on a rhetoric opposition in the conceptions of temporality. While

both sides claimed to save their community of the infidel threat, the conservative

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[212] Max Weber, *L'éthique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme* (Plon: 1905, French trans. : Paris : Agora, 1964).

[213] This analysis is developed in Reinhardt Koselleck, *Le futur passé. Contribution à la sémantique des temps historiques*, (Paris: éd. de l'EHESS, 1990), a general source of inspiration for our present discussion.

adopted the mode of the prophetical, divine a-historic injunction, opposed by the self-proclaimed *Jadid* who invoked the historical conceptions of progress and evolutionary development[214].

Political Oppositions through Time-Frame Shift from the Tanzimat to Abdul Hamid II

The pre-modern Islamic conception of time, as thought in madrese, was a-temporal. The only other "time" and change was the end of this world, and life here was to be led according to rules fixed for ever. But the new conditions of the nineteenth century changed this denial of temporality in worldly affairs.

The situation in the Ottoman Middle-East was different from that of Bukhara at the turn of the twentieth century, but the idea of cultural opposition by time-framing is fruitful. In the Ottoman Empire, the main political changes were all justified, articulated, defended, by time-framing rhetoric about the life and survival of the Ottoman Empire. Similarly to the Bukharan model, the first generations of reformers, up to the men of the Tanzimat, opposed the old elites by historicizing the world, arguing that the Ottoman system had to enter in an evolutionary motion in order to survive new threats. Time was no longer perceived as the wait for the apocalypse, but as a unilinear lane, synonym to development, where all political entities advanced and could be localized. It was their argument to say that the Ottoman Empire, on this chronological-developmentalist lane, was dangerously somewhere behind its Western neighbors, but their reforms would allow the Ottoman Empire to catch up with "civilization." The Young Ottomans attempted a sophisticated

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[214] Franz Wennberg, *An inquiry into Bukharan Qadimism: Mirza Salim-Bek* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag , 2001), in particular pp. 49-52.

synthesis, relating their own call for urgent changes towards progress with a a-historical conception of the essential superiority of the Islamic polity.

Reacting against his liberal opposition, the Hamidian intelligentsia mobilized the pre-modern denial of evolution. All the efforts were made to disguise continued borrowings from Europe, by presenting them as a re-appropriation by the Islamic polity of what "it" (the "Islamic civilization") had discovered time immemorial, but had been taken over by Europeans. The author of *Avrupa Medeniyetine Bir Nazar* (Looking at European Civilization), published in Istanbul in 1897, thus reminded his reader in the opening of his book, that "the bases of contemporary civilization are nothing but the actions and traditions of Muhammad."[215] More concretely, the Hamidian intelligentsia – the conservative ulema as well as quite liberal modernists – conveniently used to denounce the men of new ideas challenging their domination as *dahri* (from the Arabic *dahr*, "age"),[216] because they thought of Islam in terms of time and change, and no longer in terms of absolute, eternal principles. Generally, the whole legitimizing strategy was a reactionary one. Against the reformers and liberals such as Midhat Pasha who tried to explain that the world was slowly evolving and claimed to preside upon such changes in the Ottoman Empire, the Hamidian official system of thought consisted in presenting the world as static, with the sovereign and his regime being metaphysic parts of this eternal order of things. We may call this attitude, based on a conscious denial of historicity, as *a-historist*.[217]

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[215] Musa Akyiğitzade, *Avrupa Medeniyetine Bir Nazar* (Istanbul: n.d., 1897), cited in Berkes, p. 263.

[216] Berkes, p. 265.

[217] See also *supra*, p. 72-3, on the denial of social change in schools' curricula.

The Young Turk Movement, the Sudden Return of Temporality in Politics

A new shift in time intervened at the beginning of the twentieth century. The future as a political project, inexistent in pre-modern time, evolutionary during the Tanzimat, denied by Abdul Hamid II, now became revolutionary. The Hamidian regime's own contradictions contributed a large part to generate a revolutionary culture. The official discourse promoting respect and conservation of the old and the sacred was daily contradicted by the autonomous cultural developments. Censorship separated totally culture from the politics; under the apparently benign form of modern novels, accounts of scientific discoveries in newspapers, and original social critiques, the commercial printed media[218] were telling just another story of a world going through tremendous transformations.

A feeling for urgency of structural change of the Ottoman structures thus developed, in particular among the students of higher learning institutions where secret societies flourished around the turning of the century. These young men were taught to serve and protect their state, and believed in that mission. Valuing decision and direct action, witnesses of the increasing dangers gathering around the Empire, how could have they believed in a slow evolving future *à la* Tanzimat, not to speak of the Hamidian claim to stop the flow of time and changes? Their time-frame was neither the indefinite eternity of sacred institutions, nor the decades-long progress of Tanzimat reform through cautious implementation of technical adjustments. The methods were all the same, westernization and modernization, but the "temporal

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[218] The publication of religion books is an illuminating clue to the actual extent of the supposed Islamic conservatism of the Hamidian era. More were published than ever before; but less in proportion than any time before. They accounted for 38 percent of the published books under Abdul Mejid, 22 percent under Abdul Aziz, and only 14 percent under Abdul Hamid II. Figures from François Georgeon, "Le Dernier Sursaut," p. 536.

skyline of political action" (*l'horizon d'attente de l'action politique*)[219] was no further than present time, calling for decisive action, for immediate "union and progress." In the years prior to the Second Constitutional Revolution, Abdul Hamid II's opponents could not develop a consistent theoretical discourse underlying their action, but this shift in the temporal frame line of political action was gaining in influence. Constitutionalism was no longer a revival of a distant past for preparing the revival of the Islamic and Ottoman community; it was not limited to a theoretical and juridical synthesis like in the Young Ottoman thought; it was merely a rallying point for constructing a direct collective action, where political efficiency was more important than legal matters. The new emphasis on immediate political efficiency over theoretical purity is underlined by the attitude of the members of the Committee of Union and Progress towards internal dissent. Whereas the Young Ottomans often expressed different opinions on the same issue, members of the Committee of Union and Progress always respected unity of action with their external environment, even though bitter faction rivalry divided the members.

Action-oriented political groups were thus to spread in the very center of the Hamidian machine: the civilian and military officers. Their opposition to the regime had neither clear ideological constancy nor centralized organizational basis. Rather, the constellation of much differentiated collective and individual actors shared a new conception of the temporality of political action, oriented towards radical and immediate change. In the absence of a well-defined ideology of their own, they adopted constitutionalism as a banner rallying revolutionary energy, a legal cover and a guide for applied action strategies, but not a (naïve?) legalist strategy like it had been for the evolutionist Young Ottomans. It is significant in this perspective to

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[219] Koselleck, p. 314.

note that the success of the second revolution and the survival of the parliament

against the threat of a conservative reaction was largely assured by the use of non-

legal coercive resources, echoing thirty years later Ali Suavi's politics.[220]

The Post-Babi Shi'i Radicals and *Taqiye* : Profanation in Religious Garb

In Persia, the traditional a-historical temporality had been challenged in the first

part of the nineteenth Century by the radical, novel doctrinal constructions.

Shaykhism, Babism and finally Bahaism did not exactly change from an apocalyptic

conception of the future, but by locating the apocalypse in our present, they

developed a millenarist stance that paved the way for radical change of the social

universe of their time. Bahaism was finally excluded from the Persian political

arena,[221] whereas Azali Babis gradually left over their doctrinal stance to develop

secularism and social radicalism, increasingly closer to the anti-clericalism of other

shi'i dissents and liberal intelligentsia. In the beginning of the twentieth century, these

different groups gradually blended, especially under the influence of the

Transcaucasian Social Democrat connection, importing a wholly other revolutionary

stance, acclimated in Persian ideological world by the Tabriz radicals. In the

continuity of the previous analyses, we can make the hypothesis if time-framing

allows creating ideological distance between ideologies belonging the same

cultural world; on the opposite a similar time-framing allows to blend ideologies

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[220] See *supra*, pp. 148-150. Ali Suavi's peculiarity appears more clearly in this perspective: he was the only activist of his generation to adopt such a "short-term" approach to time, framed in urgency, whereas all the other liberals thought of political action in developmentalist terms.

[221] Although Bahaism did not have any major effect in Iranian politics, it prospered as a world religion. Various accounts estimate the worldwide community between 8 and 12 million believers, many of them residing in Western Europe and North America. Maybe 500 000 of them are still present in Iran, where they built a parallel society with its own underground education institutions, and get involved in "bazaar economy" trade relationships with neighbouring countries. They constitute today the bulk of the emigrants leaving Iran and being granted the political refugee status by the UNHCR.

originating from totally different intellectual universes, such as shi'i and Marxist radicalisms.

From Religious Revolts to Underground Activism

The mid-century religious uprisings had brought Persia in a state of quasi-civil war.[222] Eventually, the bloody repression unleashed by the state, protecting the official religious establishment, had crushed the dissidents. In the following decades, the *Usuli* religious leaders remained divided and engaged in patrimonial politics with other social groups, but continued to benefit from the state's coercive support, re-enforced by the new Russian Cossack police, to repress any religious reformer. In this context, the religious radical dissent did not disappear, but did not oppose frontally the official religious orthodoxy anymore. Because the Babi episode and the on-going repression of Bahaism seemed to demonstrate the impossibility to conduct cultural change through doctrinal reform, in the second half of the nineteenth century, shi'i and lay dissidents developed their radical discourse and cultural politics under the cover of an orthodox religious discourse. Many of them were former Azali Babis, who gradually had transformed their call from a religious into a political revolution.[223] Some others belonged to the new generation educated in the religious schools, under the patronage or more or less orthodox religious notables, and open to socio-cultural changes. They still aimed at the curtailing of the *mojtahed*'s role in Persian society and culture. But they retained their shi'i identity, wearing the symbolic turban and clerical garb, outwardly serving the established *mojtahed*. The dissident groups reverted to a traditional tactical behavior, deeply rooted in local culture: *taqiye*,

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[222] See *supra*, pp. 97-98.

doctrinally justified and time-honored concealment of one's true faith, ideas, or motives. Avoiding the accusation of *takfir* by retaining an outwardly religious orthodoxy, they developed two parallel political strategies: engagement in faction playing to favor liberal politicians and try to get the backing of prominent *mojtahed*, and underground cultural activities promoting anti-clericalism and profanation of the religious and political order.

Persian politics gave a prominent place to the client/patron system. The constitution of groups of followers, the backing of prominent statesmen and clerics, were the main tactics and resources for the political competition. The cover of taqiye allowed the religious dissents to enter in this faction game rather than confronting the whole system, with a twofold goal: to benefit from the protection offered by the established elite, always in need of protégés to increase their own social capital, in order to promote their anti-mojtahed propaganda; and to affect directly the result of the faction competition by trying to favor the most liberal politicians. Isfahan's local politics in the 1880s and 1890s illustrate these dissent politics.

The Isfahan Liberal Preachers' Politics

Isfahan, the former Safavid capital and an important center of shi'i thought, was administered by one of the most unscrupulous Qajar prince-governors, Zell al-Soltan, supported by a prestigious conservative mojtahed, Aqa Najari. It was also the gathering point for a number of young, lesser religious men, sensitive to Al-Afghani's propaganda, preaching freedom and radical liberal ideas. Some of those were

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[223] On Azali militant networks, see Nikki R. Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, IV (1962), pp. 265-95.

Malek al-Motakallemin (1861-1908), educated in traditional religious studies and traveler in India, a probable Babi; Jamal al-Din Vaez (1863-1908), originating from a Hamadan poor religious family; and Majd al-Islam Kermani (1872-1926), another young lower âlim from Kerman, coming to Isfahan at eighteen to work together with the "liberal preachers."[224]

During the 1880s and the 1890s, until Zell al-Sultan finally withdrew his support, they constantly maneuvered between political realism in their daily relations with Zell al-Soltan and Aqa Najari whose support was necessary in Isfahan, and radical anti-*mojtahed*, anti-Qajar propaganda. Malek al-Motakallemin, for example, was expelled twice from the city by religious authorities for his babism and heretical sermons where he had denounced the religious schools' archaism, but could come back by securing the Qajar Prince's support. The three preachers founded a secret society, and disseminated their liberal views through preaching, and articles sent to opposition newspapers abroad. They also wrote a long essay, clandestinely published in Russia through Babi network, *Roaya-ye Sadeqa* (the truth-holding dream): the essay recounted the imaginary trial of the Isfahan authorities on the last Day of Judgment, fiercely condemned all local clerical and government authorities. The Qajar ulema were accused to betray Islam by leaving the people in a state of scientific and social backwardness, and the corruption and political despotism of lay politicians. The whole writing used and respected the Islamic idiom, but betrayed some basic religious principles for the sake of the demonstration, asserting for example that pilgrimage was a waste of time, energy and money as long as poverty was not eliminated in the whole nation.[225] Meanwhile, the trio used their charisma to

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[224] On the Isfahan religious dissidents, see Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, pp. 61-66.

[225] The text is available in Eqbal Yaghmai, *Shahid Rah-e Azadi: Seyyed Jamal Va'ez Isfahani* (Tehran: Tus Publication, 1978). See pp. 306-337.

promote the governmental authorities' interests in exchange for their protection against charges of heresy. Accepting to promote a commercial initiative taken by a local merchant supported by Zell al-Soltan, the *sherkat-e Islami* (a commercial company supposed to compete with European goods and developing a nationalist communication strategy), they praised in an essay locally published[226] the very same persons and practices that they severely criticized in *Roaya-ye Sadeqa*, while using the commercial pretext to reiterate their anti-ulema argument. Overall, the Isfahan group of religious dissidents, like similar shi'i radicals all over the country, joined the patrimonial political cabals with the establishment, while pursuing their underground activities and anticlerical campaigns.

Private Schools in Iran and the Role of Education for Cultural Dissent

So far, we have seen that the Iranian religious dissidents merely used preaching, essays published in Iran and abroad, and the opposition newspapers in exile, in order to develop their cultural propaganda. All of these show how they used the existing institutional and cultural resources to promote their views, while outwardly supporting the dominant order. When analyzing the effective diffusion of the Hamidian ideology, we had seen that state proselytism and education were the two means for the practical implementation of the state policy. Proselytism was naturally impossible for the post-babi shi'i radicals practicing *taqiye*. However, education was not made impossible by their symbolic position: they indeed worked out at founding a number of private schools with liberal curricula, intended to enlighten their compatriots to the new sciences, and to form patriot Iranians who would be devoted to the

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[226] Jamal al-Din Vaez, *Lebas-e taqva* (Shiraz). The essay was probably published in 1898, when the commercial company it praised was founded.

reconstruction of the nation. Malek al-Motakallemin founded a school dedicated to secular new learning in Isfahan in 1897, under the protection of the authorities. The mojtahed Tabatabai family, closely associated with religious dissidents but favored by the Shah in the aftermath of the Tobacco Protest, opened such a school in 1899 in Tehran, where women were accepted. Although outwardly religious (it was known as "the Islamic school"), the school hired a graduate of the *Dar al-Fonun*, the government-sponsored secular modern school, as its principal, and fostered secular sciences.[227] Yahya Daulatabadi, son of the Bab's successor in the Azali community, brought an even more decisive contribution to the development of modern private education. In spite of fierce opposition from the religious establishment, he was successful in founding a number of schools managed by a radical Tabriz schoolmaster with an experience of the Russian schooling system, and to create a national library. The Isfahan liberal preachers were regularly invited to give lectures in Daulatabadi's schools, and an increasing number of the Qajar elite supported the initiative, joining Daulatabadi's cultural society (*anjoman-e ma'aref*).[228]

This account of the development of private schools leads us to two comments. First, concerning the Iranian case, it is an extreme case on how the shi'i radicals could engage in conscious profanation and cultural change while continuing to pay outward due respect to the current dominant order. More generally, it can be put in perspective with similar developments in other areas. For example, many private schools were also founded by other "free-lance" intellectuals with novel ideas, such as the Maronite Butrus al-Bustani and his "National School" (*al-madrese al-wataniyya*, created in 1863), from which emerged "the modern novel and drama in

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227 Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 59.

228 *Ibid*, p67.

Arabic as well as modern Arabic journalism."[229] For the nineteenth-century radical intellectuals or dissidents, promoting education provided another reward than the simple spreading of his ideas. Founding a school or lecturing created an institutionalized basis where face-to-face encounters occurred, where whole promotions of likewise educated younger intellectuals would constitute social networks revolving around their teachers. In a political society where mass political organizations (such as parties and syndicates) did not exist yet, the educational institutions were crucial organizational resources, creating strong links and shared *habitus* amongst an intellectual community. In short, creating social communities was a result of schools and education probably as important as the transfer of knowledge. Al-Afghani therefore spent a great amount of his time in Egypt lecturing a circle of followers in informal classes, who later on became some of his most devoted supporters. On the opposite, in the center of the Ottoman Empire, radical opposition groups emerged and flourished in the imperial military high schools, where the Young Turks originally constituted their network.

The importance of schools for the organization of collective action reminds the importance of physical, face-to-face encounter in cultural and ideological change. In Iran, the last years of the 1890s and the early 1900s indeed witnessed an increasing sophistication of the religious dissidents' networks, ushering in their increasing radicalization.

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[229] Hourani, *Arabic thought*, p. 99.

The Persian Secret Societies and Radical Networks in the Early 1900s in Tehran

During the few years before the major 1906-1909 political crisis known as the "constitutional revolutions," the organization of the contestation networks and their penetration of the central political arena dramatically increased.

In the 1900s, the networks of religious radicals practicing taqiye increased their level of organized collective action in Tehran and Tabriz, where many new secret societies appeared, larger in membership and much more focused in programs than before. In 1904, the Isfahan religious dissidents, now in Tehran, created a new *anjoman* (association).[230] It gathered the usual religious dissidents including a large proportion of Babis, along with merchants, members of the ruling dynasty, and non-Muslims, with the explicit role to replace tyrannical rule with the rule of law. Others such societies followed. The many years of underground activism provided by then with well-established action strategies. Newsletters, secret leaflets, pamphlets were clandestinely distributed, and the Persian newspapers published abroad were smuggled in and distributed to a growing public. Religious ceremonies and assemblies were exploited to propagate the cause. Rivalry between the high-ranking ulema was manipulated. Discontented officials and dismissed civil servants were sought and recruited. A network of collaborators within the government bureaucracy was cultivated to keep the societies well informed on current policies, events, incidents, and even scandals which its leaders could use to their advantage. *Taqiye* was still practiced, and the Third Imam Husein was, for example, recalled as the founder of the first secret society dedicated to a holy cause. However, the

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[230] Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 72.

delimitation between religious dissidents on the one hand, and lay secularist

reformers opposing the government on the other, was thinner than ever.

The Tabriz Trans-Caucasian Connection and the Early Twentieth Century

Universal Radicalism

While religious radicals were organizing in Tehran, another category of political

dissidents appeared in Tabriz. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the Persian

community in Baku, mainly immigrant workers in the oil industry coming from Tabriz

and its surroundings, reached an unprecedented peak.[231] Commercial and personal

contacts between members of higher social groups also continued. These important

exchanges, at both a qualitative and quantitative levels, made possible for the

Hemmatist ideology – the branch of Russian Marxist social democracy created to

reach the Russian Muslim population – to reach Iran. It may be argued that Marxism

was irrelevant to the patrimonial, or "feudal", social structures of Persia. But the

Russian Hemmatist, very close personally and in thought to the more culture-oriented

Jadidists, had actually already adapted Marxism to the conditions of the Russian

Muslim world, close to that of Persia. Practically, early twentieth-century "Muslim

Marxism" did not focus on the sole proletariat but on the whole Muslim "Nation," was

not atheist, but denounced all elite groups, political and religious. But whatever the

doctrinal flexibilities, Hemmatism shared with other branches of Russian social-

democracy its action-oriented nature. The very existence of a "Muslim" Marxist

organization was justified, when it was created in 1904, by matter "not of principles

but of tactics." In fact, the Hemmat group was ready to sacrifice doctrinal purity to

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[231] See *supra*, pp. 37, for the importance of Baku in the mid-nineteenth century-cultural change, with the class of indigenous Muslim tycoons expressing the first direct condemnation of Islam.

favor mobilization. Practically, the group's success was ensured by the fact that

Hemmatist militants were active amongst the Muslim proletariat: organizing

meetings, printing and distributing leaflets, using the patronage of rich Muslim

tycoons... working out at "awakening" the Muslim masses, in other words at

convincing them that tomorrow could be better if they acted today. For Tabriz

middle- or lower- class people, many of them coming from the religious institution,

and wearing the religious turban and garb, the Baku political parties and groups

were the most attractive model for inspiration. Moreover, Tabriz lay communist

militants developed close contacts with the Tehran religious dissidents. Haider Khan

was the most prominent of the Trans-Caucasian radicals playing a decisive role

during the revolution: educated in Yerevan and Tbilisi, having frequented Lenin in

London, following his coming back to Iran he established contacts with some of the

ulema in the capital, and had an important following among the tollab (religious

students). This case illustrates the peculiar Persian radicalism of the early twentieth

century, under the mixed influence of shi'i thought and Marxist influence.[232] Beyond

the contrast of the intellectual lineage of both these proclaimed systems of beliefs,

Western radical humanism on the one hand and shi'i doctrine on the other, the

paradox must be demystified.

In terms of revolutionary approach of time, and of effective organizational

techniques, the convergence between the radical movements in Iran and Russia, as

well as in the Ottoman Empire, is evident. All used the same clandestine mobilization

strategies adapted to urban context in a hostile political environment, and all had

become intolerant with the continuation of the "tyranny" of their monarchs, calling

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[232] Until the violent repression by Khomeyni's faction in 1981, the Persian Communist Party, *Toudeh*, was the oldest and the most important of the Middle-East, mostly implemented in the Caucasian North-Western provinces. The blending of Marxism and radical shi'ism was also very common until and during the 1979-1981 revolution.

for an immediate revolutionary change. All of them could be characterized by doctrinal confusion and inconsistency; the original theoretical source of legitimacy of their outward political stance had become not much than a source of romantic, aesthetic inspiration for creating mass mobilization.

Finally, all revolutionary groups and militants relied on the Western constitutionalist formula, now tested in multiple historical cases, as both an ideological and practical expedient for guiding collective action, and remedy to their own ideological confusions. It should be noted that their approach to constitutionalism was somehow less enthusiastic than earlier thinkers: a Parliament was an efficient political tool to be used in the political struggle against "tyranny," but was no more a romanticized goal in itself. The lesser confidence in the intrinsic values and efficiency of Parliaments, thanks to the normalization of the parliamentary experiences in other monarchies (Austria and Germany in particular), allowed the early twentieth-century political activists to be more realist than earlier activists. This new generation was aware that the legal protection offered by a sympathetic parliament was not *per se* a resource strong enough to curb the current elite's powers. Their activism show that they focused also on the mastering of non-legal resources to be mobilized against the state's repressive ability, through revolutionary ideologies spread out by clandestine networks. In the beginning of the twentieth-century all these political activists from different worlds, but living in the metropolises of autocratic empires, therefore converged in a common revolutionary-constitutionalist stance, where the defense of the Ottoman empire, the liberation of the proletariat or the Muslim "Nation," the return to a true Islam were all identical in locating the time of political radical action in the urgency of the immediate present.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we would like now to summarize the major findings of this

research. Its main objective was to provide a better understanding of the dynamics

of cultural politics, as a whole, in the early modern middle-east. Conducting these

analyses in our geographical and historical field has also allowed us to develop an

illuminating comparative perspective between the two main Muslim polities at that

time, the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Persia. Finally, the different issues raised and our

approaches lead to some more general, theoretical comments, on the role of

culture in social change.

In the Persian and Ottoman Middle-East, the nineteenth century was an era of

cultural and ideological changes. Important technical and political reforms were

conducted in both empires, changing to some extant their outward features and

structures. But we believe that even more radical changes occurred at a less visible,

more profound, level. Far-reaching reformulations of the world, the creation of new

symbolic systems and ideologies, the mobilization of traditional religious idioms for the

sake of inventing, imposing new approaches to the everyday social environment, all

together modified the structure of opportunities available for social actors to

formulate their life strategies, from the Arab Syrian peasants to Tabriz and

Transcaucasian middle-class intellectuals. The spectacular political changes of the

twentieth century Middle-East, initiated by the destructive-formative apocalypse of

World War One, were to a large extant applications and materializations of

theoretical concepts and ideological strategies first formulated during the

nineteenth century cultural confrontations. The cultural and ideological paradigms created by the interactions of nineteenth century domination or resistance discourses, were later on freely re-interpreted and applied, but never replaced as a whole. In the early 1920s, Mustafa Kemal "Atatürk" fought the Turkish "liberation war" on the Anatolian plateau along ideological lines created by the re-appropriation of Western orientalist idioms by Ottoman exiled intellectuals, and used the tandem representative assembly-coercive force typical of constitutionalist revolutions to lay the basis of his Republic. In 1979-1981 Khomeyni recycled the nineteenth century-radical anti-clerical dissidents' expedient call for a theocracy, and imposed his rule against the political opposition of new radical, clandestine networks of Marxist-shi'i organisations such as the *Mujahedin-e khalk*, using the same underground methods as the Tabriz and Tehran 1906-radical constitutionalists. The twentieth century saw the large-scale applications of recipes elaborated during the nineteenth century. Characterizing the dynamics of cultural change leading to the constitutionalist revolutions is thus crucial for the understanding of the modern history of the Middle-East.

Beyond their disparities, by and large, Ottoman and Persian cultures went along similar changes. At the beginning of the twentieth century, orthodox systems of beliefs had been consolidated by the dominant elites as a background of public life; but the growing resistance cultures, local or ideological, fostered secularist or profaning action strategies in effective daily life.

Let us recapitulate the historical process. The states' policies, their top-led political and technical reforms, contributed to the emergence of new cultures coping with the irruption of modernity. But in both polities, the state was only an element, certainly important but not unique, of the management of public life; the states had their attitudes and policies integrated in a larger institution community. In

this context, Islam, as the universal language relating the different institutions, was central in all politics of cultural reform. A main dynamic of the nineteenth century cultural politics was to change the social meaning of Islam, to change the vision a Muslim would have of his world. Religious idiom, tradition, became a main factor for cultural change. Therefore, in these reformist systems where the political and social structures were subjects of conscious changes by the hand of the political elite, the opposition between "conservative" and "modernists" does not make much sense. The fluidity of cultural structures, the subject of all re-interpretations and manipulations, available to all actors to empower and promote their own positions through mobilization of symbolic schemes, is instead the main paradigm which can explain how middle-eastern societies engaged in constructing their own versions of modernity.

The dominating elites' bid for assuring and protecting their privileged social position was one of the main forces behind cultural life. The hamidian state intelligentsia as well the Persian shi'i leaders enforced official religious orthodoxies which naturalized in theological terms their position. But it is important to note that the elites' symbolic violence was not the only factor that made possible the imposition of these legitimating discourses. Both official faith systems, although specifically promoting the afore-mentioned elites, were diffused in society thanks to the support of other autonomous sectors which linked their interests to the dominant discourses. Autonomous religious revivalist individuals and organizations, the popular media and the agrarian propertied middle-class were the necessary social partners of the hamidian political domination; the Qajar state, far from being "illegitimate," and the local notables and lay politicians engaged in factional intrigues, were the political allies and supports of the divided shi'i clergy. But the imposition of dominant discourses did not mean that cultural and ideological innovations were deadlocked.

On the contrary, Hamidian and shi'i doctrines paved the way for far-reaching re-compositions of their contemporary worlds. Hamidian Islam was an ideology of social change *per se*, changing and paradoxically secularizing the Ottoman society. Shi'i *Usuli* doctrine was merely defensive, and made possible for individual clerics to engage into radical dissent against the prevailing political-religious order, under the legitimating protection of orthodox religious garb.

Resistance to the dominant cultures was actually another strong impetus for cultural and political changes. The socio-economic conditions of the late nineteenth century Middle-East prevented the official religious-political system from evenly reaching all the empires' peripheries. Local resistant cultures remained or appeared in the interstices of power. Moreover, political confrontations during major political crises were the scenes of intense ideological confrontations ushering in rapid but long-standing cultural innovations. Finally, the apparition of an integrated cosmopolitan Muslim exiled intellectual community, largely under-estimated by specific "national" historical approaches, seems to have been crucial in ideological developments. The parallel organization of clandestine political subversion in Thrace, Istanbul, Tabriz and Teheran, resulted in radical dissents of the dominant discourses, spectacularly challenged in the almost simultaneous early twentieth century-constitutionalist revolutions.

Through the processes described above, long-standing major cultural and ideological innovations were accomplished. Sunni Islam was filled up by the sultan-caliph with a political dimension: allegiance to the political authorities and resistance to foreign imperialism, while the traditional religious elite were deprived of much of their traditional authority. In Iran, while ambitious doctrinal reforms were attempted, orthodox shi'ism focused the attention of revivalist radicals, who paradoxically formulated the first theory of a shi'i theocracy. Attempts at synthesizing Western

enlightenment and liberalism together with local cultural and religious categories ushered in the Young Ottomans' original political philosophy, and in Iran provided the doctrinal and social impetus for Bahaism to develop as a new religion. Rural communities such as the Syrian Druzes, deeply affected by the simultaneous integration in world capitalist markets and centralized political systems, developed a political consciousness of their cultural and religious specificities, incidentally empowering the old-fashioned agrarian elites which offered a focal point of resistance against the ills of economic and political modernizations. Increasingly, organized domestic oppositions called for rejuvenation of the political and cultural elites, while exiled activists integrated a newer generation of Western political thought, radical and romanticist, into their homelands' political cultures. These combined efforts led to the fostering of specific forms of "Muslim" nationalism, revivalism, and revolutionary materialism, which would be the leading ideologies of the twentieth century Middle-East.

The comparative perspective used in this study on the Ottoman and Qajar empires led us to question and re-appraise some historiographic consensuses and clichés about these two polities. The first of these common beliefs to be revised concerns the peculiarity of the developments occurring in each polity. Our analyses, beyond some structural differences, have underlined the similarity of many of the cultural dynamics developing in the Ottoman and Persian territories. The field of such comparative approaches within the Middle-East is still underdeveloped, and would merit more scholar attention. Moreover, some striking similarities the Muslim entities and other modernizing pericheral polities such as the contemporary tsarist Russia or Meiji Japan, call for a more general re-positioning of modern Middle-Eastern history in the world perspective of independent states stressed by West-European assertiveness

and imperialism. However, the interest of the comparative perspective, as much as in observing the proximities, lies in the differences pointed out, giving yet another chance to understand the particular specificities of each entity under consideration. In this regard, it is interesting to compare the "sacralization" of the state in the Ottoman Empire, and of the ulema in Persia. In their respective areas, these institutions were the focus of cultural and ideological attention, held responsible for all the country's problems, but also considered as the all-mighty lever of promising reforms capable of renewing the community.

This sacralization of the Ottoman state and Persian ulema did not prevent very severe criticisms of their current holders – on the contrary, their strategic importance attracted symbolic attacks of challengers, like it is demonstrated by Young Ottomanism's criticism of the Tanzimat autocracy and babism's extreme anti-clericalism in Persia. These two institutions, being the focus of intellectual attention, were actually a source of inspiration for formulating new critical and radical ideologies. But, however condemned in theoretical terms, mobilized and instrumentalized during effective confrontations, their "sacralized" status conferred on them physical protection during the major political crises. The Ottoman state and the Persian ulema, targets of all the radical activists' resistance ideologies, were not *per se* threatened as institutions by the revolutionary movements, and their support was even a determining resource of the confrontation. These parallel symbolic focus and sacralization of the Ottoman (-Turkish) state and of shi'i clergy are cultural features, rooted in long-term historical legacies, that would endure during the twentieth century and result in the outward contrast of Turkish and Iranian's respective political systems at the end of that century. It is interesting, in this perspective, to note, since the 1980s, the parallel development of women's body

(opposite) policies enforced by these two sacralized institutions, as still a major carrier

of political and social identity and dissent in both Turkey and Iran.

Related to this argument, the common wisdom that the well-known weakness of

the Qajar state accounts for much of the Persian political "backwardness," also

deserves more attention. Turkish as wall as Western historians have generally

emphasized the centrality of the government for social change in the late Ottoman

Empire. The same or other historians following this course of argumentation

concluded that the feeble Qajar state could not implement such a far-reaching

reform program, therefore by the beginning of the twentieth century Persia was

relatively backward, somewhere behind the Ottoman Empire, further away from

Western Europe. Our present study has shown that a more refined approach is

necessary, by differentiating political *institutions* from political *culture*. If secularism

has to be considered as an almost equivalent to "modernity," as it has become in

the academe where the two terms are almost interchangeable, then how to give

sense to the much earlier and harsher expressions of anti-secularism and atheism by

Persian intellectuals? A purely materialist or state-centred approach would not be

bothered by such a remark, answering that since these intellectuals did not affect

the effective institutions, the "superstructure," then their personal opinions – reflecting

precisely the oppressive nature of shi'i ulema – can simply be discarded as purely

theoretical objects devoid of any social or political outcome. However such a

standpoint ignores the lessons of most of the nineteenth century political crises, and

neglects in general the importance of culture as an autonomous field, whose

parallel developments still shape the social and political games. We have shown in

the previous demonstrations that cultural and ideological developments are the

result of political social confrontations, which they deeply affect in return, much

beyond the scope of the state. Comparing the Ottoman and Qajar empires allows

concluding a much lesser modern development of the latter's political institutions,

but paradoxically to a deeper influence of all sorts of radical and contestation

cultures, such as "modern" atheism and social-democracy.

    This discussion leads us to a more general and theoretical remark, which will

conclude this study: the importance of culture, and especially cultural change,

when considering political or social developments. Shaping a society's perspective

on its world, symbolically relating issues with each other and linking them to social

bodies, developing ideologies as guides for effective collective action, framing these

elements on a time lane, determine how social actors will stand and act. Culture, in

its turn, never is given for ever: social actors engage in symbolic reconstructions, for

the sake of purely symbolic or more substantial material rewards. We have been

exploring the relations between cultural, symbolic changes and social, physical ones:

none has a causal supremacy and the analyst must remain flexible and subtle in

his/her approach. With the warning in mind, approaching cultural change as an

autonomous field, though closely related to the world of social change, has proven

fruitful for the analysis of the nineteenth century Middle-East. Humanity's symbolic

and physical universes intertwine. Religion or related spiritual motives, transmitted

through different idioms and discourses, materializing according to specific time-

framings, are intimate partners of any historical and social changes.

APPENDIX

Rapport of Ferrier, French Military advisor of the Persian Government, to
Général de la Hitte, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 21 February 1850

*A l'avènement au trône de nasser eddin chah ils se réunirent en
armée au nombre de 1,200 et vinrent occuper dans le mazenderan
une position fortifiée située à quatre farsangs au sud balafrauch. Là ils
décrétèrent la déchéance de la dynastie des kadjars et la royauté du
Báb, qu'ils avaient délivrés de sa prison - en peu de temps la
population presque entière de cette province ont adopté la nouvelle
doctrine, le danger devient imminent, et le gouvernement persan fut
obligé d'envoyer 10,000 hommes pour les réduire, exaltés par la ... les
babis se retranchèrent et résistèrent pendant neuf mois à toutes les
attaques faisant chaque jour les sorties les plus meurtrièrent qui
enlevèrent bientôt aux assiègeans un bon tiers de leur effectif, mais
des renforts leur arrivèrent le siège reprit une nouvelle vigueur et après
avoir mangé jusqu'au cuir de leurs souliers, ils écoutèrent les
propositions d'accomodement qu'on leur faisait depuis l'ouverture des
hostilités. - Le prince ali kouli mirza généralissime du chah dans le
mazenderan leur promit la vie sauve et la liberté s'ils consentaient à
évacuer leur position et à rendre leurs armes, et pour donner plus de
solennité à sa promesse, il jura sur la cour de la tenir religieusement. -
les Babis se rendirent mais à peine avaient ils déposé leurs armes qu'ils
furent massacrés bien peu parvinrent à échapper - cette déloyale
boucherie.*

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The bibliography references most of, but not all, works cited in the course of the text. It is deliberately partial, and focuses on studies relevant to both our problematic and methodological choices. Most of the works cited received comment in the main text; therefore no general effort has been made to add annotations here. There is one exception however: the most important methodological sources, which many of them may be unknown to the historians, are followed by a short explanatory note. We have divided the bibliography in six sections:

Theoretic Inspiration: resources on which the methodological approach is based. A sub-section, "Key Concepts," lists the resources related to the most important concepts used in this thesis: for the non-specialist, a short annotation recapitulates each reference's main methodological contribution.

The Early Modern Middle East: resources relevant to both Persia and the Ottoman Empire.

The Nineteenth Century-Ottoman Empire: resources relevant to the politics of cultural change in the Ottoman Empire during our time of focus.

Qajar Persia: resources relevant to the politics of cultural change in Persia during our time of focus.

Historical Perspective: resources dealing with the Ottoman Empire and Persia, but out of the temporal focus of the present study.

Comparative Perspective: resources dealing with the same problematic than ours, during the same period, but in other geographical areas.

Theoretical inspiration

Key concepts for our study

Note: the annotations respects the author's own focus of concern and terminology. Some of conceptual systems were partly reformulated, or applied to a slightly different object, in our thesis.

Bell, Daniell. "The Returned of the Sacred? The Argument on the Future of Religion." In D. Bell (ed.), *The Winding Passage.* New York: Basic Books, 1980.

> Secularization and Profanation: The article is concerned with the contemporary re-emergence of religious revivalist movements. Daniell Bell distinguishes "secularization", the shrinking of the place of religion in institutions, and profanation, the decrease of the importance of religion in culture and mental categories. Both trends may be totally disconnected.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique.* Genève: Droz, 1972. Eng. transl: *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

> Habitus: In a given society, innovation through the practice of traditional cultural patterns can be explained by the concept of "habitus." Dispositions and mental structures acquired in a specific field of practice, may be unconsciously transferred to new conditions and contexts, ushering in new patterns and behaviors. Thus the social determination of an actor paradoxically creates opportunities for him to innovate in acts and create new categories.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production.* New York : Columbia University Press, 1993.

> Cultural field: Individuals and groups differ in terms of their symbolic capital, but Bourdieu sees them arranged not in a rigid pyramidal hierarchy but in autonomous social "field," an arena for cultural competition and production.

Collins, Randall. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change.* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

> Intellectual networks and the importance of face-to-face encounter: Philosophical innovation occurs when intellectuals, relatively autonomous from their social underlying, physically meet with each other. The constitution of solidarity networks on the one hand, and the occurrence of face-to-face intellectual confrontations on the other, account for intellectual change. The intellectual realm can therefore

be considered as an autonomous social world, and still social dynamics be related to ideas and theoretical constructions, by studying the sociology of the intellectuals networks and oppositions. Randall's study tests his model with eleven historical case-studies, from Ancient China to the German University Revolution.

Dobry, Michel. *Sociologie des Crises Politiques*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1986.

Political fluidity: Contemporary "complex" societies are composed of differenciated "sectors" (the equivalent of Bourdieu's "field"), arenas of social competition interrelated but autonomous from each other. During political crises, the whole social world tends to get undifferenciated: the disruption of the sectors' autonomy changes all the usual rules, imposes some major dynamics evenly to all actors, thus brining in "political fluidity."

Tilly, Charles. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1978.

Collective action: Tilly questions the dynamic of large collective action causing political confrontation and eventually revolution. Social and political communities may pre-exist, due to the awareness of common interests and daily social interactions. But for effective collective action, individuals must be organized, at least temporally, by a "mobilizing center," which can provide incentives to the individuals and mobilize the resources needed to frame generalized unrest into concrete collective action, according to the interaction of the center's and the participants' respective interests.

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