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Islam, political Islam, and the Islamic Republic: the political economy of Allah

Siyaves Azeri

This article argues that the Islamic Republic was the only alternative available to the international bourgeoisie in the face of the revolutionary crisis of 1979 in Iran during the Cold War. The task of the Islamic Republic was suppressing the revolution, which gave it a ‘provisional’ character in the eyes of the international bourgeoisie. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union that necessitated a re-definition of all bourgeois institutions and alliances, the defeat of the no-conservative policies in the Middle East, and the acute economic crisis of capitalist system prevent the Islamic Republic from arriving at its logical end and its replacement with an ‘ordinary’ bourgeois state.

Keywords: religion; political Islam; Islamic Republic; class; state; revolution

Introduction

The year 2020 marks the 41st anniversary of the 1979 Revolution in Iran that was followed by the formation of the Islamic Republic and the subsequent suppression of the Iranian Revolution by Islamists. However, it was also marked by the uprising of the poor against the totality of the Islamic Republic in more than 100 cities in November 2019 that was bloodily suppressed by the regime and two precedent powerful strikes of the workers of Haft-tappeh Sugar Complex and Ahvaz Iron and Steel Complexes, where the workers’ demands manifested itself in the widespread slogan that functioned as the symbol of their struggle: ‘Bread, Labour, Freedom, Council Rule!’ The November uprising and these strikes have definitely been the continuation of the mass uprising that took place in more than 80 cities in Iran from December 2017 into January 2018 and shook the foundations of the Islamic regime in Iran, which apparently came to power following the victory of the 1979 Revolution.

The mainstream scholars from the ‘West’ and the ‘East’, from Ervand Abrahamian to Hamid Dehbash, Michel Foucault and Žižek, just to name a few, never hesitate to call the 1979 Revolution ‘Islamic’. The common thread that keeps these diverse and apparently antagonistic interpretations of the 1979 Revolution is the lack of a proper political, class-based analysis of Iranian society; in cases that seemingly class-based analyses are presented,¹ class is conceived of in terms of some sociological category, a physically ostensible estate, or a social stratum and not ‘a politically mediated fluid being that is logically preceded by its conceptuality’ inseparable from ‘class struggle’.² Thus, in one way or another, the 1979 Revolution is conceptualized as the incarnation of the Islamic ‘ideology’, the embodiment of the Shiite ‘emancipation theology’, the realization of the ‘authentic’ values and culture of the Iranian society that had been suppressed by the Shah’s ruthless attempts at modernization and westernization of Iran; in short, as the alienation or reification of some Spirit representing the true essence of the Iranian society.³ The consequent analyses of the economic-political character of the Islamic Republic and the phenomenon of political Islam is also determined by such a ‘mystified’ conceptualization.

Another major shortcoming in analyzing the developments in Iran in particular and in the Middle East in general is lack of proper understanding of political Islam as a peculiar reactionary bourgeois *political* movement. Many observers and analysts as well as politicians from the West refrain from using the term ‘political Islam’; they deploy terms such as ‘fundamentalist Islam’, ‘radical Islam’, ‘moderate Islam’ etc. Therefore, in concordance with the aforementioned stance, they treat the Islamist movement as a doctrinaire one determined by ‘ideological’ priorities and misinterpretation or distortion of ‘true’ Islam. Whereas, in reality different factions of political Islamic movement include ‘fundamentalist’ elements such as the Islamic Republic, the Hezbollah of Lebanon as well as secular forces such as the Assad’s Baath regime of Syria. The same goes with the Sunni faction which includes ‘fundamentalist’ Jihadi organizations, the ‘fanatic’ Muslim Brotherhood, the Saudi Arabia as well as Turkey under the rule of the AKP, which supposedly represents a ‘moderate’ Islamic force that is in power in a constitutionally laic state. Such choices of terms are politically motivated and biased, notwithstanding the epistemological distortion they cause in understanding the political Islamic movement. In such a literature ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘radical’ Islam picks out the anti-West, anti-US, and anti-Israel political Islam, a faction of the movement that is represented

¹ See, for example, E. Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982). H. Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers, 2011).

² S. Azeri, ‘Marx’s Concept of Class: A Reconsideration’, *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 43:3–4, (2015), pp. 439–460.

³ Abrahamian, op. cit. Dabashi, op. cit. H. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005). M. Foucault, ‘What are the Iranians Dreaming About?’ In J. Afary and K. B. Anderson (eds) *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 203–209. M. Foucault, *Religion and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

mainly by the Islamic Republic of Iran. 'Moderate' Islam, on the other hand, refers to those factions of political Islam that are not anti-West – Saudi Arabia, Erdogan's administration (with some reservations, of course), jihadi groups of different ranks – no matter the degree of atrocity of the measures and methods they deploy against their own citizens, women, workers etc. Rather than being an embodiment of some religion – in this particular case Islam – political Islam is a reactionary movement, a political response that has been formed particularly in face of the failure of Arab nationalism in resolving the Palestinian question, of which religion is a form of incarnation.

Despite their rivalry, political Islamic factions have common class characteristics and political features, the most important of which is that they function as political devices of regional bourgeoisie in the struggle in the post-Cold War era for a greater share of power. Thus, an analysis of the characteristics of the Islamic regime in Iran (as the only faction of political Islam that is organized as a state), and of its social and class character contributes to a proper understanding of political Islam in its entirety and its role as a bourgeois political movement in determining the inner relations of the international bourgeoisie. However, to this end, a clarification concerning the Marxian conceptualization of the concept of 'class', the method of conceptualizing religion and its relation to politics is required.

The concept of 'class'

Marx's concept of class does not signify a social layer or a particular group of people; it is not a sociological category. Marx arrives at the concept of class on the basis of the analysis of the capitalist social relations of production. Marx in *Capital* in several occasions argues that the capitalist and the worker form a unity, that they are two different sides of the same coin of the capitalist relations of production and are nothing but personifications of capital. 'But individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers [*Träger*] of particular class-relations and interests'.⁴ The capitalist historically has no value other than being a personification of capital and only because of that he is respectable.⁵ The prelude and precondition (and the consequence) of the capitalist relations of production is the commodification of labour-power which amounts to transformation of the capitalist to capital-personified and the worker into 'personification of labour for capital'.⁶ The unity of the capitalist and the worker as personifications of capital as a social relation is itself a reflection of the '*immediate* unity of labour process and valorisation process' in the process of production (1992, 991).⁷ Since

⁴ K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, transl. B. Fowkes (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 92.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 739.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 991.

⁷ *Ibid.*

the development of capital and its movement is self-valorisation; both the worker and the capitalist – the personifications of capital – are continuously reproduced as these persona. Hence follows the ‘fluid actuality of class’, which, ‘logically speaking, is preceded by its concept, where the latter is the ideal reconstruction of social relations, that is, relations between human beings and their mode of activity’.⁸

Since class is a mode of existence of the capitalist social relations of production that signifies an inner contradiction –the form of appearance of capital as two antagonistic figures, that is, the worker and the capitalist – it is nothing other than class struggle.⁹ Class struggle is always politically mediated, in other words, class struggle always assumes a political form and is actualized as a political confrontation. In this regard, discussing the political changes in France and England and the development of the capitalist relations of production Marx states,

class struggle took on more explicit and threatening form, both in practice and theory. It sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economics. It was thenceforth no longer a question whether this or that theorem was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, in accordance with police regulations or contrary to them.¹⁰

The politically mediated class struggle is the manifestation of class horizon in face of the social reality of capitalism. Class outlook is not a function of one’s physical place within a class – it is not a matter of being identified as a ‘worker’ – but is a function of how the conditions and the problems that are constituted by the capitalist relations of production and this social reality are confronted. Every class poses its own responses to this social reality. What differentiates the proletarian horizon from the non-proletarian (bourgeois) horizon is the holistic, negative character of the former, which aims at abolishing the capitalist system, wage-labour, money economy and emancipating the whole of humanity.

When socialist writers ascribe this world-historic role to the proletariat, it is not at all, as Critical Criticism pretends to believe, because they regard the proletarians as gods. Rather the contrary. Since in the fully-formed proletariat the abstraction of all humanity, even of the semblance of humanity, is practically complete; since the conditions of life of the proletariat sum up all the conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman form; since man has lost himself in the proletariat, yet at the same time has not only gained theoretical consciousness of that loss, but through urgent, no longer removable, no longer disguisable, absolutely imperative need — the practical expression of necessity —is driven directly to revolt against this inhumanity, it follows that the proletariat can and must emancipate itself. But it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions of its own life. It cannot abolish the conditions of its own life without abolishing all the inhuman conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own situation.¹¹

⁸ Azeri, op. cit., p. 440.

⁹ R. Gunn, ‘Notes on Class’, *Common Sense*, 2 (1987), pp. 5–25, at p. 16.

¹⁰ Marx, op. cit., p. 97.

¹¹ K. Marx and F. Engels, *K. Marx and F. Engels. The Holy Family* (in *Marx/Engels Collected Works* 4, pp. 5–211) (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 37.

A movement cannot be categorized as bourgeois or as proletarian due to the physical presence of members of a certain class in that movement; this would be a fetishist and reductionist conceptualization of class. The class character of a social movement is a function of the totality of its political ideals in the face of capitalist relations of production.¹²

A Marxian method of analysis of religion

In the opening sentence of the 'Introduction' to the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* Marx states that 'Criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism'.¹³ Marx further states that religion is made by humans and not vice-versa. Religion, then, is the consequence of human activity or, as Feuerbach points, is the alienated projection of human's image onto the heavens.

Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. But *man* is no abstract being encamped outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, the state, society. This state, this society, produces religion, an *inverted world-consciousness*, because they are an *inverted world*.¹⁴

As an inverted picture, religion is the reflection of alienated social relations to the effect that the struggle against religion is an indirect struggle against those relations. For human emancipation to be realized religion should be abolished.¹⁵ Marx's method consists not only in exposing the worldly kernel of religion, the terrestrial untruth of the world upon which religious consciousness stands, but also in revealing why human relations under the capitalist relations of production cannot attain any other form than this specific alienated-fetishistic one. Furthermore, it aims at showing that religion is necessitated by the conditions posed by modern capitalist society itself: 'the German *status quo* is the *open completion of the ancien régime*, and the *ancien régime* is the *concealed deficiency of the modern state*'.¹⁶

Marx argues in a similar vein in his critique of Bauer's stance regarding political emancipation of Jews: 'We no longer regard religion as the *cause*, but only as the *manifestation* of secular narrowness ... We do not turn secular questions into theological questions. We turn theological questions into secular ones'.¹⁷ Neither

¹² S. Azeri, 'The Gezi Uprising: Class Struggle and the Representation Crisis of the "Radical Left"', *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 42:4 (2014), pp. 573–595 at pp. 593–594. Also see, M. Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 323, n. 23. K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (In *Marx/Engels Collected Works* 11, pp. 99–197) (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), p. 187.

¹³ K. Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction' (in *Marx/Engels Collected Works* 3, pp. 175–187) (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), at p. 175.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁷ 'On the Jewish Question' (in *Marx/Engels Collected Works* 3, pp. 146–174) (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), at p. 151.

religious superstition nor other forms of social prejudices (misogyny, ethnicism, racism, etc.) are questions in themselves and by themselves; regardless of their historical root, they are questions of the existing society and are the manifestations of the general misery and unfreedom under capitalism. The question is to locate the source of reproduction of religion within bourgeois society and to underscore the source of inequality and forms of political institutions in this society.

Understanding the essence of religion –in general understanding any essence – requires deciphering this-worldly kernel: abolishing religion requires unfolding the earthly interests – the true essence of religion – that are forms of existence, preconditions, and consequences of social relations. Without such demystification one is entrapped in the world of appearances. The secret of the devotee is not hidden in their religion; to the contrary, the secret of devotion is hidden in the real, daily person. ‘What is the secular basis of Judaism? *Practical need, self-interest*. What is the worldly religion of the Jew? *Huckstering*. What is his worldly God? *Money*’.¹⁸

Marx further argues that money is the form of existence of god in capitalist society. The descend of god down to earth in form of money is caused by its being the expression of practical daily needs and egoism. Money under the capitalist relations of production is transformed into the ‘universal self-established *value* of all things’.¹⁹ As self-positing value, money is not now a mere means of exchange or payment but is capital, the secularised god that necessarily appears as money-form.

Marx reasons similarly in his mature analysis of value-form in *Capital*. He enumerates ‘freedom, equality, property, and Bentham’ as the foundations upon which the realm of circulation and in general the totality of the capitalist relations of production arise.²⁰ According to Marx, capital is the substance-subject of capitalist society.²¹ In capitalist society, where production attains a truly social form, all production is organized toward the goal of self-valorisation of capital, that is, continuous production and reproduction of surplus-value. Through the transformation of money into capital, labour-power as well becomes a factor in the production of surplus-value insofar as it turns into a commodity and, thus, is subsumed under capital.

Marx’s concept of capital follows the same logic as Hegel’s *concept*; capital is self-moving and self-valorising. Yet, as Murray states, ‘Marx considers illusory the supposed pristine autonomy of both capital and the Hegelian concept’.²² The subsumption of labour under capital and transformation of labour-power into a commodity hide this human essence of capital as a social relation and value as a social substance. Thus follows the commodity- fetishism that in order to decipher its worldly kernel

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 172.

²⁰ Marx, *Capital*, op. cit., p. 280.

²¹ E. Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx’s Capital*, transl. S. Syrovatkin (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), p. 278.

²² P. Murray, *Marx’s Theory of Scientific Knowledge* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), p. 217.

we must take flight into the misty realm of religion, [where] the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands.²³

Marx's materialist methodology, therefore, consists in deciphering the human essence of phenomena (*reductio ad hominem*) and laying bare the conditions and possibilities of revolutionizing these relations with reference to their inner logic. Marxian materialism aims at showing why a certain essence appears in this particular way. Thus, this methodology explains the necessity of the appearance of the essence in its historical-specific form.

This aspect of Marx's method is the inner structure that unites his mature critique of social forms in *Capital* with his early critique of philosophy, philosophy of right, and religion. In this sense, Murray correctly states that '[i]n his critiques of modern philosophy, enlightened politics, and the political economy of capitalism, Marx never contradicts his statement ... that "the critique of religion is the presupposition of every critique"'.²⁴

Hamid Dabashi's conceptualization of Islam as the ideology that forms the bases of the 1979 Revolution in Iran is one of the paradigmatic examples of 'mystified' approaches to religion and the relation between material human life, politics and ideology in general – it is an exemplar method that is the subject of Marx's criticism. In *Theology of the Discontent* Dabashi conceptualizes Islam as the subject of 'laws, art, literature, music, dogma ...'²⁵ as if it is something beyond, above and over people and their praxis. In doing so, he recapitulates the very 'colonialist' image of the 'east', 'Islam', or 'Iran' he allegedly attempt to criticize. Dabashi attributes an 'in-itself' positive, 'revolutionary' nature to the so-called 'Islamic ideology' that had been supposed to yield democratic institutions, etc. However, (and perhaps despite the intentions of its main ideologues), the Islamic Republic that was constituted based on this ideology *degenerated* into a theocracy.²⁶ Dabashi derives the political from the ideological: he takes theological questions superficially as merely religious ones, disregarding the earthly roots of religion, ideologies etc. Hence he concludes, 'This paradox, of success at a time of crisis and crisis at the time of success, is endemic to Islamic history, and constitutional to Islamic political culture'.²⁷ It seems that neither the rise nor the fall of political Islam (a term that Dabashi refrains from using) has anything to do with contemporary social and political events of capitalism.

Dabashi accuses the West and the US for the failure of what he calls the 'Islamic Revolution'. His most important presumption is that the 1979 Revolution in Iran

²³ Marx, *Capital*, op. cit., p. 165.

²⁴ Murray, op. cit., p. 189.

²⁵ Dabashi, *Theology*, op. cit., p. xi.

²⁶ Ibid., p. xiv.

²⁷ Ibid.

was 'Islamic' and not suppressed by Islamist counter-revolutionary forces led by Khomeini. The war with Iraq and the rise of Mujahedin and later the Taliban in the Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, accordingly, stopped the Islamic revolution's 'insurrectionary appeal elsewhere, and redirected inward towards the corrupted formation of a medieval theocracy ... *incapable of spreading its would-be healthy wings elsewhere*' to the effect that the Americans soon would regret their success in stopping it from spread.²⁸

Dabashi is silent about the success of Islamists in suppressing the revolution; in his view, Islamism as an ideology and an ideologically-motivated political movement does not represent a class perspective and, thus, the Islamic Republic as an ideological state appears as the form of incarnation of Islam – rather than revealing the earthly kernel of Islam he concludes the terrestrial as the form of appearance of the celestial. Thus, he states that in the course of past 200 years, 'Iran has produced three simultaneous revolutionary ideologies-nationalism, socialism, and Islamism. If the Constitutional Revolution of 1906–1911 was the triumphant assertion of a bourgeois nationalism, the Islamic Revolution of 1977–1979 was the categorical claim of Islamism to a state-apparatus'.²⁹

Dabashi's 'mystified' formulation of the 1979 Revolution is reminiscent of Foucault's, who considers the aim of that Revolution the dream 'to inscribe the figures of spirituality on the earth of politics' (1999, 132).³⁰ In concordance to ascribing ahistoricity and celestuality to religion and having the 1979 Revolution as the incarnation of religiosity in mind, Foucault conceives of revolution as an event 'escaping history'.³¹ Recapitulating the image of the people in Iran (and perhaps in all the Middle East) as essentially religious, and anti-modern who demand a 'return' to their 'origins', he concludes,

After years of censorship and persecution, years of marginality for the political class and of prohibition against parties, years of decimation for revolutionary groups, what else but religion could provide support for the distress and then the revolt of a population *which had been traumatised by 'development', 'reform', 'urbanisation', and all the other failures of the regime?*³²

Foucault's essentialist/fetishistic approach to religion, 'West' and 'East' and his 'mystified' treatment of the relation between ideas and political institutions etc. become more evident as he praises the 'Islamic Revolution' as one of 'those who struggle to present a different way of thinking about social and political organization, one that takes nothing from Western philosophy, from its juridical and revolutionary foundations. In other words, they try to present an alternative based on Islamic teach-

²⁸ Ibid., p. xxi, emphases added.

²⁹ Ibid., p. xxvii.

³⁰ Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, op. cit., p. 132.

³¹ Ibid., p. 131.

³² Ibid., p. 132.

ings'.³³ Foucault's interpretation of the 1979 Revolution is contaminated by the image the bourgeois mass media relays about Iran, notwithstanding that in his ideas about social and political struggle there is no place for classes and class struggle – at least to the extent that the Middle Eastern countries are at stake; everybody in West is Westerner owing to the homogenizing hegemonic power of Western knowledge/ideas. The hope is in East, in Islam, as there in East there are no institutions similar to West; those 'others' have, say, Islam that would facilitate the construction of whole bunch of new institutions – knowledge included.

While interpreting Marx's statement, 'religion is the opium of the masses' in relation to the ongoing revolution in 1978–1979, Foucault completely misrepresents Marx's position, let alone Marx's method. Foucault, in a perverse way, reproduces Bauer's stance, which Marx criticizes: he treats religion theologically (idealistically) as a celestial (absolutely ideal) substance – just as Bauer does, but in contrast to the latter he attributes a positive role to religion, at least to Islam of 'his own time'. Hence his conclusion that

In Marx's time, religion was in fact the opium of the people, and Marx was right for this reason, but only in the context of his own time. His statement ought to be understood only for the time period in which he lived, not as a general statement on all eras of Christianity, or on all religions.³⁴

Foucault's 'theological' approach to religion becomes further manifest as he formulates the so-called 'Islamic Revolution' a 'spiritual' revolution. Foucault derives the Islamists' demands for the Islamic government from 'Shiite spirituality'; rather than political analysis, he is occupied with allegedly pure 'theological' aspects of Shiism which according to him makes the formation of a 'just' society based on it desirable.³⁵ Since he takes religion as a spiritual matter only, he fails to grasp the real basis of the rise of Islamism as a particular political movement in response to failures rooted in contradictions of capitalist society – in this particular case Iran. He therefore writes,

One thing must be clear. By 'Islamic government,' nobody in Iran means a political regime in which the clerics would have a role of supervision or control ... [It] point [s] to two orders of things ... 'A utopia,' some told me without any pejorative implication. 'An ideal,' most of them said to me.³⁶

Allah's descend from the heavens and his 'march on earth' to suppress the 1979 Revolution, has proven Foucault mistaken; his spiritual utopia would in fact be a material inferno where the working class opposition would be brutally suppressed, thousands of activist would be tortured, massacred and buried in unknown mass graves, women would be stoned to death and thieves would be mutilated.

³³ M. Foucault, 'Dialogue between Michel Foucault and Baqir Parham' in J. Afray and K. B. Anderson (eds) *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 183–189, at p. 186.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

³⁵ Foucault, 'What are the Iranians Dreaming About?', *op. cit.* p. 205.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

Ali Javaherian argues in a similar vein.³⁷ According to him the Islamic Republic was formed as an immediate consequence of the victory of the 'Islamic Revolution'; it then started to devour its children at the height of its confidence in the 1980s. In this view, revolution is not a material reality, a battlefield of classes and their political movements, a confrontation for determining the political and social fate of the society but is a moment of the actualization of the '*volkgeist*'.

The 1979 Revolution for long served as the presupposition of the Islamic state. At the height of its self-confidence in the 1980s, it devoured its own children, by turning against the very forces within civil society that had helped bring it to power. It unleashed a ruthless counter-revolutionary terror to suppress its own presupposition, and drove even its first ever-elected president, Bani-Sadr, into exile.³⁸

Javaherian, too, assumes that the people in Iran are traditionalist, conservative, and practicing believers and the 1979 Revolution is the expression of these 'authenticity'. However, it would be later betrayed by secularised religion.

Religion is clearly appropriated as means to a thoroughly secular aim. Here religion is nothing but the religion of expediency, an empirical religion, which fused with politics and nuclear science, has served as the ideological baptism of the state. But this theocratic edification of political power has brought the state-religion into a direct and permanent clash with the private consciousness of the people who have identified religion as the 'the sigh of the oppressed and the soul of a soul-less world'.³⁹

For Marx, 'secularised religion' and religion as the 'sigh of the oppressed' are two sides of the same coin of the capitalist social relations of production. Looked at from the side of capital, it is the capitalized god, that is, god put under its concept. In contrast to money, 'the jealous god of Israel'⁴⁰ as the means of simple exchange and hoarding, capital, the god of the Protestant, which is the expression of the soul of the capitalist world, 'comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt'.⁴¹ In order to endure its rule, capital does not hesitate to commit the most deplorable crimes. Looked at from the side of the masses, religion is the expression of the misery of the human kind under the rule of capital. In contrast to Marx's concrete human who is a member of social world and produces religion as the inverted consciousness of an inverted world,⁴² Javaherian's human is an abstract entity that has certain inborn attributes such as religion, which continue to exist despite the social world of humans.

Class movements and revolutions are negative, that is, they are determined not by what they positively demand for the future, but by what they are opposed to. This negativity is due to the contradictory make-up of the capitalist relations of

³⁷ A. Javaherian, 'Iran: State, Civil Society, and Social Emancipation', *Critique*, 38:2 (2010), pp. 267–282.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', *op. cit.*, p. 172.

⁴¹ Marx, *Capital*, *op. cit.*, p. 926.

⁴² Marx, 'Introduction', *op. cit.*, p. 175.

production, a mode of existence of which is the incarnations of capital in form of conflicting classes – the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Practical criticism of capitalism is necessarily an immanent criticism; there is one world only and that is the social world of capitalism. Immanent criticism is negative in nature. As Postone notes, ‘the possibility of theoretical and practical critique [should] not [be located] in the gap between the ideals and the reality of modern capitalist society, but in the contradictory nature of the form of social mediation that constitutes that society’.⁴³ The 1979 Revolution in Iran is no exception; in contrast to the strategies of the ‘radical left’ organizations that aimed at determining the revolution by propaganda that would allegedly elevate ‘class consciousness’, Khomeini and Islamists managed to dominate the social upheaval in 1978–79 by focusing on the negative aspect of the revolution – ‘No to Shah!’ So was the case with the Bolsheviks; rather than coming up with a positive socialist propaganda against the Tsar and later against the provisional government, they came on the scene demanding peace (‘No to War’) and bread. Ignoring the negativity of revolutions and the immanence of the practical criticism of capitalist society amounts to reducing revolutions into an unfolding and expression of some social or transcendental consciousness. This is the thread that links the aforementioned critiques.

The 1979 Revolution and the class character of the Islamic Republic

Conceptualizations of the class character of the (pre-revolutionary) Iran and the consequent characteristics of the 1979 Revolution are to a large extent ‘apolitical’, ‘mystified’ and understand ‘class’ in sociological terms. One major group of scholars consider both the Shah and the Islamic Republic a ‘rentier state’. Accordingly, the petroleum-based economic structure of Iran prevents the formation of a proper industrial capitalist society and social classes; this in turn yields to dictatorial regimes such as the Shah’s monarchy or the Islamic Republic. Such approaches are economic-deterministic as they correlate the existence of ‘proper’ industrial capitalism with democratization and the formation of liberal bourgeois democratic institutions – an age-old liberalist thesis that has continuously been falsified in practice.

The rentier state theory was first formulated by Hossein Mahdavy.⁴⁴ Mahdavy argues that there is a direct link between healthy economic growth based on taxing the wage labourers and the industry and the formation of democratic institutions. As the state relies more and more on external rent incomes such as petroleum, the process of capitalization is deteriorated and the consequent rentier state ‘acquires an independence from the people seldom found in other countries,’ and the state

⁴³ Postone, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ ‘The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran’ in M. A. Cook (ed.) *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East: From the Rise of Islam to the Present Day* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 428–67.

becomes able 'to distribute these rents without sanction or powerful opposing interest groups increases its authoritarian tendencies'.⁴⁵

In a more recent article, Kazem Alamdari similarly argues that (The Islamic Republic of) Iran has been a populist state between 1979 and 1989, meaning that it has had 'a non-class structure with a charismatic leadership',⁴⁶ while after the termination of the war between Iran and Iraq it has turned into a 'clientelist' state where 'the elected legislative body takes a subordinate position to an influential clergy and its associates'.⁴⁷ What is common between these two periods is their 'non-class' character: 'Clientelism is a non-class system with a power structure that consists of separate vertical rival groups rather than horizontal class layers. Such a structure crosses classes, occupations and ethnic identities, and it organises society based on family or mafia-style relationships'.⁴⁸ Alamdari claims that both populism and clientelism prevent the formation of classes (1289).⁴⁹ Populism functions as the ideology of a declining middle-class in a society in transition from agrarian system to capitalism.

However, such a transition in Iran, which has begun since the 1961 agrarian reforms, has amounted to 'peasantisation' of cities, culture, and politics as landless masses migrated to cities and urban areas. Accordingly, in an 'Islamic Culture' like Iran, such unregulated social mobility, together with lack of political parties and institutions (lack of democratic 'culture'⁵⁰) paved way for the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini 'a charismatic leader who proclaimed himself God's representative on earth and the people's saviour easily manipulated the uneducated masses, who had no political experience'.⁵¹ With the death of the charismatic ayatollah, each circle of power within the ranks of Islamists, which has been formed around different religious authorities as the representatives of god on earth with their own peculiar interpretation of religion, starts to function as an independent entity that is in relation with other circles of power, above and beneath itself, related with patron-client bonds.⁵² In contrast to traditional form of clientelism where the source of wealth belongs to the individual patron, 'in the modern type of clientelism the source of income is the rentier state and, in the case of Iran, its dominant resource – oil. Therefore, in modern political clientelism patrons aim to hold governmental positions'.⁵³

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 466–467.

⁴⁶ K. Alamdari, 'The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: From Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government', *Third World Quarterly*, 26:8 (2005), pp. 1285–1301, at p. 1286.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 1287.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 1288.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 1289.

⁵⁰ H. Moghissi and S. Rahnama, similarly, explain the rise Islamic dictatorship in Iran with reference to absence of democratic culture and institutions that prevent left organisations from making contacts and bonds with the working class; they also reduce working class to a sociological category signifying "industrial workers" ('The Working Class and the Islamic State in Iran', *Socialist Register* (2001), 197–218, at p. 197–198 and p. 201).

⁵¹ K. Alamdari, op. cit., p. 1286.

⁵² Ibid., p. 1289.

⁵³ Ibid.

Mahnaz Zahirinejad's presents the rentier state theory succinctly.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the middle class, usually, plays an essential role in the process of democratization in developed countries; however, in Iran, the middle class has failed to do so.⁵⁵ Zahirinejad aims at uncovering the reasons of this alleged failure. The main reason is presented as the role of the state in Iranian economy, which deteriorates the independence of the middle class from the state power; an independence that functions as the guarantee of its role in the process of democratization. She then concludes that Iran is a rentier state;⁵⁶ the Iranian state does not tax people and relies on huge oil revenues, which amounts to its stability as people are less demanding in face of low taxes.⁵⁷ All in all, in one way or another the 'middle class' supports the Iranian state.⁵⁸ It remains an enigma, then, why people revolted against the Shah, and why they keep on struggling and fighting the Islamic regime (1999, 2009, 2017 and 2019 uprisings).

According to the 'rentier state' theory for an 'independent' productive middle class to emerge, a society should be industrialized, because it is only industry that produces 'real' wealth. This is a new form of industrial physiocracy. Accordingly, the natural resources such as petroleum and natural gas are not produced and thus those societies that largely depend on production and sale of such naturals are not capitalistic but rentier. The people in these societies are collaborators of the rentier states. Rentier state theory is a reductionist, industrialist stance that considers 'genuine' production in terms of physical, tangible commodity production. It is blind to the structure of capitalist economy, the sole aim of which is production and accumulation of value. It disregards that rent is an inevitable outcome of capitalist production and extraction of surplus-value, a surplus-profit that should be handed to the proprietor class, just as interest is the surplus-profit to be handed to financial capital.

The rentier state theory fails to explain that if it is the 'tax contract' that amounts to democratization, why nowadays in Turkey, Brazil, Hungary, Poland, India, and elsewhere the dictatorial regimes with patrons being statespersons are at the rise? In particular, the rentier state theory of Mahdavy and others represents the viewpoint of nationalist industrialist bourgeois faction in Iran that complained from lack of heavy industry, criticized mounting industry as non-genuine and nagged that even commodities as simple as needles are imported.

A similar trait of apoliticism and economic reductionism is apparent in Ervand Abrahamian's widely celebrated account of Iran's process of capitalization and the consequent 1979 Revolution. According to Abrahamian, the 1979 Revolution was triggered by the discrepancy between economic modernization (capitalization) and lack of development in political sphere, i.e. the revolution was triggered by the

⁵⁴ M. Zahirinejad, 'The State and the Rise of the Middle Class in Iran', *Hemispheres*, 29:1 (2014), pp. 63–78.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

contradiction between economic improvement and political underdevelopment: ‘The revolution came because the shah modernized on the socioeconomic level and thus expanded the ranks of the modern middle class and the industrial working class, but failed to modernize on another level the political level... In short, the revolution took place neither because of overdevelopment nor because of underdevelopment but because of uneven development’.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Abrahamian explains Shah’s dictatorship on the basis of his personal and/or familial etc. vocations and not as a form of government necessitated by the requirements of capitalist competition and profitability of capital in an economy of Iran’s size. Accordingly, had the Shah not mismanaged the process of ‘modernization’ (a term that Abrahamian, alongside many others, uses instead of capitalization), the process of industrialization of Iran would inevitably yield the formation of liberal democratic institutions and democratization of society.

According to Abrahamian, the economic crisis that had triggered protests and which was expressed in form of acute inflation through the mid-1970s, was caused by rapid economic growth and development plans;

the lack of housing and influx of over 60,000 well-paid foreign technicians; the failure of agricultural production to keep up with the rising population; the sudden jump in food prices on the world markets; the crash industrialization program and the continued growth in the military establishment, which created labor shortages, raised wages in the rural sector, drained labor from the rural sector, and thus further aggravated the agricultural problem.⁶⁰

In response, Amouzgar’s government, by ‘engineering a controlled mild recession in 1978 managed to slow down economic growth to 2 percent, and lowering the inflation rate to 7 percent’.⁶¹ Yet, it remains unexplained why economic growth would have such drastic effect on inflation and contrary to commonsensical expectation, why such an economic growth worsened the situation of large masses. Furthermore, Abrahamian’s account becomes confusing as he introduces the ‘engineered mild recession’ as the reason for the working-class protests and strikes as it caused lowering of their life standards. Additionally, the austerity measures that were supposed to be introduced had already been announced by the Shah in October 1976.⁶² So, it would be more plausible to consider the immiseration of the working masses despite rapid capitalization and accumulation of capital and the Shah’s decision to put the burden of the economic crisis – which was in fact a regional form of appearance of the global capitalist crisis in the mid-1970s – on the shoulders of the working class and waged-labourers the main element that commenced the revolutionary process.⁶³

⁵⁹ Abrahamian, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 497.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 509–510.

⁶² Abrahamian himself quotes the Shah’s interview; *Ibid.*, pp. 511–512.

⁶³ A. Ashraf and A. Banuazizi recapitulate Abrahamian’s method of analysis while stating that the backbone of the ‘Islamic Revolution’ consisted of the religious clergy, the bazaar merchants and young teachers and

Torab Saleth's analysis of class nature of the Islamic regime too suffers from shortcomings common to traditional radical left responses to this issue.⁶⁴ Saleth correctly emphasizes that the Islamic regime in Iran is not the consequence of the 1979 Revolution, but is the outcome of the defeat of the revolution by political Islamist counter-revolution, which, in the absence of a more desirable alternative for the international bourgeoisie ('imperialism'), functions as the instrument of saving the capitalist regime in Iran. However, Saleth falls short in explaining the economic character of capitalism in Iran and the economic foundations of the political crisis that amounted to the toppling of the Shah's monarchy by the 1979 Revolution. Accordingly, the capitalization process that was accelerated by the Shah's 1961–63 reform movement known as 'the White Revolution' got into crisis due to seizure of the Iranian market by the imperialists and their local collaborators. 'In the same way that the Moghul kings used to make gifts of whole provinces to their faithful servants, the Shah was granting monopolistic licenses to his cronies to produce consumer goods'.⁶⁵ Saleth adds that the Shah was supporting monopolies against local small producers.

Saleth's argument suffers a contradiction. He argues that the state had posed custom tariffs prior to the White Revolution, which was removed after the reform movement. The removal of tariffs requires the monopolies that produce consumption goods to produce them at a lower cost in order to stay competitive. The averse of local small producers can only be explained on the basis of their inability to compete with the monopolies due to the latter's relative lower cost of production. Furthermore, Saleth argues that the newly-formed industrial bourgeoisie eventually pushed traditional merchants out of the ruling class; however, he also states that the merchant estate kept its financial power. That the local merchant estate could keep its financial power does not cohere with Saleth's thesis concerning the monopolies producing consumption goods at a lower cost. In an economy of the size of Iran's in 1970s, the profitability of capital requires a lower cost of production of labour and this is another point that contradicts Saleth's thesis. Saleth expresses the core of his argument concerning the economic character of the Shah's regime as follows:

At the core of the Shah's 'revolution' was an attempt to introduce a limited industrialisation which was based on the import of capital goods and the production of consumer goods for the home market under license from foreign companies. This plan directly clashed with the interests of the big bazaari merchants.⁶⁶

In short, these incoherent statements amount to saying that the crisis of capitalism in Iran in the second half of 1970s was based on insufficient and uneven industrialization and all these are said from the perspective of the local small capital-owners.

students. Accordingly, the 'middle class' and 'industrial working class' later joined the movement but since they were late, they more or less automatically accepted the hegemony of Islamist ('The State, Classes and Modes of Mobilization in the Iranian Revolution', *Culture and Society*, 1:3 (1985), pp. 3–40).

⁶⁴ T. Saleth, 'Class Nature of the Iranian Regime', *Critique*, 35:3 (2007), pp. 1–9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The final section of Saleth's article that aims for explaining the economic character of the Islamic Republic reveals this aspect more clearly. Accordingly, the abnormal functioning of capitalism in Iran under the Islamic regime, which is marked by the controlling of the main veins of economy by state-mafia cliques, are not caused by the economic and political crises that triggered the 1979 Revolution – the contradictions that cannot be resolved by the Islamic regime either – but is the existence and dominance of mullahs in the regime. Referring to a Persian proverb he writes, 'it has been proven once again that you never get anything back from a mullah'.⁶⁷ Saleth argues that the reason of the failure of the so-called 'reform' attempts and constituting a normally-functioning capitalist economy in the Islamic Republic is due to this dominance. Accordingly, a 'civil' Islamic Republic has the potential for such transformation. Saleth's arguments fails to explain how political Islam appeared as an alternative in the eyes of the international bourgeoisie in face of the capitalist crisis in Iran and why the faction of political Islam represented by the Islamic Republic cannot be integrated the international bourgeoisie economically and politically.

The pre-1979 Revolution economic crisis in Iran was indeed a part of the international capitalist crisis during the 1970s as Iran has already completed the process of capitalization marked by the so-called 'White Revolution' and been integrated into world capitalism. As a 'dependent *capitalist*' society (with the emphasis not on dependency but on capitalism), Iran was subject to all the laws of capitalist production, accumulation and crisis. The specificity of 'dependent capitalism' in Iran is rooted in the form of constitution of original accumulation and the initiation of capitalization process based on the export of capital (not as mere money but as a social relation) from advanced capitalist societies to late capitalized countries.⁶⁸ 'Dependent capitalism' is subject to all laws of capitalist production.

The export of capital is the operation of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. The operation of this law in the advanced capitalist countries, in whose domestic markets capital has become intensely centralized (its organic composition has increased), necessitates the movement of capital to spheres having greater profitability. From this viewpoint, the export of capital itself works as a counteracting factor of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall ... different monopoly capitals and the states which pursue the interests of these capitals in the political sphere, strive, in different ways, politically and economically, to provide the necessary economic and political conditions for the profitability of their exported capitals and also to preserve for themselves the spheres of export of capital against their rivals.⁶⁹

The export of capital is not a matter of exporting capital as a 'thing' like money. Rather, it signifies the constitution of those social relations of production that organise production toward the universal social goal of production of value and self-

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁸ M. Hekmat, 'The Main Fronts of the Class War in Present Situation' (in Persian), 1980, <http://hekmata-public-archive.net/fa/0090fa.html>

⁶⁹ M. Hekmat, 'A Consideration of the Marxist Theory of Crisis and Some Deductions about Dependent Capitalism, 1980, <http://hekmata-public-archive.net/en/0140en.html>

valorisation of capital to the highest degree. Such constitution does not require the formation of bourgeois 'liberal democracies'. To the contrary, capital puts the social relations of domination that it finds in late-capitalised societies at its own service and intensifies their monstrosity; it inherits the exiting forms of social stratification and appropriation of the surplus-product of masses that are deprived from the means of production and constitutes and reproduces them as capitalist forms of domination and appropriation by subsuming the process of production under the abstract time of value. This abstraction stems from and is the condition of the universal character of capitalist production, which contrasts the pre-capitalist forms of production 'where the use-value rather than the exchange-value of the product predominates' and hence 'surplus labour will be restricted by a more or less confined set of needs, and that no boundless thirst for surplus labour will arise from the character of production itself'.⁷⁰ Hence, even the slavery system can become an integral part of capitalist production. Marx refers to the slavery system to explain this aspect of capitalist production: To the extent the slave labour was limited to the production of immediate local needs it was conducted under a patriarchal rule but once it aimed at producing for satisfying the needs of the world market, say cotton for the capitalist textile industry, 'the over-working of the Negro, and sometimes the consumption of his life in seven years of labour, became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products, but rather of the production of surplus-value itself'.⁷¹ Capital's aim is self-valorisation. Thus, the concrete and the general, abstract aspects of labour is for it a matter of indifference. Capital, as a social relation, turns labour into 'practically abstract labour' as value-producing labour. It then takes over the concrete aspect of labour and turns it into a moment of itself, of practically abstract labour. The concept of 'export of capital' explains this process of integration of late-capitalised regions into the world market and the global capitalist system. The concept is reminiscent of what Massimiliano Tomba conceptualizes as 'different temporalities' of capitalism and the production of 'new wage-differential geographical areas'. 'Capitalist globalisation puts politics to work in order to defeat workers' resistance and to produce new wage-differentials in geographical areas where it can reap fresh sums of absolute surplus-value'.⁷²

Thus, the 'export of capital' can be interpreted as constituting conditions in a specific geographical area (a society) under which labour – as the condition of production of value – is subsumed under capital as a world-wide social relation to the effect of contributing to the global process of valorization: the constitution of these conditions can be actualized by 'freeing' labour and through formal and real subsumption of labour, as in the case of, say, the agrarian reforms from above in Iran

⁷⁰ Marx, *Capital*, op. cit., pp. 344–345.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁷² M. Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities*, transl. P. Thomas and S. Farris (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 144–145.

in early 1960s, or by appending the old forms of exploitation, such as slavery in the cotton fields of the southern states of the US to global capitalist economy and thus through hybrid subsumption of labour, or by a mixture of all these forms of subsumption. As soon as production loses its local character (that is, production for the sake of satisfying concrete local needs), it is subsumed under capital and becomes an integrated part of the total global capital. In case of Iran in the mid-twentieth century, this was done by production and export of oil, which in turn facilitated the import of capital-relation.

The export of capital is related to capital's capability to produce a surplus-profit in the importing country. Capital has to reproduce the conditions that yield such a surplus: what is at stake is not that labour is cheap but is that it should be *kept* cheap; not that the rate of exploitation is high in those countries but that it should be *kept* high.⁷³ Therefore, looked from the side of capital, dictatorships are the necessary means of constitution and reproduction of those conditions in capital-importing countries. Adam Smith had noted that,

the proprietor of stock is properly a citizen of the world, and is not necessarily attached to any particular country. He would be apt to abandon the country in which he was exposed to a vexatious inquisition, in order to be assessed to a burdensome tax, and would remove his stock to some other country where he could either carry on his business, or enjoy his fortune more at his ease.⁷⁴

Dictatorial regime is the bourgeois 'strong state' in capital-importing countries, whose class character 'subsists through world market relations';⁷⁵ it is the executive committee of bourgeoisie which sets the favorable conditions for the export of capital.

Two major classes and their political movements confronted in the 1979 Revolution: the anti-Shah bourgeoisie that was represented by two factions, and the working class. However, the absence of a political organization that represents the working class horizon and the political movement of the class, which directs it toward the goal of seizing political power provided the bourgeoisie with the opportunity of having the upper hand in determining the fate of the revolution. The task of suppressing the revolution could not be left to the pro-west bourgeoisie represented by the monarchy, which was overthrown by the revolution; this party had proved itself unable in managing the revolutionary crisis. In the atmosphere of a bipolar world and the Cold War, in order to prevent the success of a possible left-wing regime, political Islam and Ayatollah Khomeini were brought to the scene by the international bourgeoisie.

The bourgeois (Islamist) counter-revolution had two major tasks: suppressing the revolution and initiating a new phase of capital accumulation. Political Islam

⁷³ Hekmat, 'The Main Fronts', op. cit.

⁷⁴ A. Smith, *The Wealth of the Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 848–849, quoted in W. Bonefeld, 'Free Economy and the Strong State: Some Notes on the State', *Capital and Class*, 34:1 (2010), pp. 14–24, at p. 19.

⁷⁵ Bonefeld, op. cit., p. 19.

consisted then of two major factions: The Islamic Republic Party (IRP) and the 'liberal' faction that was led by Bani-Sadr. None of the two factions were able to lead the counter-revolution at that stage. The two factions needed a power in order to arise upon and to get united. There are three major questions to be asked concerning that stage of the 1979 Revolution: Why the counter-revolution lacked the ideological-political-organizational unity? What did characterize the counter-revolution? In the absence of the material conditions for the emergence of such leadership, to what extent these two factions could conduct the counter-revolution?⁷⁶

In order to constitute the rule of capital, the Iranian bourgeoisie did not get into a historical struggle against feudalism; to the contrary, the emergence of the Iranian bourgeoisie and its ascend to the rank of main exploiting class was actualized by the Shah's monarchy through capital import. Thus, the 'liberal' faction of bourgeoisie was pushed not to support monarchy, the strongest guardian of bourgeoisie, against the revolutionary movement of the people. The 'liberal' faction demanded a larger share from the surplus-profit of the vertically enveloped international capital; it was not aware that its existing share of profit had already been made possible only through the vertical envelopment bourgeois method. When the revolutionary process of 1978–79 made the collapse of the Shah's monarchy inevitable, the most illusioned faction of bourgeoisie, the 'liberals', agreed with the international bourgeoisie upon removing the Shah but saving the bourgeois state machinery with as minimal damage as possible. As Hekmat put, 'with this agreement, the petite-bourgeois liberal leadership had acquired whatever it considered to be a victory but (despite this illusion) the international bourgeoisie had taken a tactical step back only'.⁷⁷ Just as in the case of the June days of 1848 'all classes and parties had united in the *Party of Order* against the proletarian class as the *Party of Anarchy*, of socialism, of communism. They had 'saved; society from 'the enemies of society',⁷⁸ all the factions of bourgeoisie were united in order to save the bourgeois regime in 1979 Iran.

However, the massive uprising of February 11 shattered the foundations of the agreement among bourgeois factions and invalidated it in reality. In this sense, the competition and confrontation within the ranks of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie during the 1979–80 period, more than being a 'natural' act of getting the upper hand in political power, was the result of the blow dealt by the February 11 uprising. Khomeini was then sent onto the scene as the only alternative of the international bourgeoisie who had the power to suppress the revolution. On the one hand, he was the leader of the traditional petite-bourgeoisie; on the other hand, due to his influence within the revolutionary masses, he had the potential for suppressing the revolution in the name of revolution.

⁷⁶ M. Hekmat, 'Two Factions within the Bourgeois-Imperialist Counter-Revolution', 1981, <http://hekmatarchive.net/en/0030en.html>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, op. cit., p. 111.

The confrontation between the two factions of the Islamist bourgeois counter-revolution, the IRP and Bani-Sadr, was the reflection of different strategies they would adopt for suppressing the revolution. Yet, none of the two was the genuine and 'legitimate' representatives of the international bourgeoisie; such representatives can appear only when the material social conditions are provided, that is, when a new 'ordinary' cycle of capitalist accumulation starts; whereas, these two factions were only provisional means of the international bourgeoisie against the 1979 Revolution.

The position of these two factions of counter-revolution was determined by their responses to the questions that the 1979 Revolution posed to the international bourgeoisie. The IRP was aware that given the level of profitability of capital in Iran, it was impossible to constitute a western-type bourgeois democracy; therefore the IRP was advocating a violent suppressing of the revolution. Overlooking the difficulties the Iranian bourgeoisie faced due to the level of profitability of capital in Iran, the 'liberals', despite being as much anti-communist as the IRP, considered violence as the 'last resort'. However, in face of the permanence of the revolutionary process in regions such as Kurdistan, neither did hesitate to mobilize all the military and security forces of the state against the revolution. Yet, it was the IRP that could correctly identify the needs of the international bourgeoisie during the revolutionary period.

In revolutionary periods capital prioritizes overcoming the crisis to value-production. Law should be suspended so that the order is restored; it is the law that is at the service of order and not vice-versa. The international bourgeoisie was aware that the priority in the revolutionary crisis period in Iran was to establish the counter-revolutionary order so that the regime could be saved. As Hekmat then formulated,

Despite all the dangers that bourgeoisie confronts due to revolution, small and medium-size capitals understand the "order" in terms of security, end of anarchy, workers starting doing their jobs, turning of the wheels of the machines, etc. Therefore, they identify order with 'ending the conflict'. International capital, on the other hand, in such conditions does not understand 'order' in terms of production but identifies the restoring of order with the absolute domination of counter-revolution and the unqualified suppression of revolution. What the international bourgeoisie seeks in Iran does not have to be identical with the immediate commencement of production; to the contrary, *the counter-revolutionary order, in the final analysis, is the precondition of [capitalist] production; the former paves the way for the latter.*⁷⁹

Rather than being determined by its relation to the market, the state is determined by its relation to class.⁸⁰ The class character of the state reveals itself most clearly in the periods of crisis. In revolutionary periods the state is neither immediately nor indirectly an instrument for actualizing an 'economic' form but is the instrument of re-establishing a particular form of political relations. The transformation of the

⁷⁹ Hekmat, 'Two Factions', op. cit., emphases added.

⁸⁰ Bonefeld, op. cit., p. 22.

revolution-based state to the economic-based ('ordinary') state is a consequence of a more or less long process of the struggle between social movements through political means. In this sense, Islam for political Islam is not a system of beliefs based on a series of spiritual-ideological assumptions; rather, it is a wholly political instrument. Political Islam represents the terrestrial interests of the international bourgeoisie in crises periods; it is a political movement at the service of establishing a socio-political order that facilitates the permanence of these interests.

Conclusion: the future of political Islam

The aforementioned clearly shows the class character of political Islam in general and the Islamic Republic regime in Iran in particular. However, there remains one important question to answer: has not the Islamic Republic, which was formed as the international bourgeoisie's response to the 1979 revolutionary crisis, realized its task? If it has, why has it not been transformed into or replaced by an 'ordinary' bourgeois state? Furthermore, how is it possible that this instrument of suppressing the 1979 Revolution confront at least a faction of the international bourgeoisie?

Two basic factors explain why the Islamic Republic project has not yet come to its logical end and is not replaced by an ordinary bourgeois state. The first one is related to the historical conditions of the formation of political Islam as a political movement. Although the roots of political Islam go back to the end of nineteenth century, it came on the scene, though at the margins, in face of the failure of Arab nationalism in resolving the Palestinian question. That being the case, it has been moulded with anti-Americanism and hatred against Israel. In the atmosphere of the Cold War, the West could tolerate this jargon and even could mobilize it against the 'danger of communism' and the Soviet bloc. Hence, any step taken by the 'radical' (meaning anti-American) political Islam and the Islamic Republic, as the only faction of this movement that is organized in the form of a state, toward the West deprives it from its *raison d'être* and brings it a step closer to its collapse. Despite all its efforts, the failure of the Islamic Republic to integrate into the international capitalist system as an 'ordinary' bourgeois state – the ordinary political mode of existence of the capitalist relations of production – is due to this aspect of its nature. Political Islam, by definition is the expression and the source of disorder as, by nature, it violates the separation of civil and political spheres that is essential for bourgeois society; not only as politicized religion it is the representative on 'imperfect state', but also, as a last resort for reinstating order, it is the manifestation of putrefaction of capitalist relations.

Secondly, the collapse of the Soviet Union turned all the former international power balances upside down. The *de facto* leadership of the US within the West bloc, which was the consequence of the competition and confrontation between two rival poles, has lost its sense. The US endeavored to re-establish this leadership by showing muscles and waging wars against Afghanistan and Iraq; however, in the

final analysis, the die-hard fundamental political and economic realities of the post-Cold War capitalist world have determined the new power balances in the world. Moreover, the collapse of the US strategy in the Middle East and its political defeat in Iraq (the 2003 occupation), the rise of new competing regional and international powers, and the acute economic crisis of capitalism which is also reflected in the political crisis of all factions of the international bourgeoisie and its lack of strategy, all these have provided the Islamic Republic in particular and political Islam in general with a wider space for manoeuvring. Political Islam now functions as an instrument of a faction of bourgeoisie in the region to demand a larger share of power in the post-Cold War world. It is the permanence of the 'state of emergency' of the international bourgeoisie that prolongs the life of the Islamic Republic and reproduces political Islam.

Hegel defines the ordinary state as the self-realization of the mind on earth and thus as the actualization of morality and freedom in its absolute form. 'State' he says 'is the march of the God in the world' (2001, 197). By his usual trick, dealing with the state-in-general 'philosophically' (*the State*), he ignores the historical specificity of the state and its coming-into-its-concept under the capitalist relations of production. Hegel explains a truth but in a perverse way. The state is the march of god, but this is the god of the protestant – capital. In reality, rather than being 'the ethical whole and the actualization of freedom',⁸¹ the state is the showcase and the condition of unfreedom; the state is the expression of the bloody rule of capital. What necessitates the state's divine march on earth is the need to keep the order to the effect of facilitating the functioning of capital's law of self-valorisation.

The Islamic Republic is the perverse form of such a perversion, it is the walk of Allah – as the incarnation of capital-in-crisis – whose 'omnipresence', that is, its interfering in every aspect of social and political life, is the expression of its permanent incapability to separate itself from civil society. This is yet another manifestation of its provisional nature and its incapability to integrate into international capital.⁸² Its existence shows that the chronic social and political contradictions that amounted to social crisis and consequently the revolution of the 1979 have stayed intact: poverty and rightlessness, violation of the most basic human rights and freedoms on a daily basis, high rates of unemployment, wages below the official line of poverty, high rates of exploitation of surplus-value, child labour, continuous dehumanizing practices against women, workers, and the whole society etc. The class war is permanent; the existence of the Islamic Republic is a mode of existence of this war and its intensification. The overthrow of the Islamic Republic is inseparable from and will succeed dethroning Allah and the rule of capital.

⁸¹ G. F. W. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, transl. S. W. Dyde (Kitchener, ON: Batoche Books, 2001), p. 197.

⁸² S. Behdad and F. Nomani, from a different perspective, draw attention to incompatibility of the Islamic Republic with normal cycle of capitalist accumulation: 'The Islamic foundations and their affiliated capitalists have formed a formidable barrier to the capitalist development of Iran' ('What a Revolution! Thirty Years of Social Class Reshuffling in Iran', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 29:1 (2009), pp. 84–104. At p. 103).

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