

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 received considerable attention from modern social scientists¹ who study collective action and revolution because it allowed them to apply their different perspectives to an ongoing social event. Some used events in Iran to fashion new theories² and others to amend their old theories.³ Like previous studies, this project uses the Iranian experience as an exemplar, but focuses on a sequence of related social movement frames that were negotiated by Iranian groups from the late 19th through the 20th century. While structural theories of collective social action⁴ offer insights as to how the Iranian revolution was created and why it succeeded, many observers⁵ believe that a unique Iranian-Islamic culture was the “glue” that held revolutionary groups together and made collective action possible during the revolution. Many social movement researchers of the last two decades have recognized that a narrow emphasis on social structural conditions, such as economic change, often produced research that neglected the importance of culture, ideology and social identity in fostering collective action.⁶

Statement of the Problem

Periods of social conflict are often when new ideas are constructed and introduced to a society.⁷ During conflict, social movement actors manipulate *symbols* and *language* in order to create new ideas and new social identities (Snow et. al 1986). Still, movement leaders anchor their speech and action to existing cultural symbols and narratives (McAdam 1994; Swidler 1986; Zald 1996). This process results in an interesting paradox. On the one hand, leaders use traditional narratives to unify and mobilize movement followers, but their goals include changing the existing social system. In this respect movement leaders often use traditional cultural narratives—sometimes a rhetorical “return” to a religious or social ideal—in order to create new movement identities and introduce new ideas.

Social movements are often studied as discrete events, which does not allow for an

inquiry into either the continuity, or dynamic change, that can occur to a social system over time. One way to address this problem is by investigating *cycles of protest* in a society. This allows for an examination of the continuity of movement messages over time, as well as an examination of changes that protest activity has had on cultural norms and beliefs (Tarrow 1983). Snow and Benford (1992) have proposed that cycles of protest are associated with the development of a movement *master frame*. This frame is a broad collective orientation that enables people to interpret an event in a more or less uniform manner. In effect, when an individual is presented with new information, a new idea, or a new social event, they have to place this information into an existing social framework, a master frame, in order to render it meaningful. While master frameworks remain mostly constant, they are also amended during periodic cycles of protest.

This study will investigate how movement groups use, change and amend master frames of mobilization in order to gain movement support. Specifically, how did movement groups in Iran develop and amend master frames during periodic cycles of protests from 1890 to the present? Put differently, this study explores the proposition that successive cycles of protest are facilitated by the development of an innovative master framework (Snow and Benford 1992). By investigating how master frames were negotiated by social movement actors over time, this work will examine both the continuity and change of movement messages during periods of heightened social protest in Iran.

Protest Cycles in Iran

Throughout the late 19th and 20th century, Iranian society experienced increases in protest that were tied to dissatisfaction with indigenous governing systems and the increasing power that the West exercised in Iranian regional affairs. The current state of Iran was once the center of a formidable empire—the Safavid dynasty—that declined throughout the 18th century. This decline was accelerated by Russian and British expansion into the region. Concurrently, the Ottoman Empire—rival of the Safavids since the 16th century—also declined throughout the 18th century. Following World War I both these empires were formally carved into nation-states by the Western powers. The slow destruction of empire in

the Middle East precipitated the first debates concerning national sovereignty of the new Middle Eastern states.⁸ Much social protest during this period was directly related to the “state-making” process (Tilly 1984; Bright and Harding 1984).

Social movement activity is directed toward eradicating, or creating, a social condition. As such, leaders engage in *diagnostic framing* that identifies a condition as problematic, and which designates who is responsible for this condition. *Prognostic frames* are then formed which outline a plan of redress—or the program of action by which a social problem will be eliminated (Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994). In twentieth century Iran movement leaders often identified Western imperialism as the primary problem in need of redress. Designating who was to blame for this imperialism was more difficult, but usually included representatives of Western political and economic interests that were operating in Iran. Eventually those responsible for this condition included the Iranian government, which was seen as an extension of Western imperialism, and also individuals who were regarded as being more “Western” than “Moslem” in their worldview. At the same time, conceptions of “the West” changed during different protest cycles, as well as conceptions of what it meant to be “Moslem” or “Iranian.”

Tarrow (1998) defines a protest cycle as a period of heightened conflict across a social system. A protest cycle is therefore accompanied by a mass mobilization of people, increased coordination regarding information flows, the creation of innovative forms of protest and the creation of new frames of action (142). In this respect, the periods of heightened protest in the late 19th and 20th century Iran are easily identifiable and include the following:

The Tobacco Movement (1891-92) and Constitutional Revolution (1906-09)

The Tobacco movement and Constitutional revolution in Iran have often been linked together in past studies.⁹ There was continuous regional protest activity in Iran between these

periods, but these two events represent the most intense periods of nationwide protest against Western imperialism and the Iranian Qajar monarchy. The Tobacco movement started as a series of regional protests against a concession arrangement, granted by the Qajar monarchy, that created a British monopoly on the purchase and the sale of tobacco within Persia. Regional protest, instigated by Iranian tobacco merchants, later became coordinated across the nation. These protests forced the Qajar Shah to cancel the concession arrangement. Later, many groups mobilized during the Tobacco movement continued to press the Qajar Shah to relinquish some of his political authority. Their demands coalesced around the need to establish a constitutional monarchy and national assembly (*Majles-e shoora-yi melli*). The movement, after a series of symbolic protests throughout 1906, was successful in demanding, and then creating, Iran's first constitutional form of governance. Civil war (1908-09) followed the adoption of the Iranian constitution between groups that either supported the constitution, or supported the traditional system of monarchical governance.

Post World War II Movements: The Tudeh (Masses) and National Front

Reza Khan Pahlavi, a military dictator and self-styled monarch, governed Iran from 1924 to 1941. He was forced to abdicate the Pahlavi throne in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza, following an invasion of British and Russian forces into Iran during World War II. Following the abdication there was a considerable increase in social movement activity in Iran. In particular, the *Tudeh* (Masses), an Iranian communist party whose leadership had been jailed during Reza Khan's rule, staged several large demonstrations throughout the 1940s. The *Tudeh* platform generally tried to orient modern Iran toward a socialist-communist system of governance. The party was also successful in organizing many modern (wage earning) Iranian workers during this period. Most importantly, the *Tudeh*—inspired by Marxist Leninism and the Russian revolution—introduced the concept of class-consciousness into the Iranian social discourse. As a result, nearly all movement groups had to address issues raised by the *Tudeh* concerning social class during the post World War II debates. The *Tudeh* was outlawed in 1949, but remained active, to varying degrees, in Iranian politics until

it was largely obliterated during the course of the 1979 Revolution.

The other important post-war movement was led by Mohammad Mosaddeq, the Iranian Prime Minister from 1951-53. He headed the “National Front” (*Jidheh-e melli*), an umbrella organization for a loose coalition of liberal-democratic, nationalist, socialist and Moslem parties in Iran. Considerable protest activity preceded the formation of his government and occurred throughout his tenure as Prime Minister. In general, the National Front was trying to re-assert the constitutional elements of Iranian governance that had been abolished during the dictatorship of Reza Khan Shah. Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-78), in opposition to both the Tudeh and the National Front, fought to maintain the authority of the Pahlavi monarchy during the post war period. In 1951, the Iranian government, led by the National Front, formally nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Mosaddeq was forcefully deposed as Prime Minister in 1953 by a coalition of traditional elites and the military. Both were supported by United States and British intelligence agencies, whose respective governments were opposed to the oil nationalization.

The 1963 Qom Protest and the Iranian Revolution (1978-79)

Active opposition by some religious traditionalists to the Pahlavi monarchy occurred after the introduction of the “White Revolution” reforms instituted by the Shah in 1962. These reforms nominally included a land reform bill and extended political rights to women and religious minority groups in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini led a series of protests in 1963 against the reforms and the increasing influence of the West in Iranian affairs. He was exiled from Iran in 1964. Nationalist factions, primarily extensions of the National Front, were also active during this period.

All of the dissident movement factions in Iran—communist, nationalist and religious—despite their considerable ideological differences, actively opposed the Pahlavi monarchy during a series of popular protests that took place throughout 1977-78. Faced with an increasing frequency and intensity of popular demonstrations in 1978, Reza Khan Shah

left the country in January 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran in February 1979. Throughout 1979-80, religious and nationalist factions within Iran vied with each other for political power in Iran, but religious parties closely associated with Ayatollah Khomeini eventually consolidated control over the new government.

The 2nd of Khordad Movement (1997-present)

This movement is named after the date in the Moslem calendar, the 2nd of Khordad (May 27, 1997), that reformist cleric, Mohammad Khatami, was elected as the Iranian President. In 2001, he was overwhelmingly re-elected and his supporters now dominate the Iranian parliament (*Majles-e Shoora-ye Aslami*). The executive and legislative branches of Iranian governance are weak when compared the Guardian Council (*Shoora-ye Naghban-e Qanun Assas*) and the Office of the Leader (*Rahbar*) that are dominated by conservative religious factions. This has precipitated an ongoing debate between “reformists” who support the liberalizing policies of President Khatami and “traditionalists” who support the authority of the conservative clergy. Periodic protests in support of President Khatami have occurred during his tenure as Iranian President. Many of his supporters have been targets of assassination attempts and have also been frequently jailed. There are several groups loosely associated with the *2nd of Khordad*. They include a *New Religious Thinking Movement*, the *Women’s Movement* and a *Student’s Movement*.

Problems of Demarcation and Cycles of Protests

One problem with using the concept of protest cycles is that they often “occupy no clearly demarcated space with respect to institutional politics” (Tarrow 1998:143). Protest activity does not stop between cycles and important debates that contribute to movement development take place when observable protest activities are low. Periods of active mobilization are easy to demarcate, but movement activities are a continuous, ongoing

process. As such, I investigate the negotiation of movement frames that appeared directly before an intense protest cycle. This strategy is useful in accounting for the creation of the movement frames that helped facilitate the increase in protest activity.

Another difficulty with the protest periods identified above is that regions in Iran—particularly the Azerbaijan—experienced periods of social protest that are not discussed in depth in this study. These movements were largely fueled by differences concerning language and ethnicity among the diverse groups in Iran. The movements discussed previously are distinguishable from regional protests because: 1) they had participants in areas spread across the Iranian state; and 2) they are the symbolically demarcated periods used as reference points for many Iranians who are engaged in current social debates.

Overview

The movements identified in this chapter are periods of heightened protest activity in Iranian history. During these periods of conflict, resonant movement frames were used to mobilize supporters. Moreover, resonant movement messages used in the past were also adopted, and modified, by movement leaders to gain support. In this respect, movement messages—in terms of their contributions to the current historical consciousness of Iranians—were always actively being debated. In the following chapter, the fluidity of movement frames, and how this affects social movement actors, is discussed in greater depth.

¹ See John Foran's (1993) literature review in *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformations in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution* and "The Iranian Revolution of 1977-79: A Challenge for Social Theory (1994:160-188). Also, *Debating Revolutions* (Keddie [editor] 1995).

² See Foran (1993; 1997a; 1997b) and Moadel (1993).

³ See Skocpol (1979) for her general theory and (1982) for her very different explanation as to why Iran became revolutionary.

⁴ These would include Davies's (1962) J-Curve theory of revolution, Gurr's (1970) theory of social strain, Skocpol's (1979) arguments concerning the importance of "state" development in revolutionary activity,

resource mobilization theory (McArthy and Zald 1977), traditional and neo-Marxist theories concerning state development and conflict between the social classes (see Moaddel 1993 and Moghadam 1987) and World System theory (Foran 1993). See *Debating Revolutions* (Keddie [editor] 1995) and Foran (1993) for an overview. Moaddel's (1993) approach is interesting because he chronicles the development of different economic sectors of the Iranian state, a structural approach, and then demonstrates that the Iranian revolution is a "serious anomaly" with respect to some structural conditions that should cause revolution. He does not discount that structural factors contribute to revolution, but makes a case for the examination of ideology, as episodic discourse, as a causal factor for revolution in the Iranian case. This study, although it uses the language of social movement theory, generally has this same orientation.

⁵ Often anthropologists, such as Michael Fischer (1980), and historians, such as Arjomand (1984b 1988) and Keddie (1983). See Keddie (1981), Foran (1993; 1994) and Arjomand (1984b, 1988) for an example of historians who discussed long periods of social protest and the importance of religion and culture in Iran.

⁶ Olsen's (1965) "The Logic of Collective Action" is considered the starting point for resource mobilization perspectives of social movement theory that used a "rational choice" model for explaining collective action. See Larana, Johnston and Gusfield (1994), McAdam, McArthy and Zald (1996), Morris and Mueller (1992), Snow et al (1986), Tilly (1978), Tarrow (1998), Turner (1972) for a general discussion concerning the resource mobilization perspective and the recent debate concerning the importance of movement identities in mobilization.

⁷ This is generally labeled a "conflict perspective" and Karl Marx is generally considered the founder of this school of thought.

⁸ There has been considerable research on how the "nation-state"—specifically the ideas associated with "nationalism"—affected Middle East development. Most scholars who study the Middle East agree that the introduction of the "state" and the concept of "nationalism" have had profound affects on the modern Middle East, just as it had profound effects on the development of Europe. For a good analysis that is specific to Iranian state development, see Zubaida (1993) "Islam, the People & the State."

⁹ See Keddie 1968 and Bayat 1993.