

CHAPTER 8 THE TOBACCO MOVEMENT (1890-92)

The Tobacco movement is an important landmark in Iranian social history because it was a national protest directed against Western imperialism that introduced frames of national sovereignty. During this period, a new form of social movement organization, the *anjoman* (secret society), became active in Iranian social politics. These organizations established many of the first modern Iranian newspapers that were used to publicize their positions. Later, groups organized during the Tobacco movement agitated for the implementation of a constitutional monarchy that greatly reduced the Qajar Shah's authority. Many of the *anjomans* later evolved into the first modern political parties in Iran.

The Tobacco Concession (1890)

Previous concession agreements with the British had been met with opposition by Iranians, but populist support for the Tobacco movement surpassed previous protest activities. One reason this concession caused more widespread opposition was because it immediately, and directly, affected the livelihood of the tobacco merchants. By comparison, the Reuter concession was based on providing services and infrastructure that were abstractions for most Iranian citizens. Furthermore, the production and consumption of tobacco in Iran—despite the fact that the product was not introduced until the eighteenth century—had a strong cultural significance. At this time, nearly everyone in Iran, both men and women, used indigenous tobacco products. Men gathering to smoke and drink coffee quickly became part of Persian and Arab society following the introduction of coffee (from Africa) and tobacco (from America) into the region.¹

The tobacco concession granted a monopoly on both the purchase and sale of tobacco within Persia to an English company, headed by Major Gerald Talbot, for a period of fifty

years. During this period the Qajar rulers would annually receive 15,000 pounds and 25 percent of the profit generated by the concession arrangement. The agreement stated all producers were required to inform the concessionaires of the amount of crop that they produced annually and then sell their entire crop to the British company. All tobacco merchants were required to seek permits from the concessionaires and immediately pay, in cash, for all tobacco they obtained. The plan was, basically, to interject the company into the traditional relationships between individual producers and regional sellers. The prospectus to investors stated:

Now, as to the population, they will benefit by the Regie, because at present the Tambakaou passes through three of four hands before reaching the consumers... The Octroi and internal conveyance duties at present existing... are of little importance...: therefore it is certainly not these duties which are now the cause of the relatively large overcharge of the merchants and dealers; but the reason is—these merchants, with the small capital that they possess, are desirous of gaining much, and even make mixtures to raise their profits still higher.

The Growers will be most favoured in this matter, because the merchants do them great injury by depreciating their goods, in order to purchase at reduced terms, whilst your company will be careful to encourage production of the better qualities by paying remunerative prices and by making advances. (In Browne [1910] 1968:34-35 and Lambton 1987:225)

The tobacco traders quickly surmised that their livelihood was being threatened. They resisted registering with the British company. The Russians who were suspicious of all British concessionary arrangements resisted the scheme. They stated that the arrangement

violated the *Treaty of Turkmomancha*. This was a threat indicating the Russians would consider military action if the concession was implemented in the northern sphere of Russian influence. The Qajar Shah, in desperate need of capital and wanting to exercise independence from the Russians, pressed the British to protect the concession—and his own authority—from the Russians (see Keddie 1968).

Frames of Sovereignty Adopted During the Tobacco Protest² (1890-92)

The interests of the *bazaar* appear to have driven the initial protest against the tobacco concession. Once the tobacco merchants decided to protest the concession they searched for allies to pressure the Qajar Shah into disbanding the agreement. The *bazaar* merchants were unified in their opposition to the concession, and merchants not directly affected by the concession still closed ranks and supported the tobacco merchants. In particular, Hajj Mohammad Kazem Malek al-Tojar actively organized the *bazaari* protest against the Qajar state. He also pressed prominent *mojtaheds* into adopting positions in opposition to the Qajar state that they were initially reluctant to take (see Bayat 1991).

The Forged Fatwa

The most dramatic event during the Tobacco movement involved a *fatwa* (finding of religious law) that was supposedly issued by the preeminent *mojtahed* at the time, Mohammad Hasan Shirazi, who resided in the holy city of Najaf (then a part of the Ottoman Empire). Although he resided outside of Iran, Najaf is the center of Shi'i learning and Hasan Shirazi had considerable authority in Iranian-Moslem society. The *fatwa* called for a complete ban against the use of all tobacco products by Iranians. Shirazi later stated the *fatwa* was legitimate, but it was likely written by a prominent merchant, Malek al-Tojar, with the help of Hasan Ashtiyani, the leading *mojtahed* of Tehran (Bayat 1991; Lambton 1987). The

forgery was likely meant to lend legitimacy to the ban, and perhaps to pressure Shirazi into adopting a more oppositional stance to the Qajar Shah (Bayat 1991; Keddie 1968; Lambton 1987). The *fatwa* was as follows:

In the name of God the Merciful, the Forgiving. Today the use of tunbaku and tobacco, in whatever fashion, is reckoned as war against the Imam of the Age (may God hasten his glad advent) (Translation by Browne [1910] 1968:22).

The *bazaaris* sought religious condemnation of the concession as a means of increasing their support for the ban. Usually, the religious support for the ban was framed as an assertion that Moslems should not be controlled by non-believers (*kafirs*) or foreigners (*infidels*).

When the protest began it was regional in scale and instigated by the merchants. For instance, Lambton (1987)—chronicling an early protest in *Khorosan* where the merchants took *bast* in a religious shrine and set up a series of placards denouncing the concession—states that, “excitement spread rapidly, crowds assembling in the streets, uttering threats against Christian infidels, and avowing their determination to protest the cause of religion” (244). In this case the religious elite (*olama*) sided with the Qajars and the crowd was dispersed and a regional governor forcefully ended the merchant *bast*. But, as representatives of the tobacco concession moved into different regions of Iran their arrival was met with continuing outbreaks of other regional protest. When supported by the local *olama*, these protests grew considerably larger.

The protest in Isfahan became an exemplar that leaders in other regions followed. In particular, the *fatwa* attributed to Hasan Shirazi first appeared during the Isfahan protest and this precipitated support for the ban in other regions throughout Iran. The region of the *Azerbaijan*, largely under the Russian sphere of influence, had already engaged in a series of popular protest against the concession. But following the protest in Isfahan there were further protest in Shiraz, Meshad and Kerma. The ban on tobacco was also well received in the

capital of Tehran where it was supported by the leading *mojtahed*, Mirza Hasan Ashtiyani, the likely author of the forged *fatwa* banning tobacco use. Many of the *olama* who were initially inclined to back the Shah now openly sided with the protesters and began to take their cues from Shirazi and Ashtiyani. Others continued to support the Shah.

Accounts of *bazaar* closings correspond with an increase in crowd activity, and were usually organized by the leaders of the craft guilds who were also connected with the religious elite and the secret societies (*anjomans*) (Abrahmian 1982). After the Shah canceled the concession, popular protests continued in Tehran as Ashtiyani refused to smoke and broadened his demands to include a rescission of other concession arrangements. The most serious disturbance occurred in Tehran on January 4, 1892, a week after the concession had been rescinded. This protest coincided with Ashtiyani's receipt of an angry letter from the Qajar Shah. Following the spread of a rumor that Ashtiyani had been exiled from Tehran by the Shah—a common form of punishment for political and religious dissenters—the *bazaar* closed and an assembled crowd began to march toward the royal palace.

In the letter to Ashtiyani the Shah, in response to the charge that he has sold the country to foreigners, adopts a frame that the government remains the protector of the people of Persia, and makes an argument that without the government foreigners would soon subjugate the Persians [*italics added*].

Do you know that no one can rise against the government? Do you know that if—God forbid—there was no government, those same Babis of Tehran would cut off your heads? *Do you not know that if the government were not there your wives and children would fall into the hands of the Russian Cossacks, the Ottoman soldiers, the English army, the Afghans, or the Turkomans?* It is a pity that you, with your knowledge and intelligence, should give your reason

into the hands of a few talaba (students of religious schools), ruffians and scum of the city and act according to their desires. (Lambton 1987: 253-54)

It was reported that as many as ten people were killed during this protest which was characterized as revolution by some over-anxious British observers (see Kazemzadeh 1968). Ashtiyani—now concerned about the growing radicalism of the movement—later worked with the Shah to dampen protest activity in Tehran (Bayat 1991; Keddie 1968).

Frames of the Anjomans (Secret Societies)

The “secret societies” (*anjomans*) represent an innovative new movement organization in Iran that also was linked to older forms of social organization. Traditional leaders were represented, but membership also extended to *bazaari* and reformist groups (see Lambton 1987).³ Many of the procedures adopted by the *anjomans* were democratic, although they were also associated with, and dominated by, powerful individuals. They were directly responsible for the development of the first modern Iranian newspapers, which publicized *anjoman* positions.. A general interpretation of an *anjoman* would be a “society,” or a group of like-minded individuals who gather to discuss events and new ideas. There were precedents related to *anjoman* activity before the Tobacco movement —such as literary groups that discussed philosophy during the Qajar period—but the growth in the number of political *anjomans* near the turn of the century was considerable.

Membership in many of these *anjomans* was a secret because these organizations were often formed to discuss radical concepts that threatened the Qajar Shah’s authority. The secrecy of these networks was an extension of the cultural practice of *taqiyyah*, and there are many examples of overlapping allegiances, and public disavowals of society membership during this period (see Bayat 1991). Likewise, the Azali Baha’i, already practicing *taqiyyah*

as it relates to their religious beliefs, funneled their dissent into active participation in the *anjomans* (Bayat 1991; Martin 1988; Keddie 1968). Other *anjomans* made their positions and membership public. Later, the most prominent *anjomans* functioned as political parties.

While some *anjomans* were organized along a narrow interest (e.g. geographic, economic, philosophical, religious) most were also debating how the modern Iranian state should be organized in order to maintain political and economic sovereignty. These discussions centered on means by which the Iranian state could modernize and compete with the Europeans. Often, the *anjomans* became a place where reformist elements of the religious elite (*olama*) could meet with prominent *bazaaris* and sympathetic reformers employed in the Qajar bureaucracy. Some prominent reformers, such as Jamal al-Din “al-Afghani” (see discussion below) and Malkom Khan created *anjomans* as a means of furthering their respective ideas. In this respect, the *anjomans* were a place where new concepts, and new forms of knowledge, could be discussed. Some *anjomans* were predominantly secular, even anti-clerical, in their outlook, but many were actively supported by reformist elements within the religious elite.

Of primary importance is the fact that the *anjomans* disseminated their ideas through gazettes and papers that outlined their positions. Before the Tobacco movement modern newspapers in Iran were almost nonexistent, but they quickly became part of the Iranian political discourse during this protest period. Nearly all of these papers were associated with positions taken by the prominent *anjomans*. One early paper, *Qanun*, was published from London by Malkom Khan⁴ who had contacts with a number of groups in Iran. This paper often reflected the *Adamiyat anjoman's* (Society for Humanity) positions.⁵

During this period several *anjomans* appear to have been debating the concept of “humanity” and the nature of “man” relative to the authority of government. This debate generally coalesces around a movement identified as the *Alam-e Adamiyat* (World of

Humanity) by Browne ([1910] 1968), but is also referred to as the *Adamiyat anjoman* or *Jama-i Adamiyat* (Society of Humanity) by other scholars. Abbas Quli Khan Qazvini, a close friend of *Qanun* publisher Malkom Khan's, founded this *anjoman*. Qazvini later adopted the name "Adamiyat" (Humanity) as his formal surname (Abrahamian 1982). The role of this society is relatively well known because Adamiyat's son—Fereydoun Adamiyat—became a preeminent Iranian scholar of the Constitutional revolution. Likewise, the history of the *Anjoman-e Makhfi* (the Secret Society) is relatively well known because one of its founders, Nazem al-Islam Kermani (see chapter 9), kept a detailed diary that chronicled events during the Constitutional revolution.

Some of the *Adamiyat anjoman*'s activities were public, but the "revolutionary committee" met secretly and formulated plans to overthrow the Qajar Shah. They also attempted to establish ties with the reformist elements of the religious elite. Abrahamian's (1982) accounting of the backgrounds of the members of the "revolutionary committee" (57 members total) shows a diverse group. Among their occupations were civil servants (15), educators (8), translators or writers (4), a doctor (1), Moslem clergymen (14), a tribal chief (1), merchants (3) and craftsmen (3). These included members of the Qajar aristocracy (3), "secret" Azali Baha'is (4) and Zoroastrians (2) (78).

Qanun was an extension of the *Adamiyat anjoman*'s discussions. In particular, the *anjoman* was initially inspired by the philosophies of Saint Simon and Auguste Comte (Abrahamian 1982). For instance, the following *Qanun* exchange was published in Browne's ([1910] 1968) study, and shows the active courting of both merchants and the religious elite (*olama*) by the *anjoman* leadership. It also introduces ideas associated with constitutional government; in this case the rudiments of French philosophy concerning "humanity." It also hints that there is a program of action (the "book of humanity,") being made available to

those who join the movement. This exchange is typical of *Qanun*'s style, which often published letters between Iranians and the publisher:

A merchant of Tabriz writes from Erzeroum, "May I be the sacrifice of Law! Tell me what I can do!" Our answer is this. "Obtain possession of the book of Humanity (*adamiyyat*). Read it. Become a man (*adam*), and strive to further the cause of Humanity according to the measure of your understanding."

One of the ulama of Fars writes, "You are continually repeating the words 'man' (*adam*) and 'Humanity' (*adamiyyat*). What do you mean by them? We, who thirst for justice and are the foes of oppression, and who, by God's grace, consider ourselves to be 'men,' in order that, even in what concerns the name, we may differ from beasts of prey, proclaim everywhere as 'men.'"

[The response] Whoever seeks after justice, is zealous for honour, loves knowledge, protects the oppressed, supports progress, and wishes well to the community is a "man" (*Qanun No. 4* [1890] Translated by Browne [1910] 1968:39).

Regarding the concession arrangements, the following exchange were recorded that discusses the idea of an assembly, not necessarily popularly elected, that has capacity to make law. It clearly links foreign intervention to Qajar greed, and uses both Islamic belief, and the customary norms of inheritance, in its argument for establishing this assembly.

A merchant from Qazvin writes: "By what laws does the government sell our national rights to foreign racketeers? These rights, according to both the principles of Islam and traditional laws of Iran, belong to the people of our country. These rights are the means of our livelihood. The government,

however, barter the Moslem property to the unbelievers. By what law? Have the people of Iran died that the government is auctioning away their inheritance?"

Dear Merchant, the government has mistaken our inaction for our death. It is time for the mujtaheds and other knowledgeable persons to arise and save the people of Iran. We propose two simple remedies to save Iran: law and more law. You may well ask, "where will this law come from?" The answer is again simple: the shah should call at once one hundred mujtaheds and other learned persons of the country into a national consultative assembly (*majles-i shawra-yi melli*); and this assembly should have full authority to formulate laws that would initiate social progress. (*Qanun, No 6* translated by Abrahamian 1982:69; see also Browne's translation [1910] 1966:39-40)

A more aggressive strategy of the *anjomans* during the Tobacco movement was to produce public placards that condemned the concession. These placards are generally attributed to the *bazaaris* or a specific *anjoman*, which lends credence to the idea that there was some coordination between certain *anjoman* societies and the merchant guilds. The following is translation by British government officials from a placard that appeared in Tabriz. Browne ([1910] 1968) indicates that many of these appeared overnight, stationed where previous announcements of the tobacco concession had been placed. The placard below predates Shirizi's famous *fatwa*.

Ulema of the town! Law is the law of religion and not the laws of Europeans!
Woe to those Ulemas who will not cooperate with the nation! Woe to those who will not spend their lives and property! Any one of the Ulemas who will not agree with the people will lose his life. Woe to anyone who may sell one

muskal of Tobacco to the Europeans! Woe to the Europeans who wish to enforce these customs of the Infidels! We will kill the Europeans first and then plunder their property. Woe to the Armenians who will be killed and will lose their property and their families! Woe to those who will keep quiet!

We write this in answer to the Notice!

Curses on the father of anyone who may destroy this notice.

(In both Kazemzadeh 1968:258 and Keddie 1968:75; originally dispatched by the British Foreign Office in Persia⁶).

The British often charged that the Russians were producing these placards, but the threat to the Armenian Christians—many of whom were tobacco merchants protected by the Russians—would seem to eliminate this possibility. These placards also show that among some groups the *olama* were regarded as a possible liability to the movement if they supported the Qajars.

Likewise, petitions that were circulated that established Islamic law—that stated Moslems could not be subjected by unbelievers (*kafirs*)—overrode European inspired agreements:

God says in his Book “God will not allow the Moslems to be under the influence of Kafars,’ and our religious laws affirm that when a Moslem owes a sum of money to a Kafar, the sum can only be called for by a creditor himself and in case of absence he cannot appoint a Kafar... to act for him...

If we admit that the above facts are all true, we plainly see that the Kafars in no way exercise a mastery over Moslems. We are therefore utterly bewildered to see that our Sovereign is selling the whole body of Moslems, like slaves, to

the Kafars (In Keddie 1968:77; originally dispatched from the British Foreign Office in Persia).

Another strategy adopted by movement organizations was to write directly to government officials, including the Qajar Shah, and protest the concession. While the letters written by the members of the *olama* are generally respectful in tone, the letters written by members of the *anjomans* were anonymous and threatened violent action. They often employed Quranic verse as simile to demonstrate that God would sanction violence against individuals who subjected the Islamic faithful to the will of the foreigners (*kafirs*). It is impossible to connect the individual letters with specific *anjomans*, but the letter-writing campaign appears to have been coordinated. In particular, groups associated with Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (himself a prolific letter writer) appear to have sent threatening letters. For example, a follower of al-Afghani later assassinated Nasir ad-Din Shah in 1897 and during his interrogation he discussed a letter he had written during the Tobacco movement (Browne [1910] 1968). Although it is impossible to know, Keddie (1972) thinks that the following protest letter—addressed to the chief of the Court of Justice at Tabriz—might have come from someone associated with Afghani, or was perhaps inspired by him. This excerpt opens with the rhetorical question as to how this official is going to account for his actions on the day of judgment:

How could we pass the Serat... while we have yielded the path of the Moslems to the Infidels? How could you appear before the Prophet while you have caused such oppression to the followers? These few pounds of Tobacco, which were produced with labour and which a few men with trouble used for export in order to obtain a piece of bread have been coveted and they

have been granted to the infidels and forbidden to the followers of the Prophet...

Oh great human beings, don't you know yourselves? When are you going to wake up? They have suppressed the Akhtar who through pity used to criticize us; others are not blind...

It is not the fault of the ulema who are representatives of the Prophet, why reproach them?... Who is the executioner of this people? The ministers who are the lowest of the European gardeners, who have the privilege of being received in private places. (In Keddie 1972:339-40. Originally dispatched from the British Office in Persia.)

Early Islamic Modernism in Iran: The Example of Seyyed Jamal al-Din “al-Afghani”⁷ (Asadabadi)

Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's influence on Iranian movements needs to be discussed at two levels. First, there is his actual participation in the tobacco movement. Second, there was the mythical status attributed to Afghani by his followers. In this respect, the example of Afghani's life later became a symbolic exemplar employed by Islamic leaders who followed him. The elevation of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani to heroic figure was a condition made possible by variables distinct in Moslem society, but the elevation of certain individuals to the level of the mythic—particularly those who offer a prescient view of future conflicts—also occurs in other cultures.⁸

In Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's case his status has obscured the historical record because his followers embellished his achievements. Likewise, despite the fact that Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was Iranian, his status inside Iran has never approached the level he attained in Egypt. Still, Afghani—whatever the conflation of his achievements during his life—was

among the most preeminent Moslem reformist that lived near the turn of the nineteenth century. In this regard his overall influence—in terms of his affect on a generation of Islamic reformists that followed him—surpassed the specific effect that he had on events in Iran during the Tobacco movement. In this respect, Afghani became a prototype for many Moslem intellectuals in that he was among the first to fuse Western ideas with an Islamic ideal. Also important is that Mirza Muhammad Reza—a supporter of Afghani and a member of an *anjoman* that Afghani helped establish—later assassinated Nasir ad-Din Shah in 1897.

Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Modernist Moslem Thought

Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani is generally considered the founder of the Pan-Islamic movement. He was opposed to Western imperialism, but also an advocate for a reformed Islamic ideal that included greater political activism and the adoption of “modern” ideas. In this regard, Afghani was “a precursor of various later trends in the Islamic world which reject both pure traditionalism and pure Westernism” (Keddie 1972:1). Religious intellectuals in Iran later made frequent reference to his work.

He traveled throughout world and at various times lived in Afghanistan, India, Turkey, Egypt, France and Great Britain. He attracted considerable support, particularly in Cairo, among reformist elements of the religious elite as an Islamic scholar. At the same time he courted the attention of both the Ottoman Sultan and the Qajar Shah as a means of enhancing his own status. He was consistently anti-British and believed that the Qajars should align with the Russians. It also appears that he sincerely believed that he could help traditional rulers craft a means of freeing both the Turks and Persians from the influence of Western imperialism. While Afghani’s influence on his students was considerable, his renown is also associated with the fact he spent time in the West. For instance, a debate with Ernst Renan—a prominent French historian and Comtean—introduced Afghani’s thought to

Western intellectuals. He was also associated with several political magazines, printed in Europe, which advocated for an end of British influence in Egypt. He later became a consistent critic of the Qajar Shah following his expulsion from Iran in 1891 (Keddie 1972).

Afghani often used his influence among liberal elements of the clergy to advocate for a reformed Moslem ideal. He criticized blind adherence to traditional religious belief and was branded as a heretic among many orthodox clerics. He was most comfortable with other Islamic modernists who felt a reformed Islamic ideal offered a practical means to combat Western imperialism. He also advocated for the adoption of innovative, Western scientific ideals:

How very strange it is that the Moslems study those sciences that are ascribed to Aristotle with the greatest delight, as if Aristotle were one of the Moslems. However, if the discussion relates to Galileo, Newton, and Kepler, they consider them infidels. The father and the mother of science is proof, and proof is neither Aristotle nor Galileo. The truth is there is proof, and those who forbid science and knowledge in the belief that they are safeguarding the Islamic religion are really enemies of that religion. The Islamic religion is the closest of religions to science and knowledge, and there is no incompatibility between science and knowledge and the foundation of the Islamic faith.

(Translated by Keddie 1972:107. See also Al-Afghani 1982:17 in Esposito and Donuhue [eds] 1982)

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani insinuated that he was born in Afghanistan, hence the adoption of a name of origin (common in the Middle East), “Afghani.” He was actually born in Iran where he received a traditional Shi’i religious education before traveling to Afghanistan. He engaged in this evasion so that his ideas would gain greater acceptance

among both the Arabs and Sunnis. When he returned to Iran late in 1889 he quickly became active in many *anjomans* that admitted people of various backgrounds and beliefs. Among many in the religious orthodoxy he was branded as someone who was secretly irreligious, and perhaps a “Babi.” The degree to which Afghani was pious was also debated after his death. Undoubtedly, Afghani interacted with the Baha’i during his time in Iran. In many respects, this openness is part of Afghani’s appeal to Islamic modernists. In effect, while many Islamic traditionalists were inclined toward an intense parochialism—an ordering of the world where people existed as either Sunni, or Shi’i, or irreligious Babis—Afghani was inclined toward contemplating a broader perspective. He then crafted an original response that was—more or less—grounded into the Islamic ideal of unity.

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and the Tobacco Movement

In 1889 Jamal al-Din al-Afghani returned to Iran at the suggestion of the Qajar Shah. He may have assumed that he was to be offered a position in the Shah’s court as an informal advisor. There is also evidence that the Shah considered making him the editor of a state supported newspaper (Keddie 1972). In this respect, Afghani was not initially opposed to monarchy, nor did he regard it as incompatible with reform. Once in Iran, where his acclaim throughout the Moslem world preceded his return, Afghani quickly met with prominent *mojtaheds* and accumulated followers who joined his teaching circles or listened to his public speeches. His activism soon brought him into opposition with the Shah, who attempted to banish him to Qom. During the Tobacco movement, in response to this punishment, Afghani sought *bast* for eight months at a religious shrine in Tehran before the Shah’s security forces entered the sanctuary, and then escorted him to the Iraqi border. Following his exile, Afghani migrated to Britain, where he participated with Malkom Khan in an activist press campaign

against the Shah. He later immigrated to Istanbul, at the invitation of the Ottoman Sultan, where he died in 1897.

The effect that Afghani had on the intellectual development of the Iranian Islamic elite is impossible to discern with any certainty. On the one hand, Afghani was not a member of the traditional religious elite in Iran, nor was he completely disassociated from it. When he returned to Iran many of the religious elite attended his lectures, and Afghani appears to have urgently argued that the clerical class should become advocates for change. Prominent participants in the Tobacco movement—particularly Ayatollah Shirazi, the preeminent Shi'i jurist of the period who was attributed with writing the *fatwa* banning tobacco—had contact with Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and were likely influenced by his ideas.

The following excerpt is from a letter that Afghani wrote to Shirazi. It was written following his expulsion from Iran, whereupon he bitterly denounced individuals associated with the Qajar state. The entire letter is quite long, extols the virtue of Shirazi in elaborate Persian-styled prose, and likewise describes the suffering of the Persians using religious metaphors. It consistently returns to the theme that “foreigners” and “unbelievers” are oppressing Persia, but primarily lays the blame for this action on the Shah’s Prime Minister, a “wicked freethinker,” as opposed to the Shah himself. The letter later appeared in print periodicals. The letter also offers further examples of the frames being employed against the concessionary arrangements (*italics added*):

But in addition to this he hath sold to the foes of our Faith the greater part of the Persian lands and the profits accruing there from, [to with] the mines, the ways leading thereunto, the roads connecting them with the frontiers of the country, the inns about to be built by the side of these extensive arteries of communication which will ramify through all parts of the kingdom, and the gardens and fields surrounding them. Also the river Karun and the guesthouses

which will arise on its banks up to the very source, and the gardens and meadows which adjoin it, and the highways from Ahwaz to Tihran, with the buildings, inns, gardens and fields surrounding it. *Also the tobacco (tunbaku) with the chief centers of its cultivation, the lands on which it is grown, and the dwellings of the custodians, carriers and sellers, wherever it is found.* He has similarly disposed of the grapes used for making wine, and the shops, factories and wine-presses appertaining to this trade throughout the whole of Persia; and likewise soap, candles and sugar, and factories connected therewith. Lastly there is the Bank: and what shall cause thee to understand the Bank? *It means the complete handing over of the reins of government to the enemy of Islam, the enslaving of people to that enemy, the surrendering of them and of all dominion and authority into the hands of a foreign foe.*

Then he offered what was left to Russia as the price for her silence and acquiescence... (Translation by Browne [1910] 1968:17-18. Also in Keddie 1968:342-343)

The letter then describes the Russian intention to annex the Azerbaijan using similar language. And finally, towards the end of this letter:

In short this criminal has offered the provinces of the Persian land to auction amongst the Powers, and is selling the realms of Islam and the abodes of Muhammad and his household (to whom be greetings and salutations) to foreigners. But by reason of the vileness of his nature and the meanness of his understanding he sells them for a paltry sum and at a wretched prices. Yea, this it is when meanness and avarice are mingled with treason and folly!
(Translation by Browne [1910] 1968:17-18. Also in Keddie 1968:342-343)

It is impossible to know how much Shirazi was influenced by this letter, but he did later endorse the *fatwa* that began the tobacco ban, and wrote the Shah personally with respect to tobacco concession arrangement. In particular, the letter Shirazi sent to the Shah—although much more cordial in tone—did echo some of the same themes in the letter above. For instance, the listing of complaints is similar to Afghani’s, but Shirazi adds the qualifier: “It is certain that Your Majesty has not been informed of it. He who wishes only prosperity of his subjects would have been very dissatisfied and would not have allowed today these affairs...” (In Keddie 1972:352. Text was originally translated from French by the British Foreign Office in Persia [A.E Perse 1891]).

The Framing of Assassination in Iranian Culture

In 1897 Mirza Muhammad Reza—a follower of Afghani—assassinated Nasir ad-Din Shah. During the public interrogation of Mirza Reza, he consistently framed his action as retribution for Afghani’s ill treatment and banishment from Iran (Browne [1910] 1968). Likewise, Mirza Reza consistently stated that a ruler who sells his country had committed a crime punishable by death. In effect, Mirza Reza argued he was abiding by a higher law, a religious law, that sanctioned assassination. Moreover, this argument had considerable resonance among many Iranians who were observing the trial. Despite the fact that that Mirza Reza was ultimately found guilty and executed, many regarded his act as justified. For instance, Nazem al-Islam Kermani—an activist in both the Tobacco movement and Constitutional revolution—states that a small group of reformers celebrated the fortieth day following of Mirza Reza’s death, a traditional Shi’i practice afforded to religious martyrs (Browne⁹ [1910] 1966:408-09).

The portrayal of those who assassinate “illegitimate” leaders as religious martyrs is common in Iranian political culture. This practice is evident in all the movements surveyed in this work, up to the present period. Indeed, it is not uncommon for current political leaders in Iran to insinuate—following a political assassination of an opposition leader—that the act was sanctioned by a higher religious order. The current Iranian President and leader of the ongoing reform movement, Mohammad Khatami—whose supporters have been targeted for political assassination—have spoken against this aspect of Iranian political culture.¹⁰ Currently, this aspect of Iranian political culture—when compared with the period of assassination and retribution that followed the Iranian revolution—is in decline, but is still part of political life in Iran.

Other political assassinations discussed in this work include Amin as-Sultan’s assassination during the Constitutional revolution (Chapter 8) and the General Hajj Ali Razmara’s assassination on March 1951 (Chapter 9). Both events were widely celebrated by segments of the Iranian population. For example, Razmara’s assassination was celebrated and supported by Ayatollah Kashani as “a service to the country,” and this support helped acquit the assassin of the murder charges brought against him (Richard 1983).

Assassination of political opponents in Iran, and the rhetoric that sanctions these acts, is a movement frame. This rhetoric helps to explain the motivations of the assassins themselves, how movement adherents interpret the motivations of the assassins, and how movement adherents judge assassination as a political tool. Political assassination is not unique to Iran, and I am not attempting to make a judgment as to whether Iranian political culture is more violent than Western political culture. During different historical periods, in different countries of the West, the use of assassination—and the attribution of hero status to the assassin—was likewise a common occurrence.

Some will object to the assertion that political assassination is a long-standing tradition in 20th century Iran. But overlooking historical evidence that political assassination was common in Iran, and that religious and political leaders often absolved assassins of guilt because a “higher” religious law sanctioned the act, would be disingenuous. Moreover, the reform leadership in Iran is currently attempting to change this particular aspect of the Iranian political culture (Abdi 1998; Mohajerani 1998; *Payame Emruz* 2000 Peterson 2000).

There is also evidence that aspects of Iranian culture reinforce the peaceful resolution of conflicts. In particular, the traditional use of *bast* and the mobilization of the crowd were often non-violent movement tactics—clearly grounded in Iranian culture—that were tremendously effective. Initial movement successes during the Constitutional period, the oil nationalization effort, and during the 1978 Revolution used largely¹¹ non-violent movement tactics that depended on the mass mobilization of people and the symbolic occupation of space. Indeed, one common trend in the Iranian movements surveyed in this work is that most movement groups employed tactics that, while certainly confrontational, were also primarily non-violent. Often, it was after the success of a broadly supported movement that more widespread violence erupted. For instance, both the establishment of the 1907 Constitution and the deposal of Reza Khan Shah in 1979 were largely accomplished through non-violent means, primarily mass mobilizations of people, which offset the coercive authority of the state. In both cases, widespread violence erupted after initial movement successes when competing movement groups vied for authority in the new political system.

Summary of Frames During the Tobacco Movement

The Tobacco movement is an important landmark in Iranian social history because it was a national protest directed against Western imperialism. Likewise, it forced traditional leaders of Iranian institutions—the *bazaar* and the *olama*—to address their relationship with

the West, and with the Qajar monarchy. Following countrywide protests, including a widely obeyed ban on the sale or purchase of tobacco, the Qajar Shah withdrew from the tobacco concession. Nonetheless, movement goals, driven by reformers in the *anjomans*, were expanding beyond the narrow demands associated with withdrawal from the tobacco concession. Not surprisingly, movement leaders framed the political events concerning the concession arrangement using traditional Islamic metaphors. Finally, during the movement a new type of organization, the *anjoman*, disseminated ideas by publishing the first modern newspapers in Iran. Throughout the protests the frame for mobilization was that the Iranian citizens should not be subjected to, or controlled by, the commercial interests of unbelievers (*kafirs*) or foreigners (*infidels*).

The success of this movement emboldened the various factions in the country—the religious elite, the *bazaar* and the modernist reformers—to continue to press for greater power in Iran. In particular, movement leaders in the *anjomans* introduced the idea that Iranian governance needed to be dramatically reformed in order to maintain Persian national sovereignty. The leading *mojtaheds* were not uniform in their response to the tobacco concession. In some cases, this had to do with their strategic associations with the Qajar Shah; in other cases it was related to the fact that many favored the British over the Russians. Nonetheless, the authority of the prominent *mojtaheds*, and their eventual support of the movement, was an important factor in its success.

Protest against the concession was not driven by a unifying ideology, although some *anjomans* introduced the concepts of “nationhood” and participatory government in their publications. In this respect, while there was a unifying frame of sovereignty that regarded foreign intervention into Iranian affairs as problematic, there was no unifying ideal as to how this situation should be ameliorated. In the end, most movement factions were primarily appealing to traditional institutions associated with the monarchy and religious elite to rectify

this problem. Still, reformers used the protest movement as an opportunity to introduce new ideas associated with representative government. Later, movement frames that introduced the idea of individual equality, and the concept of national citizenship, would become dominant in the Constitutional revolution (1906-09).

¹ Lewis (1996) has an interesting, and entertaining, account of the “café” culture of the Middle East—primarily revolving around the consumption of tobacco and coffee—in the introduction of *A Brief History of the Middle East*.

² Keddie (1966) has a good account of the Tobacco Rebellion. Likewise, Bayat (1991), Browne (1966) and Lambton (1987).

³ Many scholars (see Abrahamian 1982, Bayat 1991, Browne [1912] 1966; Keddie 1968; Lambton 1987; Martin 1987) have chronicled the considerable importance that the *anjomans* played in both the Tobacco revolt and Constitutional revolution.

⁴ Some scholars challenge Khan’s designation as a “reformer”. He was dismissed and exiled by the Qajars after he unsuccessfully tried to implement a national lottery (of which he would have benefited tremendously). It is also asserted that he sold this concession to commercial interest in Britain once he discovered it was to be abandoned by the Shah. These individuals would see the publication of *Qanun* as a personal vendetta against that Qajars. Furthermore, Khan later shut down *Qanun* and was in governance—on behalf of the Qajars—during the Constitutional crisis. Some believe he was trying to broker an arrangement between the Shah and the reformers, others believe that he was most always motivated by his own self-interest.

⁵ Browne (1968) interviewed both Malkom Khan and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and offers several examples from *Qanun* in his text (see also Keddie [1968]).

⁶ Some of these documents can be found at *British documents on foreign affairs--reports and papers from the Foreign Office confidential print. Part I, From the mid-nineteenth century to the First World War. Series B, The Near and Middle East, 1856- 1914* / editor Day. Frederick, Md. : University Publications of America, c1985.

⁷ I choose to retain “al-Afghani” as Jamal al-Din’s name of origin because this represents his own choice, and is also how he is most commonly referred to.

⁸ See, for example, Weber’s ([1946] 1958) discussion of charismatic authority.

⁹ Also see Browne [1912] 1966:62-97 for a transcript of the interrogation Mirza Reza.

¹⁰ One of President Khatami’s closest advisors, Saeed Hajjarian, was targeted for assassination, but miraculously survived, although is now confined to a wheelchair (see Hajjarian interview 2000). For comments on the political assassination of four prominent reformers in 1998, see Abdi 1998; Mohajerani 1998; *Payame Emruz* 2000. For an account in an English daily see Peterson 2000.

¹¹ I characterize these tactics as “mostly” non-violent because there were sporadic incidences of violence and property damage during these mass mobilizations. Some mobilizations were violent in nature, such as those directed against ethnic minorities. Moreover, the rhetoric was not always nonviolent. Still, given the size of these mobilizations it is remarkable how few fatalities there were.