Religious Ideology and Political Reality:
Shiᶜism as Opposition, Martyrdom, and Revolt

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This article is a response to Vladimir Minorsky's characterization of Shiᶜism as "opposition, martyrdom, and revolt."[1] The purpose here is not to refute Minorsky's statement, but to provide another perspective of what it means to give Shiᶜite Islam such a classification. In most cases, sweeping statements concerning large groups of people, whether these groups are ethnic or religious, even when generally accurate, fail to provide the complete contexts in which these statements find their validity. Minorsky's statement regarding Shiᶜism falls into this category, hence, this attempt to clarify further what such a characterization should mean.

There is another aspect to the problem of Western scholars elaborating cultural attributes of Eastern peoples that renders the task especially difficult. Much Western scholarship of the Middle East has been produced in the environment of Western military, political, and economic domination of Middle Eastern societies. The historical processes during which Middle East studies developed in the West influenced scholars consciously and subconsciously. Edward Said has carefully reevaluated the relationship between Western scholarship of the Middle East and Western domination in his highly controversial *Orientalism.*[2]

In *Orientalism* Said explores the relationship between Western scholarship of the Middle East and Western domination of the region during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His major contention is that Western scholarship of the Orient, meaning specifically the Middle East, is one aspect of Orientalism itself, which is a "Western style for diminating, restricting, and having authority over

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1. Vladimir Minorsky, "Iran: Opposition, Martyrdom, and Revolt," in *Unity and Variety in Muslin Civilization,* ed. Gustave von Grunebaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 183-206.

2. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

the Orient." Western scholars, he maintains, contribute to this "style" of domination by creating an Orient that exists only in their minds, and that is characterized by a culture which is monolithic and ageless and a people who in most respects are not fully human. The homogenous and inferior nature of Oriental society contributed to justification of European dominance of the Middle East since Europe (or the Occident) is described by Orientalists as both different from and superior to the Middle East culturally, socially, politically, and psychologically. Without commenting on the merits of his condemnation of virtually the entire attitude of Middle East scholars, it is pertinent to note that the work of Vladimir Minorsky reenforces Said's contentions.

Minorsky was born in a small village near Moscow in 1877. Although he studied law and Oriental languages in Moscow from 1896 to 1903 his interest in the Islamic world came about as a member of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Persia, Central Asia, and Turkey. As a diplomat he was directly involved in Russian domination of Iranian society. After the Russian Revolution he moved to Paris where he taught until 1932 when he accepted an offer to teach at the School of Oriental Studies in London. He retired in 1944 and lived in Cambridge (where the School had transferred at the start of the second world war) until his death in 1966.

The scope of Minorsky's work on Iranian and Turkish elements of the Islamic world is impressive. Writing in four languages (English, French, Russian, and Farsi) Minorsky has examined aspects of the history, art, literature, religion, and politics of his geographical specialization. Among his contributions are 110 articles for the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam,* translations and commentaries of Persian geographical and administrative texts, histories of the Caucasus and of specific regions in Iran, and even an article on the esoteric Ahl-i Haqq movement.

The article in question here, "Iran, Opposition, Martyrdom, and Revolt," was reprinted under its original title, "Persia, Religion, and History," in *Iranica,*[3] a compilation of twenty of Minorsky's favorite articles. In the article, Minorsky provides brief histories of the various forces of conquest which battled for control of Iran from the early days of Islam through the first decades of the twentieth century. While Minorsky carefully cites as many factors as possible competing for Iran from Central Asia, Anatolia, and from within Iran itself, he never mentions English, Russian, or United States incursion into Iran's sovereignty. He is more concerned with concluding that Persians, as a result of long periods of alien invasions, suffer from "emotionalism" and have a "need to look to secrecy and plotting." As a result, Shah Isma^{C}il, the king who forcibly made Iran a Shi^{C}ite land, was correct in substituting the official Sunnite Islam with Shi^{C}ism. Shi^{C}ism, Minorsky explains, has "overtones" and an "aroma of opposi-

3. Vladimir Minorsky, *Iranica: Twenty Articles* (Tehran: The University of Tehran, 1964), pp. 242-59.

tion, martyrdom, and revolt," which he informs us is "quite well matched with the Persian character."[4]

Interestingly enough, he notes that Gustave von Grunebaum (a famous Orientalist and admirer of Minorsky) passed a "rather severe judgement on the duplicity of the Shi^{C}ites with what von Grunebaum calls their "most unattractive flavor of moral ambiguity" and their emotionalism. Not that Minorsky disagrees with von Grunebaum's description, he only takes exception to condemning the Shi^{C}ites outright because of these elements of their character. Instead, he condescendingly notes that as far as Persia is concerned "one must keep in mind the vicissitudes of history," and realize that as a result of these vicissitudes Islam and its sects cannot be spoken of as "logical" categories.[5]

All of these statements occur in the conclusion of an article written late in his life which appeared in print two years before his death. Therefore, the article might well be said to represent the culmination of his thought regarding the relationship of Islam to Persian culture. It is well known that his work has influenced other well-known Orientalists up to the present. His influence resulted in the publication of two volumes of essays in his honor within five years after his death. The second volume reads like a who's who of Western Orientalists.[6] Contributors included such eminent figures as C. E. Bosworth (who also edited the volume), Claude Cahen, J. A. Haywood, Nikki Keddie, A. K. S. Lambton, R. M. Savory, Joseph Schacht, M. A. Shaban, and Montgomery Watt.

Minorsky's conclusions, like other stereotypical determinations, lend themselves to highly prejudiced interpretations, particularly by the uninitiated. In fact, prejudicial statements concerning the religious, historical, and psychological natures of Shi^{C}ism based on statements similar to those of Minorsky, have been constant in the American press since large scale reporting of Iranian unrest began in the spring of 1978.

If the academic community holds views similar to those of Minorsky, then it is no surprise to see the media, which often relies on academics and government officials for information, provide the public with racist and ethnocentric stereotypes, hyperbole, and even errors regarding well-substantiated historical facts. Edward Said has documented such media distortion with regard to the Islamic world in general and the Iranian revolution in particular in his most recent work, *Covering Islam*[7] which also created much controversy. Close examination of the Western media's coverage of Islam in general and Iranian Shi^{C}ism in particular reveals hundreds of instances of factual inaccuracies, and racial, cultural, and religious slurs that would be considered expressions of

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 256-7.

5. *Ibid.*, quoting Gustave von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 191.

6. C.E. Bosworth, ed., *Iran and Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971).

7. Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

bigotry if directed against American minorities.

The result of such reporting has been a great deal of misunderstanding on the part of the American public as to the character of Shi^{C}ism in general, and the relationship between religion and state in Iran in particular. Hopefully, this article will alleviate such misunderstandings by exploring the relationship between Shi^{C}ite Islam's admitted revolutionary tendencies, with its rarely discussed proclivities toward quietism, pragmatism, and tolerance in light of Shi^{C}ism's historical experience with Sunnite Islam, and its resultant doctrinal development. Before presenting the argument, however, it is first necessary to provide a brief explanation of Shi^{C}ism and its relationship to Sunnism.

The principle dividing line between Sunnite Islam and Shi^{C}ite Islam is the dispute over the successorship to the prophet Muhammad after his death in 632 A.D. The Shi^{C}ites (from the word *shi^{C}ah*, meaning party as in political party) maintain that Muhammed chose his cousin and son-in-law ^{C}Ali ibn Talib (d. 661) as his successor. The Sunnites (from *sunnah*, meaning path or custom) deny Muhammad appointed a successor and hold that Muhammad's successors (Caliphs) should be elected by the eminent among the faithful. When Muhammad died, a council of the closest companions of Muhammad elected Abu Bakr (d.634) as the first Caliph. Even at such an early date ^{C}Ali had partisans (his *shi^{C}ah)* and together they bided their time until he eventually was chosen as the fourth Caliph in 656.

For the Sunnites the first four Caliphs are known as the *rashidun* (rightly guided) successors to Muhammad. After ^{C}Ali's murder in 661 the Sunnites recognized two successive dynasties as representing Caliphal authority: the ^{C}Umayyad (661-750), and the Abbasid (750-1258). Both dynasties preserved the ritual of democratic selection, but in reality transmitted Caliphal authority by inheritance.

The Shi^{C}ites, on the other hand, believed that succession to the Prophet could come only through the male descendents of ^{C}Ali and his wife Fatima, Muhammad's daughter. These successors were called Imams. The word "imam" in everyday usage means "leader" as in one who leads prayer or any other ordinary endeavor. In its technical usage it refers to the leaders of Shi^{C}ite Islam who possess special qualities. The Imams possess perfect knowledge of the Qur^{C}an and are its sole authoritative interpreters. They are *ma^{C}sum* (infallible) and are therefore temporal as well as religious leaders. The Caliph, among the Sunnites, held temporal authority and as such was a guarantor of Islamic law *(shari^{C}ah)* but held no religious authority as an interpretor of scripture or possessor of other esoteric knowledge.

The majority of Shi^{C}ites believe in a line of succession of twelve Imams. The twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, is said to have gone into occultation in 873 A.D., when only a small child, in order to escape persecution by the Caliphs. The period from 873 to 940 is known as the *ghaybat-i sugra* (the lesser occultation) during which he communicated with his *shi^{C}ah* through various agents

known as *wakils.* In 940 the last *wakil* announced just before he died, that henceforth the twelfth Imam would use no more agents, and would be completely cut off from direct contact with his followers. The period from 940 to the present is known as the *ghaybat-i kubra* (the greater or complete occultation). The Shiʿites believe that the twelfth Imam will return at the end of time as a messianic figure to "fill the world with justice as it is now filled with injustice."[8] In the absence of the Imam, Shiʿite Islamic law is formulated by the clergy (singular *ʿalim,* plural *ʿulama)* whose close ties to the masses are discussed below. Technically, Islam has no clergy, but in effect the jurisprudents of Islam comprise a clerical class.

The Shiʿites who believe in the line of twelve Imams are called *IthnaʿAshari* or Twelve Shiʿites. They number approximately 100 million. 90 percent of Iran is Twelver Shiʿite, as is roughly 50 percent of Iraq, while other Twelver communities dwell in East Africa, Pakistan, and northern India. There are other Shiʿite sects, less numerous than the Twelvers, which, though important, are not the subject of this article. The most notable of these is the Ismaʿili branch which recognized the first six Twelver Imams, but differs on the selection of the seventh Imam. The Ismaʿilis founded the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, but are found primarily in east Africa and north India today.

The Iranian revolution of February 1979, which overthrew the regime of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and established an "Islamic Republic,"[9] initiated a series of events and controversies that have focused world attention upon Shiʿite Islam and upon Iran to this day. The taking over of the United States embassy in Tehran in November 1979 and the resultant hostage crisis which received tremendous attention in the American media is but one example. Before November 1979 struggles for power between various factions (members of Iran's Revolutionary Council and the government of then Prime Minister Muhandis Barzagan; between supporters of the Islamic character of the revolution and Iranian leftists and Marxists; between the new regime and Iran's Kurdish and Arab minorities) and over the nature of Iran's new constitution drew much

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8. For a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of the Imamate in Twelver Shiʿism see Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shiʿism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

9. "Islamic Republic" is at best an ambiguous term. In its Iranian context it implies a government whose laws and policies are subject to approval by the ʿulama. What this will mean to the Iranian government in the long term remains to be seen. M.A. Cook's statement concerning Islam as a whole that "in general, the heritage of the great religion displays enormous plasticity in application. The context of the heritage is so varied, and the rules for exploiting it so lax, that it may in practice be used to justify almost any kind of behavior" may well become applicable to the Iranian situation. "Economic Developments," *The Legacy of Islam,* edited by Joseph Schacht (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 240.

attention to the new situation in Iran throughout the West.[10] Since the resolution of the hostage crisis Iran has continued to remain in the headlines, although, especially in the United States, attention paid to Iran in the media pales in comparison to the coverage during the 444 days American diplomats were held in Iran. The United States media, by and large, has been interested in Iran only when large numbers of persons are executed, when political assassinations occur, or when power struggles between "moderates" and "conservatives" alter the political balance within the country. The amount of attention given Iran by the media and United States government officials has resulted in countless demonstrations of Western lack of knowledge of the most fundamental aspects of Shicism, aspects which have for centuries provided it with its once dynamic and static qualities.[11]

There are certainly many reasons for the paucity of Western understanding of Shicism.[12] Perhaps most important among these reasons is the embryonic state of Western Islamic scholarship as a whole, along with its generally pro-Sunni bias.[13] As a result, Western scholars usually study Sunnism rather than

10. The new Iranian constitution, recently approved in a nationwide referendum, has been a center of controversy since the revolution in February 1979. The major issue was the power afforded to the culama. Even the early draft of the document, printed in English in FBIS for the Middle East and North Africa, on June 22, 1979, provided the clergy with veto power over any legislation "contrary to Islam." The revised version (which has not appeared in English yet) appears to grant even more power to the religious class — especially, it seems, to Ayatollah Khomeini, or anyone else who would assume his position after his death.

11. Edward Said discusses many cases of biased or inaccurate media coverage of Islam in general as well as of Shicism in *Covering Islam* cited in note 8. He closely monitored the news for only a short period after which there are countless more examples.

12. Western literature on the subject of Shicism is relatively sparse and often ill-digested. The best overall discussions of Shicism can be found in Marshall Hodgson's three volume work *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); and in Allamah Sayyid Husayn Tabatabaci, *Shi'ite Islam*, translated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

13. In general, orientalists dealing with Islam are pro-Sunni in outlook. This bias is the result of the historical ties between primarily Sunnite nations and the West, combined with the fact that Sunnites outnumber Shicites by a ratio of 9:1. Thus, Sunnite Islam is often described as orthodox while the Shicites are heterodox. This bias ranges from such introductory books as H.A.R. Gibb's *Mohammedanism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 120-126; and Bernard Lewis' *The Arabs in History* (London: Hutchenson University Library, 1950), p. 71; to advanced scholarly works such as those of W.M. Watt, who in "The Reappraisal of Abbasid Shicism," *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of H.A.R. Gibb,* ed., George Makdisi (Leidin, 1965), pp. 638-654 on p. 639 flatly concludes that the twelve Imams had virtually no recognition as leaders by anyone during their lifetimes, and were themselves not aware of any personal role as leaders in opposition to established authority. Thus, Twelver and Ismacili claims concerning the political roles of the Imams are fabrications concocted sometime during the tenth century. While neither the Shicites or those who disagree with them can conclusively prove their claims concerning the Imams, Marshall Hodgson in "How did the Early Shica become Sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* no. 75 (1955), pp. 1-13, goes a long way toward establishing that at least by the time of the sixth Imam, Jacfar al-Sadiq (d. 765) there was an awareness of an organization standing in opposition to the Caliphate.

Shi^Cism. Furthermore, much of what has been written is lacking in depth, objectivity, and appreciation. Even worse than this prejudicial treatment of Shi^Cism by many scholars, both in their publications and lectures, is that Shi^Cism as an important religious, political, historical, and cultural expression (or more precisely as a large group of expressions) is often entirely ignored — as if it were not a suitable field for scholarly endeavor.

In such an academic environment, then, it is no surprise to see a man of the caliber of Vladimir Minorsky characterize Shi^Cism as "opposition, martyrdom, and revolt," and thus naturally suited to the Persian mentality which is steeped in feelings of persecution.[14] Minorsky's position is not entirely untenable. There is some truth to it, but he makes his characterization with little scholarly analysis of the qualities and practices in Shi^Cism that stand in opposition to the characteristics mentioned above, such as quietism, dissimulation, and pragmatism, and their importance in Shi^Cite lifestyles and politics. Hence, Minorsky provides only a partial interpretation of the Shi^Cite faith, at the expense of not only much more which characterizes Shi^Cism, but also, as a result, at the expense of providing an understanding of the proper contexts in which Shi^Cism can be classified as "opposition, martyrdom, and revolt."

Shi^Cite Islam, discussed here in its *Ithna-^CAshari* form, is defined by both its revolutionary and quietistic components. These characteristics are not as contradictory as they are complementary; at once an expression of man's romantic desire for vigourous expression of idealism, and a realization that pragmatism can be ignored only at the peril of those ideals so dearly cherished. Shi^Cite Islam, then, although possessing strong tendencies toward "opposition, martyrdom, and revolt," is not a religion of constant overt opposition to established authority. Rather, those revolutionary elements within it (which give the faith much of its vitality) can be brought effectively to the surface only under certain circumstances. When the proper conditions prevail, Shi^Cite Islam can become an almost uncontrollably revolutionary force. Otherwise, its oppositional character is muted, covert rather than overt, willing to accept temporarily prevailing injustice, until circumstances permit an attempt to change the situation. Here we will examine the revolutionary aspects of Shi^Cism through a study of pertinent elements in doctrinal development, along with an examination of historical events expressive of Shi^Cism's revolutionary character, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The most profound and central aspects of the Shi^Cite expression of Islamic faith are its oppositional characteristics. However, a close look into the nature of Shi^Cism's revolutionary mentality, and the mentality's relationship to other important aspects of the religion, will lead to a deeper appreciation of the Shi^Cite faith as a whole.

14. "Not only during the 222 years of Safavid rule, *but even up to our day*, Shi^Cism, with its overtones and its aroma of opposition, martyrdom, and revolt, is matched quite well with the Persian character — a character formed in the course of a long history which is very different from the history of other peoples nearby." Minorsky, "Iran: Opposition, Martyrdom, and Revolt," p. 201.

The period from 632 A. D. to 940 A. D. is often stressed in discussions of Shi[c]ism. Frequently, the deeply held biases of the scholars,[15] when recognized by the students, tend to partially discredit all of an author's work concerned with the subject.[16] Of course, certain key events and personages from the period mentioned above need to be discussed in any comprehensive study of definitive Shi[c]ite characteristics. Indeed, from 632 to 940, the personality of Shi[c]ism was firmly molded, its basic categories by which Shi[c]ites understand the world were defined, and although Shi[c]ism has undergone considerable change since the end of that period, its essential doctrines and ideas are easily traceable to the end of the lesser occultation.

The careers of [c]Ali, Husayn, and Ja[c]far al-Sadiq are individually demonstrative of, and the genesis for, those characteristics so definitive of later and modern day Shi[c]ism. The tragic Caliphate of [c]Ali (d. 661) initiated the concept of stern loyalty to the Imams so prevalent in Twelver Shi[c]ism, and engendered a split in the Muslim world that can never be healed, although it may be partially bridged.[17] Debate on the legitimacy of claims by Shi[c]ites that [c]Ali was selected by Muhammad as his successor have been continuing in the Muslim world ever since [c]Ali's death and have spilled over into modern Western scholarship.[18] Despite the centrality of this debate in Sunnite-Shi[c]ite polemics, for the Western historian of religion and specifically of Islam, the validity of the claims of either side of the debate should be secondary to the influence [c]Ali has exerted upon both the Sunnite and Shi[c]ite worlds — an influence much more profound than many Muslims themselves realize.

As far as the history of Shi[c]ism is concerned, much of [c]Ali's importance lies in his patience and charisma. [c]Ali is the first example of the importance of

15. Professor Watt's article, cited in note 4 along with other works of his such as *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), p. 169, demonstrate one form of distortion. However, some good points are made in chapter 9, especially pp. 274-78 on the formation of Shi[c]ite Imami doctrine. On the other side of the question Shi[c]ite arguments are often so polemical in nature that an entirely different distortion of history is created. Often Shi[c]ite polemics divide the Muslim world in Sunnite and Shi[c]ite camps immediately on the death of the Prophet. See Tabataba'i, *Shi[c]ite Islam*, pp. 39-44 for an extreme example of this form of argumentation.

16. Students frequently adapt the position of the book read most recently. Since Western students of Islam are not taught "Shi[c]ism" the way they are taught "Sunnism," they often emerge from their studies with a reenforced Sunni bias.

17. The rift between the two communities is unbreachable despite the many recent statements in the press by Islamic leaders, especially Ayatollah Khomeini, that Sunnism and Shi[c]ism should deemphasize their differences and concentrate on that which they have in common. While these two major branches of Islam can coexist on a superficial level, they will never by involved in any kind of significant merger. The differences between the two branches are too firmly rooted in historical events invested with great emotive and symbolic significance (especially by the Shi[c]ites) for these groups to turn away from the features by which they are distinctive. For a good discussion of the Caliphate of [c]Ali see Hodgson's *Venture*, I: 214-17.

18. Western scholarship, on the whole, tends to deny Shi[c]ite claims concerning [c]Ali.

pragmatic concerns in Shi^Cism. ^CAli's silence for twenty-four years over his right to rule is regarded by Shi^Cites as evidence of his desire to avoid a breach in the Islamic community.[19] His subsequent shaky, unsettled, and ultimately tragic reign is seen as the result of the treachery of his opponents and the weaknesses of his followers and not as a result of ineptness on his own part.[20] His charismatic qualities overcame whatever political failings he may have had and not long after his death his descendents became focal points of a great deal of religious and political activity.[21] Two of these descendents, Husayn and Ja^Cfar al-Sadiq, have, in strikingly different ways, become more important to Shi^Cism than ^CAli himself because they provided Shi^Cism with the beginnings of its revolutionary and quietistic characteristics.

The figure of Husayn is the most tragic in the entire history of Islam. His martyrdom is the basis of all that is revolutionary in Twelver Shi^Cism. Western scholars are now beginning to recognize the importance of Karbala (the plain where Husayn was killed) within Shi^Cite Islam.[22] Indeed, the importance of the events of Karbala for Shi^Cites is hard to overemphasize — in the end, for Shi^Cites, Karbala becomes the reason for creation.[23] A complete discussion of the meaning of Karbala to Shi^Cism will supply the proper background for later discussion of the political role of Shi^Cism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where it will be shown how Karbala was used by the ^Culama to instigate social and political change.

19. Tabataba'i, *Shi^Cite Islam*, 42. Here we have Shi^Cism's first example of the necessity of patience over and above an open protest.

20. E. Kohlberg, "The Development of the Imami Shi^Ci Doctrine of Jihad," *Zeitschrift der Deutshen morgenlandischen Gelsellshaft*, 126 (1976), pp. 64-86.

21. Of course, many Western scholars would argue that this was not the case. I take issue with their view *by virtue of the fact* that Husayn even made an attempt to battle Yazid and by the fact that he did appear to have a considerable following in Iraq, especially in Kufah. The importance the events in Karbala in 680 have had for Islamic history may also bespeak the role of Husayn during his lifetime.

22. Earlier in this century Western scholars were taking note of the centrality of the martyrdom of Husayn for Shi^Cism but in only a most superficial manner, usually only chronicaling personal experiences witnessing the *Muharram* commemorations. See J.M. Unvala, "The Moharram Festival in Persia," *Studie Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*, no. 3 (1927), pp. 82-96; and J. Robson, "The Muharram Ceremonies," *The Hibbert Journal* 54 (April 1956): 267-74 for examples of this type of scholarship.

More recently scholars such as Hamid Algar, Mahmoud Ayoub, and Gustave Thais have given the *Muharram* commemorations more advanced treatment. See especially Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague: Mouton Publsihers) 1979 and Gustave Thais, "Religious Symbolism and Social Change," *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis*, ed Nikki Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 349-366.

23. "The martyrdom of Imam Hussein has been regarded by the Shi'i community as a cosmic event around which the entire history of the world, prior as well as subsequent to it, revolves. Furthermore, this event has been regarded as divinely preordained. Through it God's mercy and justice are manifested and hence man's redemption and condemnation are achieved." Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering* p. 141.

In 661 with the death of ^{C}Ali the capital of the Islamic world was moved to Damascus where Mu^{C}awiyya, ^{C}Ali's nemesis presided as Caliph. Most Muslims recognized his position and began the expansion and consolidation of an empire. After ^{C}Ali's death, opposition to Mu^{C}awiyya's rule remained strong in the garrison town of Kufah in Iraq, where ^{C}Ali enjoyed great popularity. When Mu^{C}awiyya died and his son Yazid became Caliph ^{C}Ali's partisans in Kufah convinced Husayn, ^{C}Ali's son, to lead them in revolt against what they perceived to be an unjust and illegitimate rule. Husayn, living in Medinah at the time, left for Iraq with a small following hoping to join forces with his Kufan supporters. When he arrived in Iraq his Kufan allies reneged on their pledges and refused to join him. Husayn and his troops were soon surrounded by Yazid's forces under the reluctant command of ^{C}Umar ibn Sa^{C}d.[24]

On the tenth day of *Muharram,* 680, the forces of the Caliph Yazid attacked and killed Husayn and most of his small rebel band on the plain of Karbala in Iraq. Husayn's body was mutilated and his head was brought to Damascus and put on display. These actions on Yazid's behalf did more than horrify the Islamic world, they provided Shi^{C}ism with its identity.[25] The lore that has grown up in Shi^{C}ite circles concerning Husayn's death served to intensify Shi^{C}ite self-awareness vis-a-vis the Sunni and even the non-Muslim worlds. Elaborate rituals with personal, religious, political, and revolutionary significance also developed out of the martyrdom.[26] Regarding the meanings of the mourning for Husayn, Gustave Thais has noted:

Hussein's death is seen as a vicarious sacrifice and. . .his people may benefit from taking part in the mourning over his sufferings. In this way

24. For a comprehensive discussion of the events at Karbala and their importance to the development of Shi^{C}ism see S.H.M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi^{C}a Islam* (London and New York: Longman Group Ltd., 1979)'

25. Sunnites are also affected by the death of Husayn, though certainly not to the extent of the Shi^{C}ites. The martyrdom of Husayn is a dark event in Islamic history as far as the Sunnites are concerned; they have even built up a considerable amount of pious literature concerning the events at Karbala. Yazid himself is sometimes even said to be horrified when he learned of Husayn's death. For an example of a pious Sunnite literature concerning Husayn, see Fazl Ahmad, *Husayn the Great Martyr* (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1969).

26. Key terms relating to the rituals are *Ta^{C}ziya* (passion plays), *rawzah, ziyarah,* and *hay^{C}at-i madhabi. Ta^{C}ziyas* are ritual reenactments of the drama of Karbala, which upon occasion become so emotional that the participants give way to their passions and behave violently. *Rawzahs* are narrations of the events of *Karbala* which are incredibly detailed and designed to arouse an almost mystical catharsis between the listener and the drama itself. *Hay ^{C}ati-i madhabis* are religious gatherings of varying forms (each form with its own name) which in general take place at peoples' homes at regularly scheduled intervals. The meetings are commemorations of historical events important to Shi^{C}ism, such as the martyrdom of Husayn, or the deaths of any of the Imams. However, even meetings designed to commemorate other 'Imams often conclude with a narration of the events at *Karbala.* *Ziyarah* refers to pilgrimages to the tomb of Husayn (actual and symbolic) and the literature surrounding it. For a more complete discussion of the above terms, see Thais, "Religious Symbolism," and Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering.*

they merit his intercession. But the participants in a rauzeh by crying for Hussein not only gain intercession but also are protesting, in their way, the existence of injustice and evil in the world, while at the same time reaffirming their belief in the triumph of good over evil, justice over tyranny, and belief over disbelief.27

Karbala, then, is potentially a threat to any established order viewed as unjust. As Hamid Algar states, "Imam Hussein's struggle against the ᶜUmayyads is thus transfigured into an archetype of the conflict between justice and tyranny. All autocratic regimes are held to be similar and reminiscent of the ᶜUmayyads, and on one occasion even to be descended from that dynasty."28

The revolutionary nature of Shiᶜism as expressed in and through Karbala is clear. It will be demonstrated later how and under what circumstances Karbala can and is used to effect revolutionary political change. Another figure of great importance to Shiᶜite Islam, Jaᶜfar al-Sadiq (d. 765) must be considered first, however, because his status as a man of knowledge and piety gave definitive form to early Shiᶜite quietism.

The contributions to Shiᶜite Islam by the sixth Imam, Jaᶜfar al-Sadiq lay in his combination of wisdom and piety with political quietism. Despite the tremendous political upheavals that transpired during his lifetime (including the Abbasid Revolution), Jaᶜfar al-Sadiq remained aloof from politics while at the same time becoming a scholar of considerable reputation. The success and renown of Jaᶜfar within intellectual and religious circles is indicated by the range and number of his biographers[29] and by his recognition by both Sunnites and Shiᶜites as a transmitter of *hadiths* (quotes from the prophet Muhammad outside of the Qurᶜan). Furthermore, there is substantial evidence that Jaᶜfar's thought anticipated much of what is later called Sufism.[30]

Despite Jaᶜfar's pronounced political quietism, there is little doubt that he viewed himself as the legitimate Shiᶜite leader.[31] Whether or not he believed his role could entail political concerns is not clear. Even Marshall Hodgson suggests that Jaᶜfar remained aloof from politics to avoid confusion between his legal

27. Thais, "Religious Symbolism," p. 357.

28. Hamid Alagar, "The Oppositional Role of the Ulama in Twentieth Century Iran," *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis,* p. 233.

29. Jaᶜfar al-Sadiq appears in the standard histories of Tabari and Masᶜudi, and in Ibn Khallikan's dictionary. However, so do many less prominent individuals. What is interesting about 'Imam Jaᶜfar is that he appears in Sharastani and Nawbakhti as a Shi'ite, while Dhahabi emphasizes Jaᶜfar's contribution to Sunnism, and Abu Nuᶜaym and Farid al-Din Attar record him as a leading saint and mystic. Equally interesting is the fact that Jaᶜfar is a recognized transmitter of *hadiths* by both Shi'ites and Sunnites.

30. Sufism is the term for the mystical dimension of Islam. For discussions of Ja'far al-Sadiq's contribution to Islamic mysticism, see John B. Taylor, "Ja'far al-Sadiq, Spritual Forebear of the Sufis," *Islamic Culture* 40, (April 1966): 97-113; and "Man's Knowledge of God in the Thoughts of Ja'far al-Sadiq," *Ibid.,* (October 1966): 195-206.

31. Hogdson, *Early Shiᶜa*, especially pp. 9, 11, 13. Furthermore, Hodgson states on p. 9 that Ja'far's grandson was "the scarcely disputed chief of the surviving Shiᶜa."

responsibilities and those of a political leader.[32] However, Shi^{c}ites see his quiet-ism not as a possible refutation of his political role but as Ja^{c}far's natural response to the fact that revolt during his lifetime would have been disastrous for the Shi^{c}ite community.[33] His demonstrations of wisdom and of humanity also tended to lend credence (in terms of popular support) to his belief that a political role was to be avoided. Of all the Shi^{c}ite Imams he is the most quoted,[34] and on a wide variety of subjects. He, more than any of the twelve Imams, made political quietism among the Shi^{c}ites an acceptable and often essential practice. According to tradition he was poisoned by grapes sent as a gift from the Caliph in 765.

Between the death of Ja^{c}far al-Sadiq in 765 and the end of the lesser occultation in 940, Shi^{c}ite thought began to be systematically compiled and preserved by Shi^{c}ite scholars. Unfortunately, much of the material produced during this time is either lost or not translated into a Western language. However, the *Risalatu'l-I'tiqadat,* of Muhammed ibn Ali ibn Babawayhi al-Qummi (d.991-992), written not long after the end of the lesser occultation, has been translated; it illustrates Ja^{c}far's tremendous impact upon Shi^{c}ite thought. Ja^{c}far is quoted many times by ibn Babawayhi, often in connection with the practices of *taqiyyah* (dissimulating one's true beliefs when in jeopardy), a major mani-festation of Ja^{c}far's quietism. It is surprising to note that ibn Babawayhi's creed lacked oppositional vitality. *Jihad,* for example, is never mentioned. Instead, Shaykh Saduq (as he is commonly known) stresses that

> ...until the Imam al-Qaim [the twelfth Imam] appears, *taqiyya* is obligatory and it is not permissable to dispense with it. He, who aban-dons it before the appearance of the Qaim, has verily gone out of the religion of Allah, Exalted is He, and the religion of the Imams, and disobeys Allah and His Messenger and the Imams. Imam Ja^{c}far was

32. *Ibid.,* p. 11 Hodgson's argument is ingenious, though, I feel, incomplete. Ja^{c}far al-Sadiq's role is discussed in terms of two concepts: *nass* and *^{c}ilm.* Briefly, Ja^{c}far could claim leadership of the ^{c}Alids due to his appointment by designation (nass) by his father Muhammad al-Baqir, the fifth Imam. Hodgson then argues that a new concept developed around Ja^{c}far's time — that the designated head of the community had a special knowledge (^{c}ilm) which made him the "exclusively authorized source of how to lead a holy life." Thus, whether or not the Imam was a ruler, he still had an important function. Therefore, it was not a necessity for him to rise in rebellion to become the de facto ruler, in fact, it could be a bad move if he were to try since "his role as final authority in all cases in conscience would surely be confused by joining with the rather different responsibilities of actual political power." However, Hodgson provides no data indicating that Ja^{c}far did feel that his legal and executive roles would or could become confused. Certainly Ja^{c}far's grandson ^{c}Ali al-Rida felt the roles could be combined.

33. Tabataba'i, *Shi^{c}ite Islam,* pp. 203-205.

34. Ja^{c}far al-Sadiq remains an important source for learning proper practice of individual piety to this day. The author has even heard Persian Baha'is (who contrary to statements in the press and by their opponents, are not Muslims) quoting *hadiths* attributed to Ja^{c}far al-Sadiq when discussing matters such as prayer or practicing virtue.

asked concerning the word of Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He. "Verily the noblest among you, in the sight of Allah, is the most pious." He said (it means) he who adheres most scrupulously to the practice of *taqiyya*.[35]

Although external opposition is thus strictly forbidden, inward opposition continues:

> And Iman Ja^cfar said: 'Verily I hear a man abusing me in the mosque; and I hide myself behind a pillar so that he may not see me.' And he (Imam Ja^cfar) said, 'Mix with the people (enemies) outwardly, but oppose them inwardly, so long as the Amirate is a matter of opinion.'[36]

Thus, at least during the tenure of the twelve Imams, it can be said that opposition to non-Shi^cite Muslims could only take an inward form unless circumstances were to permit otherwise. These circumstances never prevailed before the first occultation; the end of which brought new challenges to the Shi^cite world, especially regarding matters of *Shari^cah* (Islamic law), politics, and of the role of Shi^cism within Islam.

Shi^cite attempts to adjust to the new situation after 940 reflect the desire of the Shi^cite ^culama simultaneously to preserve Shi^cism from being overwhelmed by Sunnism and to maintain its self awareness as the true expression of the faith of Islam. Hence, inward opposition to established authority and the practice of *taqiyyah* were made matters not just of choice, but of faith. The revolutionary aspects of Shi^cism were internalized — finding expression in such practices as the remembrances of the martyrdom of Husayn mentioned above. The Shi^cite drive for self-preservation and self-awareness is well expressed in the development of the Imami doctrine of *jihad* to which we shall now turn.

Imami positions on *jihad* reveal a great sense of frustration on the part of the Shi^cite ^culama caused by their hatred for those who persecuted the Imams combined with the knowledge that the Shi^cites are in such a minority that armed opposition is usually an impossibility. Their frustration greatly increased whenever the Shi^cite community felt an increased threat from Sunnite Islam. Therefore, the classical Imami theory of Shaykh Mufid that *jihad* can only be proclaimed by the hidden Imam (who no longer delegates his authority) became obsolete during the late Buyid period (945-1055) when the Sunnite Seljuqs threatened the Buyids, who were Shi^cite Amirs who controlled the Caliphate and ruled in Iraq and Iran.[37]

35. Asaf A. A. Fyzee, *A Shi'ite Creed: A Translation of Risalatu'l-I'tiqadat of Muhammed b Ali ibn Babawayhi al-Qummi Known as Shaykh Saduq* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 111.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Kohlberg, "The Development of the Imami Shi^ci Doctrine of Jihad," p. 79.

In response to the pending crisis, Abu Ja^cfar al-Tusi, the last of the great Shi^cite jurists of Buyid times, introduced modifications to Mufid's theory that have influenced all later Shi^cite writings on the subject. According to al-Tusi, defensive *jihad* can be carried out even when the Imam is absent. Here again pragmatic concerns force a change in doctrine — creating new ideals out of apparent compromises. Defense of the frontiers without the presence of the Imam becomes an honorable and desirable act.

The next step in the development of the Imami doctrine of *jihad* took place during the Ilkhan period (1255-1353), when jurists gained the implicit power to summon people to *jihad*.[38] *Jihad,* however, remained a defensive tool.

The Qajar dynasty of the nineteenth century saw a major change relating to *jihad*.[39] The ^culama questioned the dynasty because of its purely secular claim to power. At least the Safavids could claim descent from ^cAli. Strictly speaking, the Qajar rulers were religiously illegitimate, a fact which allowed the ^culama to strengthen its control over the realm's affairs — especially in matters of *Shari^cah*.[40] Developments concerning the doctrine of *jihad* naturally took place in the midst of the new authority of the ^culama. These developments substantially altered the classical Imami conception of *jihad* and are of relevance to present day Iran, which at this writing is amidst its most severe turmoil since the end of Safavid rule. The views of *jihad* shaped during the Qajar peiod must be understood if one is to attempt to understand the oppositional characteristics and potential of Shi^cite Islam.

A primary document for the study of thought concerning *jihad* in the nineteenth century is the *Risala-yi Jihadiya* which though not translated has been summarized by E. Kohlberg. The author of the work classifies *jihad* into two types:offensive *jihad-i davati;* and defensive *jihad-i difa^ci;* and goes to great lengths to discuss the differences between the two. In general, defensive *jihad* can be waged without the consent of the Imam or his representatives; it can be led by *mujtahids* (high ranking clerics), but if they are unable to assume the responsibility, it can be led by anyone. All persons who can participate in defensivve *jihad* must do so, even those traditionally exempt from participation in offensive *jihad* within Islam as a whole.[41] Financial sacrifice to cover costs is virtually unlimited. Spoils must first cover costs of the war before they are

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

39. No truly new developments in thought concerning jihad took place among the ^culama during the Safavid period. The Safavid dynasty is important in other ways to our discussion and is dealt with below.

40. The ^culama's rule in political affairs during the later Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties is discussed below. For a detailed analysis of religion and state in Iran in the nineteenth century see Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785-1906* (Berkelely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

41. This is an interesting point in light of Ayatollah Khomeini's recent call for an army of 20 million soldiers. His call was expressed as a defensive gesture, thus he was acting along the lines of traditional behavior for the ^culama.

distributed among the soldiers. Treaties with *dhimmis* (non Muslim communities within Muslim states) can be revoked if necessary. Defensive *jihad* can be waged against anyone, including Muslims; it is not necessary to call on the opposition to embrace Islam before attacking. Tactics not allowed during an offensive *jihad,* including surprise attacks and grossly outnumbering the opposition, are allowed. Ceasefires may be abrogated if danger is perceived.[42]

The rules for offensive *jihad,* which are generally the reverse of those listed for a defensive *jihad,* are based on the concepts of fairness and justice which a country can afford to engage in when its entire existence is not threatened. An offensive *jihad* cannot be undertaken without the authority of the Prophet, the Imam, or his designate, but whether or not the ^culama can in fact assume the role of leader is left unclear. However, the *Risala-yi Jihadiya* does declare that "it is impossible to say that *jihad* during the Imam's concealment is more praise-worthy than during his presence."[43] The potential ramifications are obvious. A combination of these Imami views of *jihad* with the powerful symbol of Karbala is potentially an extremely explosive mixture. Under certain circumstances, the Shi^cite ^culama (and lay Shi^cites as well) tolerate the status quo, even while harboring internal opposition. Hence, these concepts can be used to great effect. These sorts of circumstances will be discussed later.

The Safavid period (1501-1732) was crucial in its contributions to the geographical, ritual, and even psychological aspects of modern-day Shi^cism. During the Safavid period Iran became a Shi^cite land for the first time. The Shi^cite ^culama communicated internationally on an unprecedented basis and Shi^cite self-awareness developed dramatically as an increasingly large number of Shi^cites were joined under the same government, and as the threats from the Sunnite Ottoman government became more severe. The rituals for commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn grew tremendously in grandeur and emotional impact during this time.[44]

The Shi^cite ^culama of the Safavids (whose spiritual ancestors were imported by the first Safavid shah, Isma^cil in 1524) allied themselves with the general population, establishing strong economic, familial, and religious ties with them. The ^culama were somewhat suspicious of the extremist ^cAlid beliefs of the disciples of Shah Isma^cil, and even though they remained aloof from the dynasty, their strong position among the masses combined with their fierce desire for independence placed them in a position to criticize the regime, which they did from time to time. Their position has been a unique one among all Muslim ^culama ever since.[45]

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42. Kohlberg, "The Development of the Imami Shi^ci Doctrine of Jihad," pp. 84-6.

43. *Ibid.,* p. 83.

44. The most comprehensive treatment in English of the Safavid period is Roger Savory's *Iran Under the Safavids* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

45. Hodgson, *Venture,* 2;35.

While the ^{C}ulama concentrated their power, the already present Shi^{C}ite proclivity to commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn was finding increasingly sophisticated expression in the development of the *ta^{C}ziyah* rituals. Throughout the empire, the Shi^{C}ites' *Muharram* commemorations were the most important events of the year. The suffering and martyrdom of Imam Husayn took on cosmic significance: "In it the drama of God and man was seen as becoming fully articulate:he who shared in Husayn's suffering and repented his own share of guilt for it would be forgiven all his sins by God. To this, all else was scarcely a prelude."[46]

This crying out concerning the injustice of the world was and is extremely malleable, capable of taking on considerable political overtones. Indeed, the struggle between the forces of Imam Husayn and of Yazid was itself a struggle of both a political and religious nature. Thus, each ritual, year after year, intensified hatred for the Sunnites. Later on, after the Safavid dynasty fell and the new claimants to Iranian leadership could no longer use descent from the family of ^{C}Ali as a tool of political legitimation, the mourning of Husayn became an expression of protest against the Iranian leaders. In fact, the entire framework of imagery surrounding Karbala could be used at any time of year, and was occasionally so powerful that its use against the government could subject one to arrest or exile, or could cause spontaneous or planned violence in the streets.

The above mentioned elements combined with the concept of *taqlid* (which was crystalized on the eve of the birth of the Qajar dynasty) gives Shi^{C}ism a tremendous potential for effective revolutionary or oppositional action. However, despite the potential power of the ^{C}ulama united with the believers, Iran has never been in a state of constant revolt, even since the beginning of the Qajar era. Only under certain conditions will Shi^{C}ism express itself in a politically effective manner and even then the Shi^{C}ite community is often divided. Therefore, a strict classification of Shi^{C}ism as "opposition, martyrdom, and revolt," at least on an exoteric level, can be seriously misleading. Shi^{C}ite opposition is rarely for the sake of sheer defiance; it is instead practical and goal-oriented. It is filled with a passion, though, that some in the West have been slow to sympathize with or understand. As we shall see, the religious and political actions of the Qajar and Pahlavi periods emphasized the way in which Shi^{C}ism can accurately be described as "opposition, martyrdom, and revolt."

During the Qajar dynasty (1779-1924) Shi^{C}ite religious and political thought became increasingly sophisticated and oppositional. Although many authors have dwelled upon the corruption of many of the ^{C}ulama, especially in

46. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

their relationships with the government,[47] a significant number among the Culama were developing doctrines and theories of government that stood in contrast to the monarchy. Among these men were the spiritual forebears of the leaders of the revolution against the former shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. The thoughts and actions of the politically active and oppositional members of the Qajar Clama, especially during the nineteenth century, were crucial to the preparation of the ideological basis for the recent revolution in Iran and are demonstrative of the conditions under which ShiCism can become a revolutionary force.

Principle among the politically relevant religious concepts defined during the Qajar period is that of *marjiC al-taqlid.* The term literally means "source of imitation" and refers to a member of the Culama whose decisions and practices are to be adhered to by ordinary believers. Such a figure comes from the high clerical rank of *mujtahid.* A mujtahid is one who exercises *ijtihad* (independent exertion) in deciding points of religious law as a result of his character and learning. A *mujtahid* who is considered superior in ability to interpret Islamic law and to lead a pious life by his peers and by the people becomes a *marjaC al-taqlid* for them in religious matters. At any given time there are a number of *mujtahids* of such a status living in and serving various communities. Drawing distinctions between religious and secular matters is problematic in any society and it is not surprising or especially revealing of the nature of Iranian society that there was considerable dispute between the government and the Culama over the scope of state and religious law.[48] The end result of the concept was

47. Reasonably balanced discussions of the role of the Culama vis-a-vis the Iranian government, especially in terms of the motivations of the clergy are Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969); "The Oppositional Role of the Ulema in Twentieth Century Iran," *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis;* Nikki R. Keddie, "The Roots of the Ulama's Power in Modern Iran," *ibid.;* "The Origins of the Religious-Radical Alliance in Iran," *Past and Present,* 34 (July 1966): 70-80; "Iranian Politics 1900-1905: Background to Revolution," *Middle Eastern Studies,* 1, 2, 3 (1969): 3-13, 151-67, 234-50; and "Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 (April 1962): 265-95; Edward Granville Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan; Leonard Binder, "The Proofs of Islam: Religion and Politics in Iran," *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of H.A.R. Gibb,* ed., George Makdisi (Leiden, 1965), pp. 118-140; A.K.S. Lambton, "The Persian Ulama and Constitutional Reform," *Le Shi'isme Imamite: Colloque de Strasbourg (6-9 mai 1968)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), pp. 245-69; and "A Reconsideration of the Position of Marja Cal-Taqlid and the Religious Institution," *Studia Islamica* 20 (1964), pp. 115-135; Abdul-Hadi Hairi, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A Study of the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics* (Leiden' Brill, 1977); and "Why did the Ulama Participate in the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909?" *Die Welt des Islam* 17 (1976-1977): 127-54.

48. See Algar, *Religion and State,* pp. 5-14; and Lambton, "A Reconsideration," for more detailed discussions of *MarjaCal-Taqlid*

that the monarchy was bound in theory to the opinions of the *mujtahids,* which in effect made the leading ^culama supreme to the executive branch of government.[49]

In practice, of course, the monarchy rarely followed the rulings and precepts of the *mujtahids,* a fact which created a great deal of tension between the two. This tension manifested itself in the form of blunt declarations from government officials stating that the ^culama should remain completely aloof from politics.

The close ties between the ^culama and the masses stimulated the clergy's potential for effective political action. First among these ties was that between ^culama and the merchant classes.[50] Business law was regulated by the *Shari^cah,* significant taxes were paid by merchants to support the ^culama (*zakat, khums*), and both groups had a vested interest in limiting the powers of the state. The clerics were jealous of their societal roles which were threatened by authoritarianism while the merchants were ever cautious against excessive taxation. Both groups also feared the encroachment of Western goods and values which undermined their respective economic and ideological positions. Furthermore, ties between the merchants and the ^culama were often strengthened by marriage alliances.

The ^culama also had important connections with the rest of the population. Education, for example, was still largely under the control of the religious scholars. In addition,

> Matters of personal law were decided by them, title deeds were written by them, and attested before them; disputes were often settled by them; commercial affairs which required the witnessing of documents were referred to them. . . .Functions connected with birth, marriage, and death all required the assistance of the ulema. These events, together with the religious festivals, taziehs, rawzeh khwanis and assemblies in Ramadan were the chief events which relieved the monotony of the ordinary people; and with these occasions the ulema were closely concerned. It was to them therefore and not to government officials that the people naturally looked for the fulfillment of their aspirations, and, above all, for protection.[51]

Thus, the clerics were ensconced in the religious and political affairs of the entire county. However, effective ^culama-inspired opposition to the monarchy was only carried out when the monarchy was perceived as grossly overstepping the boundaries of justice. The ^culama, regardless of the personal reasons for its opposition to the monarchy of any one of its members, stirred up revolt only under the guise of justice versus tyranny (often with good reason). Although

49. Algar, "The Oppositional Role," p. 235.
50. Lambton, "The Persian Ulama." p. 251.
51. *Ibid.,* pp. 249-250.

classical Imami political theory holds no government as legitimate in the absence of the twelfth Imam, revolutionary action was only resorted to if the government was perceived to have been grossly negligent of its duty to protect the people.

Qajar leaders, especially Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-1896) provided the ^Culama with personal reasons for opposition to the monarchy. Such measures taken by the monarchs as limiting sanctuary rights, reducing the scope of Shari^Ca jurisdiction, attempts to exercise dominion over *waqf* funds (pious or charitable endowments), decreasing allowances to the ^Culama, and introducing and fostering secular education,[52] caused a great deal of resentment between the government and the clergy, and resulted in sometimes violent clerical reactions. Despite the government's claims that the new programs were instituted out of a desire to instill necessary reforms, the above-mentioned actions were not aimed solely at improving Iran's social, religious, political, and economic institutions. The new policies produced two noteworthy effects. The first was the increasing of the monarchy's power at the expense of the clergy. The second was the penetration and domination of Iran's economy by foreign powers. The desire for increasing centralization of power in the hands of the monarchy, widespread corruption among government officials, and English and Russian encroachment upon the Persian economy have all been well documented, as have the declining fortunes of the Iranian people during the nineteenth century.[53] So, although the ^Culama were indeed protecting their vested interests by opposing the government, successful opposition to the regime occurred only under the aegis of restoring justice. Furthermore, there were leading members of the ^Culama who recognized the need in principle of some of the monarchical reforms of the nineteenth century, and whose attacks upon the government were solely based upon the demise of Iran under later Qajar rule. Many of these members of the ^Culama took part in the constitutionalist movement in 1905-1911.

The protests against the government of Iran in the nineteenth century, led by the ^Culama, were based upon religious concepts and symbols. Thus, the shahs were often portrayed as Yazid and were accused of being descendents of the hated ^CUmayyads. They even were charged with possessing the dagger used to behead Imam Husayn. However, despite the power of the ^Culama in Iran, the

52. *Ibid.*, p. 261; and Keddie, "The Roots of the Ulama's Power," p. 227.

53. See especially Algar, *Religion and State*, Chapters IV-VII and XIII, and Lambton, "The Persian Ulema," pp. 261-266. A major expression of popular discontent with the government was the successful opposition to the tobacco concession led by the ^Culama in 1891. The concession was viewed as yet another foreign encroachment on the economic rights of the Persian people and became a springboard for political activity on the part of the clergy. For analyses of the tobacco concession crises and the ^Culama's role, along with discussions of Persia's relations with Great Britain and Russia, see A.K.S. Lambton, The Tobacco Regie: Prelude to Revolution," *Studia Islamica* 22 and 23, (1965). 119-157 and 71-90; and Nikki Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1981-92* (London, 1966).

tremendous emphasis in Shi^Cism on the concept of Justice, and the dynamic power of the symbolism of Karbala, the ^Culama did not succeed in establishing a new basis for government, nor did they commit masses of Iranian subjects to martyrdom as a result of an excessive zeal to end tyranny.[54] Rather, those that tried advocated a method of government which shows Shi^Cism's strong ties to that which is pragmatic as well as ideologically the most pleasing. Shi^Cite support for the constitutionalist movement demonstrates the Shi^Cite willingness to tolerate government authority during the absence of the Imam that is reasonably in accordance with Shi^Cite views on justice. Furthermore, concepts arising out of Shi^Cite participation in the constitutionalist movement have contributed greatly to the ideological basis of the recent revolution in Iran as well as to the new leadership's proposals for a political establishment.

The role of the ^Culama in the constitutionalist reform movement has been the subject of several scholarly studies.[55] Sometimes those ^Culama participating in the reform are said to have been only nominally aware of the concept of constitutionalism and were engaged in the reform largely to protect their own interests. It is said that the circumstances for their participation produced merely an isolated aberration from traditional practice. There is no doubt that some of the ^Culama did not understand the implications of constitutionalism for Iran; some may have been involved for their own personal gain.[56] However, others were sincerely committed to the constitutionalist cause as a method to permanently reduce the amount of injustice the government could perpetrate among its people. After the defection of Shaykh Fadullah Nuri in 1907 from the constitutionalist cause, the most determined support came from Najaf, Iraq, then part of the Ottoman empire. In fact, it was out of the milieu of Najafi thinking that emerged "the most detailed and coherent justification of constitutional government from the standpoint of Shi^Cism"[57] in this century: *An*

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54. In fact, much of the opposition took the form of *anjumanha*, secret societies. For a discussion of the role of secret societies, see A.K.S. Lambton's "Secret Societies and the Persian Revolution of 1905-06," St. Anthony's Papers 4 (1958): 43-60.

55. See note 37.

56. It was felt by some members of the ^Culama that a constitutionalist government could and would allow unrestricted consistent application of Shari^Ca. By 1907, it became apparent to both supporters and opponents of the constitution (whether members of the *^Culama or not) that constitutionalism and Shari^Ca* were not completely compatible. This divergence between the two was found unacceptable by some of the ^Culama who had at first supported the constitutionalist movement, most notably Shaykh Fadlullah Nuri, who left the constitutionalist ranks and was later hanged by the constitutionalist *^Culama* for his efforts. For discussions of Nuri's role and thoughts regarding the constitution, see Hairi *Shi^Cism and Constitutionalism in Iran,* especially pp. 221-224 and 232-235. It should be noted that Hairi concludes that "the idea of constitutionalism was not understood by most of the modern thinkers of the Muslim world." p. 235.

57. Algar, "Role of the Ulama," p. 238.

Admonishment to the Nation and an Exposition to the People concerning the Foundations and Principles of Constitutional Government by Shaykh Mohammed Husayn Na'ini (1860-1936).[58]

Na'ini's views are largely representative of those of the leading *mujtahids* in Najaf, and have been discussed in detail by Abdul-Hadi Hairi and to a lesser extent by Hamid Algar. His work was extremely influential on the thinking of the late Ayatollah Teleghani and of Ayatollah Khomeini.[59] Essentially, Na'ini felt it was a religious duty for the ^Culama to oppose tyranny, that is to say his "only motive for writing on the idea of constitutionalism was religion."[60]

Na'ini divides secular leadership into two categories: (1) tyrannical, based on unlimited power of the ruler, and (2) *conditionally limited*, or constitutional. He argues that only through a constitutional system can a leader's natural inclination towards tyranny be limited. Thus, although injustice on the part of leadership can never be eliminated, it can at least be reduced to tolerable limits until the *Mahdi*, the twelfth Imam, returns.[61]

Na'ini also argues that it is obligatory to overthrow despotic rulers. Tyranny consists of three types of injustice: injustice to God, to the Imam, and to the people. A constitutional government has the potential to eliminate injustice to God and to the people and is therefore preferable. Since the ^Culama are the custodians of justice during the occultation, and since the preservation of order is of primary importance, the ^Culama should have authority in the Imam's absence. A *majlis* (parliament) should be elected to order the affairs of the country with significant representation of the ^Culama to ensure that it enacts no legislation contrary to Islam.[62]

Na'ini's views are (as stated above) highly representative of the leading Najafi constitutionalists, and although insight into their own minds is impossible,

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58. Nai'ini's views on government are discussed in great detail in the two works by Abdul-Hairi mentioned in note 37. Also in these works he discusses the points of view toward constitutionalism of leading *Mujtahids* in Najaf such as Mirza Husayn Tihrani, Mulla Muhammed Kasim Khurasani, Shaykh Abd Allah Mazandarani, and Shaykh Isma^cil Mahallati as well as those of Sayyid Muhammed Tabataba'i and Sayyid Abd Allah Bihbahani, Persian members of the ^Culama who resided in Iran. Although these men did not agree on all points, they were unanimous in their support for a constitutionally-based government as an attempt to eliminate tyranny.

59. In fact, the recently deceased Ayatollah Telehgani was so impressed by Na'ini's exposition on constitutional government that he had Na'ini's book reprinted with an introduction and notes by Teleghani himself in 1955. Hamid Algar calls Na'ini's work "a rare document of Shi^ci political theory, one that seeks to reconcile continued awareness of the occultation of the Imam, together with the resultant impossibility of legitimacy, with the practical need for a form of government that does not grossly offend the dictates of religion." "The Oppositional Role." p. 238.

60. Hairi, "Why did the Ulema Participate," p. 147.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 149; Algar, "The Oppositional Role," p. 239.

"the writings of the ^culama and those of their biographers plus some official reports indicate the leading clerics in the revolution: Kurasani [in Najaf], Tihrani [in Najaf], Mazandarani [in Najaf], and Tabataba'i [in Tehran] were pious individuals and were motivated by factors of genuine religious devotion and patriotic idealism"[63] Thus, although those ^culama were defending vested interests against government encroachment, the actions of many of its key leaders were also based firmly upon religious grounds.

Furthermore, if the ^culama had not risen in support of the constitutionalist movement in Iran and against Muhammed Ali Shah and the Russians, the Shah would have maintained his power and would never have reestablished the constitutional regime.[64] Of course, the restoration was soon subverted by events in 1911 and thus was not of lasting effect.

This was the first large-scale attempt by members of the *^culama* to establish a new societal-political order. That this attempt was only effected after the monarchy had engaged in policies which seriously threatened the well-being of Iran's citizens, and the nation's independence, demonstrates that despite its revolutionary overtones, Shi^cism, at least in its *Ithna-^cAshari* variety, will only effect significant political change on a large scale under extraordinary conditions. Later events in the twentieth century support this view.

Thus, for the greater part of the twentieth century, Shi^cism in Iran wore its quietistic cloak. The rapid changes brought upon Iranian society under Pahlavi rule further served to make Iranian Shi^cism appear to be receding in influence, especially in Western eyes, though the Shi^cite clergy were still perceived, even by Westerners, as having a stronger role in Persian life than did the Sunni ^culama in their respective countries.[65] However, rapid modernization, especially under Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, combined with the late Shah's creation of a strong (though bulky) central bureaucracy, his control of the army, and his tenacious internal security and intelligence force (SAVAK), gave the general impression that the political power of the ^culama was waning. Scholars such as Nikkie Keddie, only a few years ago, were anticipating an Iranian nation where religion would play a similar role as in Western countries.[66] On the contrary, it was precisely due to the reasons mentioned above for the decline of Shi^cism as a revolutionary force, that the ^culama were able to play the predominant role in forcing the Shah from power.

During the early years of the Shah's reign, Shi^cite political opposition was

63. Hairi, "Why did the Ulema Participate?" p. 152.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
65. Keddie, "The Roots of the Ulema's Power," p. 211.
66. "Given the continued growth of government power, and the expansion of the army, the bureaucracy, and of secular education, even in the villages, it appears probable that the political power of the ulama will continue to decline as it has in the past half century." Keddie, "The Roots of the Ulama's Power," p. 229.

muted largely by two factors. The first was the general quietistic outlook of Ayatollah Burujirdi, who in his later years was recognized as the supreme *marji^c al-taqlid;* and second, the perception on the part of many Iranians that Mussadegh was about to turn pro-Communist on the eve of Muhammed Reza Pahlavi's restoration to power in 1953.[67]

The circumstances of the Shah's rule after Burujirdi's death in 1961, led to a resurgence of religiously based political activity which flared up in 1963, 1970, and 1978-79; the last occasion marking an event whose historical importance for Shi^cite Islam may not be adequately grasped by historians and scholars of religion for many years. There were a number of aspects providing impetus to the recent revolution in Iran, but the root causes of the revolution are clearly discernable in the events of 1963.

After the death of Burujirdi, the Shah attempted to appoint a new leader of the clerical class by sending his condolences of Burujirdi's death to Ayatollah al-Hakim in Najaf, who was not known for his political activism, and who, as an Arab, could be expected to be less concerned with Iranian affairs.[68] However, the status of sole *marji^c al-taqlid* could not be conferred by a politician, and in fact is only achieved by a relatively informal general consensus among the leading clerics. Instead of al-Hakim, three ayatollahs assumed the role of leadership of the Iranian Shi^cite community: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Muhammed Hadi Milani, and Ayatollah Shariat Madari. Immediately following Burujirdi's death these three led the opposition to the Shah, and, as time passed, the Shah's actions extended their campaign. Even as early as 1963, when the Shah was still formulating policy, clerical antagonists of the regime had become a potent political force. Ayatollah Khomeini stood at the forefront of the opposition. Many among the clergy looked to him for leadership based upon his fiery and charismatic personality.

Although many have viewed the 1963 campaign's basis as opposition to the Shah's program of land reform and his support for the equality of women, little in the public statements of the opposition leaders indicates that this was the case. The "real targets of Khomeini's criticism of the regime in 1963," writes Hamid Algar,

> appear to have been the following: autocratic rule and violation of the constitution; the proposal to grant capitulatory rights to American advisors and military personnel in Iran and their dependents; the contracting of a $200 million loan from the United States for the purchase of military equipment; and the maintenance of diplomatic, commercial, and other relations with Israel . . .[69]

Khomeini's statements on the above issues are strikingly similar to his statements

67. Algar, "The Oppositional Role," p. 244.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 244-45.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

made just prior to the revolution — only the intervening years gave him an increasing number of reasons to make them.

Oppositional expression to the regime in 1963 was almost entirely under the rubric of Shi^{c}ite symbolism. In fact, the entire spectrum of anti-regime events occurred just before, during, and just after Muharram. During the month of Shaval in 1963 Ayatollah Khomeini himself, perched upon the pulpit of the Faydiya *madrasah* in Qum, held a copy of the Qur^{c}an in one hand, and of the Iranian constitution in the other, and accused the Shah of flagrant violation of both. The inflammatory potential of such acts did not go unnoticed by the government. On the 25th day of Shaval, March 22, 1963, paratroopers attacked the school, killed a number of students, and arrested Khomeini.[70] The date of the attack itself showed the monarchy's lack of political acumen, for it was the birthday of the Imam Ja^{c}far al-Sadiq, a fact which "further identified the regime with persecutors of the Imams."[71] No sooner was Khomeini released from jail then he was again attacking the government.

The Muharram commemorations that year took on severe political overtones. The drama of Karbala discussed above, again assumed its timeless role. A *rawzah* by Ayatollah Teleghani quoted Imam Husayn: "You have written letters to me and promised to help me and stay beside me (referring to the people of Kufah). If you are still willing to keep your promise, I am Husein, the son of ^{c}Ali and the son of Fatima who is the daughter of God's Prophet."[72] Here, the present tense, as Thais notes, symbolizes the assumption of the Imam's role by the ^{c}ulama against tyranny.

Early on the morning of the tenth of *Muharram*, Khomeini was arrested by security officers and sent to Turkey. News of his arrest spread quickly; the *ta^{c}ziyahs* scheduled for that day turned into violent anti-government protests. Only after six days of violent clashes in many parts of the country, entailing heavy loss of life, were the disturbances ended.

Between 1963 and 1978 the Shah increasingly centralized his control over all branches of government, and turned SAVAK into one of the most efficient security forces in the Middle East. The incredible breadth of the Shah's power led many to believe that a revolution in Iran would have been impossible. Nikkie Keddie, in fact, concluded that the Iranian Shi^{c}ite ^{c}ulama, would suffer the same fate under the Shah that the Sunnite ^{c}ulama suffered at the hands of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century — namely, a severe loss of power at the hands of an encroaching centralized government.[73] However, it was the Shah's absolute power, combined with large-scale corruption within the government, (including himself and his family), and severe economic mismanagement,

70. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-256.
72. Thais, "Religious Symbolism and Social Change," pp. 359-360.
73. Keddie, "The Roots of the Ulema's Power," p. 213.

that rescued the vigor of Shi^{C}ite oppositional tendencies. In other words, it was precisely the Shah's oppressive rule that forced and allowed Shi^{C}ism to act. If the regime had lived by the constitution, encouraged secular opposition, and had not been so visibly corrupt, the clergy would have had much less political ground to stand on, and would have been less inclined to engineer a full-scale revolt. Such was not the case. The Shah's rule became so absolutely totalitarian that opposition could only be expressed through the mosque. The people, including those only ceremonially religious, turned to the clergy, longstanding opponents of the Shah and his policies.

Although few scholars, agencies, or newsmen in the United States paid a great deal of attention to the nature of the Shah's rule in the 1970s, more and more information on the political life of Iran has reached the American public since the revolution. One article discussing the reasons for the revolution is by Abul Kasim Mansur, a former U. S. Department of State official who assumed a pen name in order to give freely an account of the nature of Pahlavi rule.[74] Mansur discusses the wide ranging economic problems brought on by the Shah's programs of land reform and massive military spending,[75] as well as the significance of the roles of SAVAK and the intolerance of political opposition. Mansur is correct in pointing to the absence of secular options of political expression. Virtually the entire country was able and forced to unite in terms of Islamic opposition, which, when allowed to express itself as it did in 1978 with relatively little fear of the government's capability to control it (although there

74. Abul Kasim Mansur, "The Crisis in Iran: Why the U.S. Ignored a Quarter Century of Warning," *Armed Forces Journal International* 116 (January 1979): 26-34. Farhad Kazemi has produced a very revealing analysis of the Shah's land reform program and its economic and political effects on the migrant poor in Urban Areas in *Poverty and Revolution in Iran: The Migrant Poor, Urban Marginality and Politics* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1980).

75. The Shah's highly vaunted land reform program was so plagued by corruption, mismanagement, and poor planning, that it served to raise unemployment as well as create added aminosity toward the regime. In the first place the children of families receiving the small plots of land often had no desire to remain peasant farmers the rest of their lives, nor did the system have the potential to feed Iran's people anyway. Second, the redistribution of the land cost the Shah support from the aristocracy who lost land as a result of the reform. Third, the Shah alienated both peasants and large landowners by transferring 25 percent of the country's land to the notorious Pahlavi foundation which "did not pass on the benefits of reform to the workers on Pahlavi lands, and corruptly administered the revenues involved." To make a long story short, agriculture dropped from 18 percent of GNP in 1973 to 8 percent in 1977.

Lavish expenditures on military hardware ($18 billion between 1974 and 1978) while the economy was experiencing severe difficulties exacerbated the difficulties.

Mansur also discusses a host of economic and social problems which when added together appear to make a revolution almost inevitable. Furthermore, these factors all point to a revolution stemming from the mosque, not the military, or a secularly based revolutionary movement.

were several extremely bloody clashes), played even more severely upon its dramatic symbolism to force the Shah from power. Once again the themes of Karbala were used to instill revolutionary fervor in the masses as well as the educated.

The revolution was carried out in the name of freedom from the Shah's oppression, and from foreign (principally United States) control. Furthermore, the program outlined by Khomeini for a new government was very much in line with the proposed constitutionalist government of Na'ini and the other Najafi scholars at the turn of the century. Principally, the constitution presented to the Iranians in June of 1979 called for a democratically elected *majlis* whose jurisdiction and legislation were subject to the authority of the [C]ulama.[76]

Shi[C]ism's latent power can be seen in the support given Khomeini by the illegal opposition, including the "Islamic Marxists," secularists, and the pro-Soviet Tudeh party. Although virtually the entire country was united against the Shah, the combination of the Shah's ability to suppress secular political opposition and the strength of the [C]ulama (partially resulting, as stated above, from the lack of secular avenues of appeal) required that the revolution come about through an expression of religious sentiments. Khomeini and his supporters made the most out of these circumstances. The Shah was constantly compared to Yazid (as was President Carter later); the eventual establishment of a just government based on a democratic constitution grounded with religious authority was offered as the alternative to the Shah. Husayn's martyrdom, standing as the symbol of the struggle against oppression, was commemorated each year. Each [C]Ashura was a renewal of the struggle against injustice.[77] Anyone witnessing or reading about the *Muharran* commemorations of December 1978 could only be convinced that the revolution had progressed so far that there was no stopping it.[78]

76. "Text of Draft of Iranian Constitution Published" *FBIS Middle East and North Africa,* June 22, 1979, pp. R1-R16.

77. As you observe the sad anniversary of Ashura and as you never relinquish it, let the catastrophies that have afflicted the religion of Islam from the first day and until the present day be a new Ashura whose anniversary you observe constantly. . . .Ingest the spirit of Jihad in the market and street people, in the worker, the peasant, and the university man. All will rise for the Jihad. . . . .so that the agencies of the policy of tyranny and colonialism may be destroyed and so that the Islamic government may rise of firm foundations." Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government,* date and place of publication not given, pp. 60-61.

78. "In the last ten days, the opponents of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi have demonstrated that even the edicts of a military government, backed by sophisticated weapons from the factories of Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, cannot halt the momentum of their protests." R.W. Apple, Jr., "Reading Iran's Next Chapter," *The New York Times,* December 13, 1978, p. 10. Of course, there were many Western observers who remained unconvinced that the monarchy would necessarily come to an end. However, those with a deeper understanding of the motives for the revolution were certain that a revolution was unavoidable.

Hence, although Shi^{C}ism has historically been representative in theory of man's struggle for justice — with such a struggle's necessary corollaries of opposition, martyrdom, and revolt, the Shi^{C}ite faith must not be viewed as a religion of mindless rebellion as part of an intoxicated quest for martyrdom. Instead, Shi^{C}ism is truly revolutionary only when a combination of circumstances grants it both the power and the necessity to revolt. Historically, after all, the Shi^{C}ite norm has been grudging acceptance of reality.

It remains to be seen how the Islamic government will fare once the initial revolutionary ferver is over. In the absence of any secular political consensus in the country it is hard to see the Islamic government giving way to any of the political groups currently active in the near future. The possibility of superpower intervention along with struggles of autonomy from the central government by the Kurds, the Baluchis, the Arabs in Khuzistan, and the residents of Azerbaijan further complicate scenarios of Iran's political future. Even without the abovementioned disruptive factors, a disillusionment among the general religious community with the clerically controlled government could conceivably reduce Shi^{C}ism's influence in future decades, especially if a competent and unoppressive secular government replaced the Islamic regime.

Shi^{C}ism's future, at least in Iran, as the alleged harbinger of opposition, martyrdom, and revolt, remains obscured by virtue of its recent success. If the ^{C}ulama fail to establish a government viewed as just, a separation of Shi^{C}ism from political affairs could be the end result. Such a separation would certainly only be partial, but it might reduce the symbolism of Karbala to a hope of eschatological fulfillment, without the creative tension produced by thinking that things can be dramatically improved in our time as well.

Regardless of the future of Iran and its dominant religious tradition, it is imperative for Westerners to realize that both are the product of human beings. As a result, Iran, its history, culture, people, and religion are all quite complex. All of them are results of countless external and internal forces, themselves difficult to interpret. We cannot, then, label such an intricate continuum as Shi^{C}ism with reductive and often pejorative labels which only encourage increased stereotyping of foreign peoples. Whenever misunderstanding increases hostility does also.