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Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48589-0 — Iran's Quiet Revolution
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Introduction

The Quiet Revolution

In remembering the 1978–9 Revolution, there is a scholarly convention of memory capturing our imagination. A consensus seems to be evolving that, at the cultural and intellectual levels, the revolution represented a sharp cultural war opposing the "modernist" Pahlavi state to a fiercely traditional "religious" opposition. Following this un-thought template, the revolution is recalled as a major confrontation between modernity and tradition. This book ventures a different and more nuanced analysis, arguing for a convergence of anti-modern, spiritual, and nativist discourse in both the Pahlavi state and the Islamist revolutionary movement. By focusing on the cultural transformations defining the 1960s and 1970s, the historical logic driving the revolution along anti-secular and anti-Western paths becomes considerably clarified. The complicating factor in this picture is the Pahlavi state's pursuit of a Western and modernist model in economic and social policies, but an ideologically anti-Western attitude in the cultural and even political campaign to win public hegemony.

This book therefore tells the following story: a cultural and intellectual transformation occurred in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s whose quietness was matched only by its penetrating sociological depth. An all but unnoticed Iranian cultural movement pre-shadowed the spectacularly dramatic social drama of the 1978–9 Revolution. The Pahlavi dynasty is routinely recalled wistfully as the great lost project of Iranian modernization, burned in the revolutionary crucible from which the Islamic Republic of Iran arose like a specter to disturbingly haunt the achievements of post-Enlightenment civilization. In the post-1978 decades, a nostalgic image of pre-revisionary Iranian modernization has emerged – often imagined by Iranian exiles and foreign commentators as Iran's modern "paradise lost."

A timely counterintuitive analysis of Iran's pre-revolutionary period can provide an antidote to the intellectual stasis that has beset studies of Iran's 1978–9 Revolution over the last few decades. This stasis derives

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from an uncritical modernist–traditionalist dualism that supposedly explains the central stakes of the 1978–9 Revolution in an affirmation of orthodox postcolonial themes. This simplistic template cannot withstand close empirical scrutiny, as the contents of these chapters will demonstrate. This book firstly focuses on the anti-modern substance of Iran's Quiet Revolution, an anti-secular cultural project, actively fostered between the state and the opposing forces with which it was locked in deadly combat. Secondly, this analysis of a socially conflicting but imaginatively overlapping ensemble illustrates the larger ideological vista of anti-modern discourse in Iran and transnationally. Through the multiple institutional bases of a developing society, the material and social sources of the variously symmetrical and conflicting forms of the anti-modern imaginary are explained. These explanations crack the orthodox surfaces of postcolonial dogmas on the 1978–9 Revolution and revolutions elsewhere.

The very quietness of the pre-revolutionary Iranian transformation lends itself to a misleading description regarding the glittering social and cultural "conversion experience" that the Iranian state and society underwent in those years. The Quiet Revolution went unnoticed because the cultural and intellectual mutation was a sensorium, encompassing cinematic, journalistic, and other cultural dimensions. Intellectually, it had its roots in the most obscure visions of such troubled figures as Ahmad Fardid. Its very pervasiveness, by contrast, was in transforming Iran's public sphere and state institutions through emotionally accessible images and narratives. Most interestingly, this many-sided Quiet Revolution captivated the Pahlavi elite class's imagination in an irresistible and fatal spell. And the Pahlavi elites, at the pinnacle of state power, were only one site in the widespread distribution of an anti-modern ideology that served the conflicting social interests of varying elites, subordinates, and other protagonists in a general struggle over the crystallization of modern power in the Iranian nation.

This book explores the possible connections, and discursive continuity, in the two decades preceding the 1978–9 Revolution, to the revolutionary movement driven by a violent anti-modern ideology. We see that the anti-modern ideology of the Quiet Revolution constituted a veritable web, ensnaring a surprisingly varied and conflicting cast of social protagonists. This ideology successfully mobilized the Iranian masses, particularly the urban middle class. The chapters in this

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book each focus on a defining cultural and intellectual space shaping the Iranian social and cultural life of the 1960s and 1970s. It studies the amazing convergence of anti-modern ideas, values, and ideologies as produced, embraced, and publicized by the opposition, religious as well as secular, and the secular, modern Pahlavi state. The militant hostility to modernity and the West shared by state-sponsored institutions and intellectual figures on the one hand and by those opposing the Shah's regime on the other has different origins. It was used for different means, with spectacularly contrasting ends. In both cases, however, a nation-making imaginary was constructed upon a common conceptual binary: the soulless modern West is pitted against spiritual Iran, or the East. And yet the very conflicting nature of its deployment illustrates the superficiality and emptiness of this imagined binary.

In the two decades preceding the 1978–9 Revolution, the Pahlavi state and the myriad civil society institutions were both captivated at the discursive level by the "anti-modern" imagination. This idea had a lengthy history in modern Iranian intellectual life, to say nothing of the West and its colonial victims, but had only a marginal role in Iranian cultural and intellectual sensibilities until about the early 1960s. This certainly flies in the face of assumptions that Iran and "those Muslims" have always been anti-modern. Iran's anti-modernism is of quite recent vintage. For the Pahlavi regime's opposition, as for many public intellectuals, the anti-modern discourse performed two critical functions. Politically, it undermined the Shah's autocratic modernization project and fostered resistance to Western cultural influence. It provided a powerful sense of national solidarity, invoking Iranian and Islamic past traditions and identity as an alternative to Western values. Its deployment is even more interesting, and is scarcely explored by scholars who accept the conventional modernist–traditionalist narrative. For the Pahlavi state, anti-modern ideology served to foster a "cultural" – that is, ideological – source of national legitimacy. By offering a "local" and cultural identity, the "anti-modern" ideology justified the Shah's autocracy and undermined the powerful Iranian left, with its claim to universalist and cosmopolitan ideas. In the same way, it undermined the claims of liberals who promoted a democratic sensibility that could be brushed off as "culturally inauthentic." Ultimately, it endeavored to subvert the heritage of Iran's Constitutional Revolution, which had envisioned a ground-up, popular, and secular mode of national modernization. By defining both the radical Iranian left and liberals as

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Western-inspired, and alien to Iranian and Islamic tradition, the Pahlavi state endeavored to establish itself as the authentic governing force of Iran, against the historical tide of political and cultural imperialism. This "cultural war," clearly, centered on the marshalling of discourses for the strategic purpose of undermining political opponents. The sincerity of the respective actors is a matter of secondary consideration. The aim of the Quiet information war was to foster national hegemony for one's own cause and destroy opposing nation-making ventures. There was therefore little in these imaginaries that was natural. Yet – and here is where many scholars have fallen into a trap – the very success of these movements depended upon their appearing to be the unreflecting, unselfconscious, "natural" embodiment of the "real" Iran.

The scholarly quest to understand the root causes of the 1978–9 Revolution – employing myriad templates, from mode of production to postmodernism – has neglected the pervasive cultural and discursive shift in Iranian political culture in the pre-revolutionary decades. Scholars perceive the revolution as the confrontation between a modern state and the traditional or religious masses. This includes those of the "older" Orientalist tradition and advocates of the modernization paradigm. It also includes more critical scholars on the left, who see the traditional masses as heroes (postmodernism), or a potentially anti-capitalist force for the more conventional left. For these left-leaning scholars, the Iranian case is a counter-Orientalist event that resists "rational" explanation or understanding. It is either the overcoming of oppressive hegemonic reason (postmodernism) or an irrational upsurge of protest by the traditional masses (the conventional left). Across the spectrum, from old-fashioned Orientalists, to optimistic but disappointed modernizers, to leftist postmodernists and old-school Marxists, there is a fixation upon this conventional abstraction that has obstructed sight of a concrete and well-documented cultural and social turning in pre-revolutionary Iran. When this turning is rendered visible, all the categories based on such received abstractions are reduced to chaos.

This book challenges this entire constellation of scholarly perspectives. It argues that what seemed to be a modern and modernizing state strategically embraced an anti-modern and anti-Western cultural attitude in a specific political gamble that went horribly wrong. The Pahlavi elites took a serious and well-conceived political gamble, which ended in their

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violent annihilation. This gamble has been routinely overlooked because of the persistent dogma that the Pahlavi were committed cultural modernizers. In fact, the Pahlavi operated upon several contradictory tracks: political, economic, and cultural. This deadly cocktail eventually undermined the Pahlavi state's raison d'être, making it vulnerable to the challenge of political Islam as a mass uprising from the streets.

The above "blind spot" in recent Iranian history explains why the 1978–9 Revolution continues to pose an "unthinkable" paradigmatic challenge to the social sciences "canon." It is repeatedly invoked as an enigma, a unique historical moment falling outside the net of all established historical explanations. It is thereby passed off as a miracle, the proof of Foucault's irreducible integrity of the local event. Revolutions, the long-accepted theory holds, transpired only under conditions of impoverishment and extreme economic hardship. A nation was consumed in a foreign war or civil strife, or the state was severely mired in internal factional conflict. Yet all the empirical evidence reveals Iran's revolution as transpiring amidst the highest achievements in economic development, and the Pahlavi state as boasting the securest power and firmest stability within the Middle East region. The Shah was enjoying the pinnacle of his rule. Was this a revolt against the conventionally accepted idea of "revolution"? Or have we failed to fully grasp the social situation that produced the revolution? If so, how can this situation be explained? It seems that basic sociological and historical categories may require reexamination if we are not to slide into the widely trumpeted but fanciful thesis of "Islamic difference." Yet the misplaced concreteness of the all-purpose word "Islam" does not explain the 1978–9 Revolution as the magical occasion that Westerners and Easterners alike fondly dreamed of. On the contrary, there was a clear sociological dynamic. The illumination of this dynamic adds potentially important new perspectives to our received sociological optic. It also proves more interesting than the quasi-religious myth of "exceptionalism" that has clustered around scholarly memory of the event, providing a fanciful resource for literary-critical-style interpretations of this formative twentieth-century moment. It is not too late to understand lucidly and rationally what transpired in Iran during those decades: on the contrary, we emphatically must, in order to chart a better future for a nation that demonstrated an amazing political and cultural creativity throughout the twentieth century before being ensnared in the Islamist error.

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Beginning in the 1960s, Iranian public life underwent a "quiet," yet existentially transformative, sociocultural reformation. This undocumented reformation prepared the ground for the highly cataclysmic subsequent years. The so-called "Silent (or Quiet) Revolution" was the backstage rehearsal, without which the 1978–9 Revolution remains – through the prevailing optic of the social sciences – an unintelligible, freak episode. A transfixing and determinate event may have unfolded before the eyes of the world in 1978–9, but it requires contextualization against the silent revolutionary background. The 1960s and 1970s provided the social settings, the institutional resources, a new vision of the world, and what we might call a "national spirit." This rendered possible the revolutionary mobilization and launching of a very public revolt. As a result, the self-proclaimed "ancien régime" crumbled in a short span of time.

Most of the existing scholarly and popular literature on the 1978–9 Revolution focuses on either postrevolutionary Iran or the earlier history of Islam and Persia's past traditions. Actual events, symbolic meanings, and iconic images encircling the 1978–9 Revolution have overshadowed the critical role of the so-called "Quiet Revolution" that unfolded over the two prior decades. The contemporary story of the 1978–9 Revolution, therefore, remains incomplete. It is available in fragments, without having been fully told. The time is ripe – given the unrelenting scholarly and public fascination with "Islamism" – to tell the history of the "quiet transformation" in a systematic way. This story concerns a "lifeworld." It transpired during one of the most important periods in Iran's history, as well as having undisputed global significance. A systematic analysis of the period throws a serious spanner in the works of scholars who enthusiastically envision the 1978–9 Revolution as a "great religious event" based on "scriptural" criteria (e.g. Bruce Lawrence). Such quiet enthusiasts of 1978 argue that, although horrible in its way, the event portended a necessary spiritual corrective to the oppressive evils of secular modern materialism.[1]

The Iranian cultural elite (artists, filmmakers, writers, scholars, and other urban elites), at precisely the moment of modernizing the nation and systematically destroying the traditional Iranian countryside, developed a nostalgic desire for the simple, innocent, and pure village

[1] Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

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life. Why did cosmopolitan and privileged elites (mostly based in Tehran), at the crest of Iran's drive for modernization, suddenly become profoundly emotional concerning the virtues and lost innocence of a peasant world they had never known – and were actively demolishing? By identifying this broad and strange cultural tendency among Iranian elites, we can better understand the place of Ahmad Fardid in Iran's modern history. Fardid was precisely such an intellectual: a privileged, if marginalized, Western-educated intellectual with a religious background. He was part of Tehran's urban elite during the violent state drive for modernization in the 1930s. We can hence better understand how Fardid, tortured by guilt and confusion, created a complex ideology of a return to the pure roots. He evoked an ahistorical "East" that has never existed in the real world. This Heideggerian fixation, in time, came to nurture not only Fardid's own hunger for power and influence, but also the rising Islamist politics that promised utopia in a return to the pure source of Shi'ism.

In Chapter 1 I argue that if we observe the history of twentieth-century Iranian scholarship on Sufism, we note an intriguing transnational and circulatory transition. From the balanced accounts of Sufism, considering its complex strengths and weaknesses, we see a shift into a post–World War II new wave of uncritical adulation of the Sufi tradition. Interestingly, this stream was particularly shaped by the intervention of French scholars who were inclined toward religious mysticism and who hated the secular liberalism of their home country (at the time of ongoing French political polarization between the Catholic revival and secular republicanism). A reconstructed Iranian Sufism became the refuge for notable scholars from Henry Corbin to – surprisingly – Michel Foucault. Meanwhile, a second, domestic stream inspired this new wave in Iranian scholars of the new middle classes, often Western-educated, who felt disgust with both the West and Pahlavi tyranny, and sought "authenticity" – often in Western philosophical sources (e.g. Heidegger). A third stream emerged from the Iranian left that was more critical of Sufi anti-rationalism. These discourses helped to inflame the emergent Quiet Revolution, which inspired Iranian intellectuals with a new faith in an Iranian utopia beyond the promises of Pahlavi development, the liberal achievements of the Constitutional and National Front eras, and the bitter disillusionments of Western neo-imperialism. By helping to foster a mood of anti-Western nativism, it produced the ideological conditions for the

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Islamic Revolution as a new political experiment in twentieth-century nation-making.

Chapter 1 examines the postmodern turn inspired by the intensified Sufi discourses. A set of binaries defines the genre: a fairytale celebration of violence and cruelty, an attraction to scaling new human heights that erase the subjective agency of modernism, and a collapsing of past and future in a utopian imaginary wedded to transcendental forces. The chapter explores the attraction of this new movement for intellectuals – a poetic attraction, based on mystery, the world as a blank canvas, which permits everything. It analyzes the dangerous significance of these discourses for power – a dismissal of the relevance of evidence, where lies and truth coalesce. Based on the work of Mark Lilla, Richard Wolin, and Jeffrey Herf, it contributes a new chapter to the twentieth-century history of intellectual flirtation with political authoritarianism.

Chapter 2, "De-politicizing Westoxification: The Case of *Bonyad Monthly*," analyzes Iranian modernity in the final years of the Pahlavi state, and the non-political roots of the emergent anti-modern ideology. It begins with a focus on the Pahlavi state, showing how – contrary to the prevalent portrayal – the regime embraced an anti-modern ideology at the very height of its ambitious national development project. Faced with pressures to liberalize, the regime preferred to secure hegemony through fostering an ideology of Iranian and Islamic authenticity that harshly criticized the West and democracy. It sought to appropriate aspects of the left and religious discourses that were then challenging its authority. This is shown through an analysis of *Bonyad Monthly*, a journal sponsored by the Princess Ashraf Pahlavi foundation. It helped to shift political debates toward cultural terms, evoking Iran's ancient past, and voicing spiritual prescriptions concerning the fallen human condition.

It thereby doubled ideologically with a growing anti-Pahlavi mass movement. Upon examination, both the discourse of the regime and the mass opposition derived from the *gharbzadegi* concept popularized by Jalal Al-e Ahmad, although formerly invented as an arcane discourse by the Heideggerian Ahmad Fardid. By taking this gamble, the Pahlavi regime helped to secure its own downfall.

Chapter 3 focuses on the life and thought of the prominent personality Ehsan Naraghi. Here, we see how Islamist ideology had a social genesis in the often secular and irreligious sensibility of an erratic and

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eccentric intelligentsia. They eclectically embraced multiple, conflicting ideologies, including *gharbzadegi*, in ignorance of the fact that it would destroy the basis of their very way of life. The ideological flirtations of these individuals, possessed of important social power, had a ricocheting effect upon Iran's public ideological fabric in these crucial decades. Between the 1930s and 1970s, a generation of Iranian intellectuals embraced the culture of the high life, an intelligentsia indifferent to the stark realities of the world. They remained immune to serious commitment, imagining themselves as visionaries and guardians of Iran's eternal culture. These included Fardid, Bagha'i, and Naraghi, who negotiated opposing elements in a parallel fantasy universe. Naraghi was Swiss-educated, and close to the Pahlavi monarchy and the secret police, or SAVAK. Yet he embraced the anti-modern *gharbzadegi* discourse, attending the Fardidyyeh meetings organized around Ahmad Fardid. He also flirted with involvement in the Tudeh Party (the pro-Soviet Communist Party in Iran). He worked for the Iranian government following the 1953 coup, promoting ethnographic fieldwork and a "spiritual" return to Iran's villages. Naraghi was hailed as a great Iranian sociologist, working through the royal court, SAVAK, the universities, media, and conferences to produce a nativist sociology that was highly critical of the West. In so doing, he rejected the relevance of the modern legal process for Iran and the gains of the Constitutional Revolution, urging a return to the inherent tolerance and goodness of traditional Iranian culture. He went so far as to prescribe Sharia as a solution to the world's problems. All the while, he entirely passed over the social realities of contemporary Iran. While fearing revolution, and possessed of an aristocratic temperament, he helped to beget the 1978–9 Revolution.

Chapter 4 analyzes the importance of Iranian cinema in the Quiet Revolution. The New Wave shaped public perceptions of the Pahlavi modernization process. It was key in making a new Iranian national "imaginary" and the accompanying cultural institutions. This was one extremely potent expression of *gharbzadegi*, produced by talented cinematic artists who were mostly urban, upper-class, and cosmopolitan (i.e. Western-educated). The chapter is a further testament to the transnational genesis of the Quiet Revolution. Yet these artists produced a narrative celebrating a rural village reality that they had never seen and that was being destroyed by the regime that sustained their cultural achievements.

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The chapter analyzes these fascinating figures in terms of Raymond Williams' theory of the pastoral, as a split notion of modernity idealizing a lost rural past. The wide spectrum of New Wave cinematic motifs is analyzed, including celebrations of Iranian Sufism, the pastoral hero, the virtuous poor, and the beauties of myth. The New Wave's cinematic narratives helped to construct binaries of purity–impurity, spirituality–materialism, rural community and the selfish urban individual.

Chapter 5 tells the story of an important modernist architect and his world of art. It focuses on the *Garden between Two Streets*, a book that features dialogue between Iranian intellectuals involved with the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMOCA) from before and after the 1978–9 Revolution. Their voices represent three visions of Iranian modernity: the secular-autocratic, the cosmopolitan left, and the Islamist-pastoral. Reza Daneshvar is a left-leaning Iranian novelist, speaking with the architect–designer and founder of the TMOCA, Kamran Diba. The author of the preface, Alireza Sami-Azar, was the TMOCA director under the Islamic Republic. Most strikingly, we discover that these three ideologies are neither pure nor watertight, but blurred and overlapping, concerning the central categories of Islam, modernity, and the nation. This unlikely conjuncture strikingly confirms the thesis of an underlying convergence between multiple sociological carriers for the *gharbzadegi* imaginary, among opposing social interests. There is an interlocking of secularism and nativism, and despite serious tensions over "memory" between the leftist Daneshvar and Diba, the encounter complicates the conventional accounts of modern Iran's past–present disjuncture. In Diba, we see a striking embodiment of the Quiet Revolution: his class-based estrangement from Iran's masses, his imaginary projection of this as a "foreign worldview," his yearning for a spiritual politics, and, despite his atheism, his flirtation with building mosques in public spaces to generate a "new modernist spirituality." He goes so far as to describe the fad for Islamic artistic flirtation among the elite as an Iranian equivalent to American Pop Art, suggesting how blindly he stumbled into the political populism that fed the popular wave of the 1978–9 Revolution. Such compelling evidence mandates a serious sociological rethinking of what, superficially, appeared as a "great religious event" to both casual observers and the ideologically predisposed. An almost farcical cultural episode, it is far from the regular optic of scriptural

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