

Fragile Resistance

Social Transformation in Iran
from 1500 to the Revolution

John Foran



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The system is bad, and those who suffer from it naturally hate the persons who administer it; and to this feeling, destructive of all the social ties between the governors and the governed, we may, in a great degree, attribute the recurrence of those internal troubles, which have for so long a period exposed Persia to a succession of civil wars and revolutions.

—John Malcolm, *The History of Persia*
(1829)

* * *

And hold fast, all of you together, to the cable of God, and do not separate. And remember Allah's favor unto you: how ye were enemies and He made friendship between your hearts so that ye became as brothers by His grace; and how ye were upon the brink of an abyss of fire, and He did save you from it.

—the Qur'an, surah 111, verse 103, in
Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The
Meaning of the Glorious Koran*



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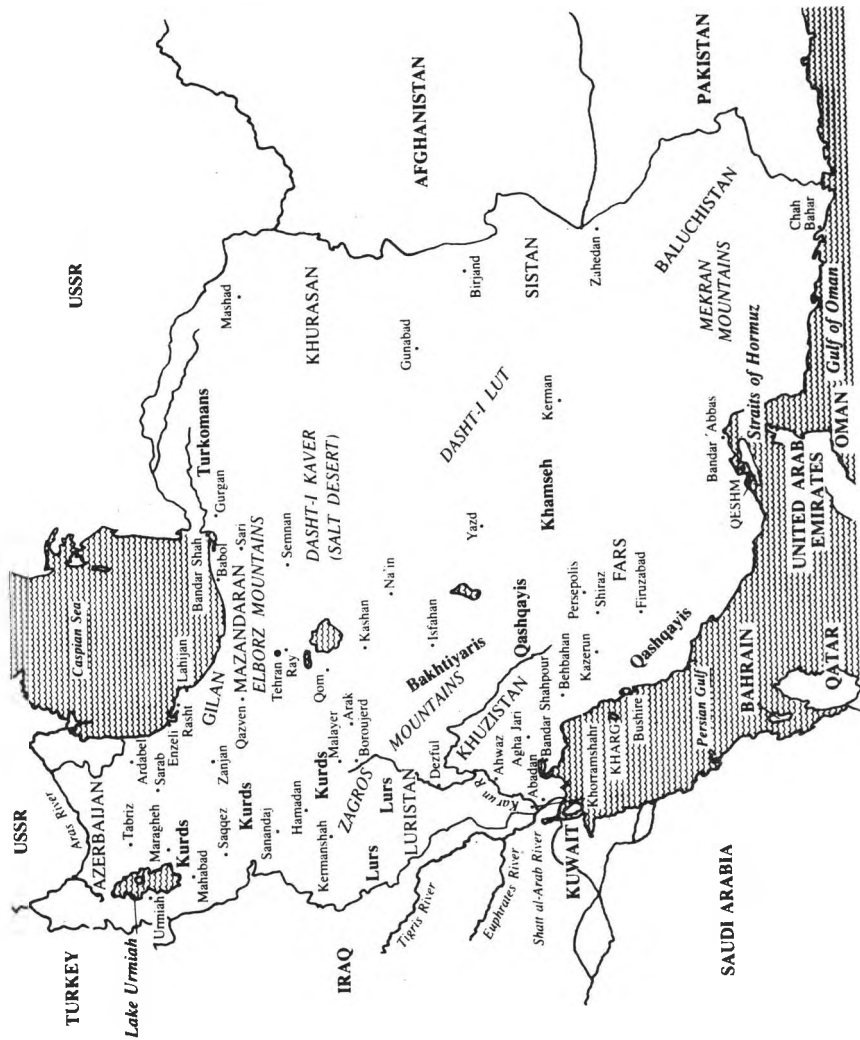
two; "The Making of an External Arena: Iran's Place in the World-System, 1500-1722," pp. 71-119 in *Review* (Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems, and Civilizations), volume 12, number 1 (Winter 1989), parts of which have found their way into chapters two and three; "The Long Fall of the Safavid Dynasty: Moving Beyond the Standard Views," pp. 281-304 in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, volume 24, number 2 (May 1992), parts of which are incorporated in chapter three; "The Concept of Dependent Development as a Key to the Political Economy of Qajar Iran (1800-1925)," pp. 5-56 in *Iranian Studies*, volume 22, numbers 2-3 (1989), which is an earlier version of chapter four; and "The Strengths and Weaknesses of Iran's Populist Alliance: A Class Analysis of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911," pp. 795-823 in *Theory and Society*, volume 20, number 6 (December 1991), which informs the interpretation of part of chapter five.

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John Foran



Iran and Its Neighbors



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Introduction

This book analyzes the processes of social transformation in Iran from the height of the country's power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under the Safavid dynasty to the aftermath of the startling revolution that overthrew the Pahlavi monarchy in 1979. It addresses two intertwined central issues: how to conceptualize a changing social structure and how to account for the periodic social explosions that have marked the process of change with a record of social movements unmatched in the modern era. Social structure is approached through the prisms of class, ethnicity, and gender, with an emphasis on the first of these dimensions but attention to the salience of the others as well. A key problem that must be carefully explored hinges on the degree to which Iran's relations with the West (in the broad sense of the more industrialized nations) have, over a period of several centuries, shaped state, society, and economy in a distinct direction of *dependence* on the world economy and on politics in the most powerful countries. The interaction of these external pressures with the pre-existing and ongoing structure of Iranian society has yielded ever more complex social relations over time. The resulting tensions have been reflected in a series of protests, rebellions, revolutions, separatist movements, and coups that originated in the *resistance* of multiple sectors of the population to the realities of foreign control and state autocracy. The puzzle is to explain under what conditions such opposition has been possible and why its liberating potential has been so repeatedly frustrated. The roots of an answer, I shall argue, lie in the complexity of Iranian social structure, the political cultures of opposition articulated by the groups involved, and the internal and external balances of power. The story is one of frequently courageous efforts to change the unequal structures of power, and just as frequent collapses of these fragile projects. It is an enormously inspiring, if ultimately tragic, tale.

I attempt to go beyond the current state of the literature in several ways, aiming to find two somewhat different audiences in addition to the generally interested reader. For Iran specialists in all the disciplines, and especially historians, this study offers a synthesis of many sources over a longer period of time than is usually attempted, and it does this in the spirit of a

theoretical reinterpretation of Iranian society and its experience of social change. Controversies in the literature over the nature of long-term changes in that society and the composition of recurrent social movements are engaged, sifted through, and recast in light of the sociologies of development and social change. For social scientists with an interest in theoretical issues, I hope to establish the relevance of a particular form of dependency theory for a non-Latin American case and to put Iran on the "theoretical map" in terms of both Wallersteinian world-systems theory and neo-Marxist modes of production analysis. I also propose a model of Third World social revolutions and suggest the utility of a dialectical approach to social change, one that brings together economic, political, and cultural levels of analysis. My overarching intent then is dual: to gain insight into the subject of social change in an enormously important single case on the one hand and to suggest, on the other, approaches to a range of unresolved theoretical problems in the study of development and social movements. I leave it to the reader to judge the value of this enterprise.

1

A Framework for the Study of Social Change in Iran

La théorie c'est bon, mais ça n'empêche pas d'exister. . . . theory is all very well, but that does not prevent the facts from existing.

—A saying of Jean Martin Charcot, repeated by Sigmund Freud, in Peter Gay, *Freud. A Life for Our Time*

Introduction

The vast social movements that swept across Iran in 1978-79 and toppled the shah from power through an unprecedented combination of massive unarmed street demonstrations, a determined general strike lasting several months, and a brief guerrilla uprising in February 1979 have by now generated a considerable body of social science literature. Both long-time researchers and a growing group of younger scholars have been struggling to come to terms with the causes, form, and timing of the revolution, as well as its subsequent, rather tortuous course and uncertain long-term prospects. Controversies have arisen as to whether (or to what degree) the upheaval has been an "Islamic" or a "social" revolution (or even merely a political change of elites); the nature of the roles played by workers, the urban poor, students, ulama (Muslim scholars and preachers), "old" and "new" middle classes of bazaar merchants and professionals, and long-suffering rural groups; the weight to be accorded outside factors such as the dependent aspects of Iran's relations with the West; and finally, the relative importance of political and economic versus religious and ideological variables as central explanatory dimensions. Yet the dramatic events on

which these questions are focused constitute only the most recent instance in a very long and rich history of Iranian social change, political and economic development and underdevelopment, and social movements. And an understanding of the events and resolution of the debates they have touched off is best not dissociated from a careful analysis of earlier cases of social transformation from the sixteenth century onward. This is because the social forces that emerged to make the revolution, and the various religious and political cultures and experiences that sustained them, cannot be adequately understood without extensive historical and sociological knowledge of the patterning of social change that has occurred and recurred in Iran.

This study focuses on the changing nature of Iran's society, state, and economy over a time-frame of almost five centuries and is intended to shed light on the principal features of the process of social change in Iran during this period, which has taken the general shape of a long transformation from pre-capitalist forms of social and economic organization to a more capitalist (though underdeveloped) system of production, punctuated along the way by social and political movements of several kinds, including tribal civil wars, urban rebellions, attempted social revolutions, and successful coups d'état. The term "social change" in this study thus covers both gradual social structural transformations and sudden, shorter-term social movements aimed at changing the distribution of power in society, as well as the complex relations between these processes and movements.

There is a widespread belief within Iran that foreigners have influenced and indeed brought about every major change that has occurred in the country's modern history. Some Western historians and social scientists reject the dependency argument in part because it can be so easily tied to this seemingly "crude" popular mythology. The present study does not argue that "the West caused everything" but rather that a complex and changing set of relations between internal and external actors and structures accounts in large part for the particular forms that social change has historically assumed in Iran. One goal is to set this record straight through a realistic assessment of the major role that the West has played in Iran, properly balanced by a full appreciation of the equally leading roles played by Iranian actors, who were by no means simple victims of or passive witnesses to their own history. On the whole, the result is to suggest the rational kernel underlying the popular perception, however distorted and exaggerated it may seem apart from this larger context. A second goal is to show how and why this process of dependency has generated such determined movements of resistance, by specifying the contradictions inherent in the Iranian mixture of dependent development and state autocracy, and the material and ideal resources available to various sectors of society that enabled rebellion. The fragile bases of these social movements, and the

factors accounting for their transformational limits, constitute a final analytic puzzle. To clarify these propositions theoretically, various strands in the sociologies of development and social change must be critically fashioned into a broad and flexible framework of analysis.

Theories of Underdevelopment

Developed primarily by Latin American social scientists in the mid- and late-1960s, dependency theory constituted a powerful critique of the then prevailing North American modernization perspective. Its most sophisticated practitioners are F. H. Cardoso and Enzo Faletto in *Dependency and Development in Latin America*.¹ The preliminary definition they offer of dependency stresses the limits to development: "From the economic point of view a system is dependent when the accumulation and expansion of capital cannot find its essential dynamic component inside the system."² This formulation points to an international economic system within which the various nations occupy positions of qualitatively different levels of power and influence. At the *center* the advanced industrial nations control the key sectors of technology and finance, an advantage that shapes the special forms taken by industrialization in the *periphery*. It should be stressed that "development" under these circumstances is not impossible: Economic growth, as measured by increased trade, rise in GNP, and industrialization, may occur in some Third World countries at certain points in time. However, these gains are generally accompanied by significant negative consequences, such as inflation, unemployment, health problems, inadequate housing and education, and the like. It is thus a *dependent development*, meaning growth within limits, advances for a minority of the population, and suffering for the majority. This seminal idea, with its coequal attention to a form of "progress" and its disadvantages, should be contrasted with earlier, simplistic versions of the dependency thesis such as that of André Gunder Frank, who felt that no development could occur under conditions of dependency on the advanced industrial capitalist powers, unless the links were disrupted during exceptional periods of worldwide economic crisis or war. Cardoso and Faletto's interpretation of the dependency paradigm, with its attention to the interaction between external structures and patterns of internal development, constitutes a major breakthrough in the sociological literature and provides the overarching framework within which to locate the historical experiences of development and social change in Iran. Its explanatory power is considerably enhanced, however, by consideration of two related bodies of literature—world-system theory and modes of production analysis.

World-system theory, associated above all with the work of historical sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein on the emergence of a capitalist world economy in sixteenth-century Europe,³ moves the analytic focus to the level of a global framework, within which a dependent or underdeveloped capitalism is the lot of most Third World nations. The modern world-system, dominated in Wallerstein's view by a capitalist mode of production (within which to be sure various "modes of labor control"—debt bondage, sharecropping, tenancy, and eventually mostly wage labor—were and are found), can be divided into a *core* of strong states taking the greatest part of the international economic surplus, a *periphery* of weak states that is super-exploited, and a *semiperiphery* consisting of a stratum of states exploited by the core yet able to profit vis-à-vis the periphery. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was also a relatively independent *external arena* of countries and regions that were not yet an integral part of the European world-economy and which subsequently were incorporated into the periphery.⁴ Wallerstein's assessment of the Third World's development prospects is pessimistic: Some changes can occur between the core and the semiperiphery (such as the decline of Spain in the seventeenth century) or between the semiperiphery and the periphery (consider the rise of South Korea and Taiwan by the 1980s). This is especially possible during periods of world-wide economic crisis and change. The system as a whole, however—divided into core, semiperiphery, and periphery—does not change much, at least under capitalism.

The world-system model has provoked a number of important criticisms since its original formulation in 1974.⁵ The most telling of these have to do with the definition of capitalism as an economic system only in terms of its exchange side, that is, markets and trade between countries; there is no equivalent importance attached to production relations and national internal class structures. A second, related problem is the characterization of the entire world-economy today as capitalist, with no theoretical space for pre-capitalist or socialist modes of production within individual societies. These criticisms are justified but may be remedied by consideration of modes of production analysis. The irrefutable strengths of the world-system perspective, however, include the need to take the world-economy as the essential background framework for the study of Third World social change and its demonstration of the utility of examining long historical periods and the various economic phases and cycles in the history of the capitalist world-economy as the framework in which dependency and development take place. In the present case study, the emerging world-system will be treated as the broadest parameter out of which emanated the external forces to which the Iranian state, economy, and society increasingly had to respond after the sixteenth century. One of the tasks of the analysis will be to map Iran's developmental process in terms of quantitative and qualitative

integration into the world-system, first as part of the external arena in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, then as a peripheral supplier of raw materials in the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, and, finally, its wavering status between the periphery and semiperiphery in the post-World War II period.

Another solution to some of the difficulties of employing the dependency paradigm, this time moving the analytic focus down to the inner workings of the Third World society and economy, has come in the form of modes of production analysis, also introduced in the 1970s.⁶ Useful definitions of the key terms "social formation" and "mode of production" can be found in the work of English sociologist John Taylor. He points out that "social formation" is the Marxist equivalent of "society as a whole," that is, actual historical societies in their political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects. The second key term, "mode of production," is a somewhat more abstract structure, consisting of the combination of two elements: (1) a labor process (or several), referring to the way(s) in which raw materials and other inputs are worked up into products for consumption and/or exchange (that is, the setting and manner in which human beings produce their goods, for example in a factory or a small shop, on a plantation or a plot of their own, and the techniques they use to do this), and (2) a system of relations of production, denoting the social arrangement (usually in distinct social classes) through which the various labor processes are structured to yield an economic surplus (this refers to the patterns of ownership and control of the key means of production—such things as land, tools, raw materials, and machinery). Each different mode of production—self-sufficient village communes, nomadic pastoralism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and others—is characterized by its own combination of labor process and relations of production.⁷

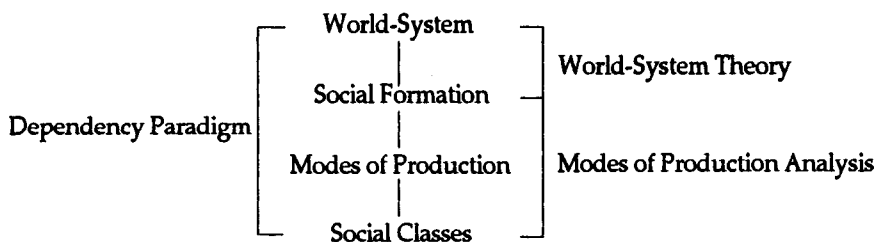
The most important insight of modes of production analysis for our purposes is its conceptualization of fundamental societal transitions such as that from feudalism to capitalism in the West, or the introduction of capitalism into pre-capitalist Third World social formations, in terms of "the articulation of two modes of production, one of which establishes its dominance over the other . . . not as a static given, but as a *process*, that is to say a combat between the two modes of production, with the confrontations and alliances essentially between the *classes* which these modes of production define."⁸ The present study will argue that the Iranian social formation in the sixteenth century already consisted of a combination of more than one mode of production and that from the seventeenth century onwards, through contact with the expanding European capitalist mode of production, can be usefully analyzed as a transitional social formation in which *several* modes of production combined to produce a complex and changing class structure. Mapping the gradual changes in this social structure over

time will help us account for the types of development and social change that have occurred, both as a measure of structural transformation and a basis for assessing class coalitions on either side of social movements.

It is important to note that class is not the only organizing principle of stratification systems. The impact of a decade or more of recent scholarship in the fields of feminist and ethnic studies has challenged neo- and post-Marxist analyses by drawing attention to the coequal significance of race/ethnicity and gender in understanding social structure. This study explores some of the interactions among ethnicity, gender, and class in Iranian social structure and social movements, both conceptually (more so for class, which is a disputed concept in Middle East studies) and empirically (to try to integrate the best insights of secondary scholarship on Iranian women and ethnic groups). It has only been possible to scratch the surface here, and much further work needs to be done in these respects.

A central theoretical contribution of the present study is to indicate a solution to the problem of integrating the world-system and modes of production perspectives on underdevelopment into the dependency paradigm.⁹ Diagram 1.1 indicates the contribution of each of the major perspectives to a synthetic framework of analysis. This diagram suggests that the dependency paradigm provides the overarching framework for the consideration of the relation between the most encompassing external and the basic internal units of analysis—that is, the relation of the world economy to the social classes of a given Third World country. World-system theory is necessary to explain the external impulses that emanate downward from the core to the social formations of the periphery, while modes of production analysis is needed for an account of how these external pressures are mediated within the social formation itself. *None* of these perspectives taken alone can adequately account for the causes of long-term social transformation. Rather, all three levels of analysis must be investigated and related to provide an adequate account of Third World social change and develop-

DIAGRAM 1.1 Levels of Articulation



ment over long periods of time. My essential point in all of this is to show that the three approaches complement one another, and secondly, that the modes of production and world-system perspectives are of great help for the problem of how to concretely *apply* the dependency paradigm.

State and Culture in Social Change

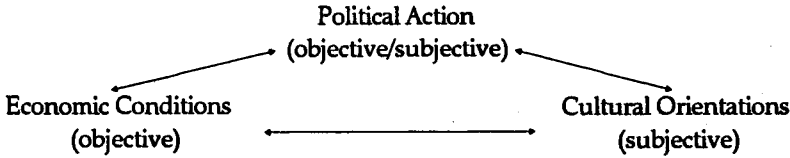
In moving from the sociology of development's emphasis on long-term processes of social transformation to the concerns of the literature on social movements with more explosive processes of change, we must consider two more key concepts—the state and cultures of opposition. Theda Skocpol has attempted to bring the state to center stage in the study of social revolutions by treating it as an autonomous structure, i.e., “a structure with a logic and interests of its own not necessarily equivalent to, or fused with, the interests of the dominant class in society or the full set of member groups in the polity.”¹⁰ For Skocpol, the state is not just an arena of struggle among classes, it is a macro-structure, whose basis is a “set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by, an executive authority.”¹¹ Thus it has the latitude to occasionally act against, or at cross purposes with, dominant classes in competing for society's resources (taxes), keeping internal order, and competing internationally with other states. It is this attention to the specifically political level of domination exercised by the state (and party system if there is one) that makes Skocpol's analysis so instructive, as she makes the point that Marxists would do well to supplement analyses of class relations and economic development with a look at “the strength and structure of old-regime states and the relations of state organizations to class structures.”¹² This is not to deny the existence of a long-standing and rich Marxist debate on the nature of the state, among, for example, Ralph Miliband, Nicos Poulantzas, Fred Block, and perhaps especially Göran Therborn, whose distinction between state apparatus and state power mirrors Skocpol's combination of an institutional and class relational approach to the state. But she goes further than any of these, and draws more resolutely on a non-Marxist tradition going back to de Tocqueville, Weber, and Hintze.

As important as the state has been in the development experiences of the advanced industrial economies, it has proven even more central to the process of dependent development in the periphery. In twentieth-century Iran, the state's position as recipient and disburser of vast oil revenues and the shah's role as originator of economic policies and virtually the sole political arbiter, added to the characteristic weakness of the industrial capitalist class, combined to give the state a preeminent role in all economic,

social, and political development. We shall see that this has been the case historically too, as the Iranian state from the Safavid dynasty's height in the seventeenth century onward has aspired (sometimes more successfully, often less) to be a centralizing monarchy with a great concentration of political, military, and economic power. This role has involved the state intimately in most cases of social change in Iran, whether as initiator of socio-economic transformations or the target of political and social movements aimed at reform and revolution. Here too the interplay of state and ethnicity can be traced by examining the central tribal dimension of state formation and dissolution from 1500 to 1800, and the gradual severing of this connection by the Qajars and especially the Pahlavis thereafter. In the Iranian case—and probably in other monarchies—the state was exceptionally conflated with the king and court, and thus forms part of the ruling class. This may explain how the state could be such a solid target of social movements: It was easily identified with the shah (who may be hated), and it had a clear class content *without* implicating all the rest of the dominant classes, who were therefore not obliged to rush to defend it. This makes its overthrow easier, but leaves serious unresolved problems of power for after the change of regime.

Although recent theoretical perspectives have refined the sensitivity with which the dependency paradigm can analyze the economic processes involved in Third World transitions to dependent capitalism, they have had very little to offer for the study of the political and especially the cultural dimensions of these social formations. Phenomena such as religion, nationalism, pre-capitalist and non-capitalist cultural forms and the orientations of social movements remain undertheorized by both world-system theory and modes of production analysis, as well as in Skocpol's work on the state and social revolutions.¹³ In part, this was a negative reaction by the advocates of the political economy approaches of the 1970s to the great emphasis placed on cultural values sometimes taken out of context by the modernization perspective in the 1950s and 1960s. Today, more sophisticated approaches to culture, offered in the work of such diverse thinkers as Clifford Geertz, Raymond Williams, Marshall Sahlins, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, James Scott, and Stuart Hall need to be reintegrated into discussions of social change. It is beyond the scope of the present study to assess each of these writers' contributions, but one way forward might be to work with a notion of *political cultures* of resistance and legitimation in the Third World.

Dependence on foreign capital and internal state domination of society impinge on and are in turn shaped by the material and spiritual well-being of the various groups and social classes who must "live" them within the everyday context of their own cultural and political orientations. "Political culture" is a complex amalgam of explicit ideological formulations, folk

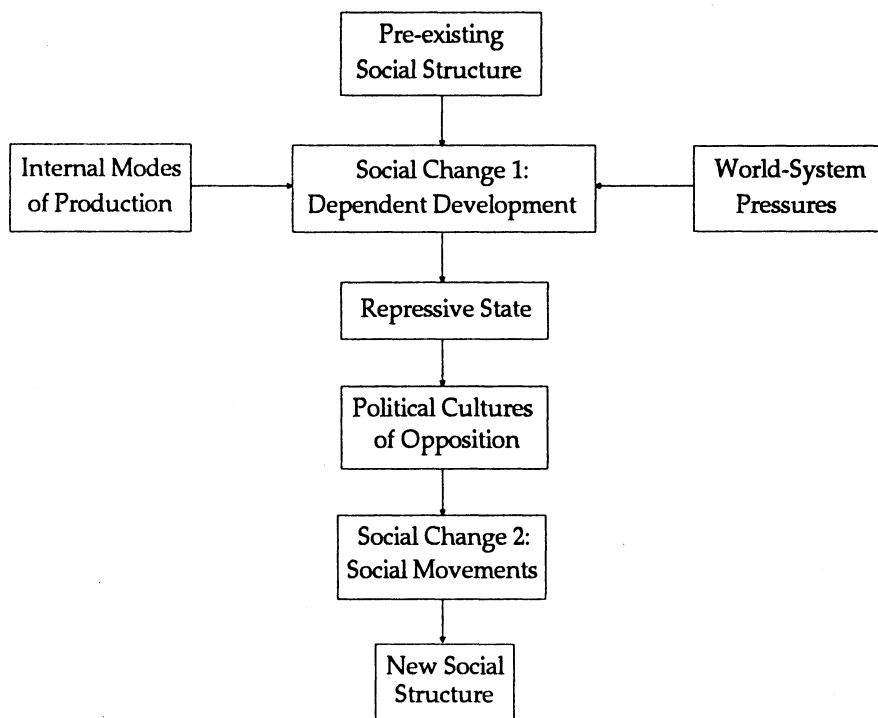
DIAGRAM 1.2 Levels of Analysis

culture and traditions, and practical orientations to actual circumstances and situations. Each aspect must be analyzed (where data exist) and taken into account to explain how and why specific groups conclude that opposition to authority is feasible. Such political cultures of resistance may be a crucial intervening moment between "objective" relations of exploitation and oppression, and political action (see Diagram 1.2). Cultural resources, along with the important organizational, material, and other capacities identified by resource mobilization theory, thereby claim our attention as relevant to the making of history by social actors. Not only cultures of opposition and resistance embodied in social movements, but the cultures of legitimation deployed by ruling groups, need to be considered potentially autonomous areas of investigation with causal significance in their own right. In the Iranian case, we will examine the various political cultures present in each of the major periods, as meaningful elements both of social stability and for change.¹⁴

A Synthetic Framework

Rather than a general theory of world-wide development and social change, then, we have a paradigm, or framework, that requires the researcher to pursue the historically specific processes of class formation and articulation of modes of production in a given social formation under the pressures of particular conjunctures of the world economy. One way to picture the overall model of social change advanced in this chapter is suggested in Diagram 1.3. Here the original diagram of long-term social transformation (social change 1) is expanded to include a second route to social transformation that may follow from it. Once a dependent pattern of development is generated by the encounter of the world-system and the internal modes of production in a Third World society, a repressive state is often (though not always) needed to contain the social forces unleashed by this process. Such a state (and the foreign powers that sustain it) will almost

DIAGRAM 1.3 A Model of Social Change



inevitably generate oppositions that draw on the available political cultures of society. Under certain conditions (which must be historically specified, and are examined for the case of Iran in several periods later in this study) social movements for change will then arise. If these are vigorous enough, even when defeated, a new social structure may eventually be consolidated. This provides a second path to social structural transformation.

Two important findings of this study may be prefigured here. First, *all* major national-level social movements in Iran in the period studied here have reposed on broad social bases, which I have termed *populist* alliances.¹⁵ Dependent development has generated diverse sets of grievances among social classes, which have articulated distinctive cultures of resistance. Multi-class and typically urban (for reasons noted later), populist coalitions have stood the best chance for success in touching off vigorous movements for change. The outcomes of such movements present a second key empirical insight: Most have encountered tremendous difficulty in bringing about social transformation on a wide scale. Once a measure of power has been won, such populist coalitions have tended to fragment into their

constituent elements, as sharp disputes have arisen over the shape of the new order. The ultimate *fragility* of these movements is traced in each case to their complex social bases, differing ideological visions, and the persistent outside pressures exacerbating these.

It will be noted that this is a complex, conjunctural causal model.¹⁶ It consists of several factors—world-system, modes of production, situations of dependency, the nature of the state, and political cultures—which must evolve in particular combinations for social movements to get under way. It is arrived at by a synthesis of existing theories in the fields of the sociology of development and social change, each of which, though insufficient in itself, contributes a part to the overall model. Theoretical work must be informed and advanced by solid case studies that are not imprisoned inside one or another of the several perspectives, but rather draw intelligently on all of them, in the process providing a basis for the evaluation of their merits and deficiencies. Only in this way can our knowledge of the Third World be improved, and it is only through such case studies that a better integration of the theories can be effected.

In the present study the logic of comparative-historical method will be used in two ways, both of which will help evaluate the manner in which key theoretical variables affected the social structures and processes of change in each of several historical periods. First, for each period to be studied, the relevant comparisons of Iran with other countries will be briefly considered. Second, and most important, the logic of comparative-historical method will be turned upon a single historically and culturally significant country, Iran, which experienced social change in several historical epoches. Thus, although the greater portion of the study is devoted to instances of social transformation from the late nineteenth century to the present, the early chapters on social change in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries will help us grasp the degree to which the key variables indeed set the parameters of change in Iran in a particular manner by the twentieth century. And careful comparisons of various periods within the twentieth century will highlight the importance of a nuanced and detailed consideration of the changing forms and circumstances of such concepts as dependency, cultures of opposition, and the state, and their impact on the types of social movements that Iranians have engaged in. The result is a sort of qualitative time-series analysis comparing instances of social change in a single case with itself at different points in time.¹⁷

The chapters that follow take up this abstract framework on Third World social change and seek to bring it to life in the concrete case of a vitally important Middle Eastern country. The aim is to challenge Iran specialists to enter into theoretical debates on the patterns and causes of social change in the country that interests them, and simultaneously to spur sociologists of development and social change to rethink the connections among iso-

lated and/or competing paradigms by focussing on a richly complex case study. Though the risks of satisfying neither constituency are many, the promise of a better integration of theory and data than is usually attained in these literatures may justify the attempt.

Notes

1. Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, translated by Marjory Mattingly Urquidí (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). The book was originally written between 1965 and 1967, and published as *Dependencia y desarrollo en America Latina* (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, SA, 1971). The English edition is an expanded and amended version of the 1971 text. Possibly because of this publishing history, many English-language discussions of dependency theory in the 1970s did not assess this work, which provides cogent answers to a number of the criticisms posed at that time (and since).

2. *Ibid.*, xx.

3. The key works are the three published volumes of a projected four-volume history of the modern world-system, and a collection of essays on current theoretical and political problems. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I, II and III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974, 1980, and 1989), and *The Capitalist World Economy. Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

4. Iran under the Safavid dynasty belongs precisely in this external arena and I shall explore the utility of this concept in chapters two and three.

5. Insightful critiques include Theda Skocpol, "Wallerstein's World Capitalist System: A Theoretical and Historical Critique," pp. 1075-1090 in *The American Journal of Sociology*, volume 82, number 5 (1977); Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: a Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," pp. 25-92 in *New Left Review*, number 104 (July-August 1977); Maurice Zeitlin, *The Civil Wars in Chile (or the bourgeois revolutions that never were)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 217-37; Aidan Foster-Carter, "The Modes of Production Controversy," pp. 47-77 in *New Left Review*, number 107 (January-February 1978); and Daniel Garst, "Wallerstein and his Critics," pp. 469-495 in *Theory and Society*, volume 14 (1985). A summary of the various criticisms is offered by Daniel Chirot and Thomas D. Hall, "World-System Theory," pp. 81-106 in *The Annual Review of Sociology*, volume 8 (1982).

6. The *locus classicus* of modes of production analysis lies in the "new economic anthropology" of French Marxists such as Maurice Godelier, Emmanuel Terray, and most notably, Pierre-Philippe Rey, according to Foster-Carter, "The Modes of Production Controversy." These writers developed the insights of French structuralist philosophers and social scientists of the 1960s such as Etienne Balibar, Louis Althusser, and Nicos Poulantzas.

7. John G. Taylor, *From Modernization to Modes of Production. A Critique of the Sociologies of Development and Underdevelopment* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 106.

8. Pierre-Philippe Rey, *Les Alliances de classes: Sur l'articulation des modes de production*, followed by *Materialisme historique et luttes de classes* (Paris: François Maspero, 1973), 15, translated and cited by Foster-Carter, "The Modes of Production Controversy," 56.

9. That this integration still needs to be effected is illustrated by the lack of explicit recognition accorded by the major writers in the principal perspectives to the other bodies of literature. Thus Cardoso and Faletto, even in their 1979 edition, have no references to modes of production analysis or Wallerstein's world-system, while Wallerstein, even in the 1989 third volume of *The Modern World-System* makes no mention of dependency or multiple modes of

production. Taylor's *From Modernization to Modes of Production* devotes a whole chapter to a critique of "the sociology of underdevelopment" which singles out texts by Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, and André Gunder Frank but has nothing to say about the further elaboration of underdevelopment theory, nor about its close relations, the dependency and world-system perspectives. I have worked out this synthesis in "An Historical-Sociological Framework for the Study of Long-Term Transformations in the Third World," pp. 330-349 in *Humanity and Society*, volume 16, number 3 (August 1992).

10. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 27.

11. *Ibid.*, 29.

12. *Ibid.*, 34-35.

13. Emphasis on the "objective relationships" at the expense of the "interests, outlooks and ideologies of particular actors" is perhaps the major weakness of Skocpol's approach for understanding social change in the Third World today and in historical perspective, for it seems plausible that specific political and religious cultures may play a decisive role in influencing the causes, processes, and outcomes of social revolutions. Skocpol has recognized this to a certain degree, in her own discussion of, interestingly enough, Iran: "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution," pp. 265-284 in *Theory and Society*, volume 11, number 3 (May 1982).

14. These remarks draw on a diverse body of literature, including A. Sivanandan, "Imperialism in the Silicon Age," pp. 24-42 in *Monthly Review* (July-August 1980), 25; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990); Craig Jackson Calhoun, "The Radicalism of Tradition: Community Strength or Venerable Disguise and Borrowed Language?" pp. 886-914 in *American Journal of Sociology*, volume 88, number 5 (March 1983); Farideh Farhi, *States and Urban-Based Revolutions: Iran and Nicaragua* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), chapter 4; William H. Sewell, Jr., "Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case," pp. 57-85 in *Journal of Modern History*, volume 57, number 1 (March 1985); and Theda Skocpol, "Cultural Idioms and Political Ideologies in the Revolutionary Reconstruction of State Power: A Rejoinder to Sewell," pp. 86-96 in *Journal of Modern History*, volume 57, number 1 (March 1985).

15. I am not here using the term populist in its more restricted Latin American sense/context, where it tends to denote mass *authoritarian* movements. I am instead appropriating it more positively to indicate the widely popular bases of Iranian social movements, and to try to capture the flavor of the political aspirations unleashed—always against internal tyranny and external influence, often democratic and participatory, involving the people as a whole. That such movements have particular limitations will be an important part of the argument.

16. The best historical macrosociology searches for such causal complexity. See the discussion by Charles D. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 23-25.

17. See *ibid.*, 23, 72.



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PART ONE

Social Structure and Social Change in Pre-Capitalist Iran, 1500-1800

"What Iran was, in terms of fundamental social structure, before the West intruded, and what Iranian society has become today—these are questions for which even a careful student may not find satisfactory answers."¹ These words, only slightly less true today than when they were written in 1955, pose the question which will preoccupy us in part one of this study. The researcher today has the very real advantage of more than thirty years of efforts by historians working on this or that aspect of Iranian society in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, but the task remains one of trying to assemble a vast puzzle with some pieces missing and others that do not quite fit. The goal of this first part is to uncover the basic configurations of the Iranian social formation in the period of the Safavid dynasty, which ruled Iran from 1501 to 1722, and then to relate this social structure to the social changes that occurred during and after its reign, through the tumultuous changes of dynasty that punctuated the eighteenth century, until another durable and yet fundamentally weaker dynasty—the Qajars—seized power on the threshold of the nineteenth century.

Chapter two is devoted to a careful empirical and theoretical analysis of Safavid social structure at the height of the dynasty's power, circa 1630, just after the death of Iran's most illustrious ruler, Shah 'Abbas. After a brief introduction on the history of the Safavids' rise to power around 1500 and the most important developments through the 1620s, the heart of the chapter examines the nature of the Safavid state and the three interrelated economic sectors of the Iranian social formation—tribal pastoralists, sedentary agriculturalists, and urban guild producers. I argue here that pre-capitalist Iran cannot be understood in terms of any single mode of production, whether feudal or Asiatic, but was much more complex than this. Nor can Iran's newly emerging links with the nascent European capitalist world-economy from 1500 to 1630 be seen as constituting a dependent relationship:

Iran in this period was a powerful world-empire in its own right. The empirical picture is rounded out with a look at some key ideological and political aspects of the seventeenth-century Iranian social formation, focusing in particular on the legitimization efforts of the monarchy and its relations with the religious specialists of the ulama, but also introducing such cultural and value orientations of the social orders below as can be discerned.

Chapter three then turns our attention to the contours of social change in Iran from 1500 to 1800. Here the varieties of social change under the Safavids are first identified, and then the dynastic revolutions of the eighteenth century are assessed in terms of the internal dynamics of the social formation and the role played by the growth in commercial relations with the West during the Safavid period. A second axis of explanation revolves around the weight to be accorded to all of these structural factors vis-à-vis the notoriously inadequate personal characteristics of the later Safavid shahs. Only by raising such questions in light of careful examination of Iranian society on its own terms during this early period of Iran's relations with the West can a baseline be established against which later instances of social change will disclose a richer significance.

Note

1. Nikki Keddie, "The Impact of the West on Iranian Social History," Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of California, Berkeley (1955), 1. Nikki Keddie would subsequently go on to become one of the foremost historians of Iran writing in the English language.

2

The Iranian Social Formation, circa 1630

Comment peut-on être Persan?

—Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, 1721

"How can one be Persian?" The present chapter attempts to sketch the broad outlines of a basis for answering Montesquieu's question through a look at the social structure of Iran in the first half of the seventeenth century. The date, "circa 1630," derives its significance from the fact that the Safavid empire is generally acknowledged to have reached its peak under Shah 'Abbas, who ruled Iran from 1587 to 1629. This society, like any other, possessed tendencies for change, such that it was not the same as the Safavid Iran of the early sixteenth or early eighteenth centuries. Thus a preliminary task is to briefly trace its evolution to the 1620s, the period that concerns us here.

Though its continuity with earlier dynasties that ruled Iran has been remarked by historians, the rise of the Safavid dynasty to power can also be considered the opening moment in the modern history of Iran for two important reasons. First, before 1501, and since the seventh-century Arab conquest, "Iran" had generally either been part of some larger empire or had been splintered into a number of smaller dynasties; second, the proclamation of Shi'ism as the new state religion came over the next century to sharply demarcate Iran from its Sunni neighbors, the Ottoman, Mughal, and Uzbek empires in Turkey and the Arab world, India, and Central Asia.

The Safavids' name and origin have been traced to an early fourteenth-century Sufi *shaykh* (holy man) named Safi, who established a base in the northwestern town of Ardabil. His successors gradually attracted significant numbers of devoted followers, especially from among the Turkoman tribes of the Anatolian plateau to the west. Around 1450 the Safavid order was transformed into a militant social movement based on the semi-

divinization of its leader, Junaid, who mobilized his tribal disciples for religious conquest (*ghaza*) against Christians in Trabzon on the Black Sea and in Georgia. When Junaid fell in battle, this policy was continued by his son Haidar who died fighting in the Caucasus in 1488. Haidar's troops became known as the *qizilbash* (Ottoman Turkish for "red head") because of the scarlet headgear they wore, with twelve triangular pieces representing the twelve Shi'i imams. Haidar's young son Isma'il went into hiding, waiting for a propitious moment to make his bid for political power in northwest Iran.¹

The 1490s were marked by severe succession struggles in the Aq Quyunlu dynasty, the Turkoman tribal confederation which had held much of Iran since 1468. The contemporary chronicler Qazvini describes the deterioration of the political situation: "when the Aq-qoyunlu state became weak, confusion reigned in the Iranian lands . . . and plunder and raids became prominent, and the affairs of the world lost order and organization."² Isma'il's tribal army defeated the Aq Quyunlu several times in 1500 and 1501. This opened the way for Isma'il's coronation at Tabriz, the capital, and the declaration of Ithna 'Ashari (Twelver) Shi'ism as state religion in the summer of 1501. Conversion of most of the Iranian population from Sunnism to Shi'ism would take place over the coming decades.³

Between 1503 and 1510 the Safavid tribal army scored a series of victories that consolidated its territorial hold over virtually all of Iran, from the Caspian provinces in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south, and from Baghdad in the west to Khurasan in the east. This phenomenal expansion was checked only by the power of the Ottoman army in 1514. This defeat undermined Isma'il's claims to invincibility, but neither could the Ottomans build upon it to annex Iran or roll back Shi'ism, and thus the setback paradoxically consolidated Iran as Safavid and Shi'i. Isma'il never personally took the field again until his death in 1524 and the bases of Safavid legitimacy shifted perceptibly away from theocracy to ordinary bureaucratic-monarchic conceptions.⁴

When Isma'il's son Tahmasp became shah in 1524 he was only ten years old. The *qizilbash* chiefs of the Turkoman clans engaged in what amounted to a civil war from 1524 to 1533, during which several attempts were made to seize control of the state. This internal chaos was compounded by invasions in the east by the Uzbeks and then by the Ottomans in the west in 1534-35.⁵ Tahmasp assumed effective control of the state about this time and consolidated the Safavid empire by ruling altogether for over fifty years until 1576. He attempted to balance the powerful tribes, dividing key provincial governorships among them and also using native Iranian bureaucratic families in his administration, as well as introducing Georgian prisoners into a few state positions. His foreign policy was basically defensive: He moved the capital from Tabriz to Qazvin to make it less accessible

to Ottoman encroachments and signed a peace treaty with the Ottomans at Amasya in 1555.

Tahmasp's death in 1576 touched off another period of instability, with the qizilbash chiefs lining up behind different contenders for the throne. After twelve years of internal intrigues and foreign invasions, Tahmasp's seventeen-year-old grandson 'Abbas came to the throne in October 1588. With the help of a new standing army of 40,000 men, 'Abbas embarked on a reconquest of Iran. By 1597 most of the provinces under Safavid authority were secured from internal strife and unruly provincial governors had been removed from office. Turning next to the external enemy, 'Abbas retook Khurasan from the Uzbeks in 1598 and regained Tabriz and Georgia in campaigns against the Ottomans between 1605 and 1607. Thus, by 1607 he had established his sovereignty over virtually all of Iran as defined by the 1555 treaty of Amasya.⁶

'Abbas had a profound impact on the major institutions of Iranian society. In the administration, as well as the army, a new and delicate balance was sought among Turkoman tribal qizilbash, Persian bureaucrats, and the new military and civilian personnel drawn from the Caucasus. Tribal power was systematically reduced in a variety of ways, all of which contributed to the absolutist power of the monarchy. In 1597/98 the capital was moved from Qazvin to Isfahan and massive public works were undertaken there. Diplomatic and commercial contacts with Europe were steadily expanded during the course of 'Abbas's reign and a functional peace was eventually established on all frontiers and remained intact for the rest of the seventeenth century, greatly stimulating internal and external trade and security and enriching the state. On the eve of 'Abbas's death in 1629, the Iranian social formation had reached a zenith of power and solidity.

The Nature of the State

The Safavid state can be analyzed in terms of three key institutions—the central bureaucracy, the provincial government, and the army.⁷ The shah and his court constituted the apex of a substantial bureaucracy centered in Isfahan, the capital. The highest officials of the court included the Grand Vazir (chief minister), the senior military officers, the state treasurer, and the chief religious official (*sadr*). Behind this topmost stratum came numerous other posts and offices—court physicians, astrologers, palace eunuchs, aides-de-camp, pages, artists, and skilled artisans. The administrative bureaucracy included clerks and financial agents attached to each of the several branches and departments of the government—court, workshops, tax collection, military units. Eskandar Beg Monshi estimates that in 1576

there were some 1,500 officials at the court, each with five to fifty attendants and subordinates, making more than 20,000 people (not including their families) in all. The personnel of the central bureaucracy were paid partly in cash and fees for their services, but mostly in drafts against some portion of the land taxes paid to the state by the peasantry.⁸

Shah 'Abbas presided over a state administration consisting of three major ethnic groups—long-standing Persian notable families who occupied many of the civilian posts in the bureaucracy, the Safavids' original Turkoman tribal base which provided military commanders and provincial governors, and a new elite consisting of Christian Georgians, Armenians, and Circassians. The latter had been taken prisoner on campaigns in the Caucasus and brought up at court as Muslims who in the early seventeenth century came increasingly to furnish top civilian and military personnel. Comparisons of the lists of high-ranking amirs (military commanders) in 1576 and 1629 show a dramatic change from primarily Turkoman qizilbash chiefs to about 40 percent qizilbash, 40 percent non-qizilbash tribal chiefs (mostly Kurds and Lurs), and 20 percent *ghulams* (royal slaves) from the Caucasus.⁹ There are a number of instances recorded of people rising from obscure or lower class origins to positions of influence, as well as sudden declines in fortune for those who incurred the shah's wrath, and this was probably the main form of social mobility in the Safavid period. Chardin notes that the shah made appointments without regard to birth, asserting there was no hereditary nobility in Iran and going so far as to claim that consideration was given only to one's office, merit, and wealth.¹⁰

The provincial government also came to be shared out among the several components of the elite. The governors "sent to the capital only limited sums of cash, but considerable stocks (*barkhana*) of local products for the King's table and raw materials for the royal workshops."¹¹ In addition, each governor was required to provide a stipulated number of troops to the royal army in time of war. In return, "the governors enjoyed great freedom. They collected local revenue and used local resources for assignments to their subordinates among whom there were considerable contingents of armed attendants."¹² Chardin tells us that the provincial governors were appointed for life and their sons could succeed them, but data from both the sixteenth and later seventeenth centuries suggest that the shahs exercised their prerogative to remove these "hereditary" governors with some regularity.¹³ Chardin writes too that each governor was assisted and observed by administrators who reported to and depended on the shah.¹⁴ Falling from grace often entailed not just dismissal from one's post, but the confiscation of much of one's wealth. Under a strong monarch such as 'Abbas, then, the central authority held the upper hand vis-à-vis its erstwhile provincial representatives, though at other times both before and after his reign, the governors ruled far more autonomously.

The third great institution of the Safavid state—the army—was also by the seventeenth century an amalgam of the older tribal elite from the provinces and a newer state-controlled force created by 'Abbas. The tribal army that brought the Safavids to power had shown its limitations in the 1514 defeat by the Ottomans at Chaldiran and its disadvantages from the viewpoint of the monarchy in the civil war periods of 1524-33 and 1576-88. The key reforms—bringing in peasants, Iranian tribesmen, and convert soldiers and equipping them with modern fire-arms on a large scale—took place in 1598-1600, and were one of the cornerstones of 'Abbas's successful centralization policies aimed at containing tribal power. The actual number of troops varied, but was on the order of 70,000 to 100,000 men, over half of them tribal cavalry. Like the civilian bureaucracy, both officers and rank and file soldiers were paid with drafts on the land revenue; an ordinary trooper would receive between five and twelve *tumans* a year (the *tuman* was a unit of account, worth 10,000 dinars or 3.3 pounds sterling in the seventeenth century).¹⁵

The total revenues and expenditures of the Iranian state for an average year in the seventeenth century are very difficult (and indeed perhaps impossible) to estimate accurately. The *Tadhkirat al-muluk* suggests cash revenues of 783,862 *tumans* against expenditures of 625,320 *tumans* for the 1720s. This does not include the vast amounts of goods that came in kind to the court, nor does it include labor service, especially in construction, that the shah could demand free of charge from certain guilds. Nevertheless these figures tally remarkably well with Chardin's estimate of the 1670s that the shah's income came to 700,000 *tumans* (32 million French livres) and expenditures came to about 744,000 *tumans* (34 million livres). The overwhelming majority—roughly 83 percent—of the Safavid state's income derived from various forms of the land tax. On the expenditures side, the military soaked up some 66.5 percent according to Minorsky (including governors' salaries), or 38.2 percent according to Chardin. Much of the rest was spent on the upkeep of the court (50 percent, according to Chardin), leaving only 11.8 percent to be spent rather more productively on the royal workshops.¹⁶

The net annual balance of revenues and expenditures in the 1722 data was positive to the amount of some 160,000 *tumans* (about 20 percent of total income), worth over 500,000 pounds sterling in the seventeenth century. This money would be hoarded in the royal treasury, which contained immense amounts of wealth for the times. Chardin judged the Safavid shah the "richest monarch in the universe," as rich himself as "all the rest of his kingdom."¹⁷ A very rough comparison of Safavid Iran with the great European kingdoms of the period is made in Table 2.1. The Iranian state income compares very evenly with England's, though not too well with the heavy taxing machinery of absolutist France (the amount of the shah's income in

TABLE 2.1 England, France, and Iran, circa 1700

Country	Population	State Income
Iran	6-10 million	goods in kind + 800,000 tumans
England	6 million	3.8 million pounds sterling = 930,000 tumans
France	19 million	577 million francs = 12,800,000 tumans

Source: based on Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-muluk*, 186.

Note: figures for Iran's population are very approximate, as for England's net income. Chardin observes that the shah's income consisted more in goods than in cash (*Voyages*, V, 415).

goods in kind would however redress part of the balance).¹⁸ It is interesting that only one-third of English revenue came from the land tax in 1700; much more derived from customs and trade duties. England invested this income wisely in a vast fleet which would later bring it rich dividends. If the table could be projected back to the 1620s, Iran at its peak under Shah 'Abbas would probably have compared even more favorably with the European kingdoms; conversely, the latter may be supposed to have made greater gains in the course of the seventeenth century than did Iran, whose relative (and perhaps absolute) stagnation will be examined in chapter three.

By virtue of its control over the key state institutions—central bureaucracy, provincial government, and army—the seventeenth-century Iranian ruling class of shah, high bureaucrats, military commanders, and provincial governors *was* the state. Taken as a whole this state had a powerful grip on the rest of society and commanded much of the country's overall surplus, but equally importantly this ruling class was internally much divided into the multiple interests which composed it. In the sixteenth century tribal military leaders had twice fought among themselves for paramount positions in Iranian society and there was a more or less constant tension between largely Persian-speaking bureaucratic families and the Turkoman qizilbash tribal elite over control of the state. After 1590 'Abbas redistributed the balance of power away from the tribes by bringing in a counterweight of Georgians and other Caucasian captives and their descendants as high civil and military personnel. By creating a standing army directly under royal control 'Abbas exercised firm mastery over the provincial governors, none of whom could henceforth presume to challenge the central authority. The Safavid state, then, evolved under 'Abbas toward a more fully-fledged absolutism which worked most smoothly when its fractious internal elements were kept in check by a powerful monarchy. It was then well placed to tax the surplus production of the economic bases on which it rested.

The Economic Structure of Iran in the 1620s

The total population of seventeenth-century Iran is rather difficult to know, as estimates (which for this period are really guesses) vary from about five or six million to a high of ten million, a figure equal to the population as recently as about 1900.¹⁹ These six to ten million inhabitants were distributed among three interrelated economic sectors as tribal pastoralists, rural peasants, and urban craft producers. Again, estimates of the proportions in each sector range widely. The tribal population has for example been estimated at anywhere from one-quarter to one-half the total population.²⁰ (Note too that some tribes, such as most of the Kurds, were sedentary and in economic terms, classifiable as peasants.) Taking averages of both total inhabitants and these proportions—say 33 to 40 percent of eight million people—the tribal population may be very roughly guessed to have encompassed some three million people in the seventeenth century (other combinations of these figures range from a possible low of one and a half million to a possible high of five million). It is to this large group in the population that we turn first in an empirical analysis of the Safavid economy.

The Pastoral Nomadic Sector

From about 1000 A.D. onward, the Iranian social formation witnessed periodic co-existence and conflict between two political economies—that of settled Iranian villagers and townspeople, and that of successive migrations into Iran of Turkic pastoralists from Central Asia. The Turkoman tribes who brought the Safavids to power are traditionally held to have been seven in number—the Ustajlu, Shamlu, Takkalu, Rumlu, Zul-qadar, Afshar, and Qajar. The term *qizilbash* was later extended to certain non-Turkoman supporters of the Safavids, including Central Asian, Iranian, and Kurdish elements. The entire list of tribal pastoralists living in seventeenth-century Iran would be even longer, as Helfgott observes, "Forming over two hundred separate tribal units divided into five major ethnic groupings (Turkoman, Iranian, Kurdish, Arab, and Baluch)."²¹ These tribal entities were composed of groups of various sizes, with a number of families making up a clan, a number of clans forming a tribe, and in some cases at the top of the system a number of tribes joining into a tribal confederation. In Safavid times this largest unit was most commonly referred to as an *uymaq*—a fluid grouping of tribal military supporters, each ranked with respect to its relative prestige and influence within the Safavid state.

Pastoralism constituted the economic basis of nomadic tribal life. As nomads, originally from Central Asia and later Anatolia and the Caucasus,

gradually settled into niches in the Iranian ecosystems (whose mountains and plains differed from the steppes), they adapted distinct semi-annual migration paths between secure campgrounds in the mountains and winter sites on the plains, entering into more predictable and less warlike relations with the settled population.²² The main economic activities of pastoralists were aimed, as in all natural economies, at satisfying basic needs, through grazing herds, engaging in handicraft production, and sometimes in limited amounts of cultivation: "Most generally, the basic means of production of nomad society consist of various kinds of herd animals and the land on which these herds pasture. Herds provide the society with its most important needs: food (meat, cheese, butter, yogurt), drink (milk), clothing (wool, hides), fuel (dung), means of transport (horses, camels, oxen, donkeys) and paraphernalia."²³ The pasture land that supported these herds was held collectively by the tribe and not "owned" in terms of legally established boundaries, but allocated by chieftains who might give the usufruct rights to a campsite to the same or a different family in each successive year. Herds were privately held by individual extended families, as were their produce, tools, implements, dwellings, and precious items such as jewelry. Production for use within the tribe was supplemented by production for exchange with the village peasants or townspeople along the migration routes; this generally involved simple bartering of animals and their by-products for agricultural and handicraft goods. For this reason many historians and anthropologists speak of "interdependence" between tribespeople and the settled population and this is one good example of how different modes of production may coexist, yet interact. The extent of these interactions was necessarily limited by the natural economy of pastoralism and the limits to accumulation posed by the need for mobility.

In terms of internal stratification and appropriation of the surplus, tribes relied on a hierarchic structure.²⁴ The qizilbash chieftains (or amirs) at the top of the tribal system—undoubtedly few in number—were the greatest flockowners and employed most of the dependent laborers at the bottom, who served as shepherds and prepared the various animal products—food, clothing, and shelter—for them. At the highest levels a handful of them participated in non-pastoral economic systems by virtue of holding posts in the military and provincial government. The many independent flockowners who constituted the core of the tribal economy would acknowledge lower-level chiefs or elders (*rish safids*, literally "white beards") as mediators of such crucial issues as allocation of specific pasture lands along the migration routes to each family in the camp group. Below these came tribespeople who owned either too few flocks to support themselves, or none at all, and who lived by tending the flocks of others. Keddie notes the key economic roles performed by women: "Tribal women, like most peasant women, are not veiled, and they usually do more physical labor

then the men, including spinning, weaving, cooking, agriculture, and animal husbandry."²⁵ It is difficult to know much about the conditions of life of the ordinary tribesperson. On the one hand the limits of a natural economy must have asserted themselves to keep most people at a virtual subsistence level, and this was compounded by the extraction of surplus upwards to the chiefs and state. The major form of surplus extraction occurred through a tax on animals, apparently ranging from one-seventh (or even lower) to one-third. On the other hand, at either rate, a smaller percentage of surplus was extracted from the armed tribesperson than from the peasant, and in Bausani's judgment, "Few nomads, and then only the most wretched, ever settled on the land, and the condition of the settled peasant farmer was definitely worse than that of the nomad."²⁶

In almost another world altogether were the tribal elite who occupied high military and provincial posts, and, to a lesser extent, those tribesmen who served in the army. When appointed by the state to a governorship or other administrative position, chiefs of tribes came into control over non-tribal sources of wealth, particularly in their capacity as the fiscal taxing agents and legitimate military power of the provincial bureaucracy. The tribal domination of the larger economy had however reached its peak by the end of the sixteenth century, when tribal chiefs lost much of their hegemony to Shah 'Abbas.²⁷ The tribal troops who served in the provincial armies and on the major campaigns of the shah may in some senses have had a higher standard of living than the average pastoralist. Tribal troops were far more likely to be involved in a money economy and likely had rather different chances of social mobility than the ordinary shepherd. Of course, only a fairly small proportion of all tribesmen could have served in the army (up to 60,000 out of our estimated three million tribespeople), while most of the booty taken went to the chiefs.

The tribal political economy of seventeenth-century Iran thus exhibited tensions between its traditional egalitarianism and growing stratification at several levels. At the economic base, tribal members were connected to one another and to their immediate chiefs through the necessary self-reliance and "rough democracy" of pastoral life.²⁸ Taxes were perhaps not extortionate and tribeswomen participated fully in economic life and were more equal with their male counterparts than elsewhere in Iranian society. These communal characteristics were nevertheless overlaid by the vast gap separating the high-level chieftains from the mass of ordinary tribespeople, a gap that spanned nearly the entire spectrum of the social structure, from the elite handful of provincial governors to the near subsistence-level existence of the basic producers. A further significant split arose at the base between tribesmen living as pastoralists and those who served in the cavalry units of the Safavid army. There was thus objectively much inequality between chiefs and tribespeople, but cutting across this were the cus-

tomary relations that permitted the extraction of some surplus from the pastoralists and the ties of tribal loyalty that made the troops a reliable instrument for extracting an even greater surplus from the peasantry.

The Peasant Sector

As with the tribal population, the proportion and absolute numbers of Iran's settled peasantry in the Safavid era can only be very roughly estimated. Accepting the previous estimate of the tribal sector as 35 to 40 percent of the total and putting the urban population at 10 to 15 percent, the peasantry would then be the largest single component of the population, with 45 to 55 percent of the total. Out of a population ranging from six to ten million people, then, high and low estimates yield 2,700,000 to 5,000,000 peasants, with the figure of four million being perhaps a reasonable guess.

The basic agricultural unit was the village, of which there were thousands scattered and clustered around the country. Lambton and other scholars infer that the original village settlements were communal, but landlords had come to be superimposed on them from very early times.²⁹ Minorsky, following Chardin, notes four categories of land in Safavid Iran: the shah's own domains, the state lands, religious endowments, and private holdings.³⁰ The crown lands (*khassa*) were the personal estates of the ruler and his family.³¹ In Safavid times, as before, the somewhat ambiguous concept of the shah as theoretical owner of all land was maintained, with various internal contradictions and compromises in reality. In practice the extent of crown lands fluctuated in the Safavid period: Most of the very valuable land around Isfahan belonged to the shahs, and the silk-producing regions of Gilan and Mazandaran passed to 'Abbas in 1595-96. A second major category of land was state land (*mamalik* or *divani*), whose taxes and rent were due to the public treasury, not to the shah's own account (though the distinction was often rather blurred).³² Shortage of cash in the underlying natural economy forced all dynasties from the Abbasids in the tenth century onwards to use state lands for the payment of the bureaucracy and military. The key form that state land assumed in Safavid times was the *tiyul*: the revenue on large grants of state land to the provincial governors (often tribal chieftains) in their own outlying areas, and revenues on lands designated to pay the salaries of specific offices in the army and bureaucracy. Tiyuls were not (in theory) hereditary; though a tiyul might pass from father to son, this was contingent on the shah's decision. The tiyul-holder possessed considerable authority over the peasants on the property, such as the right to assess fines, but this too derived, at least in theory, from the shah. State lands, according to Chardin, "contain the greatest part of the kingdom."³³

The third major category of land in Safavid Iran after the royal domain and state lands was *vaqf* land. *Vaqf* was an endowment of land for some charitable or religious purpose. It thus supported some specified group of beneficiaries—often judges, high-ranking *ulama*, or *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), and also an administrator (*mutavalli*) who took a tithe from the income. It could not be sold or transferred and generally paid no taxes to the state. Private landowners, including Shah 'Abbas, often converted their property into a *vaqf* to avoid the ill effects of taxes, Islamic inheritance laws, and confiscation, appointing their families as administrators. *Ulama*, too, were often appointed as administrators of *vaqf* land, thus increasing their economic leverage in the rural sector. As a result of these processes, by the end of 'Abbas's reign, *vaqf* land had come to be quite extensive, second probably only to *tiyul* grants.³⁴

The final type of land-holding in the seventeenth century was private estates. Though it is impossible to know the extent to which individuals owned land unconditionally, there is ample evidence in the contemporary sources that they in fact did so.³⁵ The fact that many individuals constituted "their" land into *vaqf* endowments implies that they had the right to so alienate their possessions but also that they felt insecure in the first place. A recurrent pattern in Iranian dynastic history is the gradual growth of private holdings out of land grants; Banani notes that "In the Safavid era the gamut was run once again."³⁶ In later Safavid times this privatization process seems to have overtaken both land held as *tiyul* and *vaqf* lands. Two general conclusions may be drawn: The line between "usufruct" and "possession" was blurred, and the tendency to cross it probably increased in the later seventeenth century as the strong central control of 'Abbas gradually weakened. For the period focussed on here—the 1620s—the principal categories of land-holding were first, state lands assigned as *tiyuls*, followed by the royal domains and *vaqfs*, with private property probably last in extent.

Turning to the issue of surplus appropriation, it can be observed that most lands, whether the shah's, private property, or *vaqf*, were rented to peasants according to a crop-sharing arrangement of some kind. Paying a certain sum per amount of land used was usually only done around large towns and even so was not particularly common.³⁷ In practice, the proportion actually paid as rent varied to a considerable degree. Chardin writes of the shareholding contract (whether with the shah or a private landlord) that water and fertilizer may be provided by either party; after the harvest seed for the next year is removed, then usually the owner takes one-third, though sometimes one-fourth to one-half of the crop. The landlord, whether the shah or a private individual, thus took the bulk of the agricultural produce of Iran; if the harvest was poor, the peasantry would face the prospect of starvation (though the chronicles record cases of tax relief,

successful protests, and means of recourse against excessive taxation). Peasants were also subjected to other taxes and some labor services, but these almost certainly did not equal, qualitatively or quantitatively, the regular unpaid labor service on the feudal estates of Europe.³⁸

In assessing the overall condition of Iran's peasantry in the seventeenth century, one is confronted by an evident sparseness of data. The most celebrated contemporary judgment on the peasants' lot is offered by Chardin, given here in full:

They live well enough, and I can assure you that there are incomparably more wretched peasants in the most fertile regions of Europe. I have seen Persian peasant women everywhere with silver necklaces, and great silver rings on their hands and feet, with chains from neck to navel, laced with silver pieces and sometimes gold. One sees children likewise adorned, with coral necklaces. Both men and women are well dressed, with shoes; they are well furnished with utensils and furniture; but on the other hand (*en échange de ces aises*), they are exposed to the insults (*injures*), and sometimes the blows, of the king's men and vazirs, when they do not give quickly enough what is demanded, which holds for the men only; as for the women, they are respected throughout the Orient and they are never touched.³⁹

To fill in the picture of women offered here, Keddie notes that peasant women, like tribal women, also participated in hard physical work and often went unveiled and that they had important roles in the making of carpets and textiles.⁴⁰ Chardin had travelled in both the northwest and from Isfahan south to the Gulf more than once and he says in general: "Those [of the lowest rank] of Persia, either in the countryside, or in the cities, are well-nourished and well-clothed, having all the necessary utensils, even though they work not half as hard as our [poorest subjects in France]."⁴¹ B. G. Martin discusses a document from 1592 that refers to the "scattered peasants" of Kasaj in Khalkhal, who

may well have fled their homes to escape the extortion of officials, or heavy taxation. . . . The existence of a horde of officials whose chief duty was to press the multifarious taxes, dues, tolls and other exactions out of the miserable peasants and crop-sharers must have signified widespread poverty and subsistence-level existence in the countryside.⁴²

The peasantry undoubtedly did live on the margins of subsistence, providing as they did the bulk of the state's revenues and supporting the army, much of the ulama, and private landowners. It is difficult to disagree with Bausani's conclusion: "the condition of the settled peasant farmer was definitely worse than that of the nomad."⁴³ On the other hand, general economic prosperity in the seventeenth century and strong central control