

an international women's delegation to Iran. De Beauvoir's short text, while not a direct response to Foucault, provides context for the debate over Foucault and Iran in France. The third is a March 1979 article by the journalists Claudie and Jacques Broyelle attacking Foucault's stance on Iran, published in March 1979 in the leftist newspaper *Le Matin*. Finally, we have translated from the Persian the statement that Iranian feminists issued on March 10, 1979, during their demonstrations against Khomeini's order for women to re-veil themselves. It was reprinted in *Matin-Daftari* 1990.

Note on the Translations and the Annotation

Unless otherwise indicated, Karen de Bruin and Kevin B. Anderson carried out the translation from the French of these writings. The rest were translated as follows: (1) Foucault's interview with the leftist journalists Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet was translated from the French by Alan Sheridan. (2) Roger Hardy and Thomas Lines translated Rodinson's "Islam Resurgent?" from the French. (3) Marybeth Timmerman translated de Beauvoir's speech from the French. (4) Janet Afary translated Foucault's September 1978 dialogue with Parham in *Nameh-yi Kanun-i Nevisandegan* and the Iranian women's March 10, 1979, statement, both from the Persian. Throughout this appendix, unless otherwise indicated, the notes are by Afary and Anderson.

Dialogue between Michel Foucault and Baqir Parham

Conducted in September 1978 and published in *Nameh-yi Kanun-i Nevisandegan*
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PREFACE BY PARHAM: Michel Foucault, the famous French thinker and philosopher, was recently in Iran. He came to visit the country, to travel around, and to write several articles on it. His trips apparently took him to Qom,¹ where he spoke with some of the Grand Ayatollahs. Although Foucault is not well known in Iran, he has an immense reputation in the world of philosophy. By first analyzing the field of medicine and its history, he initiated a unique and penetrating study of reason, of the structure and organization of knowledge. He has a number of valuable works, such as *Madness and Civilization*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and *The Order of Things*. Foucault's short trip to Iran was an occasion to have a conversation with him about structuralism and some other key issues. Perhaps, in a search for an answer to them, he has come to this end of the world. This interview was conducted on Saturday, September 23, 1978, in Tehran.

PARHAM: Philosophy has a claim to objectivity in its worldview. How do you, as a philosopher, see the question of political commitment?

FOUCAULT: I do not think that we could give a definition of an intellectual unless we stress the fact that there is no intellectual who is not at the same time, and in some form, involved with politics. Of course, at certain points in history, there have been attempts to define the intellectual from a purely theoretical and objective angle. It is assumed that intellectuals are those who refuse to become involved in the issues and problems of their own societies. But in fact, such periods in history have been very rare, and there are very few intellectuals who have adopted such a premise.

If we look at Western societies, from the very first Greek philosophers up to today's intellectuals, we see that they all had ties in some form to politics. They were involved in politics, and their actions had meaning only insofar as they concretely affected their societies. At any rate, this is a general principle. Therefore, to the question, "Should an intellectual interfere in the political, social, economic life of his or her country," I respond that it is not a matter of should or ought. Being an intellectual requires this. The very definition of an intellectual comprises a person who necessarily is entangled with the politics and major decisions of his society. Thus, the point is not whether or not an intellectual has a presence in political life. Rather, the point is what should the role of an intellectual be in the present state of the world, in order

that he or she [u]² would reach the most decisive, authentic, accurate results. I am, of course, only dealing with the society of which I am a part. Later, in comparison to your experiences, we shall see what are the differences between our situation in the West and yours.

In France and in Europe in general, ever since the French Revolution, the intellectual has played the role of a prophet, a foreteller of the future society. In other words, the intellectual was one whose responsibility was to deal with general and universal principles for all of humanity. But in our Western societies something important has happened. The role of science, knowledge, technique, and technologies has perpetually increased, and so has the significance of these issues for politics and the organization of society. Engineers, lawyers, doctors, healthcare workers and social workers, researchers in the humanities, all form a social layer in our society whose numbers, as well as whose economic and political significance, are constantly increasing. Therefore, I think that the role of the intellectual is perhaps not so much, or maybe not only, to stand for the universal values of humanity. Rather, his or her responsibility is to work on specific objective fields, the very fields in which knowledge and sciences are involved, and to analyze and critique the role of knowledge and technique in these areas in our present-day society. In my opinion, today the intellectual must be inside the pit, the very pit in which the sciences are engaged, where they produce political results. Thus, working with intellectuals—mostly doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists, and psychologists—has paramount importance to me.

PARHAM: In response to my first question, you also partly answered my second question.

FOUCAULT: No problem, ask it again. Maybe in this way I could answer your first question!

PARHAM: Very well. You see, we have witnessed a closeness between philosophy and political reality. I wanted to ask you, with regard to this proximity between philosophy and politics, do you see any basic change in the philosophical worldview of our time? And if so, what is its foundation and its nature?

FOUCAULT: If again we keep in mind the West, I think we should not forget two grand and painful experiences we had in our culture in the last two centuries. First, throughout the eighteenth century, philosophers—or it is better to say, intellectuals in France, England, and Germany—attempted to rethink society anew, according to the vision and principles of good government as they perceived it. The impact of this type of thinking can be seen, to a great extent, in the revolutions and in the social and political changes in France, England, and Germany. In actuality, out of this philosophical

vision—the vision of a non-alienated, clear, lucid, and balanced society—industrial capitalism emerged, that is, the harshest, most savage, most selfish, most dishonest, oppressive society one could possibly imagine. I do not want to say that the philosophers were responsible for this, but the truth is that their ideas had an impact on these transformations. More importantly, this monstrosity we call the state is to a great extent the fruit and result of their thinking. Let us not forget that the theory of the state, the theory of the all-powerful state, the all-powerful society vis-à-vis the individual, the absolute right of the group against the right of the individual, can be found among French philosophers of the eighteenth century and the German philosophers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is the first painful experience.

The second painful experience is the one that emerged not between the philosopher and bourgeois society, but between revolutionary thinkers and the socialist states we know today. Out of the visions of Marx, the visions of socialists, from their thoughts and their analyses, which were among the most objective, rational, and seemingly accurate thoughts and analyses, emerged in actuality political systems, social organizations, and economic mechanisms that today are condemned and ought to be discarded. Thus, I think both of these experiences were painful ones, and we are still living through the second one, not just in thought but also in life.

I can give another example that is both most interesting and tragic for Western intellectuals—that of Vietnam and Cambodia. One felt that there was a people's struggle, a struggle that was just and right at its foundation, against vicious American imperialism. One anticipated that out of this remarkable struggle a society would emerge in which one could recognize oneself. By "ourselves," I do not mean the Westerners, since this was not their battle. I mean a society in which the face of revolution could be recognized. But Cambodia, and to some extent Vietnam, present us with a face from which freedom, a classless society, a non-alienating society, were absent.

I think we live at a point of extreme darkness and extreme brightness. Extreme darkness, because we really do not know from which direction the light would come. Extreme brightness, because we ought to have the courage to begin anew. We have to abandon every dogmatic principle and question one by one the validity of all the principles that have been the source of oppression. From the point of view of political thought, we are, so to speak, at point zero. We have to construct another political thought, another political imagination, and teach anew the vision of a future. I am saying this so that you know that any Westerner, any Western intellectual with some integrity, cannot be indifferent to what she or he hears about Iran, a nation

that has reached a number of social, political, and so forth, dead ends. At the same time, there are those who struggle to present a different way of thinking about social and political organization, one that takes nothing from Western philosophy, from its juridical and revolutionary foundations. In other words, they try to present an alternative based on Islamic teachings.

PARHAM: In my first two questions, the topic of discussion was mostly philosophy, science, and especially the humanities. Now, with your permission, I would like to speak of something that is closer to our particular situation in Iran, that is, religion. Could you please tell us what your opinion is of the role of religion as a world perspective and in social and political life?

FOUCAULT: One of the statements I have heard repeatedly during my recent stay in Iran was that Marx was really wrong to say, "Religion is the opium of the people." I think I must have heard this statement three or four times. I do not intend to begin anew a discussion of Marx here, but I do think that we ought to reexamine this statement of Marx. I have heard some supporters of an Islamic government say that this statement of Marx might be true for Christianity, but it is not true for Islam, especially Shi'ite Islam. I have read several books on Islam and Shi'ism, and I totally agree with them because the role of Shi'ism in a political awakening, in maintaining political consciousness, in inciting and fomenting political awareness, is historically undeniable. It is a profound phenomenon in a society such as Iran. Of course, there have at times been proximities between the state and Shi'ism, and shared organizations have existed. You had a Safavid Shi'ism,³ and against it you have tried to resurrect an Alavid Shi'ism.⁴ All of this is accurate. But on the whole, and despite changes that occurred in the nature of religion due to the proximity between Shi'ism and state power in that period, religion has nevertheless played an oppositional role.

In the Christian centers of the world, the situation is more complicated. Still, it would be naïve and incorrect if we said that religion in its Christian form was the opium of the people, while in its Islamic form it has been a source of popular awakening for the people. I am astonished by the connections and even the similarities that exist between Shi'ism and some of the religious movements in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages, up to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. These were great popular movements against feudal lords, against the first cruel formations of bourgeois society, great protests against the all-powerful control of the state. In Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before they adopted a directly political form, all such movements appeared as religious movements. Take for example the Anabaptists, who were allied to such a movement during Germany's Peasant Wars.⁵ It was a movement that rejected the power of the

state, government bureaucracy, social and religious hierarchies, everything. This movement supported the right to individual conscience and the independence of small religious groups, which wished to be together, have their own organizations, without hierarchy or social stratification between them. These were all extremely important social movements that left their mark on the religious and political consciousness of the West. In England, during the bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth century, underneath the bourgeois and parliamentary revolutions as such, we have a complete series of religious-political struggles. These movements are religious because they are political and political because they are religious, and are very important. I therefore think that the history of religions, and their deep connection to politics, ought to be thought anew.

In actuality, the type of Christianity that was the opium of the people was the product of political choices and joint tactics by the states, or the government bureaucracies, and the church organization during the nineteenth century. They said we ought to bring the rebellious workers back to religion and make them accept their fate. In Marx's time, religion was in fact the opium of the people, and Marx was right for this reason, but only in the context of his own time. His statement ought to be understood only for the time period in which he lived, not as a general statement on all eras of Christianity, or on all religions.

PARHAM: Precisely. Now I come to my last question, which, unlike my other questions, is more academic. I wanted to use this opportunity to ask you about philosophical structuralism. You have been known as one of the most authentic representatives of this form of thought. Could you please tell me what the issues are exactly?

FOUCAULT: Very well, but let me first say that I am not a structuralist. I never have been. I never made such a claim. And I have always clearly said that I am not a structuralist, but such terms, such labels, are out of necessity both correct and incorrect. There is a truthful dimension to them and an untruthful one. In actuality, what is known as structuralism is a methodology used in linguistics, sociology, history of religions, comparative mythology, and so forth. These make up a group of scientific fields that use the structuralist method. In other words, their analysis is based more on systems of relations than on explorations of elements and contents. Structuralism in this meaning has no relationship to my work, none.

Beyond this, there is the fact that in the 1960s in the West, especially in France, a change took place in the form of analysis and philosophical thinking. Briefly, without wishing to enter a debate, the issue is this: From the time of Descartes until now, the point of origin of philosophical thought was the subject, and the foundational subject of philosophy was to determine

what is the subject, what is self-consciousness? Is the subject free? Is self-consciousness absolute self-consciousness? In other words, is it aware of itself? In sum, can self-consciousness, as Hegel said, become worldly?

Around the 1960s, after the world became more connected with technique and technical knowledge, I believe that a rethinking at the point of origin of philosophical thought began. That is, it seemed better to begin with contents, with things themselves. In other words, and very simply, this meant to begin with things that exist positively and to analyze them. It meant to see how the subject could be placed within this content, which is the only role that the subject can play, focusing on how the subject is determined by outside elements. In other words, the principal change is not to privilege the subject as against the objective reality from the very beginning. Rather the objects, the relation between the objects, and the comprehensibility of objects within themselves are what we explore. That is, we pay more attention to the comprehensibility of things in their own right than to the awareness of the subject.

From this point of view, we can understand why some types of research are called structuralist research. For example, look at the problem of psychoanalysis. Lacan tried to discuss the subject on the basis of the unconscious, whereas Sartre and Merleau-Ponty began with subject and tried to see if they could reach the unconscious or not, and they never, of course, reached it. Lacan begins with the unconscious, the principle of the unconscious that appears in the process of psychoanalytical probing, and asks the question: Given the existence of this unconscious, what would the subject be?

Now I turn to myself, since your question was for me. My first book was called *Madness and Civilization*, but in fact my problem was rationality, that is, how does reason operate in a society such as ours? Well, to understand this issue, instead of beginning with the subject moving from awareness to reason, it is better if we see how, in the Western world, those who are not the subjects of reason, those who are not considered reasonable, that is, those who are mad, are removed from the life process. Starting with this practice, with constellations of real practices, and finally, a process of negation, we reach the point where we can see the place of reason. Or we find out that reason is not just the movements and actions of rational structures, but the movements of the structures and the mechanisms of power. Reason is what sets aside madness. Reason is what gives itself the right and the means to set aside madness.

From such analyses that do not start with the subject, I reached the point of how one could question various manifestations of power and analyze them. In general, we can say that a philosophy based on self-consciousness

is necessarily related to the idea of freedom. And this is very good, but the philosophy or thinking whose subject matter is not self-consciousness, but real practice or social practice, relates to the theory of power. In other words, instead of self-consciousness and freedom, we reach practice and power.

I do not mean to say that power, from my point of view, is a foundational, unconquerable, absolute entity that one has to kneel before. Rather, the purpose of all of my analyses is that, in light of them, we find out where are the weak points of power, from which we can attack it. When we speak of the relationship between reason and madness, when we show that reason exercises its power on madness, this is not to justify reason. Rather, it is to show how reason as a system of power can be questioned and fought against. Thus, my analyses are in fact strategic analyses and are meaningful only in relation to strategies.

My studies on the issues of youth crime and prison are of a similar nature. I want to show what are the existing mechanisms of power that separate the criminal from the noncriminal. What are the points of weakness of this system or the historic points in between which the system has taken shape, so that we could objectively and practically challenge them? Many regard structuralism as an analysis of mechanisms that are undefeatable and imperishable, whereas the opposite is true. They say that structuralism is about analyzing relations that are part of the nature of the objects and cannot be changed. The opposite is true. I want to explain relations that have been tied together through the power of human beings and for this very reason are changeable and destructible. Therefore, from my point of view, structuralism is more a philosophy or a manual of combat, not a document of impotence. My problem is not to explore my self-consciousness to see if I am free or not. My problem is to analyze reality to see how one can free oneself.

The Army—When the Earth Quakes

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Tehran—On the edge of the two great salt deserts that stretch across the middle of Iran, an earthquake has just occurred. Tabas and forty villages have been annihilated.

Ten years ago to the day, Ferdows, in the same region, was wiped out. On this ruined land, two rival towns were born, as if in the shah's Iran the same misfortune could not give rise to the same renewal. On one side, there was the town of administration, the Ministry of Housing, and the notables.

also a gendarme that is too obviously turned against its Muslim neighbors to ensure, with widespread agreement, a national "restoration." It is a question of troops equipped in the American manner, but not of an Americanized army.

I asked one of these army representatives what, according to him, was the biggest danger to Iran: the United States or the USSR. This time he said, without any hesitation:

"The United States, because it is the Americans who are dominating us."

To me, these words seemed to carry a lot of weight, because I knew that the man to whom I was talking had been far from hostile to the actions of the Americans twenty-five years earlier, when they restored the shah to the throne.

The army does not seem, therefore, to have within it the power to carry out a political intervention. It is true that the shah cannot subsist without it, but it is besieged, or rather crisscrossed, by forces that threaten *him*.

It can permit or block a solution, but it can neither propose nor impose one that it develops itself. It is a keyhole instead of a key. And of the two keys that claim to be able to turn it, the one that seems the best adapted at the moment is not the American one of the shah. It is the Islamic one of the people's [*populaire*]²¹ movement.

The Shah Is a Hundred Years Behind the Times

First published in *Corriere della sera*, October 1, 1978.²²

Tehran—When I left Paris, I was told over and over again: "Iran is going through a crisis of modernization. An arrogant monarch, clumsy and authoritarian, is attempting to compete with the industrialized nations and to keep his eyes fixed on the year 2000, but the traditional society, for its part, cannot and does not want to follow. Wounded and hurt, it comes to a halt. It folds itself back onto its own past and, in the name of millenarian beliefs, it seeks shelter among a retrograde clergy."

How many times have I also heard intelligent observers ask with all seriousness what political form will be able to reconcile the deepest layers of Iranian society with the country's needed modernization. Would that be a liberal monarchy, a parliamentary system, or a strong presidential one?

I arrived in Tehran with these questions in mind. I have asked them twenty times and I have received twenty responses: "Let the king reign, but not govern." "Let us go back to the 1906 Constitution."²³ "Let us establish

a regency for a while, before making definitive decisions." "The shah must totally or partially step back." "The Pahlavis should leave the country and never be heard from again." But always, underlying all these responses, there is the same *leitmotif*: "At any rate, we want nothing from *this regime*." I have advanced very little.

One morning, in a big empty apartment where closed curtains let through only the almost unbearable noise of the cars passing by, I met an oppositionist who was described to me as one of the country's astute political minds. He was wanted by the police. He was a very calm, very reserved man. He made few gestures, but when he opened his hand, one could see large scars. He had already had encounters with the police.

- Why do you fight?
- To bring down despotism and corruption.
- Despotism first, or corruption?
- Despotism sustains corruption, and corruption supports despotism.
- What do you think of the idea, often put forward by the shah's entourage, that it is necessary to have a strong power in order to modernize a still backward country, that modernization cannot help but lead to corruption in a country that lacks a cohesive administration?
- The modernization-despotism-corruption combination is precisely what we reject.
- In short, that is how you characterize "this regime."
- Exactly.

A small detail that struck me the day before when I visited the bazaar, which had just reopened after a strike that had lasted more than eight days, suddenly came back to me. Incredible sewing machines, high and misshapen, as can be seen in the advertisements of nineteenth-century newspapers, were lined up in the stalls. They were adorned with patterns of ivy, climbing plants, and budding flowers, roughly imitating old Persian miniatures. These unfit-for-use Western objects, under the sign of an obsolete Orient, all bore the inscription: "Made in South Korea."

I then felt that I had understood that recent events did not signify a shrinking back in the face of modernization by extremely retrograde elements, but the rejection, by a whole culture and a whole people, of a *modernization* that is itself an *archaism*.

The shah's misfortune is to have espoused this archaism. His crime is to have maintained, through a corrupt and despotic system, that fragment of the past in a present that no longer wants it.

Yes, modernization as a political project and as a principle of social transformation is a thing of the past in Iran.

I do not mean that mere mistakes and failures have doomed the recent forms that the shah wanted to give to modernization. It is true that all the great efforts undertaken by the regime since 1963 are now rejected, by all social classes.²⁴ It is not only the big property owners who are discontented with the agrarian reform, but also the small peasants, who fall into debt as soon as they are granted a parcel of land, and are then forced to emigrate to the city. The artisans and the small manufacturers are discontented, because the creation of an internal market benefited mainly foreign products.²⁵ The bazaar merchants are discontented because the current forms of urbanization suffocate them. The wealthy classes, who counted on a certain level of national industrial development and who can now only imitate the governing caste by placing their capital in California banks or in Parisian real estate, are also discontented.

"Modernization," which is no longer desired, is this series of stinging failures. But "modernization" is also something older that sticks to the current monarch, and that is his *raison d'être*. It is something that is the basis not only of his government, but also of his dynasty.

In 1921, when Reza Khan, the head of the Cossack Brigade, was brought to power by the English, he presented himself as a disciple of Atatürk.²⁶ No doubt this was a usurpation of the throne, but he also had three objectives borrowed from Mustafa Kemal: nationalism, secularism, and modernization. The Pahlavis were never able to reach the first two objectives. As to nationalism, they neither could, nor knew how to, loosen the constraints of geopolitics and oil wealth. The father placed himself under English domination in order to stave off the Russian threat. The son substituted American political, economic, and military control for the English presence and for Soviet penetration. For secularism, things were equally difficult. Because it was the Shi'ite religion that in fact constituted the real principle of national consciousness, Reza Shah, in order to dissociate the two, tried to propagate a notion of "Aryanness," whose sole support was the myth of Aryan purity that reigned elsewhere. In the eyes of the people, what did it mean to discover one fine day that they were Aryans? It was nothing more than seeing the two-thousand-year-old monarchy being celebrated today on the ruins of Persepolis.

Out of the whole Kemalist program, international politics and the internal situation left to the Pahlavis only one bone to chew on, that of modernization. This modernization is now utterly rejected, not only because of the setbacks that have been experienced, but also because of its very principle. With the present agony of the regime, we witness the last moments of

an episode that started almost sixty years ago, the attempt to modernize the Islamic countries in a European fashion. The shah still clings to this as if it were his sole *raison d'être*. I do not know if he is still looking toward the year 2000,²⁷ but I do know that his famous gaze dates from the 1920s.²⁸

There are in Iran as in Europe certain technocrats, whose function is to correct the errors of the previous generation of technocrats. They speak of measured growth, of development, but also of the environment. They speak of the social fabric with respect. One of them explained to me that everything could still be straightened out, that a "reasonable" modernization could occur, which would take "cultural identity" into account, but on condition that the king abandon his dreams. Turning around, he showed me a huge photo on the wall where a small, disguised man was strutting in front of a gem-studded throne, as a way of saying, in the manner of de Tocqueville: "This is the man with whom we will have to govern Iran."

Even now, this ambitious man and several others with him would like to continue to save "modernization" by limiting the shah's powers and by neutralizing his dreams. They have not understood that in Iran today it is modernization that is a dead weight.

I have always regretted that corruption, which attracts so many unscrupulous people, interests honest people so little. Do you know of a treatise on political economy, or of sociology or history books, that offers a serious and detailed analysis of the speculation, corrupt practices, embezzlement, and swindling that constitute the veritable daily bread of our trade, our industry, and our finances?

In Tehran, I at last met my man, an austere economist with malicious eyes.

"No," he told me, "corruption was not the misfortune that compromised the country's development, nor has it been the dynasty's weakness. It has always been the dynasty's way of exercising power and a fundamental mechanism of the economy. Corruption is what held despotism and modernization together. Please consider that it is not a vice that is more or less hidden. It is the regime."

I then had the privilege of hearing a superb presentation on "Pahlavi corruption." The clever professor knew a lot. By birth, he was well enough connected to the traditional wealth of his country to be familiar with the old-time ruses, and his expertise had helped him to understand today's procedures well.

He showed me how Reza Shah, this unknown who came to power with only foreign support, had immediately inscribed himself on the economy of the country as a result of predatory conquests—confiscation of a few great

feudal treasures and then of great stretches of fertile land on the shores of the Caspian. He then explained to me the system of the current team. They use modern methods, such as government loans, banking associations, lending institutions such as the Pahlavi Foundation,²⁹ as well as very archaic forms, where it is a question of concessions granted to a family member, of revenues accorded to a favorite: "To one of the brothers, the real estate; to the twin sister, the drug traffic; to her son, the trade in antiquities; the sugar to Félix Agaian; the arms trade to Toufanian; the caviar for Davalou."³⁰ Even the pistachio trade was parceled out. All this "modernization" has led to a gigantic appropriation. Thanks to the Omran bank, the benefits of the agrarian reform ended up in the hands of the shah and of his family. New construction projects in Tehran were distributed like spoils.

A very small clan of beneficiaries weaves the right of conquest into the initiatives of economic development. If we add that the government disposes of the whole oil revenue left to it by foreign companies, that it can therefore acquire "its" police, "its" army, and sign fabulous and fruitful contracts with Westerners, how could we not understand that the Iranian people see in the Pahlavis a regime of occupation? It is a regime that has the same form and comes from the same age as all the colonial regimes that have subjugated Iran since the beginning of the century.

Therefore, I beg of you, do not tell us any more about the fortunes and misfortunes of a monarch who is too modern for a country that is too old. What is old here in Iran is the shah. He is fifty years old and a hundred years behind the times. He is of the age of the predatory monarchs. He has the old-fashioned dream of opening his country through secularization and industrialization. Today, it is his project of modernization, his despotic weapons, and his system of corruption that are archaic. It is "the regime" that is the archaism.

Tehran: Faith against the Shah

First published in *Corriere della sera*, October 8, 1978.³¹

Tehran—Tehran is divided in two, along a horizontal axis. The wealthy part of the city, in the middle of enormous construction sites, slowly climbs the foothills, toward the cool air. The villas with their gardens are enclosed by high walls and solid metal doors. In the south are the bazaar, the old city center, and the poor suburbs. At the periphery, very low, barrack-type buildings blend dustily into the plains, as far as the eye can see. A little further away, the

city collapses, for over the centuries, enormous excavations have been dug for the clay needed to build Tehran. Five or six hundred meters below the level of the royal palace and the Hilton Hotel, the city left its empty molds. Here, above the holes, red and black tarps have been stretched to create dwellings.

There, where the city ends and where one can already feel the desert, two opposite waves have met, peasants forced from their homes because of the failure of agrarian reform and city dwellers forced out because of the triumphs of urbanization. This is a phenomenon that characterizes the whole of Iran, for in ten years the urban population has increased from nine to seventeen million.

Today, like every Friday, the two halves of the city, side by side during the week, have separated. The North went further north, toward the beaches of the Caspian. The South went further south, toward Shahr-e Rey and the old sanctuary where the [great-grand-]son of Imam Reza lies.³² All around the mausoleum there is stamping and jostling. The European is probably wrong to seek to discern what part is village fair and what part devotion. The present monarch has tried indeed to harness some of this current. Very close to here, he erected the tomb of his own father. The father, Reza Shah, also laid out a large avenue and designed concrete platforms where there had been only vegetable gardens. He threw parties and received foreign delegations, all for naught, for in the rivalry between the dead, the [great-grand-]son of the imam wins, every Friday, over the father of the king.

"At this point, what else do they have left?" is a frequent question. "They have been cut off from their traditional existence. To be sure, their life was narrow and precarious. However, by tearing them away from their farms and their workshops, by promising them a salary that can only be found in earth-moving or construction (and this only sporadically), one exposes them to permanent unemployment. Displaced in this manner, what refuge do they have except the one they can find in the mosque and the religious community?"

But those who stay at home undergo a similar but unseen "transplantation." There are attempts to develop agribusiness where there used to be individual plots of land. There are attempts to create export crops, while products that used to be farmed onsite are now imported. There are attempts to put new administrative structures in place. Several months ago, on a deserted road, a sign welcomed arriving motorists to Meybod. One searched in vain, but there was no trace of Meybod. People of the area, when questioned, did not understand what was being asked. This inquiry revealed that a town that existed only for bureaucrats had been created from five scattered hamlets, undoubtedly for some land speculator. At the moment, no one yet cared about

this city, which was thrown on the ground like a rootless geography,³³ but soon these people were going to be governed differently, forced to live otherwise, connected to each other by other relations, and maybe displaced.

Where can protection be sought, how can what one is be found, if not in this Islam, which for centuries has regulated everyday life, family ties, and social relations with such care? Have not its rigor and its immobility constituted its good fortune? A sociologist told me of its "value as a refuge."³⁴ It seems to me, however, that this man, who knew his country well, erred (out of discretion, perhaps, in front of the European that I am) by an excessive Westernness.

Let us remember that the commemoration of the victims of the uprising took place eight days ago in Tehran's immense cemetery, which carries the name "Paradise."³⁵ Where the dead sleep in shallow ground under a thin layer of cement, the families, the friends of the dead, and people by the thousands were praying. They wailed, raising up their arms. But early in the afternoon, around the black and gray robes of the mullahs, discussion had already begun, and with such violence! Overthrow the shah, immediately or later? Chase out the Americans, but how? Take up arms or keep waiting? Support or denounce the opposition deputies who, by attacking the regime in parliament, give the world the impression that freedom is back? Late in the evening, groups formed, broke apart, and re-formed around the clerics. In the political excitement, the dead were not forgotten, but given the veneration to which they were entitled.

Moreover, eight days earlier, thousands of demonstrators, bare-handed in front of armed soldiers, had streamed into the streets of Tehran, shouting "Islam, Islam!"; "Soldier, my brother, why shoot your brother? Come with us to save the Quran"; "Khomeini, heir to Hussein, Khomeini, we follow in your footsteps." And I know more than one student, "left-wing" according to our categories, who had written in big letters, "Islamic Government," on the placard on which he had written his demands and that he was holding up with outstretched arms.

It is necessary to go back even further. Throughout this whole year, revolt ran throughout Iran, from celebrations to commemorations, from worship, to sermons, to prayers. Tehran honored the dead of Abadan, Tabriz those of Isfahan, and Isfahan those of Qom. White, red, and green lanterns were lit up after nightfall on big tree branches in front of hundreds of houses.³⁶ It was the "wedding bed" of the boys just killed.³⁷ In the mosques during the day, the mullahs spoke furiously against the shah, the Americans, and the West and its materialism. They called for people to fight against the entire regime in the name of the Quran and of Islam. When the mosques became too small for the

crowd, loudspeakers were put in the streets. These voices, as terrible as must have been that of Savonarola in Florence, the voices of the Anabaptists in Münster, or those of the Presbyterians at the time of Cromwell,³⁸ resounded through the whole village, the whole neighborhood. Many of these sermons were recorded, and the tapes circulated throughout Iran. In Tehran, a writer who was not at all a religious man let me listen to some of them. They seemed to evoke neither withdrawal nor a refuge. Nor did they evoke disarray or fear.

I did not even have to ask him whether this religion, which alternately summons the faithful to battle and commemorates the fallen, is not profoundly fascinated with death—more focused, perhaps, on martyrdom than on victory. I knew that he would have responded: "What preoccupies you, you Westerners, is *death*. You ask her to detach you from life, and she teaches you how to give up. As for us, we care about *the dead*, because they attach us to life. We hold out our hands to them in order for them to link us to the permanent obligation of justice. They speak to us of right and of the struggle that is necessary for right to triumph."

Do you know the phrase that makes the Iranians sneer the most, the one that seems to them the stupidest, the shallowest? "Religion is the opium of the people."³⁹ Up to the time of the current dynasty, the mullahs preached with a gun at their side in the mosques.

Around 90 percent of Iranians are Shi'ites. They await the return of the Twelfth Imam, who will create the reign of the true order of Islam on earth.⁴⁰ While this creed does not announce each day that the great event will occur tomorrow, neither does it accept indefinitely all the misery of the world. When I met Ayatollah Shariatmadari (he is undoubtedly the highest spiritual authority in Iran today), one of the first sentences he uttered to me was: "We are waiting for the Mahdi, but each day we fight for a good government." Shi'ism, in the face of the established powers, arms the faithful with an unremitting restlessness. It breathes into them an ardor wherein the political and the religious lie side by side.

First, it is a matter of belief. For the Shi'ites, the Quran is just because it expresses the will of God, but God himself wanted to be just. It is justice that made law and not law that manufactured justice. Of course, one must find this justice in "the" text dictated by God to the Prophet. However, one can also decipher it in the life, the sayings, the wisdom, and the exemplary sacrifices of the imams, born, after Ali, in the house of the Prophet,⁴¹ and persecuted by the corrupt government of the caliphs, these arrogant aristocrats who had forgotten the old egalitarian system of justice. While also waiting for the Twelfth Imam, who, by becoming visible, will reestablish the egalitarian system in its perfection, it is necessary, through knowledge, through the love

of Ali and of his descendants, and even through martyrdom, to defend the community of believers against the evil power.

Consequently, it is a matter of organization. Among the Shi'ite clergy, religious authority is not determined by a hierarchy. One follows only the one to whom one wants to listen. The Grand Ayatollahs of the moment, those who, in facing down the king, his police, and the army, have just caused an entire people to come out into the streets, were not enthroned by anybody. They were *listened to*. This is true even in the smallest communities, where neighborhood and village mullahs gather around themselves those attracted by their words. From these volunteers comes their subsistence, from them comes what is necessary to support the disciples they train, and from them comes their influence. But from them also comes the unrelenting plea to denounce injustice, to criticize the government, to rise up against unacceptable measures, and to mete out blame and to prescribe. These men of religion are like so many photographic plates on which the anger and the aspirations of the community are marked. If they wanted to go against the current, they would lose this power, which essentially resides in the interplay of speaking and listening.

Let us not embellish things. The Shi'ite clergy is not a revolutionary force. Since the seventeenth century, it has administered the official religion. The mosques and the tombs of the saints have received valuable donations. Considerable goods have been accumulated in its hands, leading to conflicts as well as complicities with the people in power. This has also led to many oscillations, even if it is true that the mullahs, especially the most humble ones, have been most often on the side of the rebels. For example, Ayatollah Kashani was at the peak of his popularity during the time that he supported Mossadeq. After he changed sides, he was forgotten.⁴²

The mullahs are not at all "revolutionary," even in the populist sense of the term. But this does not mean that the weight of inertia is the only thing that the Shi'ite religion can put forth in opposition to the government and to the detested modernization. This does not mean that it constitutes an ideology that is so widespread among the people that true revolutionaries are forced for a time to join it. It is much more than a simple vocabulary through which aspirations, unable to find other words, must pass. It is today what it was several times in the past, the form that the political struggle takes as soon as it mobilizes the common people. It transforms thousands of forms of discontent, hatred, misery, and despair into a *force*. It transforms them into a force because it is a form of expression, a mode of social relations, a supple and widely accepted elemental organization, a way of being together, a way of speaking and listening, something that allows one to be listened to

by others, and to yearn for something with them at the same time as they yearn for it.

Persia has had a surprising destiny. At the dawn of history, it invented the state and government. It conferred its models of state and government on Islam, and its administrators staffed the Arab Empire. But from this same Islam, it derived a religion that, throughout the centuries, never ceased to give an irreducible [*irréductible*]⁴³ strength to everything from the depths of a people that can oppose state power.

What Are the Iranians Dreaming [*Rêvent*] About?

First published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, October 16–22, 1978.⁴⁴

"They will never let go of us of their own will. No more than they did in Vietnam." I wanted to respond that they are even less ready to let go of you than Vietnam because of oil, because of the Middle East. Today they seem ready, after Camp David,⁴⁵ to concede Lebanon to Syrian domination and therefore to Soviet influence, but would the United States be ready to deprive itself of a position that, according to circumstance, would allow them to intervene from the East or to monitor the peace?

Will the Americans push the shah toward a new trial of strength, a second "Black Friday"? The recommencement of classes at the university, the recent strikes, the disturbances that are beginning once again, and next month's religious festivals, could create such an opportunity. The man with the iron hand is Moghadam, the current leader of the SAVAK.⁴⁶

This is the backup plan, which for the moment is neither the *most* desirable nor the most likely. It would be uncertain: While some generals could be counted on, it is not clear if the army could be. From a certain point of view, it would be useless, for there is no "communist threat": not from outside, since it has been agreed for the past twenty-five years that the USSR would not lay a hand on Iran; not from inside, because hatred for the Americans is equaled only by fear of the Soviets.

Whether advisers to the shah, American experts, regime technocrats, or groups from the political opposition (be they the National Front or more "socialist-oriented" men),⁴⁷ during these last weeks everyone has agreed with more or less good grace to attempt an "accelerated internal liberalization," or to let it occur. At present, the Spanish model is *la favorita* of the political leadership.⁴⁸ Is it adaptable to Iran? There are many technical problems. There are questions concerning the date: Now, or later, after another violent

incident? There are questions concerning individual persons: With or without the shah? Maybe with the son, the wife? Is not former prime minister Amini,⁴⁹ the old diplomat pegged to lead the operation, already worn out?

The King and the Saint

There are substantial differences between Iran and Spain, however. The failure of economic development in Iran prevented the laying of a basis for a liberal, modern, westernized regime. Instead, there arose an immense movement from below, which exploded this year, shaking up the political parties that were being slowly reconstituted. This movement has just thrown half a million men into the streets of Tehran, up against machine guns and tanks.

Not only did they shout, "Death to the Shah," but also "Islam, Islam, Khomeini, We Will Follow You," and even "Khomeini for King."

The situation in Iran can be understood as a great joust under traditional emblems, those of the king and the saint, the armed ruler and the destitute exile, the despot faced with the man who stands up bare-handed and is acclaimed by a people. This image has its own power, but it also speaks to a reality to which millions of dead have just subscribed.⁵⁰

The notion of a rapid liberalization without a rupture in the power structure presupposes that the movement from below is being integrated into the system, or that it is being neutralized. Here, one must first discern where and how far the movement intends to go. However, yesterday in Paris, where he had sought refuge, and in spite of many pressures, Ayatollah Khomeini "ruined it all."

He sent out an appeal to the students, but he was also addressing the Muslim community and the army, asking that they oppose in the name of the Quran and in the name of nationalism these compromises concerning elections, a constitution, and so forth.

Is a long-foreseen split taking place within the opposition to the shah? The "politicians" of the opposition try to be reassuring: "It is good," they say. "Khomeini, by raising the stakes, reinforces us in the face of the shah and the Americans. Anyway, his name is only a rallying cry, for he has no program. Do not forget that, since 1963, political parties have been muzzled.⁵¹ At the moment, we are rallying to Khomeini, but once the dictatorship is abolished, all this mist will dissipate. Authentic politics will take command, and we will soon forget the old preacher." But all the agitation this weekend around the hardly clandestine residence of the ayatollah in the suburbs of Paris, as well as the coming and going of "important" Iranians, all of this contradicted this somewhat hasty optimism. It all proved that people believed in the power of

the mysterious current that flowed between an old man who had been exiled for fifteen years and his people, who invoke his name.

The nature of this current has intrigued me since I learned about it a few months ago, and I was a little weary, I must confess, of hearing so many clever experts repeating: "We know what they don't want, but they still do not know what they want."

"What do you want?" It is with this single question in mind that I walked the streets of Tehran and Qom in the days immediately following the disturbances. I was careful not to ask professional politicians this question. I chose instead to hold sometimes-lengthy conversations with religious leaders, students, intellectuals interested in the problems of Islam, and also with former guerrilla fighters who had abandoned the armed struggle in 1976 and had decided to work in a totally different fashion, inside the traditional society.⁵²

"What do you want?" During my entire stay in Iran, I did not hear even once the word "revolution," but four out of five times, someone would answer, "An Islamic government." This was not a surprise. Ayatollah Khomeini had already given this as his pithy response to journalists and the response remained at that point.

What precisely does this mean in a country like Iran, which has a large Muslim majority but is neither Arab nor Sunni and which is therefore less susceptible than some to Pan-Islamism or Pan-Arabism?

Indeed, Shi'ite Islam exhibits a number of characteristics that are likely to give the desire for an "Islamic government" a particular coloration. Concerning its organization, there is an absence of hierarchy in the clergy, a certain independence of the religious leaders from one another, but a dependence (even a financial one) on those who listen to them, and an importance given to purely spiritual authority. The role, both echoing and guiding, that the clergy must play in order to sustain its influence—this is what the organization is all about. As for Shi'ite doctrine, there is the principle that truth was not completed and sealed by the last prophet. After Muhammad, another cycle of revelation begins, the unfinished cycle of the imams, who, through their words, their example, as well as their martyrdom, carry a light, always the same and always changing. It is this light that is capable of illuminating the law from the inside. The latter is made not only to be conserved, but also to release over time the spiritual meaning that it holds. Although invisible before his promised return, the Twelfth Imam is neither radically nor fatally absent. It is the people themselves who make him come back, insofar as the truth to which they awaken further enlightens them.

It is often said that for Shi'ism, all power is bad if it is not the power of the Imam. As we can see, things are much more complex. This is what Ayatollah

Shariatmadari told me in the first few minutes of our meeting: "We are waiting for the return of the Imam, which does not mean that we are giving up on the possibility of a good government. This is also what you Christians are endeavoring to achieve, although you are waiting for Judgment Day." As if to lend a greater authenticity to his words, the ayatollah was surrounded by several members of the Committee on Human Rights in Iran⁵³ when he received me.

One thing must be clear. By "Islamic government," nobody in Iran means a political regime in which the clerics would have a role of supervision or control. To me, the phrase "Islamic government" seemed to point to two orders of things.

"A utopia," some told me without any pejorative implication. "An ideal," most of them said to me. At any rate, it is something very old and also very far into the future, a notion of coming back to what Islam was at the time of the Prophet, but also of advancing toward a luminous and distant point where it would be possible to renew fidelity rather than maintain obedience. In pursuit of this ideal, the distrust of legalism seemed to me to be essential, along with a faith in the creativity of Islam.

A religious authority explained to me that it would require long work by civil and religious experts, scholars, and believers in order to shed light on all the problems to which the Quran never claimed to give a precise response. But one can find some general directions here: Islam values work; no one can be deprived of the fruits of his labor; what must belong to all (water, the subsoil) shall not be appropriated by anyone.⁵⁴ With respect to liberties, they will be respected to the extent that their exercise will not harm others; minorities will be protected and free to live as they please on the condition that they do not injure the majority; between men and women there will not be inequality with respect to rights, but difference, since there is a natural difference. With respect to politics, decisions should be made by the majority, the leaders should be responsible to the people, and each person, as it is laid out in the Quran, should be able to stand up and hold accountable he who governs.

It is often said that the definitions of an Islamic government are imprecise. On the contrary, they seemed to me to have a familiar but, I must say, not too reassuring clarity. "These are basic formulas for democracy, whether bourgeois or revolutionary," I said. "Since the eighteenth century now, we have not ceased to repeat them, and you know where they have led." But I immediately received the following reply: "The Quran had enunciated them way before your philosophers, and if the Christian and industrialized West lost their meaning, Islam will know how to preserve their value and their efficacy."

When Iranians speak of Islamic government; when, under the threat of bullets, they transform it into a slogan of the streets; when they reject in its name, perhaps at the risk of a bloodbath, deals arranged by parties and politicians, they have other things on their minds than these formulas from everywhere and nowhere. They also have other things in their hearts. I believe that they are thinking about a reality that is very near to them, since they themselves are its active agents.

It is first and foremost about a movement that aims to give a permanent role in political life to the traditional structures of Islamic society. An Islamic government is what will allow the continuing activity of the thousands of political centers that have been spawned in mosques and religious communities in order to resist the shah's regime. I was given an example. Ten years ago, an earthquake hit Ferdows. The entire city had to be reconstructed, but since the plan that had been selected was not to the satisfaction of most of the peasants and the small artisans, they seceded. Under the guidance of a religious leader, they went on to found their city a little further away. They had collected funds in the entire region. They had collectively chosen places to settle, arranged a water supply, and organized cooperatives. They had called their city Islamiyeh. The earthquake had been an opportunity to use religious structures not only as centers of resistance, but also as sources for political creation. This is what one dreams about [*songe*] when one speaks of Islamic government.

The Invisible Present

But one dreams [*songe*] also of another movement, which is the inverse and the converse of the first. This is one that would allow the introduction of a spiritual dimension into political life, in order that it would not be, as always, the obstacle to spirituality, but rather its receptacle, its opportunity, and its ferment. This is where we encounter a shadow that haunts all political and religious life in Iran today: that of Ali Shariati, whose death two years ago gave him the position, so privileged in Shi'ism, of the invisible Present, of the ever-present Absent.

During his studies in Europe, Shariati, who came from a religious milieu, had been in contact with leaders of the Algerian Revolution, with various left-wing Christian movements, with an entire current of non-Marxist socialism. (He had attended Gurvitch's classes.)⁵⁵ He knew the work of Fanon and Masignon.⁵⁶ He came back to Mashhad, where he taught that the true meaning of Shi'ism should not be sought in a religion that had been institutionalized since the seventeenth century, but in the sermons of social justice and

equality that had already been preached by the first imam. His "luck" was that persecution forced him to go to Tehran and to have to teach outside of the university, in a room prepared for him under the protection of a mosque. There, he addressed a public that was his, and that could soon be counted in the thousands: students, mullahs, intellectuals, modest people from the neighborhood of the bazaar, and people passing through from the provinces. Shariati died like a martyr, hunted and with his books banned. He gave himself up when his father was arrested instead of him. After a year in prison, shortly after having gone into exile, he died in a manner that very few accept as having stemmed from natural causes. The other day, at the big protest in Tehran, Shariati's name was the only one that was called out, besides that of Khomeini.

The Inventors of the State

I do not feel comfortable speaking of Islamic government as an "idea" or even as an "ideal." Rather, it impressed me as a form of "political will." It impressed me in its effort to politicize structures that are inseparably social and religious in response to current problems. It also impressed me in its attempt to open a spiritual dimension in politics.

In the short term, this political will raises two questions:

1. Is it sufficiently intense now, and is its determination clear enough to prevent an "Amini solution,"⁵⁷ which has in its favor (or against it, if one prefers) the fact that it is acceptable to the shah, that it is recommended by the foreign powers, that it aims at a Western-style parliamentary regime, and that it would undoubtedly privilege the Islamic religion?

2. Is this political will rooted deeply enough to become a permanent factor in the political life of Iran, or will it dissipate like a cloud when the sky of political reality will have finally cleared, and when we will be able to talk about programs, parties, a constitution, plans, and so forth?

Politicians might say that the answers to these two questions determine much of their tactics today.

With respect to this "political will," however, there are also two questions that concern me even more deeply.

One bears on Iran and its peculiar destiny. At the dawn of history, Persia invented the state and conferred its models on Islam. Its administrators staffed the caliphate. But from this same Islam, it derived a religion that gave to its people infinite resources to resist state power. In this will for an "Islamic government," should one see a reconciliation, a contradiction, or the threshold of something new?

The other question concerns this little corner of the earth whose land, both above and below the surface, has strategic importance at a global level. For the people who inhabit this land, what is the point of searching, even at the cost of their own lives, for this thing whose possibility we have forgotten since the Renaissance and the great crisis of Christianity, a *political spirituality*. I can already hear the French laughing, but I know that they are wrong.⁵⁸

An Iranian Woman Writes

by "Atoussa H."

First published as a letter in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, November 6, 1978.⁵⁹

Living in Paris, I am profoundly upset by the untroubled attitude of French leftists toward the possibility of an "Islamic government" that might replace the bloody tyranny of the shah. Michel Foucault, for example, seems moved by the "Muslim spirituality" that would advantageously replace, according to him, the ferocious capitalist dictatorship that is tottering today. After twenty-five years of silence and oppression, do the Iranian people have no other choice than that between the SAVAK and religious fanaticism? In order to have an idea of what the "spirituality" of the Quran, applied to the letter under Ayatollah Khomeini's type of moral order, would mean, it is not a bad idea to reread the texts. [. . .]⁶⁰ Sura 2: "Your wives are for you a field; come then to your field as you wish."⁶¹ Clearly, the man is the lord, the wife the slave; she can be used at his whim; she can say nothing. She must wear the veil, born from the Prophet's jealousy toward Aisha!⁶² We are not dealing here with a spiritual parable, but rather with a choice concerning the type of society we want. Today, unveiled women are often insulted, and young Muslim men do not themselves hide the fact that, in the regime that they wish for, women should behave or else be punished. It is also written that minorities have the right to freedom, on the condition that they do not injure the majority. At what point do the minorities begin to "injure the majority"? [. . .]

Spirituality? A return to deeply rooted wellsprings? Saudi Arabia drinks from the wellspring of Islam. Hands and heads fall, for thieves and lovers. [. . .] It seems that for the Western Left, which lacks humanism, Islam is desirable . . .⁶³ for other people. Many Iranians are, like me, distressed and desperate about the thought of an "Islamic" government. We know what it is. Everywhere outside Iran, Islam serves as a cover for feudal or pseudo-revolutionary oppression. Often also, as in Tunisia, in Pakistan, in Indonesia, and at home, Islam—alas!—is the only means of expression for a muzzled

people. The Western liberal Left needs to know that Islamic law can become a dead weight on societies hungering for change. The Left should not let itself be seduced by a cure that is perhaps worse than the disease.

Foucault's Response to Atoussa H.

First published as a letter in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, November 13, 1978.

Mme. Atoussa H. did not read the article she criticizes. This is her right. But she should not have credited me with the idea that "Muslim spirituality would advantageously replace dictatorship." Since people protested and were killed in Iran while shouting "Islamic government," one had an elementary obligation to ask oneself what content was given to the expression and what forces drove it. In addition, I pointed out several elements that did not seem to me to be very reassuring. If there had been in Mme. H.'s letter only a misreading, I would not have responded to it. But it contains two intolerable things: (1) It merges together all the aspects, all the forms, and all the potentialities of Islam within a single expression of contempt, for the sake of rejecting them in their entirety under the thousand-year-old reproach of "fanaticism." (2) It suspects all Westerners of being interested in Islam only due to scorn for Muslims. What could we say about a Westerner who would scorn Islam? The problem of Islam as a political force is an essential one for our time and the coming years. In order to approach it with a minimum of intelligence, the first condition is not to begin by bringing in hatred.

A Revolt with Bare Hands

First published in *Corriere della sera*, November 5, 1978.

Tehran—The kings of the last century were after all quite accommodating. One could see them in the early morning fleeing their palaces in big black sedans after having abdicated to a worried and courteous minister. Were the people in power more timorous than today, less attached to power, more sensitive to hate, or perhaps simply not as well armed? The fact remains that governments fell easily when the people went into the streets.

In the twentieth century, in order to overthrow a regime, more than "emotions" are needed. Arms, a military command, organization, preparation, and so forth are necessary. What is happening in Iran is enough to worry today's

observers. In it they recognize not China, not Cuba, and not Vietnam,⁶⁴ but rather a tidal wave without a military leadership, without a vanguard, without a party. Nor can they find in it the movements of 1968.⁶⁵ This is because the men and women who protest with banners and flowers in Iran have an immediate political goal: They blame the shah and his regime, and in recent days they are indeed in the process of overthrowing them.

When I left Tehran a month ago, the movement was thought to be irreversible, but it was still possible to think that it would grow more slowly. Sudden obstacles could have emerged. There could have been a bloodbath if the movement became more intense; efforts to break it up if it spread; or a slowing down, if it showed that it was incapable of developing a program. None of this has happened, and things have developed very quickly.

Look at the first paradox and the first cause of its intensification. For ten years, the population has opposed a regime that is one of the best armed in the world, with a police force that is among the most powerful on earth. They have done so with bare hands, without resorting to armed struggle, with a determination and a courage that are in the process of immobilizing the army, which, little by little, freezes and hesitates to fire on them. Two months ago, the army killed three to four thousand in Djaleh Square. Yesterday, two hundred thousand people marched in front of soldiers, who did not react. The government is reduced to sending in provocateurs, to no avail. As the final crisis looms, recourse to violent repression seems less and less possible. The uprising of a whole society has choked off the possibility of civil war.

The second paradox is that the revolt spread without splits or internal conflicts. The reopening of the universities could have put into the forefront the students, who are more westernized and more Marxist than the mullahs from the countryside. The liberation of over a thousand political prisoners could have created a conflict between old and new oppositionists. Finally and most important, the strike by the oil workers could have, on the one hand, worried the bourgeoisie of the bazaar and, on the other hand, started a cycle of strictly job-oriented demands. The modern industrialized sector could have separated itself from the "traditional" sector (by immediately accepting pay raises—the government was counting on this). But none of this happened. What's more, the striking workers gave a tremendous economic weapon to the movement. The shutdown of the refineries dried up the government's sources of revenue and gave an international dimension to the Iranian crisis. For Iran's trading partners, the shah became an obstacle to their oil supply. This is a fitting response to those who had in an earlier period overthrown Mossadeq and reestablished the monarchy, the better to control the oil.

The Revolt in Iran Spreads on Cassette Tapes

First published in *Corriere della sera*, November 19, 1978.⁷²

Tehran—In Iran the religious calendar sets the political schedule. On December 2, the Muharram celebrations will begin.⁷³ The death of Imam Hussein will be celebrated. It is the great ritual of penitence. (Not long ago, one could still see marchers flagellating themselves.) But the feeling of sinfulness that could remind us of Christianity is indissolubly linked to the exaltation of martyrdom for a just cause. It is a time when the crowds are ready to advance toward death in the intoxication of sacrifice. During these days, the Shi'ite people become enamored with extremes.

It is said that order is slowly being reestablished in Iran. In fact, the whole country is holding its breath. An American advisor sounds hopeful: "If we hang on during Muharram, everything can be saved. Otherwise . . ." The State Department is also awaiting the anniversary of the martyred imam.

Between the demonstrations in September during Ramadan and the impending great mourning, what is to be done? At first, there was the mild response under Sharif-Imami.⁷⁴ Prisoners were freed, political parties legalized, and censorship abolished. There was an attempt to decrease political tensions in order to prevent them from feeding the religious fervor. Then on November 5 came a harsh response, with the military coming to power. It is now up to the army to occupy the country with enough force to limit the effects of Muharram, but also in a fashion measured enough to avoid an explosion of despair.

It is said that this change of direction was suggested to or imposed on the shah by a small lobby: General Oveisi, manufacturers like Khayami (automobiles) and Reza'i (copper), politicians like Fouroud (former mayor of Tehran) or Massoudi (from the 1953 coup).⁷⁵ Perhaps. But if a sudden decision had been made to change the leadership team in order to prepare for Muharram "the hard way," it is due to the situation in the country as a whole. Specifically, it is because of the strikes that have spread from one province to another like a prairie fire. There are strikes in the oil sector, the steel mills, the Mino factories,⁷⁶ public transport, Iran Air, and public administration. Most surprisingly, there were work stoppages in customs houses and tax bureaus, where work is not easily stopped, given the fact that its remuneration is increased tenfold or a hundredfold by smuggling and bribery. In a regime like that of the shah, if corruption itself goes on strike . . .⁷⁷

I wanted to know what this strike movement, its magnitude hidden by censorship, is made of. In Tehran, I met some of the more "privileged" strikers, a crew from Iran Air. They had an elegant apartment, teak furniture, and

American magazines. A thousand kilometers to the south, I met the "hard ones," those from the oil sector. What European has not dreamed about Abadan, the biggest refinery in the world, producing six million barrels a day? It is a surprise to find it to be so huge, yet rather old-fashioned, surrounded by corrugated iron, with British-style management buildings, half-industrial and half-colonial, that one can glimpse above the flares and the chimneys. It is a colonial governor's palace, modified by the austerity of a big Manchester spinning mill. But one can see that it is a powerful institution, respectable and rich, by the tremendous misery it has created on this island of sand between two yellowish rivers. The misery starts around the factory with a sort of subtropical mining village, then very quickly one enters the slums where children swarm between truck chassis and heaps of scrap iron, and finally one arrives at the hovels of dried mud bathed in filth. There, crouching children neither cry nor move. Then everything disappears in the grove of palms that leads to the desert, which is the front and the rear of one of the most valuable properties in the world.

There are amazing similarities between the Iran Air strikers, who meet you in their living rooms, and those of Abadan, whom one must meet in secret after mysterious arrangements have been made. There is this one, if no other. They were on strike for the first time, the former because they had not had the desire, the latter because they had not had the right. Furthermore, all these strikes graft political issues directly onto economic demands. The workers from the refinery received a 25 percent raise last March. After October 23, the beginning of the strike, they obtained, without too many discussions on labor issues, first a 10 percent wage increase, then a 10 percent "factory bonus." ("Wording had to be found to justify this raise," said a management representative.) Then they were given a hundred rials every day for lunch.⁷⁸ It seems as though the Abadan strikers could continue indefinitely. At any rate, like the pilots of Iran Air who cannot complain about their salaries, what they want is the abolition of martial law, the liberation of all political prisoners, the dissolution—some say—of the SAVAK, and the punishment of thieves and torturers.

Neither the Iran Air workers nor the oil workers—and this seemed to me a little strange at the time—asked for the departure of the shah or the "end of the regime." Each, however, claims to want it. Caution? Perhaps. The fact is that, first and foremost, they believe that it is up to the entire people to formulate this demand and, when the time comes, to impose it. It suffices for the moment that the old saint in exile in Paris asks for this on their behalf, without faltering. Today, they are all conscious of participating in a political strike, because they are doing so in solidarity with the entire nation. An Iran

Air pilot explained to me that during the flight he is responsible for the *safety* of the passengers. If he does not fly today, it is because he has to watch over the *safety* of the country. In Abadan, the workers say that production has never been totally stopped and that it has been partially started again because domestic needs must be met. The thirty-eight tankers lying offshore in the bay will still have to wait. Are these simple declarations of principle? Probably. Nevertheless, these declarations indicate the mood of these scattered strike movements. They do not constitute a *general* strike, but each one sees itself in *national* terms.

This is why these strikes can so easily support each other. The teachers of Abadan and the oil workers declared complete solidarity with one another. On November 4, the workers of Iran Nippon, of the Iran-Japan Petroleum Company, and of the petrochemical complex united with those from the refinery in a joint meeting. This is also why there has been a continual call for foreigners to leave, whether American technicians, French air hostesses, or Afghan laborers: "We want our country to be nationalized." How to transform these strikes with national ramifications into a general strike? This is the current problem. No single party has the necessary strength to achieve this. (The nationwide strike endorsed by some politicians for November 12 did not fail, as was said, but simply never took place.) On the one hand, the extraordinary strength of the movement leans locally on a few clandestine and diffuse organizations. (They stem from old Islamic or Marxist guerrilla movements, like that of Ettehadieh Communist that I heard about in Abadan.)⁷⁹ On the other hand, however, the point of connection is found outside of the country, outside of the political organizations, outside of all possible negotiations. This is in Khomeini, in his inflexible refusal to compromise and in the love that everyone individually feels for him. It was impressive to hear a Boeing pilot say in the name of his workmates: "You have in France the most precious thing that Iran has possessed for the last century. It is up to you to protect it." The tone was commanding. It was even more impressive to hear the strikers of Abadan say: "We are not particularly religious." "Whom do you trust then? A political party?" I asked. "No, no one." "A man?" I asked. "No, no one, except Khomeini, and he alone."

The first task undertaken by the military government was to bring the strikes to a halt, a classic expedient and thus uncertain. The SAVAK, the political police that had been the shame of the regime, has instead become its most embarrassing failure. Its agents, who returned to their previous vocation of brawlers, are sent everywhere to provoke, burn, and use their truncheons. Everything is then attributed to the strikers and the demonstrators, running the risk that such a provocation would only add fuel to the fire and create an

authentic explosion, as in Tehran. Even the army has moved into the Abadan refinery, leaving behind wounded people in its wake. It remains behind the factories with its armored vehicles. The soldiers have entered the workers' homes in order to lead them by force to the refinery. But how can they force them to work?

During the two months of the Sharif-Imami government, the news transmitted every day by the once again free press had "kindled" the strikes, one after the other. The military had to reestablish censorship, to which the journalists responded by refusing to publish the newspapers. They knew very well that they were making way for an entire network of information, a network that fifteen years of obscurantism had allowed people to perfect—that of telephones, of cassette tapes, of mosques and sermons, and of law offices and intellectual circles.

I was able to observe the functioning of one of these "grassroots cells" of information. It was near one of the Abadan mosques, with the usual backdrop of great poverty, except for a few carpets. The mullah, his back against a bookshelf filled with religious books and surrounded by a dozen of the faithful, was seated next to an old telephone that was constantly ringing—work stopped in Ahwaz, several deaths in Lahijan, and so forth. At that very moment, when the public relations director of the National Iranian Oil Company was manufacturing for journalists the "international truth" of the strike (economic demands that had been satisfied, absolutely no political demands, general and continued resumption of work), I heard the mullah, in his corner, manufacturing the "Iranian truth" of the same event: there were no economic demands at all and all of them were political.

It is said that De Gaulle was able to resist the Algiers putsch, thanks to the transistor.⁸⁰ If the shah is about to fall, it will be due largely to the cassette tape. It is the tool *par excellence* of counterinformation. Last Sunday, I went to the Tehran cemetery, the only place where meetings are tolerated under martial law. People stood behind banners and laurel wreaths, cursing the shah. Then they sat down. One by one, three men, including a religious leader, stood up and started talking with great intensity, almost with violence. But when they were about to leave, at least two hundred soldiers blocked the gates with machine guns, armored vehicles, and two tanks. The speakers were arrested, as well as all those who had tape recorders.

But one can find, outside the doors of most provincial mosques, tapes of the most renowned orators at a very low price. One encounters children walking down the most crowded streets with tape recorders in their hands. They play these recorded voices from Qom, Mashhad, and Isfahan so loudly that they drown out the sound of cars; passersby do not need to stop to be

able to hear them. From town to town, the strikes start, die out, and start again, like flickering fires on the eve of the nights of Muharram.

The Mythical Leader of the Iranian Revolt

First published in *Corriere della sera*, November 26, 1978.⁸¹

Tehran—Iran's year-long period of unrest is coming to a head. On the watch-face of politics, the hand has hardly moved. The semi-liberal September government was replaced in November by a half-military one. In fact, the whole country is engulfed by revolt: the cities, the countryside, the religious centers, the oil regions, the bazaars, the universities, the civil servants, and the intellectuals. The privileged rats are jumping ship. An entire century in Iran—one of economic development, foreign domination, modernization, and the dynasty, as well as its daily life and its moral system—is being put into question. It is being totally rejected.

I cannot write the history of the future, and I am also rather clumsy at foreseeing the past. However, I would like to try to grasp *what is happening right now*, because these days nothing is finished, and the dice are still being rolled. It is perhaps this that is the work of a journalist, but it is true that I am nothing but a neophyte.

Iran was never colonized. In the nineteenth century, the British and the Russians divided it into zones of influence, according to a precolonial model. Then came oil, two World Wars, the Middle East conflict, and the great confrontations in Asia. At one stroke, Iran moved to a neocolonial position within the orbit of the United States. In a long period of dependency without direct colonization, the country's social structures were not radically destroyed. These social structures were not completely overturned, even by the surge of oil revenue, which certainly enriched the privileged, favored speculation, and permitted an over-provisioning of the army. The changes did not create new social forces, however. The bourgeoisie of the bazaars was weakened, and the village communities were shaken by the agrarian reform. However, both of them survived enough to suffer from dependency and the changes that it brought, but also enough to resist the regime that was responsible for these changes as well.

This same situation had the opposite effect on the political movements. In the half-light of dependency, they too subsisted, but could not sustain themselves as real forces. This was due not only to repression, but also to their own choices. The Communist Party was tied to the USSR, was compromised

by the occupation of Azerbaijan under Stalin, and was ambiguous in its support of the "bourgeois nationalism" of Mossadeq.⁸² With respect to the National Front, heir of this same Mossadeq, it has been waiting for fifteen years, without making a move, for the moment of a liberalization that it did not believe to be possible without the permission of the Americans.⁸³ During this time, some impatient cadres from the Communist Party were becoming technocrats for the regime. They were dreaming of an authoritarian government that would develop a nationalist politics. In short, the political parties had been victims of the "dependent dictatorship" that was the shah's regime. In the name of realism, some played the card of independence, others that of freedom.

Because of, on the one hand, the absence of a colonizer-occupier and, on the other, the presence of a national army and a sizable police force, the political-military organizations, which elsewhere organized the struggle for decolonization and which, when the time came, found themselves in a position to negotiate independence and impose the departure of the colonial power, could not emerge. In Iran, the rejection of the regime is a massive social phenomenon. This does not mean that the rejection is confused, emotional, or barely self-conscious. On the contrary, it spreads in an oddly effective manner, from the strikes to the demonstrations, from the bazaars to the universities, from the leaflets to the sermons, through shopkeepers, workers, clerics, teachers, and students. For the moment, however, no party, no man, and no political ideology can boast that it represents this movement. Nor can anyone claim to be at its head. This movement has no counterpart and no expression in the political order.

The paradox, however, is that it constitutes a perfectly unified collective will. It is surprising to see this immense country, with a population distributed around two large desert plateaus, a country able to afford the latest technical innovations alongside forms of life unchanged for the last thousand years, a country that is languishing under censorship and the absence of public freedoms, and yet demonstrating an extraordinary unity in spite of all this. It is the same protest, it is the same will, that is expressed by a doctor from Tehran and a provincial mullah, by an oil worker, by a postal employee, and by a female student wearing the chador. This will includes something rather disconcerting. It is always based on the same thing, a sole and very precise thing, the departure of the shah. But for the Iranian people, this unique thing means *everything*. This political will yearns for the end of dependency, the disappearance of the police, the redistribution of oil revenue, an attack on corruption, the reactivation of Islam, another way of life, and new relations with the West, with the Arab countries, with Asia, and so forth. Somewhat

Personally, I am somewhat skeptical concerning the extent to which governments will respect their obligations. However, it is good that the governed can rise up to remind everyone that they did not simply give up their rights to the one who governs, but that they are determined to impose obligations on him. No government can escape these fundamental obligations and, from this point of view, the trials taking place today in Iran do not fail to cause concern.

Nothing is more important in the history of a people than the rare moments when it rises up collectively in order to bring down a regime that it no longer supports. On the other hand, nothing is more important for the daily life of a people than those moments, so frequent, when the public authorities turn against an individual, proclaiming him their enemy and deciding to bring him down. Never do the public authorities have more essential obligations that they need to respect than in such moments. Political trials are always the touchstone, not because the accused are never criminals, but because here the public authorities operate without a mask. They submit themselves to judgment when they judge their enemies.

The public authorities always affirm that they need to be respected, and it is precisely here that they must be absolutely respectful. The right of defending the people that the public authorities invoke also gives them very heavy obligations.

It is necessary—and it is urgent—to give the one being prosecuted as many means of defense and as many rights as possible. Is he “obviously guilty”? Does he have the whole of public opinion against him? Is he hated by his people? This, precisely, confers on him rights, all the more intangible ones. It is the obligation of the one who governs to explain and to guarantee them to the accused. For a government, there can be no “vilest of men.”

It is also the obligation of every government to show to all—that is, to the most humble, the most obstinate, the most blind of those it governs—under what conditions, how, and in the name of what authority it can claim for itself the right to punish in its name. Even though a punishment that one refuses to explain can be justified, it will still be an injustice, both toward the one who is sentenced and toward all those subject to trial.

Concerning this obligation by a government to submit itself to judgment when it claims to judge, I believe that it must accept it with respect to all men in the world. No more than I do, would I imagine that you would allow a principle of sovereignty that would have to justify itself only to itself. To govern is not self-evident, any more than to sentence, any more than to kill. It is good that a man, any man, even if he is on the other side of the world, can rise to speak because he no longer can stand to see another tortured or

condemned. This is not about interfering in the internal affairs of a state. Those who protested on behalf of a single Iranian tortured in the depths of a SAVAK prison were interfering in the most universal matter of all.

Perhaps it will be said that the majority of the Iranian people shows that it has confidence in the regime that is being established and therefore also in its judicial practices. The fact of being accepted, supported, and voted for overwhelmingly does not attenuate the obligations of governments. Rather, it imposes stricter ones on them.

Evidently, Mr. Prime Minister, I do not have any authority to address myself in such a manner to you, except the permission that you gave me, by helping me understand, at our first meeting, that for you, governing is not a coveted right, but an extremely difficult obligation. You have to do what is necessary in order that the people will never regret the uncompromising force with which it has just liberated itself.

Is It Useless to Revolt?

First published on page one of *Le Monde*, May 11–12, 1979.

“To make the shah leave, we are ready to die by the thousands,” Iranians said last summer. These days, the ayatollah says, “Let Iran bleed, to make the revolution strong.”

There is a strange echo between these sentences, which seem to be linked. Does our horror at the second condemn the intoxication of the first?

Uprisings belong to history, but in a certain way, they escape it. The movement through which a lone man, a group, a minority, or an entire people say, “I will no longer obey,” and are willing to risk their lives in the face of a power that they believe to be unjust, seems to me to be irreducible. This is because no power is capable of making it absolutely impossible. Warsaw will always have its ghetto in revolt and its sewers populated with insurgents.¹²⁵ The man in revolt is ultimately inexplicable. There must be an uprooting that interrupts the unfolding of history, and its long series of reasons why, for a man “really” to prefer the risk of death over the certainty of having to obey.

All the forms of freedom that are acquired or demanded, all the rights that are claimed, even concerning the things that seem to be of least importance, probably have a last point of anchor here, more solid and experiential than “natural rights.” If societies persist and survive, that is to say if power in these societies is not “absolutely absolute,” it is because behind all the consent and the coercion, beyond the threats, the violence, and the persuasion, there is

the possibility of this moment where life cannot be exchanged, where power becomes powerless, and where, in front of the gallows and the machine guns, men rise up.

Because it is in this way both "outside of history" and in history, because each person stakes his life and his death, one can understand why uprisings have been able to find their expression and their drama so readily in religious forms. For centuries, all of these promises of the hereafter or of the renewal of time, whether they concerned the awaited savior, the kingdom of the last days, or the reign of the absolute good, did not constitute an ideological cloak. Instead, they constituted the very manner in which these uprisings were lived, at least in those places where the religious forms lent themselves to such possibilities.

Then came the age of "revolution." For two centuries, it hung over [*surplombé*]¹²⁶ history, organized our perception of time, and polarized hopes. The age of revolution has constituted a gigantic effort to acclimate uprisings within a rational and controllable history. "Revolution" gave these uprisings a legitimacy, sorted out their good and bad forms, and defined their laws of development. For uprisings, it established preliminary conditions, objectives, and ways of bringing them to an end. Even the profession of revolution was defined. By thus repatriating revolt into the discourse of revolution, it was said, the uprising would appear in all its truth and continue to its true conclusion. This was a marvelous promise. Some will say that the uprising thus found itself colonized by *realpolitik*. Others will say that the dimension of a rational history was opened to it. I prefer the question that Horkheimer used to ask, a naïve question, and a little feverish: "But is it really so desirable, this revolution?"¹²⁷

Concerning the enigma of the uprising, for those who sought in Iran not the "deep reasons" for the movement, but the manner in which it was lived; for those who tried to understand what was going on in the heads of these men and women when they risked their lives, one thing was striking. They inscribed, on the borders of heaven and earth, in a dream-history that was as religious as it was political, all their hunger, their humiliation, their hatred of the regime and their will to bring it down. They confronted the Pahlavis, in a game where each one staked his life and his death, a game that was also about sacrifices and millennial promises. Thus, came the celebrated demonstrations, which played such an important role. These demonstrations could, at the same time, respond concretely to the threat of the army (to the point of paralyzing it), unfold according to the rhythm of religious ceremonies, and finally refer to a timeless drama in which power is always accursed. This drama

caused a surprising superimposition to appear in the middle of the twentieth century: a movement strong enough to bring down a seemingly well-armed regime, all the while remaining in touch with the old dreams that were once familiar to the West, when it too wanted to inscribe the figures of spirituality on the ground of politics.

After years of censorship and persecution, with a political class that was strung along, with political parties forbidden, and revolutionary groups decimated, on what, if not on religion, could the disarray and then the revolt of a population traumatized by "development," "reform," "urbanization," and all the other failures of the regime, lean on? This is true, but could the religious element be expected to quickly efface itself for the benefit of more substantial forces and less "archaic" ideologies? Probably not, and for several reasons.

First, there was the movement's quick success, which reinforced the form that it had taken. There was the institutional solidity of a clergy whose hold over the population was strong, and which had strong political ambitions. There was the whole context of the Islamic movement. Because of the strategic positions that Islam occupies, because of the economic importance that the Muslim countries hold, and because of the movement's power to expand on two continents, it constitutes, in the region surrounding Iran, an important and complex reality. As a result, the imaginary content of the revolt did not dissipate in the broad daylight of the revolution. It was immediately transposed onto a political scene that seemed totally willing to receive it but was in fact of an entirely different nature. At this stage, the most important and the most atrocious mingle—the extraordinary hope of remaking Islam into a great living civilization and various forms of virulent xenophobia, as well as the global stakes and the regional rivalries. And the problem of imperialisms. And the subjugation of women, and so on.

The Iranian movement did not experience the "law" of revolutions that would, some say, make the tyranny that already secretly inhabited them reappear underneath the blind enthusiasm of the masses. What constituted the most internal and the most intensely lived part of the uprising touched, in an unmediated fashion, on an already overcrowded political chessboard, but such contact is not identity. The spirituality of those who were going to their deaths has no similarity whatsoever with the bloody government of a fundamentalist clergy. The Iranian clerics want to authenticate their regime through the significations that the uprising had. It is no different to discredit the fact of the uprising on the grounds that there is today a government of mullahs. In both cases, there is "fear," fear of what just happened last fall in Iran, something of which the world had not seen an example for a long time.

Hence, precisely, the necessity of underscoring what is not reducible in such a movement and what is also profoundly threatening for all despotisms, those of today as well as yesterday.

It is certainly not shameful to change one's opinions, but there is no reason to say that one's opinion has changed when one is against hands being chopped off today, after having been against the tortures of the SAVAK yesterday.

No one has the right to say, "Revolt for me, the final liberation of each man hinges on it." But I do not agree with those who would say, "It is useless to revolt, it will always be the same." One does not dictate to those who risk their lives in the face of power. Is it right to rebel, or not? Let us leave this question open. It is a fact that people rise up, and it is through this that a subjectivity (not that of great men, but that of anyone) introduces itself into history and gives it its life. A delinquent puts his life on the line against abusive punishment, a madman cannot stand anymore being closed in and pushed down, or a people rejects a regime that oppresses it. This does not make the first one innocent, does not cure the second, and does not guarantee to the third the results that were promised. No one, by the way, is required to stand in solidarity with them. No one is required to think that these confused voices sing better than others and speak the truth in its ultimate depth. It is enough that they exist and that they have against them all that strives to silence them, to make it meaningful to listen to them and to search for what they want to say. A question of morality? Perhaps. A question of reality, certainly. All the disillusionments of history will not change this. It is precisely because there are such voices that human time does not take the form of evolution, but that of "history."

This is inseparable from another principle. The power that a man exerts over another is always dangerous. I am not saying that power, by nature, is evil. I am saying that power by its mechanisms is infinite (which does not mean that it is all-powerful, on the contrary). The rules limiting it will never be rigorous enough. Universal principles are never strict enough to take away from it all the opportunities that it seizes. Inviolable laws and unrestricted rights must always be opposed to power.

These days, intellectuals do not have a very good "press." I believe that I can use this word in a rather precise manner. Therefore, now is not the time to declare that one is not an intellectual. Besides, it would make you smile. I am an intellectual. If I were asked how I conceive of what I do, here is how I would answer. The strategist is a man who says, "How does this death, this outcry, or this uprising matter in relation to the needs of the whole and to such and such general principle in the particular situation in which we find ourselves?" It is

all the same to me if this strategist is a politician, a historian, a revolutionary, or a partisan of the shah or of the ayatollah, for my theoretical ethics are on the opposite side. My ethics are "antistrategic." One must be respectful when a singularity arises and intransigent as soon as the state violates universals. It is a simple choice, but hard work: One needs to watch, a bit underneath history, for what breaks and agitates it, and keep watch, a bit behind politics, over what must unconditionally limit it. After all, this is my work. I am neither the first nor the only one to do it, but I chose it.

Critique of Foucault on Iran

by Maxime Rodinson

First published as the introduction to a reprint (Rodinson 1993a) of his "Khomeini and the 'Primacy of the Spiritual'" (also translated in this appendix, pp. 241-45). The present title was supplied by the translator.

"Khomeini and the 'Primacy of the Spiritual'" was intended as a clarification amid what I thought was a wave of confusion. At any rate, it still bears witness to the atmosphere among the leftist (and sometimes rightist) European and American intelligentsia, during and immediately after the period when the Iranian Revolution toppled the shah under the banner of Shi'ite Islam.

Gradually, as the revolt developed in Iran in 1977 and 1978 (see "Islam Resurgent?" app., 223-38), these leftist intellectuals had turned their attention in this direction, with greater and greater intensity. The hope for a world revolution that would abolish exploitation and the oppression of man by man, for a long time dead or moribund, resurfaced, timidly at first and then with more assurance. Could it have been that this hope now found itself incarnated in the most unexpected way in the Muslim Orient, up to now a not very promising location for it; and more precisely, in this old man lost in a universe of medieval thought?

High-flying intellectuals hurled themselves toward an Iran that was on fire. They wanted to see with their own eyes, to witness then and there this astonishing revolutionary process, to study it and to scrutinize it. Over there, Iranian intellectual friends, or friends of friends, took them in hand.

The latter were intoxicated by a struggle that was making gains every day. Soon, it would be the intoxication of victory. Every day brought new evidence of the mobilizing power of Islamic slogans and of the charisma of the one who embodied them most energetically, Ayatollah Khomeini. Under these slogans, barehanded crowds faced machine-guns and rifles.