[THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION]

An Interdisciplinary Approach

Joep Bijhold
3510264
Islamic Studies

Kaia de Graaf
3976386
Literary Studies

Sara van der Hoeven
3975762
Political Geography

Herman Hendriks
Supervisor

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INTRODUCTION

In 1978-1979, a revolution in Iran succeeded in toppling the Shah, the authoritarian monarch supported by the United States of America. After the Shah was forced to leave the country, Khomeini, one of the leaders of the revolution, returned from his exile in France to become the Supreme Leader of Iran. In the newly created Islamic Republic of Iran, Shi'a Islam was implemented as the state religion (Parsa, 1989; Skocpol, 1982).

The results of this revolution are at present still noticeable in Iran; not only in the obvious domains of politics and religion, but also on a personal level and in everyday life. In this interdisciplinary research project we shall try and reach a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of the Iranian revolution that took place in 1979. That is, we will attempt to answer the following research question:

What are the cultural-political effects of the Iranian revolution of 1979?

We will go into this question on three different levels: international, national and individual. This is because we want our insights to yield a comprehensive understanding of contemporary Iran, something which can only be achieved by looking at multiple levels and their interaction.

Because the above research question is complex and cannot be answered from the perspective of a single discipline, we shall adopt an interdisciplinary approach. This will hopefully provide coherence to fragmented theories and enhance the explanatory powers of the individual disciplines (Repko, 2012: 272). The problem is complex because the effects of the Iranian revolution exist on multiple levels: they obviously involve politics and religion, but also affect the economical, societal, and personal domain, corresponding with the levels mentioned above. We will approach this research question from the perspective of the disciplines of Political Geography, Islamic Studies, and Literary Studies. We have chosen not to include the economic and social sciences, because the relevant economic effects already come into the fore in political geographical insights, while the societal effects abound in Islamic and Literary studies. Whereas each of our disciplines contributes to the research from a different point of view, their combination offers a comprehensive understanding of the effects of the Iranian Revolution ranging from the political macro-level to the personal micro-level.

Firstly, from the perspective of Political Geography, the focus will be on the position of Iran within the political and economic world-system. In this chapter it will be investigated how the geopolitical context has influenced the course the revolution has taken. In connection to this, the discipline will study the effects of the Iranian revolution by looking at Iran's foreign policy and the way in which its geopolitical codes derive from it, i.e.: the "manner in which a country orientates itself towards the world" in terms of 'allies' and 'enemies' (Flint C. , 2012). Finally, the geopolitical codes of other countries concerning Iran are also continuously shaped by the changing geopolitical code of Iran which in turn provides a more comprehensive context in view of the effects of the Iranian revolution. This means that the following three disciplinary sub-questions will be addressed:

- *How are the effects of the revolution shaped by its geopolitical context?*

- *How did Iran's geopolitical code develop in the decades after the revolution?*

- *How did the geopolitical codes of other, powerful, countries change considering Iran after the revolution and how did this affect Iranian politics?*

Together, the developments derived from these three sub-questions will shed light on the effects of the Iranian Revolution from a geopolitical perspective.

Secondly, Religious Studies will focus on Shi'a Islam, the religion that provided a framework for the revolution; for Iran to become an Islamic state, however, Shi'a Islam itself also had to undergo its own revolution. Khomeini introduced the concept of *Velayat-e faqih* or 'guardianship of the jurist', that allowed the clergy to take on political power. Even today, the effects of this revolution within Islam itself are being used to legitimize the Islamic Republic of Iran and dispose of 'political enemies of the state' (Goldschmidt & Davidson, 2012). For understanding the effects of the Iranian Revolution, religious studies will hence focus on the following disciplinary sub-questions:

- *How did Shi'a Islam develop in Islamic history?*

- *In what way did the concept of 'Velayat-e faqih' revolutionize Islamic thinking?*

- *How did Shi'a Islam become a full political force?*

Thirdly, Literature Studies can show how individuals' reactions to the political situation in Iran reflect, and at the same time influence, Iranian society. This discipline will therefore analyse the literature that was written in the decades before the revolution, but it will also study the literature produced after the revolution, both the literature that supports the Islamic state and the literature that opposes it – in an attempt to sketch a picture of the effects of the revolution on an individual level. The relevant disciplinary sub-question is the following one:

- *What effects did the Iranian revolution of 1979 have on Iranian literature and its role in Iranian society?*

First, we will present the insights gained from considering the international level from a political geographical perspective, thereby creating a framework for the remaining disciplinary insights. Second, we will describe the politicization of Shi'a Islam on the national level and its legacy, in an account that elaborates on the preceding section. Third, we will present insights regarding the individual level that were obtained from a literary perspective that complements the other two approaches. After separately presenting the insights of the various disciplines we will first deal with differences and conflicts between these insights by creating common ground, thus following the integration methods described in *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* by Allen F. Repko (2012). Finally, we will integrate the different disciplinary insights into a more comprehensive understanding that answers our research question.

Iran's Changing Geopolitics

The Iranian revolution and its effects did not occur in isolation and can only be fully understood within the context of the modern world-system and capitalist world economy. Therefore, the disciplinary perspective of Political Geography is needed to situate the political effects of the Iranian Revolution in the broader framework of an international inter-state system.

In this chapter the following disciplinary sub-questions will be tackled:

- *How are the effects of the revolution shaped by its geopolitical context?*

- *How did Iran's geopolitical code develop in the decades after the revolution?*

- *How did the geopolitical codes of other, powerful, countries change considering Iran after the revolution and how did this affect Iranian politics?*

The effects of the Iranian revolution will be analysed from the world-system perspective offered by the comprehensive theoretical framework of Wallerstein. This specific perspective is used for the analysis in view of the fact that "social change in one country can only be fully understood within the wider context that is the modern world-system" (Flint & Taylor, 2011). The world-system perspective views the multiplicity of states as interdependent; both rich and poor countries are part of this system and experience different (economical) processes within it. The world-economy that is part of this system encompasses a single capitalist world market and a three-tire structure of core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral countries. In this system, Iran is viewed as a semi-peripheral country: exploiting peripheral areas while suffering exploitation by the core. The distribution of power, the so-called world order, is operated accordingly and abided by most countries through their respective geopolitical codes – "the manner in which a country orientates itself towards the world" in terms of 'allies' and 'enemies' (Flint C. , 2012).

In addition to this perspective, the idea of Modelski's model of world leadership is used throughout this chapter. This model shows the hegemony of world powers in phases of undisputed and disputed power. The power of a hegemon lays in its agenda-setting capacity and its ability to enforce it worldwide. This model is useful in order to place the events related to the Iranian revolution into a historical perspective and contextualise

the geopolitical codes of states within the within the world-system. The Iranian revolution and its effects played during the world hegemony of the United States of America (US) (Flint C. , 2012).

Overall, this provides a political geographical framework that can be used for explaining geopolitical actions of Iran in the wake of the 1979 revolution. Also, the development of Iran's geopolitical codes is placed into context and, thus, better understood (Flint & Taylor, 2011; Flint C. , 2012). The framework can also be used to put the insights from the other disciplinary chapters in context.

The most important dynamics that can be derived from this framework include the following: the US as world hegemon, challenged by the Soviet Union (SU) during the Cold War, the disintegration of the SU in 1991, the master frame 'The War on Terror' since September 11, 2001, and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 that made Islam the substitute of Communism as threat to US hegemony.

Figure 1 (Belfer Center for Science and International Affair, 2015)

In order to continue the geopolitical analysis, Iran's geographical position needs to be explained. Iran is part of the Persian Gulf region within the Middle East (see Figure 1 and

2). The borders of the country have been quite stable over the past centuries; it is separated from its surrounding countries by several mountainous areas. Around 60% of the population is Persian; the other part of the population consists of Kurdish, Azeri and other minorities (CIA, 2015).

THE GEOPOLITICAL WORLD ORDER

Within the Persian Gulf region, more than 63% of the world's crude oil reserves and around 40% of the world's gas reserves are located. According to Sajedi (2009), this has been one of the main reasons why the US has always sought to obtain security and control through setting up friendly governments in this region, thus securing its own hegemony. Insecurity in this region would not only threaten Western oil-dependent countries but also endanger the oil-exporting countries. This is one of the reasons why the revolution that took place in Iran in 1979 caused so much anxiety – not only for the US, who lost an ally, but also within the region itself. Together with Saudi Arabia, Iran functioned for the US as a local 'great' power that helped keep the SU out of the Persian Gulf during the Cold War. Later, other concerns would also contribute to a continuing US-presence in the Persian Gulf region, such as the SU military entry in Afghanistan later in 1979, countering terrorism, and eliminating the threat of weapons of mass destruction (Sajedi, 2009).

The exportation of oil generated great revenues for Iran. It functioned as the economic motor of the country and made it into a rentier-state. This is the most visible aspect of the interdependence between different countries within the world-system (Skocpol, 1982; Sajedi, 2009).

The Iranian Revolution and the first decade under the rule of Supreme Leader Khomeini took place within the geopolitical context of the Cold War. Iran lay in between the spheres of influence of the two greatest world powers, the US and the SU. Because of this, both powers were not in a position to intervene militarily when the social mass revolution started (Skocpol, 1988). However, great powers do influence the geopolitical codes of other states. Thus, for example, the US, being one of the great powers in the Cold War era, clearly influenced the geopolitical code of Iran, as is visible in its friendly relations with the overthrown Shah Pahlavi (Flint & Taylor, 2011). The US helped Pahlavi back to power in 1953 and their backing of his regime had helped Iran, in return,

to gain regional military power and ensure regional security. In this way US' interests in the region were secured (Skocpol, 1982; Sajedi, 2009).

In contrast, after the Shah had been overthrown the US still played an important role in the creation of the geopolitical code of Iran but it had a reverse effect. In Iran the anti-America framing was already apparent before and during the revolution, and it became an institutional part of Iranian foreign policy in the wake of the Revolution under the rule of Khomeini and later presidents (Rakel, 2007; Skocpol, 1988).

Most of the time, the West and many Arab states have viewed Iran's actions as ideologically driven and expansionist. However, as will appear below, Iran's foreign policy has mostly been pragmatic (Gundogan, 2003; Rakel, 2007; Barzegar, 2008). The following section will depict the development of Iran's geopolitical code after the revolution through an analysis of the foreign policy of its different presidents. It is divided into five phases corresponding to the presidential terms.

KHOMEINI 1979-1989

Khomeini was able to greatly influence the decisions of Iranian foreign policy, not only because he had been the leader of the revolution and gained the Shah's power but also because in the first few years after the revolution the Islamic Republican Party in Iran "systematically reconstructed state organizations to embody direct controls by Shi'a clerics" (Skocpol, 1988). Other political parties and actors already present in the revolution, such as Marxists and other intellectuals, were eliminated from the previous all-encompassing revolutionary alliance. The Shi'a clerics succeeded in consolidating their cultural and political hegemony. However, as Shi'a Islam is not 'originally' a political religion, Khomeini used the concept of V*elayat-e faqih* to politicize the religion and legitimate both the taking over of the power by the clerics and the revolution as a whole (Skocpol, 1982; Skocpol, 1988).

During the challenge over world hegemony by the SU with the US during the Cold war, Iran under Khomeini took on the position of "*Neither East nor West but the Islamic Republic*". This included the idea of equilibrium, or *tavazon*, which contained the idea of maintaining Iran's independence through adopting a policy of non-alignment or impartiality (*bitarafi*). Iran did neither have close political relations with the West nor with the SU. Iran was able to do this because of its great oil revenues. This policy was

based on the history of the country, the country's geographic position, the spiritual and humanist ideals of Islam, and the reciprocity in relations with other countries (Ramazani, 1989; Sajedi, 2009). To present itself as a country independent from the two great powers, Iran made use of very anti-Western, and especially anti-US, framing to distinguish itself from the US which used to influence Iranian politics greatly. The US was equated to the West and the former regime of the Shah and labelled 'Satan' or enemy of Iran, for example, an important slogan during and after the revolution was 'Death to America'. Furthermore, the US embassy had been taken over by a group of Iranian Islamist students for 444 days and fifty two American diplomats and citizens were held hostage. Up until now this event is yearly commemorated during a demonstration in front of the embassy, during which slogans as the above are openly expressed (Broekhoven & Erdbrink, 2015; Rakel, 2007)

Another important aspect of Iran's geopolitical code in this decade was "the export of the revolution to free others from their oppressive and corrupt leaders" (Rakel, 2007; Skocpol, 1988). This meant, practically, supporting organisations abroad which could carry the ideology of the Islamic revolution outside of Iran, for example Iran's support of Hezbollah in Lebanon (Barzegar, 2008). Although Iranian policy in this decade appears very unified and mainstream when seen from the outside, within Iran there existed tensions between the conservative and radical factions in the government which later also affected the pragmatists (see Table 1 at the end of this section).

Overall, during the decade under Khomeini's rule Iran's policies were very much driven by the clergy's ideology. The conservatives advocated normalizing international relations, strict behavioral and dress codes for women and a limited role for the state in the economy. The radicals, in contrast, advocated economic self-sufficiency because they considered life-improvement of the impoverished masses a fundamental duty of the state. In addition to this they opposed any rapprochement with the US and supported the export of the revolution. Thus, these two factions differed on foreign policy, cultural issues, and state intervention in the economy (Banuazizi, 1994). Their difference can also be characterized, using Ramazani's words, as a conflict between 'Islam-firsters' (idealists) versus 'Iran-firsters' (realists), especially after the emergence of a pragmatist faction, which stressed the importance of Iran's international relations and was less doctrinaire (Banuazizi, 1994; Ramazani, 1989).

Iraq invaded Iran in 1981 as it seemed an instable country that had just emerged out of a revolution; Saddam Hussein justified the war at home by claiming that it would block the Persian-Shiite influence. This idea resonated with the fears of other Arab countries for Iranian Shiite influence, they were afraid that a powerful Shiite country could influence Shiites in their respective countries to revolt against their regimes as well, and also with the US fear of expansion of the Iranian revolution to the rest of the region. Subsequently, the West as well as the SU sided with the Arab countries and gave Iraq political and military support that led to a further political isolation of Iran (Barzegar, 2008; Rakel, 2007; Skocpol, 1988).

Iran framed the Iraqi invasion as being instigated by the US, which fitted perfectly in Iran's new geopolitical code and anti-Americanism, and also served to justify the war to the Iranian people. The country became politically and economically isolated, because of the war and its anti-Western confrontational policy, and, furthermore, because the Soviet Union viewed Iran as an anti-Soviet state. In spite of the apparent contradiction between Iran's Shi'a Islamic and Turkey's Kemalist political ideologies, Iran's local geopolitical code was pragmatic towards Turkey because it needed Turkey's alliance to continue its war with Iraq (Gundogan, 2003; Ramazani, 1989). The cease-fire with Iraq in 1988 led to a change in Iran's anti-West confrontational position by pragmatists' policy of Rafsanjani, as will be elaborated on in the next section (Banuazizi, 1994; Rakel, 2007; Ramazani, 1989).

So, the geopolitical context of the Cold War and the geopolitical code adopted by Iran under Khomeini, which can be summarized in the 'Islam-firster' slogan "*Neither East nor West but the Islamic republic*", led to Iran's cultural, economic, and political isolation in the first decade after the revolution. However, as Ramazani also notes, since Iran is part of an interdependent world-system and economy, the country "does not have another choice than accepting the concept of an interdependent world culture" (Ramazani, 1989). This means that however much Iran longed to be independent from either East or West under Khomeini, this was actually an impossible goal because of the reality of the world-system, -economy and Iran's semi-peripheral geopolitical position with its oil and gas reserves. It depended on the West and other countries for its oil and gas export

revenues while at the same time being boycotted by those same countries during the war.

RAFSAJANI 1989-1997

The presidency of Rafsajani, which started after the death of Khomeini and the installation of his replacement Khamenei, coincided with the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the SU, and the completion of the economic, political, and eventual cultural hegemony of the US (Flint & Taylor, 2011; Rakel, 2007). Iran's position as a strategic player in the global oil business had become more prominent; Russia and Iran allied in economic, political, military, and nuclear domains in what constituted a counterbalance to the NATO for Russia (Rakel, 2007).

Rafsajani's foreign policy can be characterised by "*Both North and South*"; breaking away from Khomeini. It mainly focused on economic development and post-war reconstruction after the Iran-Iraq war. The end of the war required a more pragmatic foreign policy, in contrast to the radical-conservative road Iran had been taking because of the need of foreign capital and technical expertise to deal with the post-war situation. Rafsajani's policy focused, furthermore, on improving relations with countries in the region and with Europe in order to restore stability and to reintegrate Iran in the world-economy by countering its isolation. Rafsajani can, thus, be characterised as an 'Iran-firster'. "Both North and South" refers to the ambition of preventing the US from filling the vacuum that had arisen in Central East Asia after the disintegration of the SU (North), as well as to Iran's non-alignment attitude (South) (Rakel, 2007). The pragmatist geopolitical code of Iran at the time stressed the importance of relations with other governments and was less 'doctrinaire' than the position of conservatives and radicals but was not as reformist as the approach to be adopted by succeeding president Khatami (Banuazizi, 1994; Rakel, 2007). Iran did not become much more integrated into the world-economy, however, because the US passed the Iran Non-Proliferation Act and the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, which prohibited investment in Iran's energy sector in the period 1992–1996 and which was extended until 2006 (Rakel, 2007). So, Iran's isolation continued at least on an economic level during this period.

KHATAMI 1997-2005

Khatami became president of Iran in 1997. His presidency is characterized by reform and an 'Iran-firster' "*dialogue between civilizations*". It can be seen as starting a trend of liberalization. Reformists "are mainly concerned with using foreign policy to improve the country's position in the global economy and to implement domestic reforms" and in that way Khatami continued what Rafsanjani had started. He tried to improve relations with EU-countries, Saudi-Arabia and other Persian Gulf countries, and focused on domestic issues. Also, ties with China were strengthened. (Rakel, 2007). Two issues became very central and prominent during Khatami's presidency: the nuclear issue and the US invasion in Iraq.

THE US INVASION IN IRAQ

After its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, it was Iraq, instead of Iran, that was considered an immediate threat to the security of the Persian Gulf. The US invaded Iraq in 2003, legitimizing it in the name of liberating the Iraqi people from a dictatorial regime within the master frame of the war on terror (President's Speech, 2003). As a result, other countries in the region became more willing to cooperate with Iran because they were afraid that it would fill the regional power vacuum that was created. Also Sunni Arab states were afraid of Iran's Shiite expansionist ideology (Rakel, 2007; Barzegar, 2008). According to Barzegar (2008), the vital interest for Iran in Iraq is not to support the creation of a Shiite regime but "to block the emergence of an unfriendly Iraqi regime". This further supports the argument that Iran prioritizes geopolitical reality and pragmatist rhetoric over ideology.

THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

Iran's nuclear programme was – and still is – considered a threat by the US and the EU, who want to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Iran, however, has continued this programme, which is claimed to generate nuclear energy only for peaceful means. In 2003, Iran signed the Non-Proliferation Act, which requires it to be transparent about all its nuclear activities. Since Iran wanted to prevent this case from being referred to the UN Security Council, it was agreed that "Iran would fully cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency and that it would suspend all uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities voluntarily" [...] "[British, French, and German Foreign

Ministers] declared their readiness to cooperate with Iran to promote security and stability in the Middle East, establish a regional nuclear-weapons-free zone, and provide Iran access to modern technology and supplies" (Rakel, 2007). However, in 2006 the case was transferred to the UN Security Council. Within Iran there is no consensus on the issue. Some elites are against the possession of weapons of mass destruction, while others argue that the possession of nuclear weapons "is Iran's right and a national security imperative" (Rakel, 2007).

AHMADINEJAD 2005-2013

The presidency of Ahmadinejad ended the trend of liberalization that had started under former presidencies and brought policy back to an 'Islam-firster' and conservative perspective, while still maintaining economic relations with European countries. A hostile attitude towards the West and Israel was adopted, more in keeping with the course of Supreme Leader Khamenei. The change of course of Iranian foreign policy that took place throughout Ahmedinejad's presidency led to polarization between conservatives and reformists (Rakel, 2007). The election of the conservative president Ahmedinejad did not bring the nuclear issue closer to a solution. The Security Council adopted the following resolution: "The Security Council today imposed sanctions on that country, blocking the import or export of sensitive nuclear material and equipment and freezing the financial assets of persons or entities supporting its proliferation sensitive nuclear activities or the development of nuclear-weapon delivery systems" (Security Council, 2006).

ROHANI 2013-PRESENT

In 2013 Rohani was elected as Iran's new president. Because his presidency is not over yet, only some generalities can be mentioned. His election meant change, as he presented himself in stark contrast to the presidency of Ahmedinejad. Iran's geopolitical code under Rohani changes because of the current domination of the pragmatic faction in Iranian politics. Iran seeks rapprochement with the West by wanting to engage in serious negotiations and stating that the nuclear program does not pose a threat to the region (Monshipouri & Dorraj, 2013). In April 2015, Rohani held a speech in which he made clear to the world that Iran is only using its nuclear programme for the development of the country, that is: for peaceful objectives. Thus, the programme is not

a threat to the region, said Rohani at a meeting with six world powers. An agreement concerning the issue will probably be signed in June 2015 (NOS, 2015; NOS, 2015a). Finally, Iran seeks to adjust its foreign policy towards economic recovery, thereby acknowledging the interdependent world-system and -economy (Monshipouri & Dorraj, 2013).

Table 1: Factionalism

Foreign policy	**Idealists**	**Realists**
Islam-firsters	Radicals Hardliners	Conservatives
Iran-firsters	Reformists	Pragmatists Moderates

CONCLUSION

The disciplinary perspective of Political Geography perspective has yielded the following insights concerning the effects of the Iranian revolution:

First, the revolution and its effects have been severely affected by the geopolitical context and realities at the time, as specified by the broader world-system; the Cold War, the disintegration of the SU in 1991, the master frame 'The War on Terror' since September 11, 2001, and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 that made Islam the substitute of Communism as threat to US hegemony. The geopolitical context has been characterized by the involvement of the US as a world power in the region for reasons of security and natural resources; Iran as a semi-peripheral country has been exploited by the core countries of the West.

Secondly, the revolution has influenced the continuously changing geopolitical code of Iran. Although it presented itself as primarily Shi'a doctrinaire driven through its anti-Western and 'Islam-first' rhetoric, its standpoint in the nuclear issue, and its support for e.g. Hezbollah, it actually acted pragmatically and mostly defensive in order to tackle security threats (Barzegar, 2008; Eisenstadt, 2001). In this respect, the US image of Iran and actual Iranian foreign policies are not in agreement with each other (Sariolghalam, 2003).

Furthermore, Iran has sought rapprochement with or distanced itself from the West and other countries, such as Turkey, Russia, other Persian Gulf countries, and China, depending on the presidency and the faction in power: conservatives, radicals, pragmatists or reformists (Table 1).

Third, the geopolitical codes of other countries concerning Iran changed as a result of Iran's position. For example, directly after the revolution, Iran became an 'enemy' of the West, and especially of the US world hegemony, because of its very anti-Western rhetoric and ideology.

In contrast, if the US fails to sustain regional security within the Persian Gulf region, it risks losing its main import opportunity of oil and gas. This explains US' involvement in the region and with Iran, for example over the nuclear issue. This can be explained by its global geopolitical code and interest in sustaining its world hegemony and position as a core country within the world-system.

Furthermore, because of Iran's geographical position within the Persian Gulf region and its possession of big oil and gas reserves, it continued having regional power and was able to position itself as independent directly after the revolution under the rule of Khomeini. Sunni Arab countries in the region have been wary about regional security because of the political effects of the Shi'ite Iranian revolution and distanced themselves from Iran.

Fourth, as a result of the changing geopolitical codes of other countries, Iran has become politically, economically, and culturally isolated within the world-system. To illustrate, the West and Sunni Arab countries sided with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war and the Iran Non-Proliferation Act and the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act were adopted. This happened primarily as a result of Iran's confrontational policy.

Finally, the effects of the Iranian revolution are on-going. Its legacy is continually unfolding itself further.

THE EVOLUTION OF SHI'A ISLAM

The Iranian revolution has had many effects on the daily lives of the Iranian people, on the economy and on international relations within the Middle East and the rest of the World, but most of all it had an effect on religion. It is striking to see how within a single decade Islam in Iran transformed from an a-political religion into a political force to be reckoned with. In this chapter I will describe how Shia Islam came to be the framework on which the revolution was build. In order to do this I will highlight three different periods in Islamic history, each with its own sub-question. First, a brief history spanning the first five centuries of Islam will be presented in order to answer the following question:

How did Shi'a Islam develop in Islamic history?

By answering this question it will become clear why we can think of the Iranian revolution as an Islamic revolution, as Shi'a Islam has long been a religion without political intentions. The second question of this chapter is focused on the work of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who can be considered the grand architect of the revolution.

In what way did the concept of 'Velayat-e faqih' revolutionize Islamic thinking?

The answer of this question will give insights in the events that transpired between the end of the 18th century and the Iranian revolution in 1979. This period displays the apparent political potential of Islam in Iran. The third and final part of this chapter addresses the way in which Islam has become a full political force in Iran.

How did Shi'a Islam become a full political force?

I will argue that the biggest change in political Islam did not happen in 1979, the year of the revolution, but rather in 1989, the year Ali Khamenei came to power after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. After having answered all these questions I will conclude that the Iranian revolution has played an unprecedented role in the politicization of Shi'a Islam.

THE FORMATIVE PERIOD OF SHI'A ISLAM

Shi'a Islam is a branch of Islam that differentiates itself from 'mainstream' Islam by its belief in Ali as the rightful leader of the Muslim community after the death of the

prophet Muhammed (Momen, 1985; Rippin, 2015). Three other caliphs preceded Ali, whom the Shiites believe to be the designated successor, before he finally came to power as the fourth caliph. However, Ali's reign was contended by the Syrian ambassador Muawiya, who considered himself to be the rightful successor to Uthman, the third caliph. A five-year period with much turmoil and conflict ensued. This period is called *fitna* by Muslim scholars (a term that can mean many things but in this sense is used to describe a period of distress and hardship). It marks the first major schism within Islam. When Muawiya finally became caliph in the year 661 AD, after the death of Ali and after having killed Ali's son and heir [!] Husayn in battle, the Muslim community was divided in three groups: Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kharijites (Hawthing, 1986). The Shi'ites, now living under the rule of Sunni caliph Muawiya, continued to stress Ali's legitimacy, arguing that the Quran and Hadith state that Muhammed had designated Ali as his replacement (Momen, 1985). Henceforth, the Shi'ites would turn to Ali's offspring for guidance on religious matters, believing them to have access to the true meaning of the Quran (Halm, 2004). Ali and his offspring came to be called the Imams; a term that used by Sunnis to designate anyone leading a sermon, for Shi'ites this term is reserved for religious leaders of the community.

It was under the sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Saddiq, that the Imamate asserted itself as the one and true source of authority. The position of Imam was one that could only be acquired by the principle of *nass*, that is: the explicit designation by God (Jafri, 1976). It is said that God designated Muhammed; and that Muhammed in turn designated Ali, who designated his son. Ja'far as-Saddiq is the sixth imam in this line, designated by his father Muhammed al-Baqir. Another concept, closely related to *nass*, is that of *'Ilm*, or knowledge. *'Ilm* involves all knowledge concerning the apparent and true meaning of the Quran. After the death of a designated Imam, all this divine knowledge will pass on to the next designated Imam. Ja'far argued that his designation by God and the divine knowledge he possessed put him far above the earthly rulers. For Ja'far and his followers this was reason to refrain from political struggles.

Ja'far thus effectively put the Shi'a Imamate outside of the political spectrum: politics was something for earthly rulers, whereas the imamate, being God-given, needed not be enforced by armies (Jafri, 1976).

The next big step in the depoliticization of Shi'a Islam took place with the disappearance of the twelfth Imam. The Shi'ites adhering to this specific form of Islam are called 'Twelvers', after the twelve Imams they recognize. For the remainder of this chapter I will simply use the term 'Shia Islam' (Rippin, 2015). At the time, the Imamate operated in the shadow of the Abbasid caliphate, which had toppled the Umayyad caliphate in the year 750 AD (Halm, 2004). Starting with the eight Imam Ali al-Rida, the Abbasids had placed all Imams under house arrest. They were allowed to communicate with their followers through messengers, but were rarely seen in public. The life of the twelfth Imam, Muhammed al-Mahdi, is surrounded with mystery. His very existence has been disputed, but tradition says he went into hiding at a very young age and only communicated with the outside world via a few people (Momen, 1985). At the time of his death Imam Muhammed did not have any sons to take his place, but since the Shi'ites believe the world cannot exist without an Imam they introduced the concept of *ghayba* or hiding. It is said that the twelfth Imam will come back at the end of time, when he will rule the world for a number of years before the day of judgement will arrive (Momen, 1985). The hiding of the imam proved problematic for the Shi'ites: he was both spiritual and political head of the community but had not left any instructions on how to proceed. Initially the absence of a political leader would not be have been problematic, since most Shi'ites lived under the rule of the Sunni caliph, but later with the emergence of Shi'ite states, it did prove to be a problem (Momen, 1985).

POLITICAL POTENTIAL AND VELAYAT-E FAQIH

We fast-forward to the late 18th century. At that time, Shi'a Islam harboured two different schools of Islamic law: the Usuli and the Akhbari. The Akhbari believe that the Quran and the Hadith are the sole sources of law. Only these works are authentic and can be used. The Usuli on the other hand state that the Hadith contains traditions that may not be reliable, so that critical analysis is required to assess their authority. In addition, the Usuli School believes that intellectual principles of general application should be created, such as the principle of *ijtihad,* or reasoning. By means of *ijtihad*, everyday problems can be solved by the creation religious laws that do not need to be mentioned in the Quran or the Hadith (Momen, 1985; Nasr, 2007). The scholars authorised to do this reasoning are called *marja taqlid*, or source of imitation. In matters of worship or personal affairs a *marja* is allowed to provide his insights in the matter. It

is important to note here that these rulings can always be corrected by other *marja's* (Amirpur, 2014) (Momen, 1985).

At the end of the 18th century the Usuli School with its *marja's* triumphed over the Akhbari School. From then on the *marja's* were put in charge of the *sahm-e imam*, the imam's share. Every *marja* had a following of Shi'ites who turned to their *marja* for religious ruling. In turn they paid a religious tax that was designated for the imam but 'kept safe' by the *marja*. This increase in wealth and the number of followers entailed a growth of power, religious as well as political, of the *marja's* (Amirpur, 2014). In spite of this, most of the clergy in Iran remained quietist until the first part of the twentieth century. This quietist position can be ascribed to the strong believe in the pending return of the twelfth Imam, who, even during his absence, is the only one with the rightful claim to political power.

One particular *marja*, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, contested this view. He believed the scholars are not only responsible for the interpretation of scripture but should also be responsible for the implementation of its findings, meaning the clergy should not only be part of politics but also actually assume political leadership (Amirpur, 2014). Khomeini theorised further that only the universally accepted jurisconsult, the most learned of all the *marja*, is capable of leading the Muslim community. This 'supreme jurisconsult' is to be 'the deputy of The Twelfth Imam and his representative on earth'. He is the 'accepted and acclaimed Islamic ruler by the majority of the population' (Amirpur, 2014). Who this leader should be and how his acceptance is to be determined will be discussed in the next chapter. For now, and at least until the revolution in 1979, we can safely assume that it is Khomeini himself who should be the 'supreme jurisconsult', while the acceptance of his position is firmly embedded in his leading role before and during the revolution.

Exactly how Khomeini came to power is too large of a topic to be discussed here. I will give a short account of the events that occurred. For further reading *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* by Gilles Kepel can be recommended, which contains an entire chapter about the revolution in Iran. In 1964 Khomeini openly attacked the Shah. This resulted in a fifteen-year exile, during which Khomeini developed his political theology. At the time there was much political unrest in Iran: the middle class, student radicals and a growing class of urban poor all suffered from the Shah's 'modernization' plans. A sudden

drop in oil price in 1975 created major social and economic stress, which was suppressed by the Shah's secret military police, the Savak. In 1976 Jimmy Carter became president of the United States of America. Accordingly, American support for the Shah was weakened, as Carter was a strong opponent of the Savak brutality. Kepel points to the seemingly fortuitous publication of an insulting article on Khomeini as the moment that transformed the 'agitation against the Shah into an Islamist revolution'. He then goes on to describe how Khomeini strategically seized control of the revolution using the strong organizational structure of the clergy.

After defeating the Shah Khomeini disposed of his co-revolutionaries: Marxists, urban poor and intellectuals. As a result, only his Islamic party was left (Kepel, 2002). With Khomeini, Iran had its first Islamic leader.

KHAMENEI AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF VELAYAT-E FAQIH

For ten years Khomeini held office as the *vali-ye faqih*, the Islamic supervisor. Other terms associated with the position of the supreme jurisconsult are *rahbar-e enqelab* and *marja taqlid*, which respectively mean 'leader of the revolution' and 'source of imitation'. During these ten years Khomeini ruled in the true sense of the term *vali-ye faqih*: he supervised Iranian reforms and made sure everything went according to Islamic law. Some, like Mangol Bayat, argue that Khomeini never intended the dramatic change in Shi'a doctrine that would follow from his revolution. His innovative thought was political and he did not concern himself with religious renewal (Bayat, 1983). Whatever his intention may have been at the time, by the end of the decade and shortly before his passing in 1989, Khomeini introduced a different reading of the concept *Velayat-e faqih*. He now stated it was sufficient for the supreme jurisconsult to be a mere *mujtahid*. The term *mujtahid* is used for describing someone who is qualified to interpreted Islamic law, but ranks far below the title of *marja*. In addition to this Khomeini decreed that the supreme jurisconsult had 'to be up to date politically and able to represent the Revolution's ideological foundations and goals' (Amirpur, 2014).

This meant that the very foundation of the V*elayat-e faqih* – the fact that the supreme jurisconsult was the 'accepted and acclaimed Islamic ruler by the majority of the population' – was no longer valid. It has been suggested that this dramatic change was needed because in March 1989 Ayatollah Montezari, the designated successor of

Khomeini, voiced strong criticism about continuing economic problems and violations of human rights. Enraged about this public 'attack' on his government, Khomeini dismissed Montezari from public office. After this event no *marja's* could be found who were willing to replace Khomeini, while those who were willing to replace him did not have the title of *marja.* Accordingly Khomeini gave orders to change the constitution; it was no longer needed for the *rahbar* to be a *marja* (Amirpur, 2014)*.*

In June 1989 Khomeini passed away and Khamenei was appointed as the new leader. It was the first time that the *rahbar* of the Islamic republic did not hold both the highest political and religious office, since Khamenei was not considered a *marja taqlid*, a source of imitation. Although many Shi'ites outside of Iran, especially in Lebanon where Hezbollah tried to implement Khomeini's original version of V*elayat-e faqih*, did accept Khamenei as a *marja taqlid* (Alagha, 2011), in Iran there were many scholars with a much higher religious authority. To compensate for this lack of religious authority Khamenei was assigned the title of *Ayatollah*, that is: sign of God, directly after becoming the new leader of the Revolution (Amirpur, 2014). The fact that Khamenei was given this title is striking, as *ayatollahs* gained their title for being regarded as very skilled scholars, something Khamenei was not. By including him the title of *Ayatollah* became politicized. Henceforth it could be acquired by attaining a certain political rank. Khamenei, aware of his lack of religious authority has ever since tried to acquire the rank of *marja taqlid*, thus far without success, since other, more qualified clerics like Montezari are still alive (Amirpur, 2014).

Khomeini was aware of the fact that a lack of religious authority might undermine the position of the *rahbar*. To compensate for this, the political powers of the *rahbar* needed to be expanded. From now on the *rahbar* was awarded absolute political power, based not on his religious authority but on his appointment to office (Amirpur, 2014). Again, while the effects of this change may not have been intended, this change in constitution did allow for a new interpretation of the position of the *rahbar*, namely:

> *The "absolute appointive authority of the jurists" gives the Supreme Juris-consult absolute authority, elevating his decrees (hokm-e hokumati) over those of the sharia: "The orders of the Supreme Jurists, according to this thesis, must not only be obeyed as a religious duty; they must also prevail, in cases of*

contradiction, over the state law and the sacred law alike." - Kadivar, *Nazariyeha-ye doulat*, (Amirpur, 2014, pp. 108-9).

Though lacking the religious authority, Khamenei is now, by political appointment, the highest religious authority. Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, a fervent supporter of Khamenei, has provided the basic argument to support this claim. Yazdi states that God himself chooses the faqih. Only someone chosen by God has the right to rule, so whether the people accept his rule or not, he will not lose his legitimacy (Amirpur, 2014). In addition to this; a law, according to Yazdi, is only valid because the faqih approved it, not because it has passed through a democratic assembly (Amirpur, 2014).

Thus Yazdi effectively elevated the position of *vali-ye faqih* to a level that was previously reserved for the Twelfth Imam upon his return.

CONCLUSION

The politicization of Shi'a Islam as seen from a historic perspective is striking. Much of the formative period of Islam is marked by quietism of the highest Shi'a authorities. Shi'a doctrine even developed in such a way that the a-political nature of the Imamate was legitimized by Ja'far as-Saddiq. With the victory of the Usuli School over the Akhbari School, the office of *marja taqlid* laid the foundation for Shi'a Islam to create the strong organizational structure that helped Khomeini take control of the revolution and implement his revolutionary theory of *Velayat-e faqih*. It was not until 1989 however, that the politicization of Shi'a Islam was completed. Khamenei's designation as successor of Khomeini and leader of the revolution required a new interpretation of Khomeini's *Velayat-e faqih* that completely shattered the centuries-old tradition of quietism. Today, with Khamenei in power, the position once reserved for the highest religious authority is filled by political degree, a measure that effectively negates the original intention of an Islamic State ruled by the highest religious authority. It can be said that in merely ten years' time Khomeini has revolutionized Shi'a Islam in such a way that only the return of the Twelfth Imam may be expected to have a bigger impact.

A LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

The Iranian revolution of 1979 has undoubtedly changed the lives of many. From a relatively western-minded society, Iran became an Islamic state when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became the leader of the country. In everyday life this meant that people had to give up certain freedoms in exchange for Islamic law. Religious leaders were given political power and, as a result, women were obliged to wear a veil and men encouraged to grow a beard, alcohol and music were banned, schools taught the Koran and disapproved of other religions, and art and media became subjected to censorship – among many other changes made according to Islamic law.

The revolution also had its effects on the literary landscape of Iran. Whereas Iran used to have a progressive literary movement, this soon changed after the revolution. To understand the effect of the Iranian revolution on Iranian society we shouldn't forget about literature, Kamran Talattof argues in his book *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature:* "Factors such as class struggle, state politics, and economic dependency cannot fully explain the complexity of Iranian historical experience. A thorough historiography must take into account the seriousness of literary activity in this society" (Talattof, 2000, p. X). A study of literature can yield insights in how the situation in a society influences individuals, while the way in which literature is used in that society reveals a lot about that society as well.

By analysing the cultural and political effects of the Iranian revolution, I will try to answer the following sub-question: *What effects did the Iranian revolution of 1979 have on Iranian literature and its role in Iranian society?* Firstly, I will focus on the literature that was written in the decades before the revolution, and then I will discuss the literature after the revolution, both the literature in favour of the Islamic state and the literature opposing it. Hopefully, this will give an idea of the effects of the revolution on an individual level, of the people of Iran.

LITERATURE LEADING UP TO THE REVOLUTION

Iran has a rich literary history. Persian literature dates back to inscriptions made in the time of the Acheamenid, or the first Persian, Empire, which lasted from 550 to 330 BC. Later, stories and rhymed poems constituted an important part of classical Persian culture. The *Shahnameh*, or the Persian book of kings, written by Ferdowsi from 977 to

1010, is the national epic of Iran. It is celebrated as the most important work of Persian mythology. Of course, other famous examples of Persian literature are the stories included in *One Thousand and One Nights.* Moreover, world famous writers such as Goethe were supposedly inspired by Persian literature. Literature has thus always been an important part of Iran's cultural history. It is therefore not surprising that Iranians use this medium for expressing themselves in troubling and eventful times. In the decades leading up to the revolution, with increasing discontent with the political situation amongst Iran's citizens, the amount of politically conscious literature in Iran also increased. In his article "Introduction: Iran's literature 1977–1997", Karimi-Hakkak even calls modern Persian fiction from before the revolution "one of the most socially relevant bodies of twentieth century literature" (Karimi-Hakkak, 1997, p. 216).

The advanced political consciousness in the literature of Iran grew on account of the eventful times around the revolution. The great economic inequality and the domination of the oil industry by a British company under a western-minded shah caused discontent among many Iranians. The Shah was seen as a puppet of the west. Tensions rose, and many people turned against the Shah. These included a large group of Islamic fundamentalists who argued for an Islamic state instead of a monarchy, but there was also a group of Marxists and nationalists in disagreement with the Shah's policies. The radical opposition included many intellectuals, students and authors, like the leftist poet and playwright Saeed Soltanpour.

Those who turned to literature to express themselves and make their ideas known were mainly Marxists. They started publishing journals and periodicals and wrote 'committed literature': "Literary activists believed that there were two kinds of literature: one that defended the people and was committed to their cause, and another that disregarded serous social and political issues and remained "pure" literature." (Talattof, 2000, p. 66). The Marxist literary activists engaged in the former and wrote about themes of equality, justice, and freedom. The fact that different groups in Iranian society had a common opponent made them more sympathetic towards each other. Whereas there used to be hostility towards religion in the committed literature, this disappeared, Talattof argues: "Literature in this episode became the medium most appropriate in the eyes of all groups for communicating the revolutionary messages about socio-political change, which they envisioned would improve the condition of the Iranian people" (Talattof,

2000, p. 67). Literature was used to convey messages about the urgent need for change in society and its politics. It became a tool to express dissent, to share an ideology, and to connect groups. Revolution and political change became the goals of 'committed literature'. Imagination helped people to believe in the possibility of overthrowing the Shah's regime. Literature was a perfect medium for this purpose, because despite the efforts of the Shah at censorship, authors could use allegories, symbols and metaphors to cover their messages.

The short story "The Little Black Fish" by Samas Behrangi is an example of a political allegory. In the story an old fish gathers all her children and grandchildren and tells them a story. This is the story of the little black fish. The little black fish lives with her mother and other fish in a small pond. However, the little black fish is not happy. She fantasizes about the world outside of the pond and wants to discover it. Most of the other fish in the pond are not happy with her desire to explore the world because to them the pond is the world, but the little fish goes anyway. She meets other creatures that believe other things and experiences adventures. The little black fish becomes an example to the children and grandchildren of the old fish telling the story. This story seems to be a children's story, but it has a message meant not only for children. As Karimi-Hakkak notes, when discussing progressive literature in Iran: "Works like Samad Behrangi's stories, particularly "The Little Black Fish", in the collection of the same name, presented that discourse in the guise of political parables intended for children" (Karimi-Hakkak, 1997, p. 194). The real meaning of the story is subtly hidden beneath its surface. In the Iranian society led by the Shah many people felt discontent with politics and wanted to explore alternative ideologies. The little fish is like a leader who shows that the way of life in the little pond is not the only one and points the way towards alternative ways of life. This is a message readers can extract from the story. You don't have to accept the 'normal' way to live and the present state of the world. The story thus argues for change and urges you to look critically at your own society. It is a plea for a revolution. "a protest parable about the oppressiveness of conformity to government rules", as Fischer and Abedi argue in their essay "Revolutionary Posters and Cultural Signs" (Fisher & Abedi, 2015).

LITERATURE SUPPORTING THE ISLAMIC STATE AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Committed Marxist literary activists have gotten only half of what they wanted from the revolution. The Shah was overthrown in 1979, but they didn't manage to secure state power and Iran became an Islamic state instead. Nationalists, Marxists and supporters of the western-minded Shah all had to make place for Islamic fundamentalists. Newly created cultural institutions regulated artistic and literary activities to make sure that writings conformed to the state's Islamic values. Writers at the very least had to be careful about what to write and what not to write, because writing things that conflicted with the state's Islamic values was now prohibited and could have serious consequences for the author. This was a great loss for a great many Iranian authors and readers. Instead, an increasing amount of Muslim literature was produced in Iranian society. These authors supported the state ideology and were therefore greatly appreciated and supported by the state. As Talattof observes: "The work of Islamic writers who, in one way or another and to various degrees, supported the state ideology gave rise to new literary activities in the 1980's" (Talattof, 2000, p. 111). He adds to this: "the state supported these writers, and their literature supported the state" (Talattof, 2000, p. 112). The dominant Islamic discourse in fiction and poetry was rewarded by the state. It was used as a tool for political interests because it propagated the state ideology and motivated readers to believe more wholeheartedly in their religion. The state supported Islamic literature by providing readership in schools, associations and mosques, and by sponsoring publications. Consequently, this kind of literature began to take an important place in Iranian society.

In many of these novels and poems the theme of 'Karbala' is used. "This theme, unlike the previous committed literature, achieved a new position in Islamic Literature after the revolution. Karbala in Islamic literature refers to a holy place where Imam Hossein, the third Imam of Shi'a followers, was martyred." as Mahrokhsadat Hosseini in his article "Iranian Women's Poetry from the Post-revolutionary Islamic Literature to Feminism Consciousness and Expression" (Hosseini, 2012, p. 107). Karbala glorifies sacrificing the individual for the ideal society, an idea beneficial to the state.

Not much of this Islamic literature has been translated into English, but Talattof mentions some stories in his book. An example is Muhammad Nurizad's story "The Man and Karbala". This is story of a man who leaves his village in order to find a better life for

his family in the city. However, he fails to find work and his son is very sick. At a moment when everything is at its worst for the man, he comes across a house in which a preacher is delivering a sermon about Karbala. The man is very moved by this. After the sermon, the preacher comes to the man and reminds him to have trust in God. This gives the man new hope and when he returns home, he finds that his son is feeling better. "He utters to himself: 'With trust in God…'" (Talattof, 2000, p. 116). Nurizad shows that Karbala is such a sacred place that even the idea of it has the power to accomplish miracles. The story speaks to the faith of people and promotes the Islamic state ideology.

LITERATURE OPPOSING THE ISLAMIC STATE AFTER THE REVOLUTION

After the Iranian revolution ideas conflicting with values of the Islamic state were suppressed. Authors who didn't agree with the newly imposed Islamic laws had to find other ways to express themselves, as they were no longer able to write freely. They risked to be exiled if they did. Ideas that used to be normal suddenly became excluded from the accepted culture. These ideas had to be shared in the private spheres, secretly. In Karimi-Hakkak's words:

> "[Post-revolutionary] authors often needed to mute their attitude toward Islamic leaders in order to avoid prosecution and to assure their publishers that the book would not be banned. [...] In the 1980s the state's policy toward the press and publishing industry has reflected both fundamental fear of secular ideologies and a deep desire to push the intellectual community into greater conformity. This censorship and the intellectual writers' interest in the reinterpretation of Persian literature and Iranian culture resulted in the invention of new metaphors, allegories, and other tropes in the language of modern Persian literature causing further variance in literary production." (Karimi-Hakkak, 1997, p. 111)

The strict regulations of cultural forms of expression made authors use language differently. Thus they had to find metaphors, for example, like the author of "The Little Black Fish".

People who differ from the reigning group in their ideas or ideology can be called a minority. Deleuze and Guattari, in their study of literature from minorities in society, argue: "Because [minor literature] exists in a narrow space, every individual matter is

immediately plugged into the political. Thus, the question of the individual becomes even more necessary, indispensible, magnified microscopically, because an entire different story stirs within it." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 16). Literature of the majority can be concerned about individual matters, with societal matters brought to the background, but the narrow space in which minor literature exists forces it into politics, because it somehow has to relate to the larger social milieu of which it is a part. Iranian literature from people who not have the same values as the Islamic state in Iran has to relate in some way or another to the Islamic state ideology. This goes even further, because people in Iran are not allowed to write anything that goes against Islamic values. Given this, minority literature in Iran cannot ignore its context and has to relate to politics. It automatically becomes political.

Because of the strict rules many Iranian authors have gone abroad to be able to write what they want. Other countries could serve as a safe-haven for these authors. Examples are Marjane Satrapi, who wrote the graphic novel *Persepolis* from France, and Azar Nafisi, who wrote the novel *Reading Lolita in Tehran* from the USA. The latter is especially interesting in the context of our research, because the story is a memoir about lessons on literature that are taught to a group of young girls in Tehran, privately and illegally. The novels that are read by the girls in the novel are mostly from the West, and expose the girls to western influence. The book is written from the perspective of people who disagree with and suffer from the rules of the Islamic state. They find their escape in literature. This, for example, becomes clear in the following passage:

> "[T]hose of us living in the Islamic Republic of Iran grasped both the tragedy
> and absurdity of the cruelty to which we were subjected. We had to poke
> fun at our own misery in order to survive. We also instinctively recognized
> poshlust – not just in others, but in ourselves. This was one reason that art
> and literature became so essential to our lives: they were not a luxury but a
> necessity." (Nafisi, 2003, p. 23) [...] [N]ot only did the most ordinary
> activities gain a new luminosity in the light of our secret, but everyday life
> sometimes took on the quality of make-believe or fiction." (Nafisi, 2003, p.
> 60)

The act of reading becomes both an escape from the society they live in, and a political act of rebellion against it, because the girls are not allowed to read the books they are reading. The novel itself is political in that it communicates values that differ from those of the Iranian Islamic state. In the novel Nafisi also mentions the fact that only literature observing Islamic ideology is being valued in Iran: "We lived in a culture that denied any merit to literary works, considering them important only when they were handmaidens to something seemingly more important – namely ideology. This was a country where all gestures, even the most private, were interpreted in political terms." (Nafisi, 2003, p. 25). The USA functioned as a safe-haven for Nafisi where she could write free from censorship.

With the internet, Iranian people now have a new platform to express themselves. This takes the form of 'cyber literature'. Cyber literature not only broadcasts texts to the public, but may also involve dialogue. It is possible to receive feedback and may thus involve a different relationship with readers. Nima Mina writes about this in "Blogs, Cyber literature, virtual culture in Iran":

> "On 10 August 2001, the Paris-based exile Iranian author and musician Reza Ghassemi was the first Iranian writer to expand the literary communication with his audience inside Iran and in the Iranian diaspora into cyberspace. […] Until it was filtered and blocked in February, 2005 Ghassemi's website had 4,000 daily visitors, with 70% from inside Iran […] The electronic publication allows [Iranian writers] to reach a larger audience in the Iranian diaspora and inside Iran." (Nima, 2007, pp. 28-29)

Blogs and cyber literature are alternative means of free expression for Iranian people. They escape censorship because it is difficult to block this kind of literature: when a particular website is blocked, users can still access it via proxy servers. Blogs and cyber literature have also created a possibility for authors from outside Iran to reach an Iranian audience.

CONCLUSION

Stories can show how individuals cope with its political situation in a country but the way in which literature is used also says a lot about the culture and politics of a county, and literature can moreover itself influence society. The Iranian revolution in 1979 had

a great influence on Iranian literature. It had an impact, both on the kind of literature that was written and on the role of literature in the Islamic state of Iran. One of the main changes seems to be that literature has become more political. Muslim literature is now the most accepted form of literature, and this has enhanced the presence of that type of literature in Iranian society. By propagating the dominant ideology, it has become a political tool for the Islamic state. But other literature, not completely in keeping with Islamic values, has become political too, because it has to relate to the context of the Islamic state with all its rules, of which it is a part. Literature can thus also be a tool for rebellion. The forms in which literature manifests itself have changed as well. Because of the many restrictions, authors began to exploit various possibilities of language, for example by making use of metaphors, allegories or symbols. Also, because of the possibilities of the Internet, cyber literature underwent a rise. Thus although certain literary forms are not allowed anymore, people find different ways to express themselves.

INTEGRATION

In this chapter we will integrate the insights obtained in the separate disciplinary chapters. We will first point out incongruous concepts between the disciplines. In order to create a conceptual common ground for our integration, we will then solve these incommensurabilities through techniques described in Repko's *Interdisciplinary Research* (2012). Next, we will organize all our concepts using Repko's specific technique of 'organization'. For an explicit and a clear overview, we have gathered our concepts in Figure 1 below, which will be explained with the help of our disciplinary insights. Finally, we will summarize our findings in a more comprehensive understanding, the answer to our research question.

DIVERGENT CONCEPTS AND COMMON GROUND

Politicization of Islam is a concept embedded in two different insights that "*masks different contextual meanings in the relevant disciplinary insights*" (Repko, 2012, p. 297). In Islamic studies, politicization of Islam refers to the gradual change in doctrine that enables a more political role of the clergy, whereas in Political Geography, politicization of Islam merely describes the institutionalization of the clergy and its effects on foreign policy; islamization of politics. Within literary studies, the same meaning is given to politicization of Islam as in Political Geography, but its main focus there is the censorship imposed by Islamic law.

Using the "Technique of Extension" (Repko, 2012, p. 340) we expand the meaning of political Islam beyond the domains of the individual disciplines from which they originated into the domain of the other relevant disciplines. We expand the meaning of Political Islam to incorporate both 'politicization of Islam' and 'islamization of politics' as described above. The extension of the concept leads to a shared understanding of the concept 'political Islam' by the three disciplines.

A second concept shared by all three disciplinary insights is Western influence. This concept masks different meanings in the respective disciplines as well. Within Islamic studies the main focal point of Western influence is the danger it poses to religious morals, whereas the emphasis of Political Geography concerns the geopolitical American influence in the region with respect to foreign policy, security and natural resources, and

the strong revolutionary opposition it invoked in 1979. Again by using the technique of extension, we can incorporate the different views on Western influence from Islamic studies and Political Geography into a single notion of 'Western influence'. This new notion of Western Influence encompasses the perceived danger Western influence poses to Iranian political and religious society.

By contrast, in literary studies the West has functioned as a safe haven for several Iranian writers who publish literary works that do not observe the values of the Islamic state. The concept from literary studies will have to be redefined using the "Technique of Redefinition" (Repko, 2012, p. 336). This is necessary in order to avoid confusion. From the perspective of literary studies the West and Western influence can be seen as offering possibilities after the revolution, whereas in the other two disciplines Western influence is seen as an instigator of the revolution. Henceforth we will use the term 'Western safe-haven' for referring to the concept in literary studies.

Now that we have resolved the conceptual incongruities between the disciplines we extend our common ground by clarifying how certain phenomena interact and by mapping causal effects. This is an application of Repko's "Technique of Organization" (Repko, 2012, p. 340).
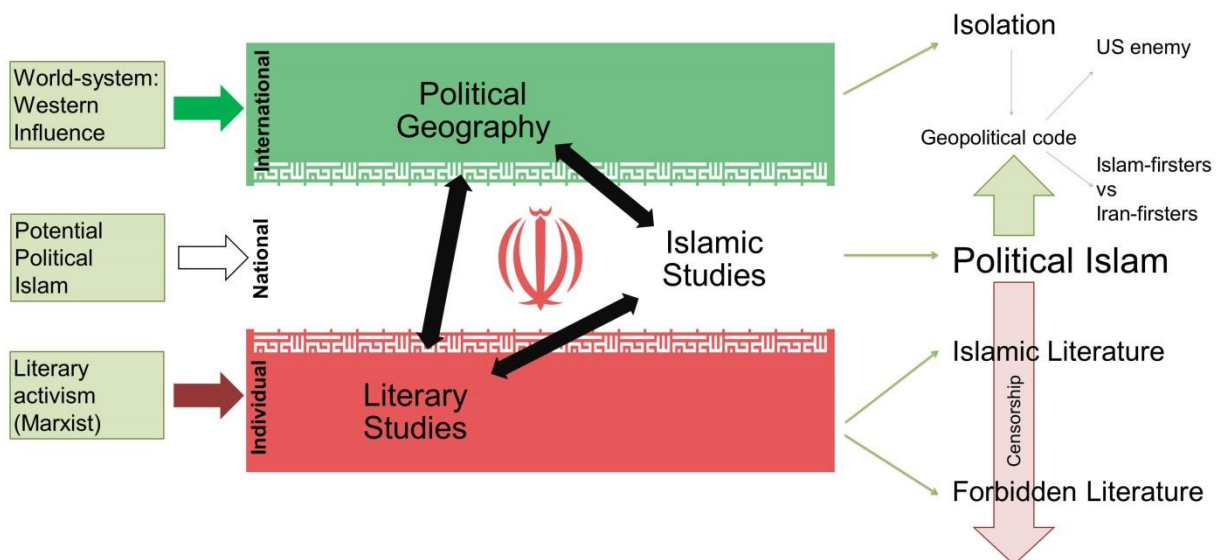

Figure 2: Organization Common Ground (authors, 2015)

Organizing the different disciplines and their concepts reveals the various interactions on multiple levels and the changes on the disciplinary levels that result from the revolution. As can be seen in the central triangle of Figure 1, the three disciplines, positioned on their respective levels, interact with each other. The following quote stresses this interaction:

> *"Geopolitics is as much a matter of everyday popular culture as it is the behaviour of state elites or academics."* (Flint & Taylor, 2011)

Thus, the phenomena studied in the three disciplines are inseparably connected.

The left-hand side of the figure comprises the conditions before the revolution, namely the political potential of Islam, the discontent towards Western influence, and the geopolitical context of the Cold War, which were found in our disciplinary research. The political potential of Islam followed from the strong organization of the clergy that was used as a social structure to complement government in Iran. On the *international* level we found that Western influence resulted from close relations with the US: they helped the Shah come to power in 1953 so that Iran could gain a more powerful position within the Persian Gulf region. As a result of this influence, we found growing discontent towards the Shah on the individual level, as represented in the works of Marxist literary activists, which can be explained by the geopolitical context of the Cold War. On the national level, this discontent, in combination with growing popularity of the Islamic reform proposals by Khomeini, created a situation in which the political potential of Islam was actualised.

The right-hand side of the figure displays the effects of the revolution per discipline/level and shows how they affect each other.

The central effect of the Iranian revolution is the politicization of Islam, which connects all three levels. The main insight of Islamic studies focuses on Khomeini's idea of *Velayat-e faqih.* This concept formed the basis for an on-going politicization of the previously a-political Islam that continued until Khamenei came to power in 1989, 10 years after the revolution. This resulted in the almost unlimited political power of Khamenei, the current supreme jurisconsult.

In addition, insights from Political Geography show how this process changed the political situation within Iran and led to the creation of Iran's global and regional geopolitical code, which, together with the disintegration of the SU, changed the global world order. Iran used to be an ally of the US, but now it views the US as an enemy. However, there are different factions within political Islam; the main distinction is that between 'Iran-firsters' and Islam-firsters'.

Censorship, a further consequence of political Islam, resulted in two main trends in Iranian literature. The first is an increase in the production of Islamic literature. Islamic literature has become a political tool for the state because it can be used to propagate its ideology. Second, literature opposing values of the Islamic state has become prohibited. As a consequence, authors and readers of this literature have to find other ways of expressing and reading such alternative ideas, resulting in authors who use language differently, write from abroad and explore the possibilities of the internet.

MORE COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING

The diagram in Figure 1 is helpful in answering our main research question;

What are the cultural-political effects of the Iranian revolution?

The Iranian revolution had several effects which cannot be fully understood in separation. Because of the revolution, Khomeini was able to politicize Islam by using his concept of *Velayat-e faqih*. This concept was able to gain momentum within the Iranian political sphere because of a long history of discontent with the Pahlavi regime, as is manifest from many forms of literary activism. Non-religious actors involved in starting the revolution lacked the mass-mobilizing organizational structure of the clergy. They could therefore easily be discarded from the political scene, leaving the Islamic Republican Party as the only remaining candidate for leading the 'new' Iran. For its supporters, this 'new' Iran encompassed an Islamic State, strict rules for what may be published and what people are allowed to read, as well as changed local, regional, and global geopolitical codes.

To conclude, we did not only show the effects of the revolution within the three different disciplines, but, by combining and organizing these insights, we were also able to show how these effects interacted with each other on a multi-level scale that transcends the individual disciplines.

REFLECTION

Having completed our interdisciplinary research process, we reflect on the work done. Because of our background and the limitations imposed by language and location we have a Western perspective on the subject. This means that we could not include all sources we would have liked to include, which led to a biased research perspective and influenced the questions we asked. Thus our position entails for example the following underlying assumptions: the desirability of democracy, freedom of speech and the separation of state and religion.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach has advanced our understanding of the Iranian revolution and its effects by integrating our separate disciplinary views. The results can be used for further research. While our more comprehensive understanding is indeed broader than the insights of the individual disciplines, it focuses more on organizing the different insights in order to illustrate the dynamics than on creating a new concept or theory. Moreover, as we have limited ourselves to three disciplines, not all effects and related interactions have become visible in our research. In further research additional disciplines may be added to the above organizational diagram. We would have liked to include the following ones: history, economics, and cultural anthropology, among others.

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