REGIME CHANGE IN IRAN: CONTENTIOUS INTERACTION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS FROM 1999 TO THE PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

Since the breakout of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran witnessed three major waves of unrest, in 1999, 2009 and 2018. The first two movements did not lead to a regime change and ended up dissolving in the regime structure.

This thesis aims at answering the question ***why the waves of unrest in Iran are not leading to regime change*** by studying the interaction between the social and political structures they are emerging in.

INTRODUCTION

War made the state, and the state made war

— **Charles Tilly (1975)**

In December 28, 2017, protests broke out in Mashhad, one of the most conservative strongholds in Iran. The civil marches transformed into open rebellion against the regime and the leader of the Islamic Republic - Ayatollah Khamenei. 'Death to the dictator' was one of the fragrant claims that headlined various articles and op-eds about the situation in Iran. From Mashhad, in less than one week, the protests reached more than twelve cities and towns, including the capital Tehran. Alerted by the situation, the Iranian authorities mobilized their internal security forces to suppress demonstrations and attempted to block social media and messaging applications to limit the online gatherings and digital engagement. *Were they afraid of a regime change?* This question was also worrying journalists and political commentators who were closely observing the turnout of events and trying to discern regime change indices.

The situation described above is a recent example where the outcomes and results are still being disputed and remaining blurred. But, the ongoing episodes of contention in Iran mark a third wave of large popular unrest, after the breakout of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The first round was in 1999, when students from the University of Tehran began demonstrating after the closure of the reformist newspaper *Salam.* The second round was the movement of 2009 that came to be known the Green Movement. The inconceivable results of the Presidential elections led to one of the biggest protests that post-revolutionary Iran witnessed.

The regime that developed after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 practiced two main features; Islamization and international isolation. The indoctrination of Islam in the political

processes and culture is reflected in the relationship between the two branches of power, the theocratic and democratic. The theocratic branch is represented by the Supreme Leader of the Republic-Ayatollah Khamenei and the Guardian Council, an advisory council of twelve clerics. The constitution grants the Supreme Leader 'power over the decision of war and peace; the right of appointment, dismissal, and acceptance of the resignation of the supreme judicial authority; the right of resolving differences between the three wings of the armed forces, and; regulation of armed force relations'(*Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Article 110,1980). In addition to his political role, the Supreme Leader is the spiritual leader of Iran as he is representing *al-Mehdi (the Jurist)* on Earth.[1] This radical adoption of Shiism, in addition to the use of an anti-Western rhetoric led to the isolation of Iran from its Sunni regional surrounding and from the rest of the world. In a famous speech on the Persian New Year in 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini summarized the new foreign policy of Iran. He said, "[w]e should clearly settle our accounts with the powers and superpowers and should demonstrate to them that, despite all the grave difficulties that we have, we shall confront the world with our ideology"(Khomeini 1980).

Understanding the features of this regime helps to display the environment in which social movements are operating. Islam and international isolation play a major role in identifying the shapes and forms of activism and disobedience that the aforementioned waves of unrests take. However, this understanding does neither explain why the regime is still rigid nor the reasons behind the dissolution of the movements within the political structure.

From this perspective, I ask, *why the waves of unrest in Iran are not leading to regime change?* In order to answer this question, it will be divided into two sub-questions: How do the

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[1] The Governance of the Jurist is a post-Age-of-Occultation theory in Shia Islam which holds that Islam gives an Islamic jurist custodianship over the people. Iran implements this ideology of in government.

political and social structures interact in situations of contention? And, how do different agents interact in situations of conflicting interests?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Past research in this field, studied the role of political contexts and ideas in shaping the structure of social movements in Iran.[2] I argue, however, that the outcome of the collective actions depend instead on the interaction between the political and social structure and the opportunities offered by both. Based on the theory of contentious politics developed by Sydney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, I study the opportunities offered by the institutional and political structures (Tilly and Tarrow 2007a).[3] In this vein, I analyze the nature of interaction between different actors (internal and external to the institutional venues) in order to understand the origin of the structural opportunities and their effect on the protesters' tactics. Reciprocally, I adopt the Tocquevillian approach to examine how the activists perceive the political opportunities structure. Tocqueville suggests that structural weaknesses are not enough to study the emergence of conflicts but also subjects' perceptions and actions towards them (Tocqueville 1955). Respectively, and in order to study the 1999 and 2009 waves in Iran, I examine the possibilities of matching and mismatching between the perceived and political opportunities. In the case of matching, the social-structure is able to take advantage of all the political opportunities available to create a strong opposition and eventually reach its goal. In contrast, in case of mismatch, the social-structure is unable to perceive the different opportunities which create a divided and a weak opposition and lead to the dissolution of the movement within the political structure. It is important to note, that movements of 1999 and

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[2] See also Assoudeh, Eliot, and Debra J. Salazar. 2017. "Movement Structure in an Authoritarian Regime: A Network Analysis of the Women's and Student Movements in Iran.

2009 are not studied as isolated events. Rather, they are viewed as a work-in-progress that is gradually accumulating, acquiring new trends and developing new goals.

My hypothesis suggests that the first and second waves of unrests in Iran did not lead to regime change due to a mismatch between the emerging opposition's perception of the political opportunities that the regime offered in very determined contexts. Relying on my interest in Iranian politics, I observe that the emergence of weak and heterogeneous opposition along with an international will of negotiating with the current regime is limiting the chances for a regime change to happen soon.

METHODOLOGY

As this thesis is case-driven, I will not discuss the limitations and strengths of the structural approach in studying social movements and contentious politics. Instead, I use this the basic concepts of this theory to frame my empirical findings. In this qualitative approach in studying social movements, I draw on five forms of eyewitness discourses of the 1999 and 2009 movements and compare them to official narratives.

To conduct my research, I relied on two types of primary sources, first Iranian officials' statements through a discourse analysis of speeches, press releases and internal correspondences, and second, on interviews with five eyewitnesses from both cycles of contention. The interviewees, are political activists and analysts coming from different political and social backgrounds. Due to security and privacy concerns, three of the participants asked to remain anonymous, therefore they were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

To be able to reach out to the participants, I created a list of Iranian acquaintances who referred me to their comrades, whereas in some cases I collected names from documentaries and news reports. I contacted more than fifteen activists, to finally receive five positive confirmations.

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The interviewees replied to three sets of open-ended questions. The first set is related to their background and history of political engagement, the second one to the pre-movement period and the general sentiment about what was going to happen next, and the third one to the movement itself, the sequences of events, and the social interactions among protesting groups. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, via skype and in-person.

As mentioned above, the empirical discussion here, relies on a discursive comparison between interviewee's experiences and officials' positions and reactions to the course of events. In this attempt of studying the social perception of the political opportunities in each of my case studies, I try to highlight on different voices from Iranian' opposition groups to achieve two main goals. The first goal is to answer the main research question. The second goal is to make some conclusions about the fate of the episodes of contention happening in 2018.

LIMITATIONS

The interviewees chosen reflect the opinion of large opposition groups in Iran. However, due to the limitation of time and access to data, some voices were neglected in the research, such as feminists groups and regime supporters. Furthermore, in the case of 1999, the research process was hindered by the lack of primary data in English and Persian.

STRUCTURE

As mentioned above, I will be studying the first two waves of contention in Iran, the 1999 and 2009 movements. I begin by describing the political context in which contention occur, then identifying the main actors, and decompose the contentious processes into mechanisms (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 26–28). By definition, according to Tarrow and Tilly, mechanisms are the different layers of events that affect relations among agencies and structures in a similar way (Tilly and

Tarrow 2007, 29). Consequently, processes are the combinations of those mechanisms (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 29).

Then I proceed by discussing the opportunities offered by the structure and the reflection of the latter on the opposition groups' perceptions. This reflection is also presented through the variations of the performances and repertoires that can range from peaceful to strident.[4] Finally, I expose the aftermath of the waves of unrest and discuss the existence or absence of correlation between the perceived and political opportunities.

The following thesis is divided into four chapters. In chapter 1, I start by highlighting the different schools of thoughts in the field of social movement and contentious politics. Then, I elaborate on the theory of contentious politics and the related concepts. In chapter 2, I map the Iranian's century of contention. In the second section of the chapter, I examine the success of the Islamic Revolution's goal in deposing the Pahlavi regime based on my theory of correlation between the perceived and political opportunities. I find a relation of match between the perception of opposition forces led by Ayatollah Khomeini and the political opportunities of the Pahlavi regime. In chapter 3 and chapter 4, I study the political contexts and structures of the movements of 1999 and 2009. I explain in both cases the reasons behind the mis-match between the perceptions of the rising opposition and Iran's domestic and foreign politics. Considering social movements in Iran as work-in-progress, I conclude with a presentation on the varying patterns among the studied cases. Finally, I conclude with some normative moves for the 2018 ongoing protests.

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[4] Performances and repertoires are the tactics used to present certain claims (e.g. porotests, petitions, concerts etc.)

CHAPTER 1
CONTENTION, POLITICS AND COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

Movement's scholars have long debated the relationship between external context, political structures, resources and mechanisms of operations to explain the emergence of contentious politics. The debate focuses namely on the nature of this relationship and its impact on the motives and the outcomes of collective actions within a given political frame. In other terms, scholars have been trying to study the sustainability of social movements by examining their causes, structures and limitations within specific contexts. From this perspective, three major schools of thought have emerged in this field; the rationalism, constructivism and structuralism. While the first two approaches look into social movements as the outcome of contention (Olson 1971; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Edelman 1971), the structuralist school defines this social phenomenon as a sustained process of contentious politics that is forged by a structure, a capital (cultural and/or economic) and the political opportunities (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b; Bourdieu 1993; McAdam 1999a).

Research examining the emergence of contentious politics in the case of authoritarian regimes, like Iran, has shown that sustainability of movements is jeopardized by the limitations of the opportunities that shape their structures and affect their capital. Therefore, we see the importance of the theoretical framework developed by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow who emphasize on the political factors (regimes and interaction of governments) in their analysis on contentious politics.[5] Eliot Assoudeh and Debra Salazar have studied contention in Iran between

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[5] The structural school takes into consideration domestic and international politics to explain the causes and processes of contention (Tilly and Tarrow 2007). We will be justifying the choice of the theoretical framework of Tilly and Tarrow in the Iranian context in the second section of this chapter: Contention Politics: Agency, Repertoires and Political Opportunities.

1997 and 2008. Both researchers observed, in their study, that the limitations of political opportunities are the result of a two-way interaction between the structure and the political context. They explain: "political context and political ideas appear to play roles in shaping movement structure" while "particular structures are associated with particular political strategies"(Assoudeh and Salazar 2017, 138). For instance, the alternation between a reformist government by President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2004) and a repressive one by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) has affected the strategic choices of movements who moved from being centralized under Khatami to seeking external alliances under Ahmadinejad.

This chapter starts by exposing what the rational and constructivist schools offer in the analysis of contentious politics in terms of causes, strategies and outcomes. The second part elaborates on the choice of the structural theoretical framework in relation to the emergence of contention in Iran in 1999 and 2009.

1.1.COMPETING THEORIES: RATIONAL AND CONSTRUCTIVIST SCHOOLS

As aforementioned, the rationalist approach explains social movements as a result of contention. This school of thought depicts the micro-foundations of collective actions by focusing on the resources of mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Olson 1971).

Mancur Olson looks into the incentives that motivate a group of people to gather and consolidate power against a common opponent.[6] From this angle, social mobilization goes beyond grievances and is more likely to happen when influential members of a large group, whether lobbyists or labor unions, have interest in taking the leadership of its collective goods (Olson 1971, 9–10). According to Olson, the scale of mobilization varies in accordance to the willingness of the

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[6] Mancur Oslon was an Americam economist and social scientist whose main work focused on institutional economics, public goods and collective action.

'influential members' to engage with other groups in collective action. Groups from outside the organization are most likely to accept sharing "the costs of the group action" due to certain incentives, whether coercive or rewarding (Olson 1971, 51).[7] Olson's frame of analysis suggests that the success of a collective action is dependent on a centralized organization structure that operates according to certain interests and calculate the amplitude of its involvement. In other words, Olson's theory suggest that social mobilization does not occur for "free." Self-interest is the core motive behind calling for actions and reaching out for greater participation. Hence, the dissolution of a movement is the result of the emergence of new interests and the suspension of others.

John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1977) found another explanation for collective action problem. They suggest that the micro-foundation of collective actions is not only studied through the identification of the groups at stake but also of "movement entrepreneurs" who "attempt to form a viable organization" that "meet with the preferences of the demands"(McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1226,1236) . Therefore, collective actions' outcome depends on the circulation of capital in accordance to a supply-demand equation.

While the rationalist school of thought focuses on the material cost and benefit for collective actions to occur, the constructivist approach tends to investigate into the roots and the cultural identity of collective actions and movements. In his book *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence*, Murray Edelman (1971) draws upon the effect of politics on identities. He argues that governments play a major role in reflecting and shaping "myths" that

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[7] "The incentive must be "selective" so that those who do not join the organization working for the group's interest, or in other ways contribute to the attainment of the group's interest, can be treated differently from those who do. These "selective incentives" can be either negative or positive, in that they can either coerce by punishing those who fail to bear an allocated share of the costs of the group action, or they can be positive inducements offered to those who act in the group interest. A latent group that has been led to act in its group interest, either because of coercion of the individuals in the group or because of positive rewards to those individuals, will here be called a "mobilized" latent group."(Olson 1971, 51).

sustain the powerful (Edelman 1971).[8] Edelman links myth and identity by recalling the definition developed by Jerome Bruner and which entails that identities are formed by the "individual man […] who is able to structure his internal clamor of identities in terms of prevailing myth" (Edelman 1971,53). Between the role of the government in creating myths and the effect of myths on identities, Edelman's theory aims at demonstrating that politics is a social and symbolic interaction. It indirectly defines the notion of enemy and select adversaries according to which ones will "most potently create and mobilize allies"(Edelman 1971,114).

Coming from the same school of constructivism, in his book *the Weapons of the Weak,* James Scott (1985) adopts an ethnographic approach to explain the rise of contentious reactions (Scott 1985). Scott's investigation on the Malaysian peasant class contributes to the general understanding of the concept of resistance. From this perspective, the expression of collective resistance is an expression of class struggles as portrayed by Marx. It is an explanation of different tactics used by subordinate classes in a capitalist society. In in this context, and according to Scott, major collective forms of resistance are accumulations of everyday forms of such practices that are directly and unwillingly affected by culture and identity.

In summary, the materialistic approach of the rationalist school and the identity-based analysis of the constructivism, treats collective action as the fundamental process. In that view, the episodes of contention qualify as simple instances which structures are fundamentally affected by the available resources of mobilization (economic or cultural capitals). These two schools of thoughts take into account politics, not as a process of interaction between political actors, but as a continuous battle of power struggles wherever and however contention occurs. In contrast, the

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[8] According to Murray Edelman a myth is "an unquestioned belief held in common by a large group of people that gives events and actions a particular meaning, is a particularly relevant form of symbol in the emergence of mass political movements"(Edelman 1971, 53).

structural approach emphasizes on agency in the study of collective actions and contention. From this perspective, scholars like Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, have developed a theoretical framework that explains contentious politics as a result of intersection between contention (claim making), politics (political agents and political opportunities structure) and collective actions (Tilly and Tarrow 2007).[9] It is important to note that the structural approach does not neglect the notions of identity and history. However, it clusters them into structures and processes that constitute repertoires of contention, which operations are affected by the interaction between different political bodies such as governments and organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). [10]

1.2. CONTENTIOUS POLITICS: AGENCY, REPERTOIRES AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

The book *Contentious Politics,* by Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow (2007) summarizes a lifetime endeavor of research on contentious politics and social movements. In this book, the authors sought to surmount universalism and to highlight on the particularity of cases according to three main pillars of analysis: (1) the interaction of actors, (2) the repertoires of contention and the margin of innovation,(3) and the political opportunities structures.

According to Tilly and Tarrow, contentious politics is the outcome of processes of communication through which actors "make claims bearing someone else's interest" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4). The claims' range varies between strident demands and direct attacks (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4) Hence, when violent claims take place, contention is more likely to occur

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[9] Those terms will be defined and explained in the second section of the chapter: Contention Politics: Agency, Repertoires and Political Opportunities

[10] Those terms will be defined and explained in the second section of the chapter: Contention Politics: Agency, Repertoires and Political Opportunities

between the actors who are making these claims (subjects) and the ones receiving them (objects).[11]

For instance the student movement in Iran in 1999, resorted to violence after the attack of a student

dormitory in Tehran by a clandestine group (Ansar Hizbullah) considered to be close to the

hardliners in power. In this view, claim making, as framed by the subject and as received by the

object, affects the nature of responses and actions. Or, according to Tilly and Tarrow, they affect

the nature of "performances" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4). As defined by the authors,

"performances are standardized ways in which one set of political actors makes collective claims

on some other set of political actors" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 11. Those standards evolve over

time and change in accordance to the political contexts. For instance, students in 1999 resorted at

early stages of their "claim making process" to sit-ins in Tehran, communicated their demands

through press releases and used traditional ways to mobilize the crowd (e.g word to mouth and

flyer distribution technics). Whereas during the Green revolution in 2009, the civil society turned

to demonstrations, communicating their demands to the government as well as to the outside word

through the use of social media platforms.

In the study of agency, Tilly and Tarrow's theoretical framework takes into

consideration the governments and their affiliated structures. Those political entities are not

necessarily the objects of contention, however, they play the role of catalyzers of the latter for

three main reasons. First, "political contention puts at risk the advantages of those who currently

enjoy government power" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4). Second, governments as actors, can have

a major impact on the nature of performances in cases of contention. This is because they "make

the rules governing contention: who can make collective claims by what means, with what

outcomes" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4). Third; "governments control substantial coercive means:

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[11] Within this theoretical framework, actors can be individuals, groups and even institutions (Tilly and Tarrow 2007,4).

armies, police forces, courts, prisons and the like" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4). In the case of Iran, the government is a major agent that cannot be neglected in the study of contention. For instance, in the following chapters, we will elaborate more on the role of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps during the waves of unrests in 1999, 2009, and 2018 and on the repressive measures taken by Ahmadinejad to suppress the collective actions of the Green revolution.

Tilly and Tarrow elaborate on the concept of repertoire of contention. They defined the repertoire as "arrays of contentious performances that are currently available within some set of political actors" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4). The authors explain that the sources of repertoire change emanate from "the effect of rapid political change" that can be related, for instance, to globalization and economic integration (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4). In this concern, we will discover in this research project the role of globalization in shaping the Iranian repertoire of contention between 1999, 2009 and 2017/8. Furthermore, factors that bring change to this array of performances can be related to the "outcome of incrementally changing structural factors" that according to Tilly and Tarrow can be sorted in three main categories: connections between claim making and everyday social organization, cumulative creation of a signaling system contention itself, [and] operation of the regimes [that] sort performances between tolerated and forbidden (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4)

In this case of less dramatic change, one can take the example of the students' strike of 1999 in Iran. The sit-ins and acts of civil disobedience disrupted the everyday social organization. They succeeded in expressing a refusal of the fulfillment of a certain social role (in this case being a student) without trespassing the fields of un-tolerated and forbidden performances.[12]

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[12] Untolerated performances such as burning the image of Ayatollah Khomeini or shoot on the internal security forces , and even gathering without getting a license from the Ministry of Interior.

The ongoing mutation of the repertoire draws on "identities, social ties and organizational forms" from which collective claims emerge as well as the means for those claims to happen. (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4). From this perspective, the theory of contentious politics as designed by Tilly and Tarrow does not neglect the notions of identity and culture. However, it suggests studying the expression of them – claims and performances- rather than studying them as primary origins of contention and collective actions.

The forms of contentious politics changed in Iran between 1999 and 2009. One of the interpretation suggests that claim making under Khatami was much easier than under Ahmadinejad (Assoudeh and Salazar 2017). Coming from this example, analyzing the political context of contention helps in understanding the dimensions of opportunities and threats that are relevant for the movement itself, its outcomes, and its sustainability. Tilly and Tarrow, for instance, develop the concept of political opportunity structures. Those structures reflect how "contentious politics varies in close connection with shifts of political power, and [how] it organizes both inside and outside institutional venues" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 4). Tilly explains, during a discussion panel about his book in the University of Cambridge (2006), that this structure "impinge on actors' orientations and actions"(Tilly, 2006). This impingement is the result of interactions between different political structures that enforce a particular political context. Those structures are formed by the government and public institutions but also by external political actors such as governments of other countries, international institutions and transnational movements. .Tarrow and Tilly identifies the regimes where the roots of contention are multilayered as composite regimes. In such contexts, the contentious repertoires are affected by different systems of rule (Tilly and Tarrow

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2007, 163). For instance, in chapter 2 and 4, we will be discussing the effect of the US- Iranian relations on the contentious repertoires from historical and structural perspectives.[13]

Tarrow and Tilly's approach projects on the vertical effect of the political opportunities structure on contentious politics. However, studying the state weaknesses and/or international pressure on the latter are not sufficient to understand the origins and outcomes of contention (Goldstone 1991; McAdam 1999; Tocqueville 1955). From this perspective, McAdam argues that the structure of political opportunities is one of two determinants of contentious politics, the other being the subject perception (McAdam 1999b, 40–41). In Tocquevillian terms, this subject perception, referred to as the social-structural factor, combined with the state structure can determine the relative effect of the collective sentiment (Tocqueville 1955). In line with this trail of thought, Goldstone(1991) observes that political and perceived structures cannot operate independently. In this respect, although State's breakdown is usually triggered by political structural factors, revolutions are more unlikely to fulfill their objectives without a subjective perceptions of the breakdown itself (Goldstone 1991, 408).Consequently, studying the social structure and political structure in contentious politics implies that individuals play a major role in calculating opportunities before ceasing them. This compliments what Tilly and Tarrow says, in that 'contention comes sometimes from above but its effect would not be, relatively, visible without the perceptions of the subjects'(Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 46).

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis aims at studying the causes of dissolution of social movements in Iran and the failure of change infusion after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. This is not a comparative study between the motives behind the Khomeini's success in dominating the structure of power with the values of the revolution and the failures of the waves of unrests

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[13] We will be discussing the repercussions of the US-Iranian relations such as the economic sanctions on Iran as well as the nuclear deal initiated by the Obama administration.

that Iran has been witnessing since its last regime change in 1979. In contrast, the main objective of this thesis is to understand how the interaction of different actors and different structures affect contentious politics, its mechanisms, and its outcome.

CHAPTER 2
IRAN 1979, AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ISLAM

"Not all state crises end with revolutions," Goldstone notes (Goldstone 1991). As discussed in Chapter 1, some scholars argue that contention is more likely to occur when there is a match between the political opportunity and perceived opportunity (McAdam 1999b; Tocqueville 1955; Goldstone 1991). In this respect, this possibility tends to occur when the population succeeds in perceiving, for instance, a weak state structure correlating with the emergence of an opportunistic opposition highly committed to pushing an agenda of change forward.[14]

Tocqueville, in his analysis on the relationship between the regime structure and the occurrence of the French revolution, observes that the structural weakness of the regime that triggered revolution was combined with popular sentiments of collective actions (Tocqueville 1955).[15] While the monarchy failed with its reforms' attempts, an intellectual opposition was growing and was able to reach out to the masses with new messages challenging the current system and providing alternatives for the popular common good. In this context, popular sentiment, angered by unfavorable structural conditions and stimulated by an inspiring opposition, was built gradually until it exploded. Protestors' high engagement, according to the Tocqueville, requires time and an acquired sentiment of trust in the cause and its success (Goldstone 1991; Tocqueville 1955).

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[14] In this respect, we are not discussing the authenticity of those demands and new agendas of change.

[15] Tocqueville, in his book *The Old Regime and The French Revolution,* investigates the causes that led to the breakout of a revolution in 1789. He focuses on the social-structure factor, as well as on the political structure of the state. Tocqueville bases his argument on three main factors that led to an uprising: the failure of the regime of monarchies in attempting reforms, the rise of an intellectual opposition and popular aggressive reaction to the situation. Although he was pessimistic about freedom in France, Tocqueville believed that at some point France might be ruled by a free government. An important observation on Tocqueville conception is worth to mention; he always backs-up his arguments about the continuity of pre- and post-Revolutionary institutions and structures with statements about the rupture and the change that the Revolution presented (Tocqueville 1955).

The comparison between the French revolution (1789) and the Iranian revolution (1979) might be criticized due to the existence of multiple layers that can be only justified or explained in a specific context and under determined conditions. However, one can argue that in both cases the eruption of popular revolutions is closely related to what Gramsci calls relational political forces; "the relation of internal forces [State and opposition] in the country in question, [and] of the relation of international forces, of the country's geo-political position"(Gramsci 1971, 304). From this perspective, Gramsci, just like Tocqueville and Goldstone, sees that in case of state crisis, collective actions are an "evaluation of the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness, and organization attained by the various social classes (Gramsci 1971, 304).

Revising the concept of correlation between the social-structure opportunity (perceived opportunity) and political opportunity structure is important in this chapter to understand the factors that led to an Islamic revolution and then to the fall of the Pahlavi monarchy. In the following chapter, I discern the political opportunity structures that contributed to the rise of the opposition led by Ayatollah Khomeini. I do not proceed chronologically with the events that led to the fall of the monarchy. Rather, I highlight on the series of events that allowed interaction between "the structures of political power, established institutions, and the character of contentious politics" and triggered a common will for collective actions (Tilly and Tarrow 2007; Goldstone 1991a; McAdam 1999; Tocqueville 1955; Gramsci 1971) .

The history of modern Iran is marked by episodes of contentions. From the Constitution Revolution in 1906 till the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has witnessed four phases of regime change (1906, 1925, 1953, and 1979).[16] Contemporary literature on Iran frequently argues that the

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[16]1906, the Constitutional Revolution, 1925: end of the Qajar Dynasty through a military coup by the Pahlavi's, 1953: Toppling of Reza Shah and his replacement by his son Mohamed Reza Shah through a military coup, 1979: the Islamic Revolution.

Islamic regime that was introduced by Ayatollah Khomeini is not only reactional against the prior regime but also an accumulation of a century of contention and politics that shaped the domestic preferences inside Iran and re-shaped Iran's positioning on the International level (Ayatolahi 1984; Ajudani 1997; Dezfuli 2016; Tabatabai 2008).

2.1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: RELIGION, OIL, AND THE WEST

The fall of the monarchical system and the emergence of a Shiite political philosophy dates back to the early stages of modernity and democracy in Iran.[17] The Constitutional uprising succeeded in modernizing the institutions and establishing a parliament (Majliss) during the Qajar dynasty.[18] However, it introduced divisions within the political class and opened up to heated debates between the advocates of modernism and democracy and a religious opposition (Dezfuli 2016, 11). Led by Sheikh Fazl-Allah Nouri, the Shiite conservative group ventures to describe the principles of the Constitutional revolution as part of the Western doctrine that contradicts the incontrovertible rules of the Sharia and Islam.[19] The heated debate had "wide-ranging yet neglected consequences for the evolution of modern Shia political thought and later developments in Iran's modern history, including Islamic Revolution of 1979" (Dezfuli 2016, 11) Those intellectual transformations are necessary to unfold the origins of the basic principles of the Islamic Republic in Iran but do not by any means explain the drastic political shift in 1979.

The twentieth century waves of contention cannot be understood or discerned without an in-depth understanding of the role of oil and weapons in Iran. It started with the Anglo-Persian

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[17]. From the 17th till the 19th century, the Persian Empire went through a series of conflict with the Czarist Russian Empire. The latter's defeat in conquering the Persian Empire led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 (i.e.Mashrūtiyyat) which brought democracy.

18 Qajar Dynasty was an Iranian royal dynasty of Turkic origins, specifically from the Qajar tribe, which ruled Persia (Iran) from 1785 to 1925.

[19] Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri was a prominent Shia Muslim cleric in Qajar Iran during the late 19th and early 20th century and founder of political Islam in Iran.

agreement in 1919 that aimed at creating a strong oil and military partnership between Persia and the UK. The agreement was centered around granting the Anglo-Persian Oil Company the right of drilling oil while the British committed to support Iran militarily and economically (Hershey 1919). The agreement was rejected by the National Assembly in 1921, however the repercussions were transferred to the post-Qajar dynasty period.

The Qajar family was overthrown by a staged military coup d'état led by Reza Khan in 1921. Four years later, the latter Khan pushed the parliament to depose the Qajar family and proclaim Reza Khan, i.e Reza Shah Pahlavi, as the next monarch of Iran. Being a hardline nationalist, Reza Shah tried to maintain full control on the Iranian oil by ignoring the work of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in 1932. His willingness in nationalizing the oil production and challenging the British influence in the region by appealing to Nazi Germany during World War II, has led to the deposition of Reza Shah in 1941 and he was replaced by his son Mohamad Reza Shah (Abrahamian 2009, 97–98).[20] Ervand Abrahamian explains that the British did not want to depose the Pahlavi regime, however, they wanted to "facilitate the flow of both oil to Britain and supplies to the Soviet Union" (Abrahamian 2009, 97). Therefore, they decided to replace the current Shah with his son.

Mohamad Reza Shah survived in power for thirty-eight years before the irruption of the Islamic Revolution. The Pahlavi son had capitulated his will to the British and Americans in order to remain in power, at least during the twenty-five years of his rule. The role of the AIOC remained a controversial issue in the domestic politics of Iran. The attempts of oil nationalization under Reza Shah opened the floor for negotiations between Mohamed Reza Shah and AIOC. In 1949, a

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[20] Reza Shah was accused of cooperating with Nazi Germany. Therefore, the Soviets and British saw the necessity of overthrowing without changing the regime him. See more: Abrahamian, Ervand. 2009. A History of Modern Iran. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Supplemental Agreement aiming at revising the British oil concession, allowed Iran to reallocate its income in-order to finance its military and development plans, without jeopardizing its relationship with the West, namely Britain and the United States of America (USA). Despite the fact that the outcome of the negotiations increased the share of oil profits for Iran, a group of nationalist Iranians were rising (Alvandi 2014, 14–15). In April 29, 1951 the Majliss (parliament) voted against the Supplemental Agreement and brought into power Mohammad Mosaddeq, a nationalist hardliner. The popularity of the newly Prime Minister Mossadeq was growing on a domestic level and decreasing on the Anglo-American level due to the fear of the spread of communism inside Iran. The American administration, under Eisenhower decided to support the overthrow of Mossdeq. In return, the Shah of Iran was promised to insure his power consolidation and support Iran's economy and military (Alvandi 2014,17) .

The coup of 1953 launched by General Fazlollah Zahedi against Mossadeq launched a new partnership between Iran and the USA. In August 1954, the National Oil Company "signed an agreement […] with an international consortium of oil companies, including five major US companies" (Alvandi 2014,18). In this context the long-lasting Anglo-Iranian oil partnership came to an end as a new partnership saw the light. This new combination contributed to the political, military and economic stabilization in the midst of the Cold War. As Mohamed Reza allegedly confessed to Kermit Roosevelt: "I owe my throne to God, my people, my army- and to you (Roosevelt 1979, 199).[21]

The history of contention in Iran is tanned with coups and cannot be understood by dismissing the interaction between three main factors: Islam and the political system, oil's role in

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[21] Kermit Roosevelt was the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the United States during the 1940's-50's. He was heading the Middle East Department of the CIA during the 1950s when he gave the greenlight to topple Mossadeq. See Kermit Roosevelt, "*Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran"(1979):199*

sustaining the military and the economy, and Iran's century of engagement with the West (namely the British and then the Americans). Between the Qajar dynasty and the shifts in the Pahlavi state, Iran remained a monarchy that oscillates between waves of democratization, Westernization and modernism. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 came to conclude those heated debates that lasted for almost a century and were reflected in a weak political and constitutional structure. The rise of Ayatollah Khomeini in addition to the lack of trust in the Pahlavi establishment, led to a historical collective action that ended a thousand-year-old monarchy and led to the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI).

2.2. ISLAMIC REVOLUTION AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES STRUCTURE

"Contention did not only come from below"(Tilly and Tarrow 2007a, 46). It also originates from within the regime or the state that suffers from its consequences (i.e. contentious politics). As Tilly and Tarrow portray it, contentious politics "varies and changes in close connection with shifts of political powers" and is relatively dependent on the interaction between the structure of political powers and institutions (Tilly and Tarrow 2007a, 46). From this perspective, political opportunities refer to characteristics and features in the regime that accumulate and facilitate the irruption of collective action (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 47). In the context of the Iranian revolution, history and movement scholars have considered that the weaknesses of the Pahlavi regime made it highly susceptible to collapse.

2.2.1. UNDERMINED REFORMS AND SOCIAL CLASH

One of the accumulating features of Pahlavi regime is the undermining of the state's social support. Charles Kurzman (1996) observes that the state's weakness explained by the failure of social support reforms in Iran is an argument that "takes different forms depending on the affected group" (Kurzman 1996, 157). In the early 1960's, Mohamed Shah launched a set of reform measures as

steps towards modernization, as described by the latter.[22] For instance, the land reform policies created an emerging opposition within the oligarchy but also 15 years later within the groups of farmers and villagers. The Washington Post reported on December 29, 1978 that farmers expressed dissatisfaction from the land reform measures that were supposed to improve their social and financial status. The main reasons behind those failures were the overheated oil-boom industry that weakened the agriculture sector and strengthened the industrial sector, in addition to a high level of corruption in the ministry of Agriculture (*Washington Post*, December 29, 1978).

The weaknesses of the Shah's institutions and the failure in implementing the reform plan were accompanied with an increased censorship of intellectuals and journalists and the empowerment of the military. The most affected group by those measures were the Shia clerics who were entirely deprived from "their longstanding judicial role […] [and whom] educational role and… role in welfare distribution" were challenged and limited (Kurzman 1996, 157).

2.2.2. OIL CRISIS AND INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE

Political opportunities not only include the "instability of current political alignments" but also "the availability of influential allies or supporters for challengers" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 57). The political challenges that Mohamed Reza Shah were facing on the domestic level had repercussions on the positioning of Iran on the international political map on one hand and destabilized the Iran-USA relations on another hand.

The undermined reforms along with the expanded industrial projects, and the high military expenditure created pressures on domestic oil supplies during the 1970's. On March 21, 1973, the

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[22] The reform measures were part of what Mohamed Reza Shah called it White Revolution, or the Revolution of the Shah and the people. The aim of this revolution was to empower the lower social classes and suppress a middle class that was conventionally with the traditional system and against the wave of modernization. See also Ramazani, Rouhollah K. 1974. "Iran's 'White Revolution': A Study in Political Development." International Journal of Middle East Studies 5 (02): 124–39. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800027781.

New York Times reported that the Shah formally announced that Iran would take the control of its "oil-industry from foreign operators" This transfer of oil ownership induced an economic shock on the global level (Priest 2012).[23]

The election of Jimmy Carter, as President of the United States, caught the Shah by surprise. The main source of fear was not Washington bailing on him but actually the demands of the new president. The Shah notes in his autobiography that during his meetings with US ambassador to Iran, William Sullivan "the only word [he] received from Mr. Sullivan was reiteration of Washington's complete support for [his] rule" (Pahlavi 1980, 161). However, what mattered for him was whether or not "the United States would ask him to implement policies which would seriously jeopardize his hold on power" (Ashraf and Banuazizi 1985, 19–20).[24]

The American pressure was simultaneously accompanied with a pressure from International Human Rights Organizations, namely by Amnesty International. Dr. Roham Alvandi (2018), in a talk at Stanford, explains that the Iranian revolution irrupted due to the mushrooming of Human Rights activism in Europe and in the United States during the 1970's. He observes that the movements in Iran did not start from Tehran but actually were triggered by international movements advocating against Shah's abuse of Human rights (Stanford Iranian Studies Program 2018).[25] This activism started bourgeoning in late 1960's, especially after Shah's visit to West German Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger in Berlin that mobilized Iranian migrant students. While the Shah was negotiating new opportunities for joint projects in military and industrial

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[23] The decision of nationalizing the oil had put Nixon's administration in a position of indecisiveness towards Iran. In fact, "Nixon officials had been signaling their support for a crude-oil price increase—both to strengthen Iran, the closest U.S. ally in the Persian Gulf, and to protect domestic producers—but they did not count on OPEC's sweeping renegotiation of concessions followed by a giant price spike, largely spearheaded by Iran's Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was increasingly desperate for expanded revenues to fund his grandiose military ambitions"(Priest 2012).

[24] The Shah was afraid to be overthrew just like his father (coup of 1953).

[25] "The Iranian revolution was not something that just happened in Tehran, but it is something that just happened here in Northern California, in Berlin, and in Najaf and in Leizig"(Stanford Iranian Studies Program 2018).

development, students from the Free University of Berlin clashed with the Shah's security forces and German police that led to the death of a student, who according to German media had nothing to do with the protests.

2.2.3. THE PERCEPTION OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THE IMAM IN EXILE

The weakness of the state in Iran along with international pressure created awareness among the popular mass. This awareness according to MacAdam does not automatically translate into protests (McAdam 1999, 48). It requires a subjective perception of the political and institutional opportunities.[26] The population's perception of the State coercive power in 1978 was gradually translated into acts of organized civil disobedience, yet protests at that point were still inspiring fear in the minds of the participants. For that reason, the majority of the people avoided taking the streets, even during Islamic marches such as Ashûra.[27]

Meanwhile, in Paris, an Imam in exile, appeared to the mass population as the new leader who would save Iran from the Pahlavi tyrants. Ayatollah Khomeini was highly charismatic and able to mobilize extensively the suppressed religious opposition. The appearance of a leader was highly significant for the masses. Recruitment of people started from Khomeini's village, Shiraz, where people were invited to "abandon oneself" or to "abandon life." (Hegland 1986, 233–34) A few months later, liberals joined the revolutionary movement not because they believe in the values advocated by Ayatollah Khomeini, but because they found that there is no other way to operate outside the collective action frame (Kurzman 1996).

The questions around the emergence of Khomeini are numerous. However, they are inspired by the political opportunities put forth by the Shah regime. Some relate it to the oppression

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[26] This is when the study of the forms and ideologies of movements becomes important.
[27] Ashûra is a solemn day of mourning the martyrdom of Hussein in 680 AD.

of the clerics and the Shia in the country; other's relate it to the international pressure on the Shah and the willingness of the Americans to bet on a new ally in the Middle East (*BBC,* June 2, 2016).[28] In both cases, one can observe that the correlation between the weakness of the state and public's awareness and perception of those opportunities led to the irruption of a revolution that drastically changed the system of governance in Iran. In the following chapters we will be discovering the features of the new regime respectively with the emergence of unrest in post-revolutionary Iran. However, it is important to note that in more theoretical terms, the occurrence of contention and the variations in contentious politics is comparable to mechanism of communication; the resonance between the perceived and political opportunities requires political signals from above and perceptive ones from below.

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[28] On June 2nd, 2016, BBC revealed secret correspondence between Ayatollah Khomeini – founder of Iran's Islamic Republic and the man who called the United States "the Great Satan"- and Jimmy Carter – the man who promised to stand by the Shah until last minute. For more see. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36431160

CHAPTER 3
STUDENT MOVEMENT, 1999

3.1. INTRODUCTION

3.1.1. CONTEXT

On July 9, 1999, the Islamic Republic of Iran witnessed the largest outcry after the Islamic Revolution in 1979.[29] Students from the University of Tehran took to the streets to protest for justice and freedom of expression. Although the demonstrations expanded to other cities, they only lasted for a week before being crushed by the regime.

The different phases that this student-led movement went through in only seven days shaped the goals of the protests, the claims, and the performances. At the beginning, students started to demonstrate after the closure of one of the reformist newspapers in Iran, *Salam* (Peace).[30] After the first days of protests (July 8), the dormitory of the University of Tehran was attacked by a group of undercover clandestine forces known as the Comrades of Hezbollah (Ansar Hezbollah). [31]"It was sudden and terrifying, I had to close my eyes just to imagine how death would look like," Faruh, a former student at the University of Tehran tells me (Faruh 2018).[32] However, this incident did not stop the students from organizing bigger protests the second day.

The six-day protests marked chaos in the streets of Tehran. Beside the regular confrontation with Basijs, students resorted to violent means to express their anger. *The Economist* reported

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[29] Iran witnessed episodes of contention before 1999, for example the farmers protests in Islamshahr in 1995. However, the student movement in 1999 was the largest and most violent one up until this date.

[30] Salam (Peace) was one of the few newspaper in Iran that covers topics like corruption and reforms. The name of the Newspaper was given by the son of Ayatollah Khomeini; Ahmad Khomeini.

[31] Comrades of Hezbollah (Ansar-Hezbollah) is a conservative t para-military organization which ideology evolve around the principles of the Islamic Revolution.

[32] The names and identifying details of some activists have been changed to protect their right of privacy.

dramatic escalations, as they were burning tires and throwing stones while the Basijs were shooting and firing tear-gas to stop the 'rioters'(*The Economist,* July 15, 1999).[33] During the second day of protests, the President Mohamad Khatami announced that the Supreme Security National Council, decided to fire police officers who launched the attack on the students in the streets (*CNN* - July 10, 1999). However, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was ordering, in public, the Basijs troops to intervene and stop the rioters (*The Economist,* July 15, 1999).[34] This contradiction of the authorities' response increased the tension between protesters and regime.

President Mohamad Khatami was a reformist politician with a progressive human rights based agenda. He won the Presidency in 1997 with an unexpected landslide victory (69.1%).[35] According to Ahmad and Mohamad Sadri – prominent scholars on Iranian affairs- Khatami was not seen as a serious candidate by the Supreme Leader and the hardline Guardian Council (M. Sadri and Sadri 2013).[36] For that reason, he was not disqualified from the election, although the Guardian Council rejected 99% of the candidacies during the 1997 election.

The first term of Khatami (1997-2001) was a term of inaction. His "non-confrontational nature" did not allow him to stand up for right wing theocrats nor to implement parts of his democratization agenda (M. Sadri and Sadri 2013). It is important to observe that the power struggle under Khatami had definite repercussions on the intensification of contention during the student protests in Tehran. As explained above, the perceived inconsistency in the authorities' responses contributed to more violence in the streets and aggravated the tone of demands. Students

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[33] Basij is one of the five forces of the Revolutionary Guards whose job is to maintain internal security and insure law enforcement.
[34] The names of the officials were never revealed.
[35] See more on the elections data on http://irandataportal.syr.edu/1997-presidential-election
[36] The Guardian Council is formed by six Shiite jurists appointed by the Supreme Leader and six legal experts. The body is formed by right wing members who have the right to vet candidates for the elective office.

had abandoned their initial claim on freedom of the press and started demanding the overthrow of Khamenei.

3.1.2. PARTICIPANTS

As mentioned in the methodology section, I conducted two interviews with an Iranian Sociology and Religion scholar, Prof. Ahmad Sadri, and; a veteran Iranian student from the University of Tehran, Faruh. Prof. Ahmad Sadri is not only an academic but also a reformist supporter and member in the National Iranian American Council (NIAC).[37] Sadri wrote articles on Khatami and his democratization plan, amongst *Mahmoud Khatami* that was published in the Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics in 2013 (M. Sadri and Sadri 2013). Faruh is an alumni student of the University of Tehran. He is currently living in Iran with his family. Faruh was among the students who witnessed the dormitory incident and the demonstrations that followed.

3.2 FINDINGS

3.2.1 SOCIAL AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES STRUCTURE

3.2.1.1 Lost Trust

The election of Khatami in 1997 brought hope for some Iranians, including the student groups, who were seeking a human rights and democratic approach to the system of governance. It was considered a "turning point" in the history of Iran, a "Fresh start" and even a "Democratic success."[38] In retrospect, three main factors led to the victory of Khatami. First, the frustration of Iranians due to President Rafsanjani's latent efforts in re-building Iran after the Iraq-Iran war.[39] In

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[37] National Iranian American Council (NIAC) was founded in 2002 to advocate against war with Iran. And currently NIAC is advocating for the nuclear deal with Iran.

[38] See more "Moderate Leader is Elected in Iran," New York Times, May 25, 1997; "Khatami Promises a Fresh Start," Middle East Economic Digest, June 6, 1997; R.H. Curtis, "Khatami's Election May be a Turning Point,"Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (August-September 1997); and S.C. Fairbanks, "Iran's Democratic Efforts," Middle East Policy (September 1997)

[39] Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is one of the Islamic Republic founding fathers and the fourth President of Iran.

addition to his economic policies, namely privatization of public sector institutions that contributed to the emergence of a new class of *nouveau riches* (a newly rich class) (Amuzegar 2006). Second, Khatami's "campaign platform and manifesto" suggested progressive approaches to issues such as human rights, liberties and democracy, and was able to attract intellectuals and students to Iran (Amuzegar 2006). Finally, the Iranian will to depose the Speaker of the *Majliss* (Parliament), Ali Akbar Nateq-Nur, a hardcore conservative politician whom prospective measures were "the [enforcement] of Islamic legal and ethical codes in the government and society" (Amuzegar 2006). The openness of Khatami was also well received by the West, as he promised to open up to Western culture. Consequently, the US offered Iran a limited sanctions relief. And by 1999, America started exporting medical and agricultural products to the Iranian market (Kozhanov 2011).

The optimistic expectations began to fade away with the media suppression measures up until the closure of *Salam* on July 7, 1999. On June 20, 1999, Heshmatollah Tabarzadi, the chief editor of *Hoveyat-e-Khish*—a reformist newspaper—was arrested. Shortly after the Human Rights Watch Report listed that under Khatami there was the closure and banning of more than fifteen publications in his four years of governance.[40] Faruh explains that the systematic closure of newspapers reflected the weakness of Khatami to standup for his progressive ideas and not his willingness of suppressing people (Faruh 2018). He added: "We all knew that the judicial branch was responsible for those media suppression measures. In fact, I thought before this wave of newspapers closures that having Khatami would motivate me to start a new magazine inside the University of Tehran. My aim was to cover students' activities and engagement in the Iranian society. But, yet I was still having some doubts in the system as whole"(Faruh 2018).

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[40] See more Human writes watch report https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/iran/Iran99o-02.htm

The loss of trust in the regime under Khatami was nourished by the resignation of Ahmed Borghani, the Deputy Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance; due to the recourse of special courts to suppress freedom of expression. Borghani was a reformist and an advocate of human rights. In a last speech before leaving the Ministry, Borghani said:

> They accuse us of trying to create a free press. They accuse us of closing our eyes to violations of press regulations. It was not clear what the legal rights of the press are...their focus is to close the windows which bring in fresh air, and this pressure is from all sides (Borghani 1999).

The resignation of Borghani, the closure of *Salam,* and the suppression of freedom of expression were perceived threats to Iranians and the structural opportunities that allowed for contention to emerge. However, there is an additional aspect to consider in this case; the emotions. The students, who started demonstrating, were emotionally motivated to engage in contention. In this respect, Tilly and Goldstone (2001) explain that some movements can be understood in terms of what they called "emotional socialization"(Goldstone and Tilly. 2001, 39). The emotional identification to a cause motivate individuals to join a movement but not become attached to the movement from within (Goldstone and Tilly. 2001, 39) Faruh's involvement in the student's movement had more to do with his passion for journalism. He explains: "when they closed *Salam* newspaper, I felt that I need to take the streets and start screaming"(Faruh 2018). While recalling these moments, Faruh's voice noticeably changed. He was talking passionately about his engagement and activities.

In the analysis on contention within regime, Tilly and Tarrow define a "political opportunity structure [as] features of regimes and institutions that facilitate or inhibit" collective action (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 49). And those regime's features can be reflected in splits within

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the ruling classes, as it was under Khatami's rule. Prof. Sadri explains: "Ayatollah Khamenei was surprised when Khatami won. And he tried to weaken his rule in different ways" (A. Sadri 2018). He added that Khatami was never corrupted but at the same time non-confrontational (A. Sadri 2018).

The episodes of contention that the student movement went through revealed absence of harmony between the Khatami and Khamenei. This conflictual relationship was reflected through contradictory official statements during the week of demonstrations. After the dormitory incident, Khatami refrained from responding or releasing a statement. The choice of remaining silent did not please the Supreme Leader and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Consequently, on July 9, 1999, the IRGC sent a strong worded letter to Khatami accusing him for disrespecting the blood of the victims and announcing their readiness to take the appropriate measures:

> …Do you think that the inattention of a small group called "Hezbollah" constitutes permission for [the opposition] to break the head of every religious Iranian and destroying the respect of religion? ... In conclusion, with complete respect and endearment towards His Excellency, we declare that our patience has come to an end, and we will not permit ourselves any more tolerance in the face of your inaction (IRGC commanders 1999).

The subliminal message of this letter was accusing Khatami of supporting the student demonstrations that broke out, the morning after the attack on the University of Tehran. The silence of the President was interpreted in two different ways; Khatami was either insinuating that the regime agrees on the attacks on the dormitory, or he was trying to send a green light for students to escalate the tone. In both cases, it was not well received by the IRGC.

During the violent episodes of the movements, the authorities changing statement led to more chaos and increased uncertainties. On July 10, 1999, Khatami denounced the police reactions to the students and pushed the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) to fire the police officers who launched this operation. Faruh explains "we were shocked when we heard Khatami. But ironically, we never knew who was fired and never understood why the head of the police Hedayat Loftia never resigned. Khatami tried in so many ways to show support but he was always stopped" (Faruh 2018). In contrast, Sadri believes that the student protests in 1999 was a hardliner fabricated game (A. Sadri 2018). He says: "if you observe the evolvement of events one can spot hard-liners' interference. First, in majority all the newspapers who were closed or banned were reformist ones. Why would Khatami close them? Second, the attack on the student dormitory was hardliners backed event. It is true that the authorities condemned it but also were able to use students' anger as an attempt by the enemy to threaten Iran's National Security"(A. Sadri 2018).

The split in the ruling class was visible in Khatami's contradictive responses. A few days after his announcement about the decision of firing police officers, Khatami appeared on the National Television to support Khameini's request to stop the riots. Faruh explains that the reaction of Khamenei was expected; "he accused us for being led by an external forces, and for threatening the National Security. As he always does"(Faruh 2018). He continues to say that, in contrast, Khatami's statement on the National television engendered more anger and dissatisfaction among the student body (Faruh 2018). In fact, after denouncing police's behavior, Khatami stated that the act of riots that were taking place in the streets should be stopped by violence. Furthermore, with the same rhetorical direction as Khamenei, Khatami described the events as being "neither deeply rooted nor widespread"(Khatami 1999). He added that his administration does not prefer resorting to violence; however, in the case of riots, he expressed confidence in people's awareness to stop

those acts but also in the security, intelligence and law-enforcement agencies commitment in ending those problems "with the grace of God"(Khatami 1999). The moment Khatami left the decision in the hands of the "law-enforcement agencies," the violence escalated for one day then started to dissolve progressively.

In summary, the political opportunity structure (or lack thereof) under Khatami, was the regime's inability to act. The general perception on the difference between the rhetoric used and the measures implemented facilitated the emergence of collective actions. Furthermore, based on Tilly and Goldstone definition of emotional socialization, we can conclude that the connection between perceptions and the opportunity structure was driven by an emotional instinct that encouraged people to join the demonstrations (Goldstone and Tilly. 2001, 40). In this respect, the students' engagement in the collective action was not only based on the need of a free media in Iran but also the emotional attachment to the feeling of freedom.

The emotional perceptions change with the evolvement of contention. These perceptions might intensify but at the same time they might fade away. Tilly and Goldstone explain that the emotional socialization process requires a buildup of rational arguments about the cause itself (Goldstone and Tilly. 2001, 40). In the case of the student movement, the rational argument used by the protesters was intellectual and press freedom. As violence increased, this argument faded away. In this term, the collective action became reactional to authorities' responses. Faruh explains, "I was among a group of students who were advocating for a re-channeling of our claims"(Faruh 2018). He goes on to add, "the dissolution of the student demonstrations was due to the absence of a determined goal" (Faruh 2018). This evokes the question of opposition, its structure and its appearance to the larger public. From a Tocquevillian (1955) perspective, one of the factors that led to the success of the French Revolution was the ability of the intellectual class

to appeal to the working-class in France. In comparison, students' demands in the 1999 movement could not inspire older and working-class Iranians who had different social and economic priorities. In an article for the *New York Times* (1999), Elaine Sciolino describes her visit to a small town in the south of Tehran, Islamshahr where she met young men who did not take part in the student movement. She reports that they only heard about the violent riots but were ill-informed about the closure of *Salam* newspaper *(The New York,* July 16,1999). She writes: "They share the same desires for personal freedoms. It is just that, here, priorities are different. The men of Islamshahr want jobs"*(The New York,* July 16,1999).

3.2.2. PERFORMANCES AND REPERTOIRES

The variation in contention outcomes depends on the properties of the regimes in terms of degree of capacity in affecting the activity and resources of the population (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 55–56). In the case of Iran, the government has a high-capacity to maintain order through coercive means and channels. From this perspective, the government has the capacity to change the character of contention and "to affect the opportunities and threats impinging on … the maker of claims" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 55–56).

As Sadri describes it, the dormitory incident was aimed at changing the nature of the movement. The right wing's expectation was to force Khatami to condemn the accident and open a channel of communication with the students. The inaction of Khatami led to a social outrage that was translated into violent movements in the second day. The authorities' response to the riots were confrontational and suppressive, which led to an escalation in the nature of contentious performances of the protesters.

The initial claims of the student movements, as mentioned above, tackled the issues of freedom of expression and journalism for social change. These claims were translated into peaceful

performances like sit-ins and slogans condemning the injustice. The general perception at the beginning was in favor of Khatami especially that the closure of *Salam* was decided by a special judicial court and not by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. In addition to slogans advocating freedom of expression, such as آزادی اندیشه، همیشه همیشه (Freedom of Thought, Always Always), protesters were also screaming: خاتمی خاتمی حمایتت می‌کنیم (Khatami Khatami We Support).

The dormitory incident shifted the course of events and the opposition group's perception of the regime. This shift in perceptions, in alliances, in opportunities and threats have moved "power holders toward rigid repertoires, and has moved challengers toward more flexible repertoires" that fluctuate according to the circumstances (Tilly and Tarrow 2007b, 55–56)). Despite the division in the regime between Khatami and Khamenei, the students could not win Khatami as an ally. In the opposite, the lack of trust in Khatami turned him into a supporter of state terrorism in the eyes of the protesters. The violent performances were accompanied with extreme slogans demanding the resignation of Khamenei, claiming the illegitimacy of the Majliss, and accusing the regime for terrorism. Faruh recalls chants, such as: وای اگر خاتمی حکم جهادم دهد (Wow if Khatami decides to fight for jihad), طالبان حیاکن ، دانشگاه رو رها کن (Taliban Humor, Leave University), مجلس فرمایشی خجالت خجالت (The congressional assembly, embarrassment of embarrassment). The students in some regions of Iran were chanting "Death to Khamenei," but according to Sadri those were reactional moments. The students' claims and choice of performances made the Iranians reluctant to join the movement. Sadri adds, "despite all the slogans that were raised in the streets here and there, there was no intention of regime change because the claims were very targeted, freedom of expression, no for violence and no for corruption" (A. Sadri 2018).

The means of mobilization, according to Faruh, were very conventional and unorganized; "we resorted to tactics like press releases, flyers, and mouth to mouth"(Faruh 2018). However, the

international media played a major role in mobilizing the international community towards the events in Iran. Although there is no evidence that the student movement's contentious repertoires were inspired by the ones of the student protests in China (1989), the movement was referred to in some international media outlets as the "Tiananmen Square" of Iran of 1999.[41] The common features that led to such comparison were, the students' resilience against coercion and the effect of these movements on changing international perceptions and stereotypes. The picture of Ahmad Babeti, an Iranian student waving the bloody t-shirt of his wounded friend had the same effect of the "Tank Man" picture taken at the Tiananmen Square. Published on the front page of *The Economist*, this picture made the young student a symbol for the student movement. With his 1990's look and relatively shaved beard, he unintentionally created an international movement of solidarity with the students of Iran. In an interview with CNN's Anderson Cooper, Babeti explains that this picture was not well received by the authorities because it defaced the image of the divinity of the Islamic Republic, according to the judge of his trial (Batebi 2011).

The students chose to intensify the performances with the intention of popularizing their struggle to the larger Iranian and the international communities. However, the rigidity of the regime in addition the high-capacity of containing violence contributed to an escalation and then a de-escalation of the contentious performances, which contributed to the softening of the repertoires.

3. 3. AFTERMATH AND CONCLUSION

Despite the clashes between the regime and the students, Sadri explains that Khatami's term was marked by an active student life (A. Sadri 2018). The dissolution of the student protests

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[41] Absence of comparative literature between the structure of movement in Iran (1999) and China (1989). See (*Time*, July 12, 1999) http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,27987,00.html

strengthened the network of Iranian student organizations who started cooperating independently on the currents of the Iranian politics. Hussein, a former activist in *Anjoman-e Eslami* (Islamic Association), explained to me that the character of activism in his association changed after the 1999 movement (See Chapter 4). They started to be more engaged in intellectual, social, and economic topics and avoided political activism unless it is necessary. Furthermore, that the network of the association is expanding all over Iran in terms of recruitment and partnership with other organizations.

Going back to the main question: why the student movement did not lead to regime change in Iran? Although this movement was one of the largest after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, its fate was to fade away after six days of the breakout. By looking closely at the micro-structures and the nature of interaction between different actors, we can claim that the limited political opportunities provided by the system and the channeled perception of the movement led to the rapid dissolution of the movement due to three main factors.

First, despite the incapability of Khatami in implementing his agenda entirely, his Presidency helped the Iranian people in becoming more aware of their rights as citizens of the nation. For this reason, the reformist supporters refused to join the riots believing that the episodes of violence were intentionally planned to weaken the President, who appeals to the conservative public as inactive and careless about the national security of Iran.

Second, the mismatch between the perception and structural opportunities occurred because of the opposition's lack of farsightedness and inability to pick up on the split in the ruling elite. As Tilly and Tarrow explains, one of the most important features of regimes as political opportunity structures is "its openness to new actors"(Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 57). Going back to our case, this feature elevated under Khatami, however the emotional involvement of students in

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the protests led to reactional performances and repertoires. Furthermore, the opposition could not appeal to the mass with its claims that disseminated with the increase of violence

Finally, the high-capacity of the regime to suppress the movement through coercion and the incapability of the students to fight back. This character of the Iranian regime was also one of the main reasons that ended the second wave of unrest in 2009, as we will discover in the following chapter.

Image 1: Ahmad Batebi,Iran 1999
© The Economist 1999

Image 2: The Tank Man; China 1989
© gettyimages

CHAPTER 4
GREEN MOVEMENT, 2009

4.1. INTRODUCTION

4.1.1. CONTEXT

"No social movements operate in a vacuum"(Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 169). The irruption of demonstrations in 2009 was the outcome of close interaction between "contention, political power and institutions" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 169). Prior to the Presidential election in 2009, Iran witnessed disjoint episodes of contention that emanate from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad four years of governance and had repercussions on the pre-election and campaigning period.[42]

The end of Khatami's second presidential mandate, as discussed in chapter 3, concluded eight years of struggle against hardline Shiite clerics, especially the ones holding positions in the Guardian Council. Khatami's nonconfrontational approach, as well as his incapability to push his progressive agenda forward and to stand-up to the right wing, created a popular malaise against reformists (Sadri and Sadri 2013).[43] All of these factors opened opportunities for the mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to emerge on the political scene.[44] Analogously to Hugo Chavez' leadership style, Ahmadinejad appeared as the revolutionary leader who promised to re-integrate the core principles of the Islamic revolution into the system of governance.[45] His eloquence and

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[42] Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected for the first time in 2005.

[43] The popular malaise against reformists is mainly related to Khatami's incapability in pushing the progressive agenda that he promise adopting during his electoral campaigns. More: Chapter 3 Student's Movement, 1999

[44] Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a hardline conservative politician. After the Islamic Revolution, he joined the Revolutionary Guards. He claims that he was with the students who crashed into the American embassy and took its employees to hostage. See more: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahmoud-Ahmadinejad

[45] Although Hugo Chavez is a far left leader and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a far right, they both used the same tactics to appeal to the people as the revolutionary leaders. See more: Mirtaheri, Seyed Ahmad. 2013. "The Politics of

charismatic character helped him in presenting himself as the leader of the people, who came from them and who is ready to stand by their rights. Ahmadinejad is described as 'populist' not only in terms of rhetoric but also in terms of policy choices. He was "a master of predicting and taking advantages of the masses' fears, concerns and hopes" (Mirtaheri 2013). Furthermore, he utilized the rhetoric of "bringing oil money into people's households" and sharpened an anti-American narrative to mobilize the masses in favor of his candidacy (*BBC Persian,* March 8, 2013).[46]

The outcome of the first term of Ahmadinejad (2005-2009) can be summarized with three main observations; political repression, International isolation and economic struggle. [47] Due to these circumstances, frustrated Iranians saw in 2009 an opportunity for change. Hussein, an Iranian activist and student, expresses that a vast majority was expecting a shift in power after the presidential elections.[48] He adds -with a passionate tone: "even us, students at universities who were already active on the ground saw that change cannot be achieved outside democratic processes"(Hussein 2018). In essence, and despite the anger of the mass population, up until June 12, 2009, the possibility of change was still perceived achievable through the political structure itself.

The results of the elections caught the Iranians by surprise.[49] The defeat of Mir-Hussein Mousavi and the victory of Ahmadinejad by 70% (as the announced before the closing of the polls) mobilized the people who took the streets and started demonstrating against the fraudulent election processes.[50] The general claim was straight forward: 'Where is my vote?'.[51]

Ahmadinejad and Chavez: A Misplaced Comparison." Class Race Corporate Power 1 (1): Article 5. https://doi.org/10.25148/CRCP.1.1.16092147.

[46] Ahmadinejad won against a well-known former president and reformist leader Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

[47] This part will be elaborated in section 4.2.1 Social and Political Opportunities.

[48] The names and identifying details of some activists have been changed to protect their right of privacy.

[49] Final results show that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won by 62.5% and the electoral turnout was 85%. For more about the election data see http://irandataportal.syr.edu/election-data-2.

[50] Mir-Hossein Mousavi is an Iranian reformist politician who served as the Prime Minister of Iran from 1981 to 1989. After 1989, Mousavi left the political sphere to become an artist and an architect.

[51] 'Where is my vote' is the central slogan of the Green movement. See Chapter 4 section 4. Processes and Repertoires.

On June 19, 2009 the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khameini made a famous speech accusing the popular protest of being "a campaign of destruction" launched by the West and the Zionists (Ayatollah Khamenei 2009). However, witnesses, like Hamid Dabashi, perceived that the main characteristics of this collective action were its 'transideological' feature and the absence of religious or secular claims (Dabashi and Nikzadfar 2011, 12). Dabashi explains in one of his writings that the protesters' claims reflect a development in the Iranian political culture that shifted from 'political modernity' to 'social modernity' (Dabashi and Nikzadfar 2011, 12). With the development of the situation, street violence increased. The military institutions, operating mainly under the umbrella of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, played a major role in maintaining a high-capacity interference in the collective action until its dissolution.

The interaction between the episodes of contention under Ahmadinejad, the rise of an opposition led by the reformist politician Mir-Hussein Moussavi and the close involvement of the military resulted; the Green Movement of Iran (2009-2010). Similar to the student movement in 1999, the movement of 2009 had social and civil rights claims. Nevertheless, the social perception of the political opportunities in addition to the emergence of a political opposition caused a serious regime crisis that post-revolutionary Iran had never witnessed before.

4.1.2. PARTICIPANTS

The interviews I conducted for this section were activists and protest organizers from the Green Movement of 2009. The interviewees belong to three different opposition groups. Amir belongs to the circle of activists who believe that the process of democratization of Iran requires a fundamental separation between the clergy and the political structures. In contrast, Hussein is more pragmatic and believes that change is a gradual process that should come from within the current structure. Finally, Hamza Ghalebi, the advisor of the former leader of the reformist opposition

Mir-Hussein Mousavi, agrees with Hussein however, he expresses a bigger faith in the reformist camp of 2009 and in Mousavi as a leader.[52]

4.2 FINDINGS

4.2.1 POLITICAL AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES STRUCTURE

The engagement of individuals in contentious politics emanates from the co-occurrence of threats and opportunities within a determined political structure (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 58). In this respect, threats turn into opportunities, and vice-versa, depending on what the actors have at stake. For instance, the institutional and economic gaps under Ahmadinejad rule (2005-2009) were seized as opportunities by the reformist opposition but received as threats by Iranian neutral social entities. As Amir explains: 'Ahmadinejad was despised in the major cities of Iran, mainly Tehran, Tabriz and Isfahan.' And this is due to 'the President's policies that led to the international isolation of Iran (Amir 2018).

The discursive analysis reveals two categories of opportunity structures that facilitated the engagement of opposition groups in contentious politics. First, we discuss the political opportunities (threats) under Ahmadinejad's rule. Second, we discern the relationship between the Presidential election processes and popular mobilization.

July 31, 2006, the UN Security Council passed the resolution 1696 (S/RES/1696), demanding Iran to suspend all nuclear enrichment programs and threatening with international sanctions (UN Security Council 2006).[53] According to Amir, this decision came as a result of Ahmadinejad's determination to make Iran a nuclear power and his refusal of the EU's offer in building an inland nuclear reactor (Amir 2018). His unwillingness to cooperate was expressed in

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[52] It is important to note, that the interviewees now live outside Iran and cannot go back for the time being.
[53] See the full text of Resolution 1696 on
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1696%282006%29

a hardline speech addressed in the city of Arak, where he ironically asked the Europeans: "Do you think you are dealing with a four-year-old child to whom you can give some walnuts and chocolates and get gold from him?"(*The Guardian,* May 17, 2006). Amir explains that consecutive UN Security Council's resolutions against Iran raised concerns about the sustainability of the market, the fate of international institutions and multinational corporations, and Iran's international integration (S/RES/1737 (2006), S/RES/1747 (2007), S/RES/1803 (2008)). He adds: "the concerns were not spreading only among top level administrators in big companies and institutions but also among employees who were afraid to lose their jobs on the long run" (Amir 2018).

During his first term, Ahmadinejad made sure to consolidate his power through the empowerment of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Basijs. In a policy brief on Ahmadinejad's economic legacy, Prof. Nader Habibi, reports that the Iranian President increased the economic activity of the military by filling top government and bank positions with members of the IRGC and the Basijs to assure the full cooperation on his policies (Habibi 2013). This economic empowerment was accompanied with an increase in repression and tightening on freedom of expression. Hussein, who was a member in one of the largest students clubs in Tehran, *Anjoman-e Eslami* (Islamic Association), explains that the vibrant student life was excessively suppressed under Ahmadinejad. He adds: "Basijis intervention in our activities and panel discussions became more frequent," (Hussein 2018). Furthermore, a 'star system' (ستارا دار, *Setare dar)* was introduced to the educational processes.[54] Hussein explained, a student could not join a university if he or she had a star on their records. The grades and the ranking on the entrance exam were insignificant in case the student had a star next to his/her name, as an indication of involvement in suspicious political activities (Hussein 2018).

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[54] ستارا دار , Setare dar direct translation : the one who have a star.

The economic situation witnessed a progressive decline. The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) reported an increase in the poverty rate especially in big cities. The CBI study released in August 2008, stated that "14 million Iranians are living below the poverty line, which is hardly news to ordinary Iranians who are feeling the pinch of inflation reaching 30%, one of the highest in the world" (*Brookings*, August 8, 2008). The three interviewees discussed Ahmadinejad's policy of privatization and their repercussions on the economic conditions of citizens. They all evoked examples of the privatization of the communication sector that became managed by IRGC officers. In the same context, Amir stresses on the existence of high levels of corruption, which starts with the Supreme Leader and propagates within the structure of power. The difficulty in backing this statement with evidence resides in the lack of access to information. However, the truth behind this statement is not its accuracy but the reflection that it transmits on relationship of distrust between a group of citizens and the highest and most divine authority.

The regimes' high-capacity in sustaining order did not limit the possibility of people's engagement in contentious politics. However, the preparations for the upcoming Presidential elections slowed down the process. In this context, collective action was centralized towards mobilizing people to vote. For the first time in the history of post-revolutionary Iran, the Presidential elections witnessed a high turnout rate of 85%. Amir explains that the 2009 Presidential elections was a real opportunity for change through the ballots (Amir 2018). He adds with an angry voice: "my sister and my family did not want to vote, but I forced them to go and vote for Mousavi. The election was the only way to overthrow Ahmadinejad at that point." In the same vein, Hussein explains that even the silent voters, who primarily belong to the middle class of Iran, were motivated to vote during this specific election (Hussein 2018).

The political balance in Iran, since the first Islamic government in 1980, has always been oscillating between the right-wing and the reformist camps. In this context, it is valid to ask three important questions to understand the character of contentious interaction in 2009. First, why the Green Movement happened after the defeat of the reformist and former Prime Minister, Mir-Hussein Mousavi? Second, why was the trust in the democratic process broken? Finally, what were the factors that unified the claims?

Tilly and Tarrow observe that 'high-capacity regimes avoid democratization in general, however, in regimes like in Iran, democracy is subject to pre-consulted results' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 67). Ahmadinejad's victory opened the eyes of the public on a possible fraud. The pre-elections polls and observations indicated that Mir-Hussein Mousavi would win the elections (WikiLeakes 2009).[55] From inside the electoral campaign, Hamze Ghalebi explains that the interaction of the masses with Moussavi's return to politics after twenty years, was positive. According to Ghalebi, Moussavi refused to use a populist rhetoric like Ahmadinejad, who was offering apartments for the poor residing in rural areas. Ghalebi recalls: "our campaign was based on engaging the public in the decision making. The society was so active … people were sending us ideas and suggestions on how to handle certain situations. What was surprising is that I used to receive the same suggestions from different regions in the country … This demonstrates the existence of a unified vision all over the Iranian territory"(Ghalebi 2018).

During the campaigning period, Amir joined Moussavi's team of volunteers not because he believed in the need of reformists in power but because he was hoping that Ahmadinejad would

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[55] According to a classified email sent to Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and released by WikiLeaks : 'A leading Tehran-based economic and political consultant predicts that Mir-Hossein Mousavi will win the Iranian elections in a June 19 run-off against Ahmadinejad… He sees 25 million votes as a minimum turnout goal for anti-Ahmadinejad candidates, as the current President can likely muster only ten or 11 million legitimate votes in the first round, plus a possible one million fraudulent votes, for a total of 12 million first round votes… If Mousavi wins, our contact predicts a possibly violent reaction by hard-line Ahmadinejad supporters, which the regime would move swiftly to contain'(WikiLeakes 2009). See more. https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ISTANBUL206_a.html

be deposed through democratic means. He describes that the political activity inside the streets of Tehran in 2009 reflected an authentic and vibrant democratic life, until the release of the results (Amir 2018).

When I asked the question; how did you know that the authorities manipulated the election's results? Hussein answered, "we did not need tangible proves to understand that the regime turned its back on our choice"(Hussein 2018). In a democratic election, everything can change in the last few minutes if the polls indicate a slight difference between the candidates. However, the polls of 2009 have shown at least 20% of difference between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi (Hussein 2018).[56]

Shortly after the closure of ballots, the Ministry of Interior banned all types of public gatherings.[57] Despite this fact, protests started to appear in different regions and major cities in Iran, namely Tehran, Isfahan and Tabriz. Ghalebi explains that the first demonstrations were not organized. The networks of protesters grew progressively with the contentious escalations.

The emergence of Mir-Hussein Moussavi as a strong opposition leader was imposed by the circumstances and unexpected popular support. A day after the elections, Moussavi's team circulated a press-release asking people to avoid protesting. Meanwhile, the Moussavi met with Ayatollah Khamenei and suggested a re-election. The Supreme Leader refused, even after Moussavi's proposal of not presenting his candidacy for the new round (Ghalebi 2018).[58]

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[56] I could not access official polls, but Hussein showed me a classified excel sheet sent from activists in Iran who were working on the polling of votes.

[57] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document IAP20090613950098, " Iran's Interior Minister Warns Against Public Gatherings Without Permits," Tehran Islamic Republic of Iran News Network Television (IRINN), June 13, 2009. See more https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R40653.pdf

[58] Ghalebi reveals an old relationship of animosity between Ayatollah Khamenei and Mossavi. It goes back to the period when Khamanei and Moussavi where holding respectively the Presidency and the Prime Ministry. He explains that Moussavi excluded Khameini in the decision process by using his close relationship to Ayatollah Khomeini especially during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).

The irresponsiveness of the highest authority and the ongoing violence in the streets encouraged Moussavi to join the demonstrations. After his statement, on June 15, 2009, in which he promised not to 'give up' on the movement, protesters collectively started identifying themselves to his Green campaign (Moussavi 2009).

As the level of violence increased, the demands were becoming more extreme in their rhetoric. While some people were still screaming *Where is my vote,* others were burning pictures of Khamenei and demanding regime change. Amir was one of them. He explains that he did not see the potential of change through Mousavi, but he was inspired by the resilience of the Iranian people. He says: "it was the first time I see Iranians taking advantage of reality and refusing to adapt to imposed circumstances"(Amir 2018) On the other hand, Hussein and Ghalebi perceived the Green movement as a collective action with determined claims evolving around civil and political rights. In their estimate, change could not be realized outside the existing structure (Hussein 2018; Ghalebi 2018).

The gravity of social responses to the structural threats led to the development of an array of contentious repertoires. This relationship of causality, studied on a macro-level, hold true the correlation between perceived and structural opportunities. However, a micro-analysis of the Green Movement shows the occurrence of a mismatch between the structural opportunity and perceptions. This concludes with three main insights. First, the mismatch between the perceived and structural opportunities occurred due to the absence of a strong opposition. Mousavi did not aim at unifying the claims of the movement. And he showed vulnerability after the arrest of the people who were close to him, including Ghalebi.[59] Second, based on Gramsci's definition of collective actions, the Green movement failed in the evaluation of homogeneity and organization

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[59] Ghalebi was arrested during the first week of protests.

of the various social classes (Gramsci 1971, 304). The interviewees' views and assumptions on the Green movement showcase a division within the social-structure engaged in contentious politics. And third, the irruption of protests and demonstrations came as a reaction to the election results and not to the regime's flaws- otherwise Ahmadinejad years of Presidency would have witnessed similar episodes of contention.

4.2.2 PERFORMANCES AND REPERTOIRES

The Venezuelan researcher Margarita López-Maya, classifies individual episodes of contention into three main categories; conventional, confrontational and violent (López-Maya 2002, 203; Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 50–51). The Green Movement went through two main phases, a confrontational and a violent one. Accordingly, the evolution of contentious performances and repertoires were contingent on the level of violence in the streets.

The general form of contentious performances adopted was the conventional way of mass demonstrations. The originality of those mass protests relied on an attractive branding through colors and slogans. The Green color was embraced after Moussavi's speech calling for unification of color. He stated:

> We would not give up the green color which is the symbol of spirituality, freedom, religious rationality, and tolerance and not give up "God is Great" which shows our Revolutionary roots. These color and slogan unite our lines and are the best means to connect our hearts and demands to each other (Moussavi 2009).

The Green color was accompanied with a general slogan written and chanted in English "Where is my vote?" According to Amir, the use of the English language was a way to communicate injustice to the world (Amir 2018).

As mentioned in chapter 1, repertoires are affected by the interaction between different political bodies. During the protests, a secret letter from the US President Barak Obama and Khamenei was leaked. Obama called for 'improvement of relations' with Iran, a"[set out] prospect of "co-operation in regional and bilateral relations" and a resolution of the dispute over Iran's nuclear program" (*The Guardian*, June 24 2009). This incident led to the creation of anti-American contentious repertoire. For instance, people started chanting in the streets—اوباما یاباونا یاباما اوباما اوباما- *Obama Obama with them or with us*— The willingness of cooperation with the Iranian regime explains the presence of the US involvement in the development of events. The reports from WikiLeaks on Hillary Clinton's emails on the topic of Iran reveals an active presence of the American intelligence and disclose an unanswered letter from an Iranian opposition group sent to President Obama, requesting his involvement.[60]

In addition to the anti-American repertoire, an array of contentious performances-repertoires-were developed in response to violence. Hussein notes that suppression was intense, therefore protesters resorted to social media and mainly Facebook to develop and spread new claims (Hussein 2018). Facebook groups were created to inform and mobilize people, and to share information with the international public (Facebook users and international media). International media, except BBC Persian, was not able to properly cover the events due to a signal disruption caused by the authorities.[61] Therefore, protestors started filming with their phones and posted the pictures and videos on social media.

The advent of citizen journalism contributed to the making of a revolutionary 'icon'(Duranti 2013, 1355). Among all videos shared, the posthumous video of Neda Agha-

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[60] See more https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09LONDON2485_a.html
[61] BBC Persian started transmission on other satellites and increased their broadcast hours in order to combat the interference[

Solman went viral on the internet and became a main reference for the international media to highlight human rights violations in Iran. Octavia Nasr, CNN Middle East correspondent, observed that the story of the death of Neda, irrespective of her social and educational profile, made this girl a symbol for the Green Revolution in Iran ("CNN: The Power of Neda - YouTube" 2009). Neda became the speechless voice of the revolution that also challenged the concept of martyrdom or *shahada* defined in line with the ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For the first time, an iconic figure symbolizing revolution was a woman (Duranti 2013, 1355–56). In this respect, the word "NEDA" became a slogan for different movements condemning the current ruling regime in Iran and advocating for people to claim for their rights.

The strong presence of government allowed the sustained control through "substantial coercive means: armies, police forces …"(Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 5). The episodes of contention in Iran became extremely violent after the famous speech of Ayatollah Khamenei, on Friday June 19, 2009 warning the people from participating in the protests otherwise they will be held responsible for their own lives (Ayatollah Khamenei 2009). Despite Ayatollah's threat, Hussein explains that the people showed their will in participating in what was called "the bloody Saturday". He adds the "streets were like war frontlines… the authorities allowed intentional but random shouting on the citizens" (Hussein 2018).

The evolution of the protestor's repertoire from peaceful actions into a violent ones was not only a reaction against authorities' responses but also a reflection of "long history of previous struggles"(Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 17).[62] In reaction to the Islamic regimes' coercive measures, protestors used violence against IRGC officers, but also worked on intensifying the message. During the violent confrontation, the slogan "Where is my vote?" transformed to "death to

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[62] See chapter 2. 1979, An Opportunity for Islam.

Khamenei." Furthermore, Amir reports that in the streets where he was protesting, in Tehran, people were chanting against Islam and the Wilayat- EL Faqih doctrine as described in the introduction.[63] At that point, Moussavi was also releasing statements that inspired protestors in creating poetic slogans.[64]

The presence of a strong political structure that is able to make rules governing contention, was a main obstacle against the development of consistent contentious repertoires. However, the use of the internet for mobilization and spreading of news challenged the authorities' capability of controlling the free flow of credible information. In this respect, the Green revolution had spread a new types of performances that became 'modular', in the sense that they 'can be adopted and adapted across a wide range of … sites of contention by a broad range of actors'(Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 12). The first to utilize those performance tactics were the opposition groups who led the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011.

4.3 AFTERMATH AND CONCLUSION

The Green movement after the end of 2009, started to dissolve. The regime remained. Ahmadinejad fulfilled his second term. And the reformist Hassan Rouhani won the elections of 2013.

The dissolution of the Green Movement and perseverance of the current regime in Iran is closely related to a mismatch between the political and perceived opportunities for two main reasons. First, the emergence of a weak opposition that was not able to challenge the political structure by its foundation and processes. Second, the heterogeneous nature of the social-structure of the opposition led to the dispersion of claims and a divergence of goals. While protestors like

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[63] See more. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMUaN8vEAOY .
[64] E.g.: You are fighting shadows in the streets, but in the real battle field you are losing people's confidence – (Moussavi 2009)

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Amir were seeking regime change, reformists' supporters were demanding reforms within the same structure.

The disparity between the structure opportunities and perceptions is also related to US inaction. As explored in chapter 2, Gramsci's theory of relational political forces suggests that popular perception of political opportunities can be enabled by an interest-based relationship between internal forces of the country and external forces (Gramsci 1971, 304). In the context of the Green movement, the interests of the US leaned towards the regime and diverted from the opposition's claims. In other words, the Green Movement, unlike the Islamic Revolution of 1979, was not able to gain an international backing that might have contributed to its sustainability over a longer period of time. Another reason for the dissolution of the Green Movement, is the high-capacity of the Iranian government in enforcing the law through means of coercion. The continuous violence in the streets had created a collective fatigue and contributed to the deceleration of the movement's pace.

Finally, the inability of the Green Movement to build a transnational alliance had a minor effect on its perseverance. According to Tarrow and Tilly, transnational activism contributes to the creation of transnational networks of coalitions and alliances that provide international exposure to the mutual cause.

In summary, the Green Movement reflected a deep crisis within the political structure of post-revolutionary Iran. However, the regime was able to survive due to the existence of a gap between the popular perception and political opportunity structures. This gap is closely related to the unsustainability of the popular movement that was subject to three main structural pressures: the high-capacity of the Iranian government in oppressing acts of disobedience, the absence of the international support and the heterogeneity of its social structure.

CONCLUSION

Why did the regime not change in Iran? We could certainly rehearse the various conclusions from our studied cases. But perhaps, it will be more significant to highlight the varying patterns between the student movement in 1999 and the Green Movement in 2009. The outcome in both cases was largely the same; the regime remained and the movement dissolved into the structure. However, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the waves of social movements cannot be studied as isolated outcries. Therefore, it will be important in the second section of our conclusion to discuss how those patterns would affect the outcome of the third wave of unrest in Iran.

MISMATCHED OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPRESSED PERCEPTIONS

As demonstrated in Chapter 3 and 4, the waves of unrest in Iran did not lead to a regime change due to a mismatch between the perceived and the political opportunities. The misperception of the political opportunities (threats) offered by the regime was conditioned by different factors and patterns. Based on the study cases, I depict four main factors.

First, the array of unsynchronized claims decreased the possibility of forming a strong opposition block. During the movement of 1999, the irregularities in claim-making, from advocating for freedom of the press to asking Khamenei to resign, led to an increased violence. Consequently, students were not able to trigger the interest of the larger audience of sympathizers and to mobilize protesters. Similarly, during the Green Movement, the diversity of claims emanated from a divided opposition structure. While some people were claiming for reforms from within the system, others were focusing on regime overthrow.

Second, the absence of leadership inhibited the creation of a collective identity for the movement. Tarrow, believing in the agency factor, insists on the importance of "organizers' " use

of contention "to exploit political opportunities, create collective identities, bring people together in organizations, and mobilize them against more powerful opponents" (Tarrow 1998, 3). Reflecting on the history of regime change in Iran, we observe that the 'organizers' that Tarrow referred to, are in the context of Iran emancipating leaders. The Islamic Revolution in 1979 was successful due to the emergence of the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini who was able to exploit the political opportunities offered by the monarchy. As discussed, in chapter 2, Khomeini took advantage of the weakness of the Pahlavi regime and the American's reservation on the Shah's policies to empower the revolution and consolidate his power. In contrast, during the Green Movement, Mir-Hussein Mousavi emerged as a leader. However, his leadership held two main shortcomings, first, his hesitation in joining the movement from the beginning, second, his openness to the regime structure and ideology which affected his image on the international level. While on the other hand, the student movement was leaderless and reactional rather than ideological or principle-driven.

Third, the internalization of the international controversies in the context of the movements led to their dissolution. In both cases, the economic and nuclear interests of the US favored regime over the opposition one. For that reason, the protesters of the Green Movement felt abandoned by the Americans and started chanting against Obama's administration.

Finally, the regime was always able to own the balance of force for its benefit due to its high-capacity of control of resources and population through coercive means. In both cases, the Iranian regime resorted to Basijs and Iranian Revolutionary Guards troops to stop the unarmed protesters. In a side story, Amir explains that during the Green Revolution, the regime imported militants from Hizbullah, the Lebanese Iranian-backed paramilitary, to avoid emotional and

cultural contact between anti-riots troops and the protesters, which accelerated the suppression process.

REINCARNATION OF MOVEMENTS

The breakout of protests in 2017 in conservative cities like Mashhad increased the attention towards the existence of a higher possibility of regime change in Iran. However, in comparison to the case studies elaborated above, I argue that regime change in Iran is still an unreachable goal for the following reasons.

First, the emergence of a conservative opposition is being perceived by some opposition groups as an attempt of weakening Hassan Rouhani rule, a reformist politician. In comparison to the scenario of 1999, Hassan Rouhani is perceived now as an enemy due to the act of violence that authorities are exercising,

Second, the current protests do not have unified claims. The socio-economic demands in Mashhad are totally different from the feminists groups' demands in cities like Tehran and Isfahan. Respectively, the social structure of opposition groups is still heterogeneous and cannot be contained under a unified leadership.

Finally, the European persistence on maintaining the Nuclear Deal with Iran grants the regime of Ayatollah an international legitimacy. As speculations around the emergence of hardliners in Iran after the exit of the US are increasing, Amir comments that, hardliners are already in power and do not seek international legitimacy. Whereas on the other hand, Prof. Sadri explains that re-isolating Iran will hinder reforms in Iran on a domestic level and would contribute to the development of a "harsher" foreign policy.

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