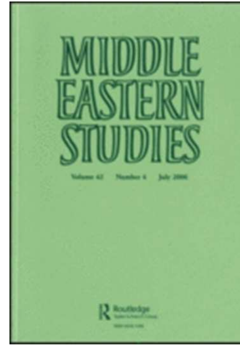

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Bread and Justice in Qajar Iran: The Moral Economy, the Free Market and the Hungry Poor

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In 1971 E. P Thompson published a seminal article on eighteenth century English bread riots which was to become a foundational text for the study of such protests and which was, furthermore, to exercise a profound influence on the understanding of crowd politics in general across wide geographical areas and chronological periods. Challenging older elite notions of the irrationality, illegitimacy and even criminality of the "mob", in this article Thompson situated popular direct action in times of food crises within a very specific historical, economic and, most importantly, cultural, context.[1] This context produced a deeply-held adhesion among the poor to the concept of a "moral economy" and an equally profound rejection of the free market as enshrined in the new political economy of the eighteenth century, theorized most famously by Adam Smith.[2]

This article returns to Thompson's original text in order to assess whether and to what extent his paradigm may be useful in understanding bread riots in Iran.[3] In particular, it examines

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[1] E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1971, pp. 76—136; see also *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (London: Merlin Press, 1991); *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1968). For a later reassessment see Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth (eds), *Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict, and Authority* (New York, St Martin's Press, 1999).

[2] Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* was first published in 1776.

[3] The relevance of the work of the British Marxist historians, particularly E. P. Thompson and George Rude, to the study of the Iranian crowd was first noted by Ervand Abrahamian, "The Crowd in Iranian Politics, 1905-1953," *Past and Present*, vol. 41, 1968, pp. 184-210; "The Crowd in the Persian Revolution," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1969, pp. 128-150. The early adoption of this approach had little sequel until it was again taken up by Stephanie Cronin, "Popular Protest, Disorder and Riot in Iran: The Tehran Crowd and the Rise of Riza Khan 1921-1925," *International Review of Social History*, vol. 50, part two, 2005, pp. 167-201. The almost simultaneous publication by Vanessa Martin, *The Qajar Pact:*

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Bargaining, Protest and the State in 19th-Century Persia (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), constituted a truly ground-breaking study of popular politics in Iran over the nineteenth century. Cronin again dealt with crowd politics with "Popular Politics, the New State and the Birth of the Iranian Working Class: the 1929 Abadan Oil Refinery Strike," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 46, no. 5, 2010, pp. 699-732. Abrahamian returned to the study of the crowd with "The Crowd in the Iranian Revolution," *Radical History Review*, no. 105, 2009, pp. 13-38.

Interpretations of bread riots based broadly on Thompson's paradigm have now appeared for various countries of the Middle East. These include James P. Grehan, *Everyday Life and Consumer Culture in Eighteenth-Century Damascus* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011) and "Street Violence and Social Imagination in Late Mamluk and Ottoman Damascus," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 35, 2007, pp. 215-36; Boaz Shoshan, "Grain Riots and the 'Moral Economy': Cairo, 1350-1517," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 10, no. 3, 1980, pp. 459-478; Amina Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans: Urban Protest in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria* (Cairo: The America University in Cairo Press, 2017); Till Grallert, "Urban Food Riots in late Ottoman *Bilad al-Sham* as a 'Repertoire of Contention'," Stephanie Cronin (ed), *Crime, Poverty and Survival in the Middle East and North Africa: The 'Dangerous Classes' since1800* (London: I. B. Tauris, forthcoming).

This work followed the rather earlier application of Thompson's paradigm to other areas of the non-European world, especially India and China, where subaltern social history was more developed. For some of this literature see Stephanie Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs and Sbalterns in Iran: Opposition, Protest and Revolt, 1921-1941* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) pp. 284-5.

The first significant efforts to locate bread protests within a discussion of popular politics in Qajar Iran were by Martin, *The Qajar Pact*, pp. 100-101 and Cronin, "Popular Protest, Disorder and Riot," pp. 193-6. Bread riots in the early Pahlavi period and World War Two are discussed by Stephanie Cronin, "Popular Protest, Disorder and Riot in Iran," and Stephen L. McFarland, "Anatomy of an Iranian Political Crowd: The Tehran Bread Riot of December 1942," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1985, pp. 51-65.Willem Floor, *History of Bread in Iran* (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2015), also provides some very useful accounts of bread protests in a slightly different context. Ranin Kazemi's unpublished PhD dissertation, "*Neither Indians nor Egyptians:" Social Protest and*

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Islamic Populism in the Making of the Tobacco Movement in Iran, 1850-1891 (Yale University, 2012), has a chapter which looks at food protests in Tabriz, 1856-7, and Tehran, 1860-1. Sections of this dissertation have been published as "Of Diet and Profit: On the Question of Subsistence Crises in Nineteenth Century Iran" *Middle Eastern Studies,* vol. 52, no. 2, 2016, p. 335-58; "The Black Winter of 1860-61: War, Famine, and the Political Ecology of Disasters in Qajar Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 37, no. 1, May 2017, pp. 24-48.

Bread protests have also been mentioned and contextualized in several broader historical accounts. For the Tehran riot of 1861 see Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian monarchy, 1831-1896* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), pp. 378-382. For Isfahan in the 1890s, Heidi Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King: Zill al-Sultan and Isfahan under the Qajars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008); and Tabriz, Vanessa Martin, *Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism*, pp. 79-93.

Various Persian-language memoirs of the nineteenth century contain descriptions of bread riots. See, for example, the two extracts edited, translated and introduced by Negin Nabavi, *Modern Iran: A History in Documents* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2017), pp. 7-9. The first extract looks at the bread riot of 1861. The source cited is *Yaddashtha-ye Farhad Mirza Mo'tamed al-Dawlah*, quoted in Fereydun Adamiyat, *Andishe-ye tarraqi va hukumat-e qanun-e 'asr-e Sepahsalar* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Khvarazmi, 1351/1972, pp. 79-80. The second extract, describing the riot of June 1900, is from Qahreman Mirza Salur, *Ruznameh-ye khaterat-e 'Ayn al-Saltaneh* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Asatir, 1376/1997), pp. 1467. See also Heribert Busse, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule* (translated from Hasan Fasa'i, *Farsnamah-yi Nasiri*, 1821 or 22), (NY: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 356-8. Petitions about bread shortages may be found in the Iranian National Archive and in the Majlis library. A few relate to the interwar decades, but they mainly come from the period of the Second World War. See footnote ???? below.

Rather more attention has focused on the broader question of famine in Iran, its causes and consequences, without necessarily dealing in depth with subaltern responses other than the struggle for survival. The most systematic investigation of the relationship between ecology and politics in Iran is Kazemi, "*Neither Indians nor Egyptians*." Recent studies of famine also include Mohammad Gholi Majd, *he Great Famine and Genocide in Persia, 1917-1919* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003); *Iran under Allied Occupation in World War 11: the bridge to victory and a land of famine* (Lanham: University Press of

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the evidence which supports the notion that Iran experienced a "golden age" of bread riots in the 1890s and early 1900s, just before and perhaps contributing to the outbreak of the

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America, 2016); *A Victorian Holacaust: Iran in the Great Famine of 1869-1873* (Hamilton Books, 2017). Majd's books also contain some information about popular responses.

Older work includes Shoko Okazaki, "The Great Persian Famine of 1870-71," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1, 1986, pp. 183-192; Charles Melville, "The Persian Famine of 1870-1872: Prices and Politics," *Disasters*, vol. 1, 1988, pp. 309-25; Xavier de Planhol, "Famines in Persia," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*," vol. ix, fasc. 2, 1999, pp. 203-206; Ahmed Seyf, "Iran and the Great Famine, 1970-1872," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2010, pp. 289-306; Abbas Amanat, "Of Famine and Cannibalism in Qom," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1011-1022; An Iranian eye witness account of the great famine in Qum may be found in John Gurney and Mansur Safatgul (eds), *Qum dar Qahti-yi Buzurg, 1288 qamari* (Qum: Kitabkhanah-i Buzurg-i Hazrat-i Ayatullah 'Azmi Marashi Najafi, 1387).

Published Persian secondary material includes the very useful Mahdi Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat: Ta'sir-i Buhranha-yi Nan bar Siyasat va Iqtisad-i 'Asr-i Nasiri* (Tehran: 1394), For a general discussion of bread riots in this period see Dariush Rahmanian va Mahdi Mir Kiyayi, "Ta'sir-i Balvaha-yi Nan bar Ravabit-i Hukumat va Mardom dar 'Asr- Nasiri," *Tahqiqat-i Tarikh-i Ijtima'i*, 1392, no. 6, pp. 65-98.

For various famine years see Sarhang-i Muhandis-i Jahangiri Qa'im Maqam, "Qahti-yi Sal 1273 qamari dar Tabriz", *Adabiyat va Zabanha*, 1343, no. 194, pp. 266-269; Mas'ud Kuhistani Nazhad, "Sal-i Dampukht (Qahti-yi Sal 1296 shamsi)," *Ganjinah-i Asnad*, 1381, nos 45-6, pp. 40-85; Muhsin Khudadad and Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Manzuralajdad "Payamadha-yi Ijtima'i-yi Qahtiha-yi 'Asr-i Nasiri", *Tarikh-i Islam va Iran*, 1389, no. 7, pp. 21-44; Riza Jahan Muhammadi, "Mushkil-i Nan va Kambud-i An dar Qazvin pish az Mashrutah", *Tarikh-i Mu'asir-i Iran*, 1386, no. 41, pp. 41-54.

The broader analysis of famine and dearth contained in this article is influenced particularly by Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World (*London: Verso, 2001) and David Arnold, *Famine* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988). Useful for the broader socio-economic context is Hooshang Ahmirahmadi, *The Political Economy of Iran under the Qajars* (I. B. Tauris, London and New York, 2012).

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constitutional revolution.[4] It then suggests, in explanation of the intensity of the popular conflicts over bread raging in Iran's cities in the late nineteenth century, a parallel with eighteenth century England. Although a century of chronological time separates the two cases, each country experienced, at their different moments, a similar collapse of an older paternalist socio-economic and political order and its supersession by modern capitalism, this in each country provoking a similar response from the urban poor. The Iranian and Middle Eastern bread riot had functioned reasonably effectively in pre-modern economic and political contexts, where the "politics of negotiation" or mediated governance were still salient. As the free market replaced paternalism, however, so did class conflict replace older methods of bargaining, albeit occasionally by riot, between unequal partners within a social pact.[5]

Bread Riots and the Moral Economy

The constitutive components of Thompson's paradigm may be summarized as follows.[6] Firstly, it strongly rejected "crass economic reductionism" in its explanation of food riots. They were not instinctive reactions to hunger, not "rebellions of the belly". On the contrary, Thompson argued that it was the political culture, the mentalite, of the bread rioters, in particular their perennial possession of a legitimizing notion, which was crucial in understanding their modes of action. This notion was, specifically, the beliefs that they were defending traditional rights or customs "as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate" practices in the production, milling, baking and marketing of bread, and that they were supported in this by a broader community consensus. This consensus among the poor drew additional strength from the fact that it occasionally found some endorsement from the authorities and it was, in any case, so powerful that it could overcome both habitual deference and any fear of retribution. Thompson's hungry poor accepted the right to a fair profit. It was rather price hiking, hoarding, profiteering and the manipulation of the market in the pursuit of private gain and to the detriment of communal interests which aroused popular outrage. It was anger, not hunger, which produced bread riots. Secondly, Thompson pointed out that this concept of a "moral economy" derived directly from an older elite paternalism,

[4] P. W. Avery and J. B. Simmons, "Persia on a Cross of Silver, 1880-1890," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1974, pp. 259-286, p. 281.

[5] For the "politics of negotiation", see Martin, *The Qajar Pact*.

[6] Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd."

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embodied in custom and particularly in law, which regulated markets and offered some protection to consumers. The objective of the crowd was the enforcement of this older paternalism, not "the sack of granaries and the pilfering of grain...but the action of "setting the price." They were determined, in effect, to enforce what they believed to be the law when the authorities could or would not do so. Thirdly, it was this sense of legitimacy which produced among Thompson's bread rioters an extraordinary discipline and purposefulness such as to make the description "riot" inappropriate. Fourthly, Thompson highlighted the extraordinary persistence, over hundreds of years, of a pattern of crowd action, a pattern "which repeats itself, seemingly spontaneously, in different parts of the country and after the passage of many quiet years." Thus the food riot, far from requiring a high degree of organization, needed only "a consensus of support...and an inherited pattern of action." Finally, Thompson noted that the peculiar tensions of the eighteenth century bread riot arose from the fact that the older paternalism was being aggressively challenged by notions of the "free market". Nonetheless it still had both an "ideal existence, and also a fragmentary real existence" and was always available for revival by the authorities to provide a moment of "symbolic solidarity," in periods of crisis. For Thompson, in pre-industrial societies the market, and specifically the struggle over prices, was the primary arena of class struggle and it was in the actual marketplace that the poor became conscious of a sense of their collective power. Only as industrialization advanced did the workplace, factory and mine, and the struggle over wages, supersede this older conflict.

The traditional Iranian bread riot possesses an extraordinary similarity to Thompson's paradigm. It displayed a very specific choreography and conformed to a very precise pattern.[7] In Iran, as elsewhere, food riots were an urban phenomenon, only arising where the majority of the population were dependent on the market for their everyday needs. It was in this context that the price of staple foods, especially bread, became an issue of the greatest sensitivity, even the smallest price rises representing a potentially mortal threat to the very

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[7] The occasional descriptions of bread riots contained within elite memoirs also exhibit a remarkable similarity, their somewhat conventional and stylized depictions reinforcing the notion of a pre-modern cross-class consensus regarding bread and justice. Compare, for example, the two extracts edited, translated and introduced by Negin Nabavi, *Modern Iran*.

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poorest. At times of crisis, provoked by sudden price rises, by the apparently inexplicable failure of prices to fall after good harvests, or by the export of grain in times of dearth, crowds of the urban poor, sometimes men and women together but often women alone, their anger inflamed by well-founded rumours of hoarding, speculation and official collusion, would assemble and make their demands. These demands were couched in the language of custom and justice, and were aimed squarely at those they considered the responsible authorities, often the shah himself. Principal among these demands was for the authorities to enforce a "just price". Such bread riots, or perhaps more accurately bread protests, tended to erupt during periods of more generalized political tension. They might be isolated episodes but might also extend over several days, often abating after dark only to resume next day with renewed vigour and larger numbers. They were typically preceded only by little or rudimentary planning and began peacefully. Looting and theft were rare and it was only after the initial petitioning of the authorities expressing complaint and requesting, or occasionally demanding redress, failed to produce results, that the protesters might turn from rowdiness to violence. It seems that in these actions, bread rioters were attempting not to challenge or disrupt the status quo themselves, but rather to force delinquent or recalcitrant elites to abide by commonly held notions of mutual rights and responsibilities and to observe custom and tradition.

Although the Iranian bread riot retained its traditional features into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries, the political and economic environment in which it operated was being radically transformed. Far from demanding change, the bread rioters of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Iran were rather acting in the name of an older and perhaps idealized paternalism. By the late nineteenth century, however, they were also reacting against the chaotic transformation of their lives and living standards wrought by a collapsing Qajar political order and the simultaneous arrival of newly aggressive economic imperatives. Iran's urban poor, like their English predecessors, accordingly mounted a last ditch resistance to the rapid ascendancy of the free market and the disappearance of older forms of elite and royal paternalism, market regulation and consumer protection.

The Moral Economy of the Iranian Crowd

Bread riots were not new in late nineteenth century Iran. In both form and content the numerous and widespread Iranian bread riots of the 1890s recall powerfully earlier protests, appearing to have retained certain key features over a very long period of time and to draw on

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much older traditions of subaltern political interventions, to be indeed, a perennial feature of urban life. Like Thompson's bread rioters, Iranian crowds seem to have sustained traditions of urban protest over remarkably long periods, indeed over hundreds of years. The resilience of the Iranian pattern is extraordinary. One episode from Isfahan in the 1720s, for example, is startlingly familiar to the bread protests of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its key features include a marked contempt for the person of the monarch together with a general absence of deference to the authorities, and the prominent role of women. Most significant too is the choice of target, the shah himself, and the apparent demand, for the authorities to carry out their recognized duty of enforcing the price they themselves had fixed. [8] On this occasion, a sudden rise in the price of bread resulted in widespread popular suspicions of grain hoarding. A crowd of women and "the rabble" assembled, went to the shah's palace, shouted insults at the shah, threw rocks at the palace and even tried to set it on fire. They later turned their attention to the house of a high-ranking cleric, a notorious hoarder, apparently intending to plunder it. The crisis was ended by a last minute paternalist intervention, the shah ordering the cleric to make a large quantity of grain available on the royal square.

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The longevity and ubiquity of this pattern is striking and is reinforced by a comparative perspective. Iranian bread riots were remarkably similar to other such episodes across the wider Middle East. In medieval Cairo, early modern Damascus and across the Ottoman empire, the urban poor frequently took collective action to assert their right to bread and to exert pressure of various kinds, sometimes peaceful, sometimes not, on the authorities to control excesses in the operation of the market. Indeed, the urban bread protesters of Safavid and Qajar Iran, Mamluk Cairo and eighteenth century Damascus often seem interchangeable in their mode of organization, choice of target and especially their sense of legitimacy. All invoked the concept of the "just price," displayed suspicions of plots to hoard grain and manipulate prices and anger against merchants, millers and bakers, and demanded official intervention to regulate the grain trade. [9]

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[8] Rudi Matthee, "Blinded by Power: The Rise and Fall of Fath 'Ali Khan Daghestani, Grand Vizier under Shah Soltan Hoseyn Safavi (1127/1715-1133/1720," *Studia Iranica*, vol. 33, 2004, pp. 179-220.

[9] Stephanie Cronin, *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008)* p. 8

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E P Thompson argued that the eighteenth century English crowd derived its sense of legitimacy and its understanding of proper economic behaviour not only from custom but directly from Tudor and Stuart statutory law and its enforcement by magistrates, and government action more generally, which sought to modify the operations of the market in times of dearth. This has exact parallels in the Iranian, Middle Eastern and Islamic contexts. The traditions of Iranian bread protesters were also embedded in a wider culture not only of custom but also of law. It was indeed this wider legal tradition which explained the rioters' readiness to appeal to the shah or other authorities to protect them against speculators and hoarders, their occasional successes in thus mobilizing the authorities apparently justifying their own belief in the continuing relevance of past customary entitlements and practices. They had much custom and surviving practice on which to draw, nineteenth century Iran still possessing approaches to market regulation dating back to the medieval period and even earlier.

In Iran, as across the Islamic world, market supervision by state officials had always been extraordinarily close and complex. The key figure was the *muhtasi*b, who was entrusted with the *hisba*, ie the general duty to "promote good and forbid evil."[10] The *muhtasib* was the most powerful official in the urban administrative/legal structure, possessing a general mandate much wider than that of individual *qadis*. He had a wide variety of duties, including supervising the performance of religious obligations and monitoring proper public behaviour, but his main responsibility was controlling the marketplace. He was normally a member of the ulama and his office possessed considerable authority, his practical functions reinforced by the moral and religious prestige of his office. Among his tasks were the everyday ones of, for example, checking of weights and measures, of the quality of merchandise, and preventing adulteration of foodstuffs. However he also monitored prices and, although he does not seem to have possessed the power to fix prices himself, the usual practice was for him to agree prices with the merchants. He then had the power to enforce the agreed rate, reprimanding and even punishing any merchant whose prices rose above it, and he might also crack down on hoarding, especially in times of shortage.[11]

[10] Cl. Cahen, M. Talibi, R. Mantran, A.K. S. Lambton, A. S. Bazmee Ansari, "Hisba," A.K. S. Lambton, "iii Persia," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, second Edition*,

[11] A.K. S. Lambton, "iii Persia."

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This system of market supervision survived across the Islamic world until the nineteenth century when it disintegrated everywhere, although at different times and at various speeds. It seems to have functioned reasonably well in Iran under the Safavids. The chief *muhtasib* was appointed by the Safavid shah, and *muhtasibs* also existed in most of the larger cities. Every month the heads of guilds would submit their prices to the chief *muhtasib* for his consent. Failure then to abide by the agreed prices might make the malefactor liable to sometimes quite harsh punishment. However the system seems to have declined rapidly under the early Qajars. Always vulnerable to corruption, the old system, even were the *muhtasib* beyond reproach, was unable to survive in the face of new economic imperatives. By mid-century the monthly price list drawn up by the chief *muhtasib* in consultation with the guilds was being published in the Tehran gazette, and was still being transmitted to the wider population more directly by town criers.[12] Yet henceforth the cities gradually lost their supervisors, Shiraz in the 1850s, Isfahan in the 1870s, while the last mention of a *muhtasib* in Tehran comes from 1853, although his office seems to have lingered on.[13] The decision to abolish market supervision seems to have been a deliberate one. The *muhtasib* did not disappear simply as a result of the decay of Qajar administration. On the contrary, in the late nineteenth century his public order role was formally assigned to the new police force, the *nazmiyyah*, while his role of market supervision was simply eradicated.[14]

The final suppression of the *muhtasib* and the system of market regulation which he represented, and the de facto arrival of the free market, synchronizes strikingly with the proliferation of bread riots in Iran. For the Iranian poor, official market regulation was not merely a distant memory but was still, in the nineteenth century, a living reality. Indeed, the abolition of the *muhtasib*, after more than a thousand years of market supervision, took place over a very short time span, a few years in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, the system

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[12] *Ruznama–i Wakayi'-i Ittifakiyya*, no. 127, 29 Ramadan, 1269/1853, cited by A.K. S. Lambton, "iii Persia." Floor, *History of Bread in Iran*, p. 122.

[13] A.K. S. Lambton, "iii Persia."

[14] The *muhtasib* seems to have been occasionally supplemented by another official, the *darugha-yi bazaar,* (market superintendant), who possessed very similar functions. The darugha was also incorporated into the modern police force in 1878-9. W. M. Floor, "The Marketpolice in Qajar Persia: The Office of Darugha-yi Bazar and Muhtasib," *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 13, 1971, pp. 212-229, p. 221.

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continued to have a shadowy afterlife until the early 1920s, the levies payable by the guilds for the maintenance of the *muhtasib*, for example, only abolished in 1926.[15] It was this experience, of centuries of legitimate market regulation and price monitoring, surviving in the collective memory of the urban poor and even on the tax-rolls, which provided Iranian bread rioters with their central objective and their primary target. They aimed their protests at the authorities, and demanded that they carry out their popularly understood responsibility to "set the price," and then to enforce this price in the marketplace. Iranian bread riots were almost always, in fact, "price riots."

The legal and religious responsibility of the state to supervise the market was embedded in elite political theory, exemplified by the *hisba*. From this elite theory, the poor derived directly their sense of entitlement to bread. The specific interconnectedness of bread and justice was an idea that stretched back to the Middle Ages and beyond and might be found in Iranian and in wider Middle Eastern political culture. The system was supposed to work in the way described by the famous eleventh century *Vazir* to the Seljuks, Nizam al-Mulk, in his *Siyasatnamah.* In a chapter dealing with judges, law-enforcement and royal justice, Nizam al-Mulk relates a morality tale according to which, on one occasion when bread became scarce, the poor went to the ruler seeking justice, accusing the royal baker of hoarding. The king ordered the baker to be trampled to death by an elephant, hung from its tusk and paraded round the town, symbolizing a threat to other bakers of the same fate. By evening the desired result had been achieved and bread was available everywhere.[16]

By the nineteenth century, Iranian elite and popular discourses were suffused by concepts which would have encouraged the poor in their belief in their right to justice and therefore also to bread. The peculiar intensity of popular attitudes displayed during bread protests arose partly from the poor's actual experience of hunger, and partly from broader cultural attitudes. In Iran, again as elsewhere in the Middle East, food riots were almost always centred on the price and quality of bread, although there were occasional rice riots in the Caspian provinces. Bread was an essential staple in the Iranian diet, especially for the poor who lacked access to other foods. But the cultural significance of bread went far beyond this practical aspect.

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15 A.K. S. Lambton, "iii Persia."

16 Quoted by Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 95.

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Bread was surrounded by highly-charged emotions imparting to it an almost "sacred" character. It had a place in religious ritual, was often used linguistically and proverbially as synonomous with life and the sharing of bread symbolized a binding commitment.[17] Giving bread to the hungry was an obligatory charitable act and folk wisdom measured the qualities of monarchs by their generosity in providing food.[18] These general assumptions contributed to producing a conviction among the population that they possessed an actual entitlement to bread.

Islam itself provided a framework which emphasized the idea of justice, this framework reinforced by the Qajar revival of concepts captured in the even older idea of the "Circle of Justice."[19] This notion, with its emphasis on the maintenance of a social balance or equilibrium between the classes, implied the interdependence of the ruler and the ruled. The ruled owed the ruler obedience and the payment of taxation, but only so long as the ruler carried out his own obligations to them, principal among which was to guarantee the supply of bread. A hegemonic concept intended to encourage the acquiescence of the ruled, the Circle of Justice sometimes proved to be a double-edged sword, legitimizing demands and even overt opposition when the circle was popularly believed to have been breached.[20]

Notions such as the Circle of Justice were particularly important for the early Qajars who lacked the religious legitimacy of their Safavid predecessors and consequently surrounded themselves with "invented traditions" designed to demonstrate their fitness to rule. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the second Qajar shah, Fath Ali Shah revived a political vocabulary derived from the Circle of Justice, his royal titles emphasizing his role as protector and guardian of his people.[21] The later decades of the century saw Nasir al-Din Shah experiment with a number of reforms to the petitioning system which likewise encouraged a belief in the availability of justice and the primacy of the ruler in guaranteeing

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17 For a full discussion of the cultural significance of bread in Iran see Floor, *History of Bread in Iran*, pp. 89-100.

18 Floor, *History of Bread in Iran*, p. 95

19 Linda T. Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013) p. 159.

20 Darling, *A History of Social Justice*.

21 Darling, *A History of Social Justice*, p. 159

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it.[22] As the nineteenth century approached its end, a "modernized" concept of justice, derived from both indigenous and European political traditions and vocabulary, became central to the projects of modernist intellectuals. Indeed, the first demand of the constitutionalists in the mass demonstrations of the revolution of 1905-6 was for an *adalatkhanah*, a House of Justice.

The Circle of Justice indicates the broad contours of the discourse of Qajar paternalism but this discourse was clearly an elite product. There were, however, various routes of transmission which ensured that versions of it reached the general population. The illiterate poor would of course have had no access to the court literature extolling the virtues of the Qajar shahs and their supposed Achaemenid and Sasanian predecessors as dispensers of justice but they would, for example, have heard echoes of such ideas in proclamations read out by town criers, in Friday sermons in mosques, from popular preachers, from reciters of the *Shahnameh* and professional story-tellers in coffee houses. It would seem that the poor absorbed such ideas from this originally elite discourse as were useful to them. Indeed, they introduced an ideological innovation of their own. Elite discourses linked the royal provision of bread and justice, but it was the creative subaltern reception of this discourse which introduced the idea of the legitimacy of direct action should the monarch default. During the process of transmission from top to bottom, ideas of royal paternalism ceased being solely devices for ensuring obedience but became legitimations of protest. Story-telling, for example, easily appropriated notions of justice and the legitimacy of resistance, inverting existing hierarchies along the way, encouraging opposition even to shahs and sultans were they oppressive.[23] Folk stories, myths and legends, song and poetry all show evidence of the existence of a powerful popular conception of justice. Such a subversive subaltern discourse may also be perceived in the popularity of myths surrounding the *lutis*, well-organized gangs

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[22] Mansoureh Nezam-Mafi Ettehadieh, "The Council for the Investigation of Grievances: A Case Study of Nineteenth Century Iranian Social History, *Iranian Studies*, vol. 22, 1989, pp. 51-61.

[23] Stephanie Cronin, "Noble Robbers, Avengers and Entrepreneurs," Eric Hobsbawm and Banditry in Iran, the Middle East and North Africa," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 52, no. 5, 2016, pp. 845-870, pp. 861-2.

of young men, usually illiterate and drawn from the urban poor, who advertised themselves, and were sometimes accepted, as defenders of the oppressed against injustice.[24]

The depth of the popular belief in the right to justice, the responsibility of the shah personally to provide and guarantee it, and the legitimacy of resistance were it denied, is also demonstrated by the popular devotion to the system of petitioning. Indeed bread protests were often launched with a petition. The shah's centrality to the system of petitioning, and to these notions of justice in general, is familiar from other authoritarian monarchies, most notably the neighbouring Tsarism. It certainly contributed to the hegemonic power of the monarchy, but only as long as the person of the monarch and the institution was seen to uphold its part of the bargain. This perception began to wane in late nineteenth century Iran, as it was waning elsewhere, and the resulting disillusionment was correspondingly profound.

In summary, until the mid-nineteenth century, Iranian society shared a common belief that the shah was ultimately responsible for guaranteeing the welfare, symbolized by the supply of bread, of his subjects who, in their turn, owed him their loyalty. Such a notion, expressed in various idioms, was indeed common to patrimonial imperial monarchies throughout Asia. In times of crisis, the Mughuls in India and the Chinese Qings, for example, as well as the Qajar shahs, depended for their legitimacy on the implementation of a quartet of fundamental and specific measures. This policy quartet consisted of anti-speculative price regulation, embargos on food exports, tax relief and the strategic and sometimes theatrical distribution of free food.[25] Such measures were indeed still in evidence in Iran, if somewhat erratically, during the first half of the nineteenth century.

From these broad conceptualization of justice, and the actual policies that it had, if somewhat erratically, inspired, the poor of Qajar Iran derived the belief that they possessed both a right to bread and an expectation that the shah would guarantee it. This belief extended to the idea that the authorities ought to take action, even specific forms of action, to ensure bread was available. Such actions included prohibiting the export of wheat in times of shortage, taking measures to ensure the provisioning of cities and, especially, controlling prices. The urban poor clung to this belief and no amount of experience to the contrary succeeded in disabusing

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[24] Martin, *The Qajar Pact,* pp. 113-132.

[25] Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, p. 286.

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them of it. Faced with the reality of the delinquency of the authorities, they furthermore considered themselves entitled to suspend their submissiveness and take action to oblige compliance.

It was, therefore, a sense of moral outrage, rather than an extremity of hunger, which is of greatest importance in explaining the eruption of discontent in Iran. Again as elsewhere, Iranian bread and price riots cannot be synchronized with the harshest conditions and the greatest shortages. Indeed, famine produced rather few such episodes. Starvation was inimical to collective action. Where dearth and price rises deteriorated into real starvation, the ability of the urban poor to mount collective political action largely disintegrated, to be replaced by a demoralized retreat into exhausted, pathetic, and occasionally shocking attempts at personal survival. The hungry and the fearful might riot, the starving could not. The city of Qum, for example, which was very hard hit by the great famine of 1870-72, saw only one bread demonstration, and that at the beginning of the catastrophe.[26] Tehran saw several minor protests but here the general situation was better. Indeed, the many accounts of famine in Iran rarely mention any form of direct action to obtain bread. Throughout the country, the famine years of 1869-71 saw a total of only six recorded protests.[27] On the contrary, accounts in abundance emphasize the passivity and resignation of the poor as they starved in the midst of well-stocked bazaars, market traders and officials impervious to the dying paupers who surrounded them and their produce.[28]

The eruption of a bread riot in fact depended on the poor harbouring a particular view of the reasons for a shortage. Were the hungry to accept that there was simply no food available, then protest would have been futile and irrational, and lacking in targets. Iranian bread riots rather resulted not so much from hopeless hunger but from the conviction that “others were unjustly depriving them of food to which they had a moral and political right.”[29]

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[26] Gurney and Mansur Safatgul (eds), *Qum dar Qahti-yi Buzurg*, pp. 50-51.

[27] Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*,” pp. 204-5.

[28] See, for example Brittlebank, *Persia During the Famine*, p. 96.

[29] Charles Tilly (ed), *The Formation of Nation States in Western Europe* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 389.

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The one single factor which was always present in Iranian bread riots was the belief that shortages were artificial and the result of hoarding and speculation by the rich, and that ample supplies existed but that the poor were being deliberately deprived of their entitlement. This belief is expressed strongly during every bread riot in Iran throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Indeed, the belief that such hoarding, rather than any actual shortage, was responsible for the price hikes and the consequent distress was universally and immediately expressed by the urban poor whenever prices rose. When the severe bread shortages in Tehran in the spring of 1861 led to serious protests by women of the city, they had already been infuriated by the general belief that the high officials of the city were hoarding and speculating in the small amounts of grain intended for distribution to the needy.[30] In 1865 in Shiraz the city was in the grip of a "great outcry" against the governor on account of his hoarding a huge quantity of grain and only offering it for sale at unaffordable prices.[31] In 1871, during the great famine, as several bread protests threatened in Tehran and other cities, it was again being popularly asserted that there was in fact a moderate amount of corn in the country, but that it was being hoarded by influential people for the sake of gain, and the Shah himself was loudly and openly blamed for tolerating or conniving at what was considered to be such impiety.[32] During the hungry 1890s in Tehran it was repeatedly and generally stated that the doubling and trebling of prices of staples was due to the profiteering of Court officials, who were also large landowners, at the expense of ordinary people. A prolonged bread crisis in Isfahan in October 1893 saw the population openly express its anger at the duopoly who controlled the politics and economy of the city, the governor, the Shah's eldest son, Zill al-Sultan, and the chief mujtahid, Aqa Najafi, who, it was said, possessed between them vast quantities of grain stored away in their villages.[33] As the nineteenth century drew to a close, senior members of the ulama, who had taken full advantage of the commercialization of land, were increasingly the target of popular anger over hoarding and speculation, joining the older culprits, officials and landed magnates. However it was the shah who suffered most in popular esteem. Just as the shah was exalted as the ultimate provider of bread, so he was blamed for its dearth.

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[30] Alison to Russell, 3 March,1861, FO60/256.

[31] Shiraz Agent's Journal, Alison to Russell, August 11, 1865, FO60/290.

[32] Alison to Granville, August 16, 1871, FO60/335.

[33] Preece, Isfahan, October 28, 1893, FO248/572.

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Popular beliefs about hoarding were no mere rumours but were based on firm grounds.[34] Indeed the poor, as labourers and servants, were often well-placed to have intimate knowledge of their masters' stocks of grain. No element among the elite escaped popular odium. Government officials, themselves drawn from the landowning class, were inclined to collude in such practices even though they were theoretically responsible for market regulation. The ulama were also large landowners, with multiple ties to the merchant class, and were correctly identified as among the most active speculators while the shah was the largest landowner of all and, by the end of the century, most implicated in the practice.

Iranian bread rioters were drawn from the lower classes of Iran's towns and cities and sometimes represented the very poorest among them. The viability of reconstructing the experience of such social layers, especially in the Middle East, has often been questioned because of their illiteracy and their archival silence. In the case of Iranian bread rioters, only fragments of indirect speech survive, recorded by observers, which hint at their mentality. Yet the poor were neither mute nor passive. Although we know little of what the poor thought, we know more of what they did, and through their actions we may begin to understand something of their understanding of their own situation. In Iran, as elsewhere, such rioters, rather than constituting a desperate and rampaging mob impervious to its own illegitimacy, in fact invariably appear to have been motivated by a strong sense of justice and entitlement, targeted their actions precisely and appropriately, and sometimes displayed an astonishing self discipline.

For protesters, the price of bread was first and foremost a political, not an economic, issue, and they directed their anger accordingly. Their disbelief in any genuine dearth determined their strategy. The initial, main and sometimes sole demand of most Iranian bread protests was for "setting the price", for the responsible authorities to intervene to regulate the market in accordance with law and custom. To this end, the usual object of their action was to petition the highest accessible political authority, if possible the shah himself. Occasionally, as the century wore on, attempts were made to mobilize representatives of the European powers. The crowd begged, importuned and finally threatened any available figure of

[34] The significance of hoarding, speculating and profiteering was first noted in the early article by Okazaki, "The Great Persian Famine." Its mechanics have most recently been investigated by Kazemi, "Of Diet and Profit."

influence, demanding that they exert control over those whom the protesters believed to be the real authors of their distress, the rich landowners, merchants, and hoarders and speculators generally.

The Iranian crowd occasionally exhibited an extraordinary discipline and sense of purpose, making the description of riot entirely inappropriate. One example comes from a blockade. As well as "price riots," blockades were another typical tactic of the crowd, this type of action again legitimized by the customs of Qajar political practice. Placing an embargo on food exports from areas threatened by shortages was, like price controls, a key policy of Qajar paternalism. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Iranian government repeatedly issued *farmans* prohibiting the export of grain from areas suffering from shortages. Their ability, as well as their willingness to enforce these orders was, however, limited and, from the 1870s onwards, further hampered by a powerful British diplomatic establishment almost fanatically committed to free trade. Hungry populations accordingly took it upon themselves to force compliance with royal edicts. In 1870, at the height of the famine, the minister for foreign affairs announced an interdict on the export of grain from the port of Bushihr. A British-protected merchant nonetheless made preparations to ship out a quantity of corn, while British diplomats put the strongest possible pressure on Iranian officials, both local and at Tehran, to permit this export. Consequently a crowd of about two thousand local people, men and women, assembled with the intention of preventing the shipment. They occupied the local telegraph office and forwarded a telegram to the merchant saying that they and their families, being threatened with hunger and starvation, were resolved to use force if necessary to prevent the export of grain from Bushihr. They were, however, ready to purchase the corn belonging to the merchant at more than double its original cost.[35] The merchant abandoned the attempt to export the corn.

In the more common "price riots", the protesters would first aim to petition in person the highest figure of authority within reach. In Tehran this was the shah himself. Their recognition of his authority, however, implied no automatic deference or even basic respect. If they were unable to gain direct access to the environs of the palace, the women of Tehran were quite ready to lie in wait for the shah in the street, surround his carriage and openly insult him. High prices in the bazaar would see the monarch at constant risk of public

[35] Alison, Tehran, to Clarendon, June 28, 1870, FO60/327.

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confrontation and execration.[36] In November 1899 as the price of bread was steadily rising, reaching twice what it had been the previous year, the shah was publicly insulted by a crowd of women.[37] In April 1903, following serious bread riots in Mashhad, while the Shah was out driving in Tehran a crowd, numbering some 200 women, surrounded his carriage, and demanded, by shouting loudly, redress against the oppression of the governor. They were dispersed by the shah's servants, but only after he had promised them that an inquiry would be held into their grievances.[38]

In Iran, as elsewhere, women were always central to bread riots, acting alone or as initiators to be joined by men at a later stage. There are very few, if any, cases recorded of a bread protest in Iran in which women were not involved.[39] Although women are sometimes mentioned as taking part in public protests over other issues, their perennial presence in bread demonstrations is notable. This was probably due to their strictly defined but essential gender roles. Responsible for feeding their families, they would have been most alert to the price and quality of bread and most concerned about likely future price movements and how to cope with them. With a natural collective consciousness, born of neighbourhood and family networks and shared roles and responsibilities, their everyday meetings in front of bakers' shops to buy bread almost invited a demonstration when prices rose. Their actions

[36] Durand to Salisbury, November 14, 1899, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol.1, p. 590, R. M. Burrell (general editor) and Robert L. Jarman (research editor), *Iran Political Diaries*, *1881-1965* (Farnham Common: Archive Editions, 1997); Hardinge to Lansdowne, April 28, 1903, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 2, p. 110.

[37] Durand to Salisbury, November 14, 1899, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol.1, p. 590.

[38] Hardinge to Lansdowne, April 28, 1903, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 2, p. 110.

[39] For a discussion of the role of women in popular protest in Iran see Martin, *The Qajar Pact*, pp. 95-112; Cronin, "Popular Protest, Disorder and Riot in Iran,"; Cronin, "Popular Politics, the New State and the Birth of the Iranian Working Class." The role of women in bread riots has been noted in a wide variety of historical periods and geographical locations. For a discussion of the role of women in contemporary popular protest see John Walton and David Seddon, *Free Markets and Food Riots: The Politics of Global Adjustment* (Blackwell: Cambridge MA and Oxford) pp. 82-89. For the role of women in coping with hunger see Khudadad and Manzuralajdad "Payamadha-yi Ijtima'i-yi Qahtiha-yi," pp. 23-6.

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during bread protests were heavily gendered and typically displayed a strong ritual and symbolic aspect. They might remove their chadors, throw dust on their heads, rend their garments and engage in theatrical demonstrations of weeping, emphasizing their own supposed weakness in a bid to shame their oppressors. Women, although scurrilously abusive and destructive of property, rarely used physical violence towards people. They were not, however, immune from violent reprisals.

In provincial cities crowds would usually begin by targeting the governor. In Tabriz in 1895 bread rioters attacked the house of the chief provincial official, Qa'im Maqam; in Ardabil in the same year a group of women, with stones carried in chadors tied round their waists, attacked the governor's residence; in 1903 a hungry crowd in Mashhad sacked the house of the *bayglarbaygi*, an unpopular senior local official; in 1906 in Mashhad a bread riot began with a demonstration against the provincial governor and in Hamadan women mobbed the governor's residence during bread riots. As in Tehran, so too in the provincial cities, women would frequently simply ambush officials in the street, accosting and abusing them, a favoured tactic being to pull them off their horses.

As communications between the provinces and Tehran improved, local populations became increasingly dissatisfied with petitioning their nearest authorities and more determined to address their protests to the shah himself. This they did by occupying telegraph offices and putting themselves directly in touch with the government and the court in the capital. The telegraph clerks often transmitted these telegrams out of fear for their lives.[40] In 1865 for example, during serious bread riots in Shiraz, a crowd of women stormed the newly-opened telegraph office and demanded that a telegram be sent to the shah stating their grievances against the governor who they blamed for the high price of bread.[41] In the summer of 1870, at the onset of famine and as prices rose in Qum, crowds gathered and about two thousand men and women went to the telegraph office demanding the shah be telegraphed and informed of their complaints.[42] In Bushihr in 1870 the crowd blockading the export of grain used the

40 British Agent, Shiraz, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to Nicolson, 7 August, 1886, FO248/436.

41 Shiraz Agent's Journal, Alison to Russell, August 11, 1865, FO60/290.

42 Gurney and Mansur Safatgul (eds), *Qum dar Qahti-yi Buzurg*, pp. 50-51.

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telegraph to make their demands, to explain their grievances and the justification for their action and, with their promise to pay for the blockaded grain, to emphasize their legitimacy.[43]

Bread rioters would also vent their resentment on their supposed protectors, senior members of the ulama. In Mashhad in 1859, the Imam-i Jum'ah, known to be hoarding grain, was attacked in his own mosque and dragged from his pulpit.[44] At the peak of the bread riots in Tabriz in 1898, the most lethal conflict was between the hungry poor and Nizam al-Ulama, a wealthy landowning cleric. In Isfahan in October 1893 placards publicly, albeit anonymously, accused the leading mujtahid, Aqa Najafi, of hoarding. Women crowded into his mosque and prevented him from conducting services, accusing him of forcing prices to rise. He was finally forced to go into his pulpit and swear on the Quran that he possessed no grain, but he was still not believed.[45] Again, in 1898, when new disturbances took place as a result of prices continuing to be high although the harvest was known to be excellent, placards were again posted throughout the city abusing Aqa Najafi and blaming him for the high price of bread.[46] Low-ranking clerics, however, especially religious students, often played a different part in bread crises, joining demonstrations and acting as interlocutors for the crowd.

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The sensitivity of bread protesters to changing conditions, and their discipline in their objectives, is also shown in their tactical exploitation of the growing influence of foreign consuls, using this as a lever to move their own officials, and in their increasing use of consulates as places of safety, beyond the reach of their own authorities. As early as 1857, Tabrizi bread rioters asked for the intervention of the Russian consul.[47] During a severe famine in Kirman in the early 1900s, over two hundred people, "respectable Musulmans", in fact mainly shopkeepers themselves, took refuge in the British consulate, asking for British

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[43] Alison, Tehran, to Clarendon, June 28, 1870, FO60/327.

[44] Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, p. 378.

[45] FO248/572, The Isfahan bread riots are fully contextualized by Heidi Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King: Zill al-Sultan and Isfahan under the Qajars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), pp. 181-2; Martin, *Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism*, pp. 79-93.

[46] FO248//676 Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*.

[47] Murray to Clarendon, April 18, 1857, FO60/217.

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protection.[48] Their leader, a sayyid, explained to the consul that the price of bread was so high that they could not live any longer under Iranian authority. The consul offered them charity, an offer they rejected with the retort that they were not beggars. They further said that they were quite ready to become Christians if they could only get cheap bread. The result of this protest was that the consul paid an unofficial visit to the Governor and extracted from him a promise that bread should be lowered to a more or less normal price by gradual reductions spread over a period of ten days.[49] The intention to bring consular pressure to bear on the local government, rather than the avowed desire to become either British subjects or Christians, was clearly the aim of the protest and it was successful. The tactic was repeated in Kirman in 1902 when, following a bread riot in the city, three hundred of the poorest people took refuge in the British consulate. Here too the consul successfully extracted a promise from the local governor to lower the price of bread.[50] Bread protesters also sought help from the Russian consulates. In Tabriz in 1898, rioters made repeated and finally successful efforts to take bast in the Russian consulate. As late as 1925, in the last bread protest of the Qajar period, a large crowd attempted to gain entry to the Soviet legation.[51]

Bread protests almost always began with a confrontation with the political authorities. Direct attacks on the bazar, on bakers, and looting and theft appear to have been relatively unusual, occurring only when tensions had already risen and the situation deteriorated. Looting also appears to have become more common from the 1890s. Tabriz, where political tensions ran high throughout the 1890s, saw several spates of looting. In 1895, the bazars were rushed and many shops looted, and again in 1898 a crowd of women and religious students marched to the bazars and attacked the bakers' shops, several of which were sacked and wrecked. In Shiraz in May 1902 several bakers' shops were looted, and one baker killed, and in the riot in Tehran in 1903 a baker was nearly killed.[52] The bakers were more than capable of fighting

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[48] Malcolm Napier, *Five Years in a Persian Town* (London: John Murray, 1905), pp. 235-6; Floor, *History of Bread in Iran*, p.122.

[49] Malcolm Napier, *Five Years in a Persian Town* (London: John Murray, 1905), pp. 235-6.

[50] Summary of Events, April 2 to April 28, des Graz to Lansdowne, May 27, 1902, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 2, p. 59.

[51] Loraine to Chamberlain, 29 September, 1925, FO371/10849/E22/5808/34.

[52] Hardinge to Lansdowne, April 27, 1903, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 2, p. 110.

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back. In the Tabriz riot of 1898, after several bakers' shops in the bazaar were sacked and wrecked, one women was severely wounded and another shot dead by a baker.[53]

Bakers, although often speculators on their own behalf, might also find themselves squeezed between powerful local notables and the hungry population.[54] When rioters raised the demand for setting the price, the authorities frequently concluded that a simple order to the bakers, not necessarily intended to be taken very seriously, would be sufficient to calm the crowd. If the bakers complied, this was indeed often enough, but sometimes they could not or would not. At the mercy of the grain prices demanded by the landowners, their reaction to orders from the authorities to lower their prices was often simply to shut their bakeries and shops, thus further enraging a hungry population.[55] The closure of the public bakeries meant that bread was no longer available at any price. Bakers were also the favourite target of the authorities for a demonstration of retribution, thus diverting the rage of a crowd away from themselves. Savage and exemplary punishment continued to be meted out to bakers periodically throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in efforts to placate angry crowds. In Astarabad in 1896, where the price of bread was high, the governor attempted to placate the discontented population by mutilating a baker, although with no effect on prices.[56] During the high tension in Tehran in 1898, the authorities decided to make an example of some shopkeepers, and a common sight in the bazaar was that of bakers and butchers convicted of extortionate charges or adulteration hanging head downwards in their own shops. In Tehran in December 1905, just before the eruption of the constitutional revolution, the authorities had the head of the bakers' guild bastinadoed, extracting a promise that he would solve the bread problem, only to find prices rising further the next day.[57]

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[53] Monthly Summary, August 1-26, 1898, Durand to Salisbury, August 26, 1898, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 412.

[54] For the scapegoating of bakers see also Kazemi, "Of Diet and Profit," pp. 350-1.

[55] Consul-General, Tabriz, August 29, 1898, FO248/675.

[56] Summary of Frontier News, July 10-August 8, 1896, Durand to Salisbury, August 8, 1896, *Iran Political* Diaries, vol. 1, p. 332.

[57] Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 174

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Although bread rioters, especially women, were not initially violent, they were far from placid. They were always ready to heap abuse on high officials, and the destruction of property of those they considered responsible, especially government property, was common. In March 1861 in Qazvin, where there was great hunger, a mob of women wrecked the governor's palace. In June 1900 bread rioters assembled in Tehran, invaded the town hall, and partially wrecked it. As late as 1925, protesters were still employing the same tactics, a crowd, led by women, breaking into the Majlis, doing considerable damage.[58] Yet, before the 1890s and the revolutionary years, assaults on persons by protesters, especially female protesters, rarely went beyond the throwing of stones and mud along with the hurling of abuse.

Protesters might, however, themselves be the victims of substantial violence from the authorities. When confronted by an angry and hungry crowd, the authorities had limited options available to them although their first inclination seems to have been suppression by force. The levels of violence might reach shocking levels. In a bloody confrontation in Shiraz in 1865, about twenty rioters were wounded and two killed. In April 1871, during the great famine, a crowd of hungry men and women forced their way into the Shiraz telegraph office and three people were shot by the governor's riflemen.[59] In the Tabriz of the 1890s the death toll steadily mounted over several years. In August 1895, five bread rioters were killed on one day, another two on the next and one man and one woman on a third day. In April 1897 three people were killed. But the violence reached a crescendo in August 1898, local reports stating that some thirty men had been killed during a bread riot and many more wounded.[60] In Mashhad three people were killed in 1906. Nor was the presence of women in the crowd any deterrent to the use of force. In 1895 in Ardabil the governor ordered a crowd of women assembled in front of his residence complaining about a bread shortage to be fired on.[61]

In the suppression of bread riots, however, the army was of doubtful reliability. By the 1890s soldiers, often receiving part of their wages in bread, were experiencing the same difficulties as the civilian population, and were expressing serious discontent. In the 1890s, the Tabriz,

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[58] Loraine to Chamberlain, 29 September, 1925, FO371/10849/E22/5808/34.

[59] Agent to Alison, 14 April 1871, FO248/267.

[60] Consul-General, Tabriz, 29 August, 1898, FO248/675.

[61] Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*, p. 185.

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Isfahan, Shiraz and Mashhad authorities all found their troops too few and to unreliable to risk using them against bread riots, and in the capital the troops openly sympathized with the crowds and refused to take action against them.[62] Authorities besieged by angry crowds would most often resort to using their own retainers and dependents for their defence. Although the government's ability to suppress bread riots using military force was very uncertain, this did not mean it shrank from violence. Indeed, in order to stave off perceptions of weakness, the authorities might, when the immediate danger had passed, resort to the performance of salutary punishment for rioters, including public whipping in the bazaars and mutilation, usually the cutting off of ears.[63]

Given the general coercive weakness of the state, the authorities were still ready to deploy a variety of tactics in efforts to appease crowds whom they could not suppress. The politics of negotiation remained an option and the discourse of paternalism might be temporarily resurrected. In 1866-67 in Shiraz the governor and the crowd, especially the "widows, orphans and 'gossipy women'" of the city, engaged in an elaborate game of riot, promise and concession over a number of months.[64] Another common reaction by Tehran was the dismissal of a governor. This was a cheap and easy tactic, only inapplicable in the few cases where the governor was too powerful to be dispensed with easily. Since the principal demand of the crowd was often precisely for the dismissal of a governor, the shah's compliance might be interpreted as sympathetic. It has been estimated that half of the bread riots in the second half of the nineteenth century resulted in the dismissal of a high secular or religious official.[65] Local governors, *kalantars*, *pishkars*, *karguzars*, *na'ib al-tawliyyahs*, government ministers and even prime ministers might thus fall victim to ejection from office as a result of a bread crisis.[66]

The authorities had one final tactic up their sleeves for dealing with recalcitrant crowds, and that was to divert the anger of the crowd away from themselves and towards a scapegoat. In

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[62] Monthly Summary, Spring-Rice to Salisbury, June 27, 1900, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 642.

[63] Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*, pp. 184-5.

[64] Busse, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, pp. 356-8.

[65] Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*," p. 191.

[66] Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*, p. 205-6.

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many bread riots, it appears that there was a degree of consciousness of a shared interest among the poor, especially the female poor, of the various communities within a city.[67] In May 1906 there were bread riots in Hamadan, mainly by Muslim women, one or two of whom were severely wounded in fights in the town. They then took refuge in the churches in the Armenian quarter of the town, where they were fed and looked after by the Armenians.[68] The Shiraz Jewish community also participated in protests, on one occasion carrying pages from the Talmud.[69] Occasionally, however, the authorities were successful in diverting the anger of hungry people away from themselves towards other targets, Babis and Jews particularly useful for this purpose.[70] During the very lean years of 1865-7, when famine threatened in the south of Iran, the city of Shiraz appeared to be in the grip of a simmering class war, which erupted occasionally into bread riots. In August 1865 a particularly serious outbreak took place, led as usual by women of the town. The authorities tried all the methods at their disposal, first ordering riflemen to fire on the crowd. They then ordered bakers to sell bread cheaply. The government in Tehran ordered the dismissal of the governor and the Imam-i Jum‘ah ascended the pulpit in the man mosque and also tried to restore calm. But the situation instead degenerated into chaos, with gangs of lutis attacking and looting the Jewish quarter, the entire city reduced to chaos and finally left cowed and in a state of high alarm and fear.[71]

A Golden Age of Bread Riots

The late nineteenth century appears to have been a golden age of bread riots in Iran. The bread protests which raged across the country in the 1890s and early 1900s were novel in their frequency, their scale and their duration.[72] Not only is there evidence of an increase in the occurrence of bread riots, but the significance of the such actions itself seemed to change.

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[67] Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*, p. 201.

[68] Monthly Summary, Grant Duff to Grey, July 19, 1906, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 3, p. 31.

[69] Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*, p. 201.

[70] For a discussion of communal conflict see Kazemi, *Neither Indians nor Egyptians*, pp. 308-393.

[71] Shiraz Agent’s Journal, Alison to Russell, August 11, 1865, FO60/290.

[72] An increase in subsistence crises as the nineteenth century progressed has been noted by Kazemi, “Of Diet and Profit,” p. 337.

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Rather than being isolated episodes, as in earlier decades, easily ended by suppression or concession, they rather constituted the heart of prolonged, almost permanent, urban crises.[73] Not only were the bread crises of the 1890s capable of simmering for months and even years, and often prone to a sudden descent into serious violence, but they also erupted in every part of the country, wracking both the capital and all the major provincial cities. By the 1890s such protests had become enmeshed in a web of much deeper political and economic antagonisms. Indeed, by that time Iranian cities, and especially the capital, were in the grip of a pervasive sense of impending crisis.

Sources begin to appear making regular mentions of bread protests from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. One partial list has estimated the second half of the century saw forty seven such protests although this list is based on incomplete source material and is certainly a considerable underestimate.[74] Yet the list clearly shows an acceleration in the number protests as the century neared its end, the 1890s seeing the greatest frequency.[75]

An explanation for the increase in the frequency and intensity of bread riots in the late nineteenth century may be sought directly in the impact on the urban population, especially its poorest elements, of the accelerating economic changes of the period and of the political crisis engulfing the Qajar state. As the narrative above has demonstrated, bread protests were not only more frequent by the 1890s, but exhibited greater levels of violence on both sides. Looting, rarely in evidence in earlier periods, also became more common. As far as the authorities were concerned, market regulation had been abolished. The urban poor, however, clung to the practice and gradually withdrew legitimacy from those who refused to honour and abide by this tradition. The declining authority of the Qajar state was specifically illustrated by its inability to rely on its *nizam* troops, built up at such huge expense throughout the century, as the hungry soldiers sided with the hungry poor.

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[73] See Vanessa Martin, *Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism: The Constitutional Revolution of 1906* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

[74] Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*, pp. 204-5.

[75] Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*," pp. 204-5.

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The last performance of a traditional paternalism by the Qajar state and the monarchy may be dated to the serious bread riots of 1861. Elite and royal paternalism depended for its legitimacy on reciprocity. The ruled, but also the ruler, each had their own specific responsibilities. The poor, when driven beyond endurance, were entitled to demand justice and bread but, equally and crucially, the shah was obliged to act. In 1861, the last serious bread riot took place in Tehran in which the shah observed this script.[76]

Each actor in the performance of this riot clearly understood the part they were expected to play. Trouble had begun in mid-February, the price of bread having risen by two hundred per cent, when the shah was "mobbed and hooted" in Tehran and an attempt made to pull the governor of the city off his horse.[77] The bakers' shops were soon besieged by the hungry clamouring for bread. On the 28th of February the shah, on returning from hunting, was surrounded by several thousand women yelling for bread. They gutted the bakers' shops and were so violent that as soon as the shah entered the palace, he ordered the gates of the citadel to be shut. The next day thousands of women forced their way into the citadel, and began to attack the guards with large stones, being urged on by their men. The shah summoned the *kalantar* of Tehran, Mahmud Khan Kalantar Nuri, who promised to put down the riot and himself went into the crowd, and began laying about the women with a large stick. The women, now displaying their bloody clothes, called on the shah for justice, in which demand they were supported by mullahs in the crowd, who loudly impressed on the shah his obligations. The shah, apparently deciding that further force was unwise, changed tack. He summoned the *kalantar* and ordered that he be strangled on the spot. The corpse of the *kalantar* was then stripped and dragged through the streets amid thousands of protesters and

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[76] Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe,* pp. 378-382; Ranin Kazemi, *Neither Indians nor Egyptians*, pp. 269-287. This episode has attracted considerable attention owing to its scale and to the fact that it generated unusually graphic and deailed reports. See Edward Backhouse Eastwick, *Journal of a Diplomat's Three Years' Residence in Persia* (London: Smith, Elder and C., 1864), 2 vols, vol. 1, pp. 287-92; *Yaddashtha-ye Farhad Mirza Mo'tamed al-Dawlah*, cited by Nabavi; Heinrich Brugsch, *Reiser der K. Preussischen Gesandtschaft nach Persien* 1860 *und 1861* (Leipzig: J. C Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1862-3) 2 vols.

Alison to Russell, Tehran, February 18, 1861, FO248/195.

[77] Alison to Russell, Tehran, February 18, 1861, FO248/195.

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finally hung up by the heels at one of the city gates where it was left for three days. Nevertheless protests continued next day. The shah appeared dressed in a red robe, as a sign of further blood-letting, and ordered that all the *kadkhudas*, (heads of urban quarters) of Tehran were to be bastinadoed. He crowned these measures by throwing open all the royal granaries. The crowd, finally reassured of royal protection, was calmed.[78]

This was the last occasion on which the shah subjected a responsible high official to an exemplary and public physical punishment, and also the last occasion on which he performed a legitimizing act of generosity in symbolic solidarity with the hungry, a theatrical distribution of the contents of the royal granaries. From now on, hoarders no longer needed to fear the shah's wrath. The bread riot of 1861 marks the symbolic death of Qajar paternalism. From now on the equation of reprocity on which the traditional choreography of the bread riot depended was no longer operational. On the contrary, rather than engaging in performances of symbolic solidarity, the shah was increasingly identified as colluding with rings of speculators, himself the principal hoarder. The inability of the crowd to evoke a recognizable response from the authorities contributed to a change in their own mentality and an increase in violence on both sides.

The last vestiges of paternalism melted away during subsequent decades. The shah's strategic and sometimes theatrical distribution of free food ceased owing to the declining fiscal base of the state, the fall in revenue in real terms, and the shah's need for money, partly to fund expensive modernization projects and partly to fund his own induction into modernity via with luxury imports and foreign travel.[79] Remissions in taxation, routinely granted by the shah in times of hardship, dwindled and finally ceased.[80] Embargos on food exports, designed for a pre-modern economy, were more difficult to enforce as the state's waning coercive power was unable to counteract the powerful incentives of an increasingly profitable regional and international trade, and especially to resist the determined opposition of British officials, acting in the name of free trade.

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[78] Alison to Russell, Tehran, March 3, 1861, FO248/195.

[79] Willem Floor, *A Fiscal History of Iran in the Safavid and Qajar Periods* (Indiana: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 1998), p.462.

[80] See, for example, Report on the State of Azerbaijan, November 28, 1860, Consul-General, Tabreez, to Alison, November 29, 1860, FO248/192.

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The Tobacco Protest of 1890-2 revealed profound political and ideological discontent among the mercantile and religious elites. The urban poor, however, had their own grievances which often implicated precisely those elites. The most vulnerable to price rises owing to their dependence on the market and their lack of reserves of either cash or grain, they had, by the 1890s, not only swollen in numbers but were increasingly desperate. Peasants driven from the rural areas by successive waves of famine joined artisans evicted from the collapsing handicraft industries to create a perpetually hungry lumpenproletariat. Newly dependent on the cash nexus, and subject to a long-term process of pauperization, the urban poor were then devastated by a specific currency crisis which resulted in a potentially lethal decline in the purchasing power of their wages.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid economic change in Iran. Cash crops for export began rapidly replacing subsistence farming, production for profit replacing production for consumption, and money overtook barter as the most important instrument of economic activity.[81] A generalized commercialization of agriculture turned land into a commodity which might be bought and sold, ownership passing from military and civil elites to merchants and ulama, social groups more attuned to profit. The search for cash crops and cash profits was made urgent by a trade deficit which had developed directly from Iran's enforced opening to European economic penetration as a result of its military defeats in the early nineteenth century.[82] The impact of these processes on standards of living in Iran has been the subject of some debate.[83] Data is sparse, and in any case even by the end of the nineteenth century, Iran did not really constitute a single economy, being rather divided into informal economic zones, each with its own patterns of production and trade.[84] Not only did economic development affect different areas differently, but different social classes also

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[81] Floor, *History of Bread in Iran*, p.120.

[82] Ram Baruch Regavim, *The Most Sovereign of Masters: The History of Opium in Modern Iran, 1850-1955* (2012), publicly accessible Penn Dissertations 687, GIVE details p. 24

[83] For a recent summary of this debate see Regavim, *The Most Sovereign of* Masters, pp. 49-55.

[84] Gad G. Gilbar, "Trends in the Development of Prices in Late Qajar Iran," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 16, nos 3-4, 1983, pp. 177-198, p. 195.

experienced change differently. The impact on the urban poor, of inflation, currency depreciation and speculation, was devastating. Swollen in numbers in the towns and cities, dependent on the market and the cash nexus, they were exposed to the shocks of the domestic and global free market as never before.

Inflation resulted from a decline in food production for the domestic market and large increases in the numbers of the poor in Iran's towns and cities which increased demand. Food in general, and especially bread, the staple of the poor, was subject to severe inflation in the latter decades of the century. Iran was accustomed, like all predominantly agricultural countries, to seasonal fluctuations in prices of grains and cereals during each year, to a rise and fall in prices from year to year resulting from abundant or poor harvests, and even fluctuations over periods of years. Prices would rise but would, sooner or later, return to customary levels. The last third of the nineteenth century, however, witnessed a sustained price rise. Bread simply became more and more expensive, never falling back to earlier levels, presenting the increasing numbers of the urban poor dependent on the market for food with an entirely novel situation and creating an unprecedented level of anxiety and political tension. During the second half of the century, it is estimated that the price of bread in Tehran rose by five hundred per cent.[85]

Inflationary pressures were exacerbated by the encouragement to speculation given by a newly monetized economy.[86] Disincentives, on the other hand, opprobrium or worse from an energetic *muhtasib* or indeed from the shah himself, had vanished. Hoarding had always been a perennial feature of the agricultural cycle, occurring when harvests were plentiful as well as when they were not. By the latter nineteenth century, however, the financial incentives had exponentially increased. The constraints imposed on profit by the limitations of a pre-modern, barter-based, localized economy began to melt away while new banking institutions and possibilities for international trade made the secure accumulation of financial wealth both

[85] E. Lorini, *La Persia Economica* (Rome, 1900), p. 392, cited by Hooshang Amirahmadi, *The Political Economy of Iran under the Qajars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 71.

[86] For summaries of the transformations affecting the economy especially the production and marketing of food, see Kazemi, "Of Diet and Profit;" Floor, *History of Bread in Iran*.

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possible and worthwhile.[87] Landowners and officials were joined by commercially-minded merchants and ulama in forming sophisticated "rings," cornering everything which had a market price, but especially bread, leading to an almost permanent crisis in the politics of food.

These developments appear to have contributed to a series of devastating famines which Iran suffered during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the mortality rates difficult to assess with precision but certainly staggeringly high. Indeed the great famine of 1870-1872 was of apparently unprecedented severity and national scale. Certainly Iran, along with other predominantly rural economies, suffered from the ecological turbulence of the late nineteenth century. But the better documented cases of China and India would seem to confirm that it was not the ecological disaster of drought alone, but the economic and political context, specifically "the free marketing of grain combined with local failure of incomes" which produced the catastrophic scale of the 1870-72 famine in Iran.[88]

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As argued above, famines were inimical to the organized and political character of the bread riot. The occurrence of famine is relevant, however, in two respects. It contributed to the accumulation of a numerous, hungry and embittered lumpenproletariat in Iran's towns and cities while its impact on popular consciousness, producing both a permanent state of fear and a heightened sense of class consciousness, was profound.

The price of bread generated a perpetual anxiety in Iran's towns and cities, any rise potentially heralding hunger and then famine. For most of the population of Iranian cities, until well into the twentieth century, the struggle for sufficient food was a constant preoccupation of daily life. The sufferings endured during "great hungers" entered folk memory, and the resulting fear was persistent and pervasive. Mortality from episodes of famine was occasionally catastrophic and both urban and rural populations were haunted by any signs of their impending arrival.

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87 Kazemi, "Of Diet and Profit," pp. 336-7.

88 Karl Polanyi *The Great Transformation* (Boston, 1944), p. 160, quoted in Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, p. 9.

The fate of the Iranian poor in times of famine has been well documented by European travellers, missionaries, diplomatic staff, medical professionals, and by Iranian observers themselves. The arrival of famine was never either sudden or unexpected. On the contrary, its slow progress, heralded by wild fluctuations in prices, could be observed over months and sometimes years. As hunger turned into starvation, the famished refused to resign themselves but engaged in a bitter struggle to survive, resorting to a range of strategies, each more desperate than the last. Conditions in the cities often become almost apocalyptic, with scavenging, the consumption of raw animal flesh and dung, the streets filled with skeletal beggars and the unburied dead, and the authorities' posting of guards on graveyards to prevent the theft of the corpses for food.[89] The sale or enslavement of women and children became quite common, often for paltry amounts of money or food. Indeed, daughter-selling, *dukhtar-furushi*, became such a proverbial resort of the starving poor that it was to be one of the sparks for the constitutional revolution in 1905-6.[90] The poor were not always supplicant. Although mass violence was perhaps surprisingly rare, "swarms of beggars" might easily turn from importuning to menacing.[91] As E P Thompson remarked, the poor, especially in oral cultures, have long memories, and the experience of famine, especially the great hunger of 1870-2, conditioned future responses to any hint of bread shortages and price rises.

The towns and cities of Iran were transformed by famine, especially the great hunger of 1870-72. In the countryside too the change engendered was profound, notably on patterns of landownership.[92] Many of the famished resorted to flight to areas where it was hoped affordable food might be found.[93] While their strength remained, groups of the starving

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[89] Granville to FO, May 29, 1871, FO60/334

[90] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *The Story of the Daughters of Quchan: Gender and National Memory in National History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

[91] William Brittlebank, *Persia During the Famine* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1873), p. 137

[92] Dariush Rahmanian va Mahdi Mir Kiyayi, "Ta'sir-i Khushksali va Qahti bar Vaz'iyat-i Malikiyyat-i Zamin dar Iran-i 'Asr-i Nasiri," *Mutala'at-i Tarikh-i Islam*, 1393, no. 23, pp. 219-254.

[93] Khudadad and Manzuralajdad "Payamadha-yi Ijtima'i-yi Qahtiha-yi 'Asr-i Nasiri", pp. 35-9.

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would move from the rural areas to the towns, from town to town, and eventually to the capital, wherever they moved constituting a presence at best unwelcome, and at worse a menace. The scale of this population movement was very considerable and usually permanent.[94] The starving would often simply follow caravans in the hope of scavenging their refuse. With little or no reliable information as to where food might be found, this blind flight meant only the swelling of the starving in the larger urban areas and the exacerbation of the existing situation. Refugees permanently abandoned their former lives, their employment or trade and any small plots of land they may have worked, and sank into the mass of pauperized newcomers in the towns and cities. Especially after the 1870-72 famine, the urban centres were swollen by famine victims, who carried with them the trauma of starvation and of the loss of land, possessions, livelihood and family, and who were entirely dependent on the market for food.

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In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the swelling of the populations of the major cities is staggering. Hunger and famine had certainly stalked Iran in earlier periods but, before the nineteenth century, the peasantry had starved in silence and invisibility while the small numbers of the urban poor had only rarely been able to mount the kind of action that found its way into the sources. Now the urban poor were beginning to appear more menacing than supplicant. Estimates suggest that Tehran, with a population of 85,000 in 1867, possessed 200,000 by 1900 and grew to 350,000 by 1913. Tabriz, between the same dates, doubled and then trebled, reaching 300,000.[95] In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, Isfahan, Shiraz and Kirman also saw huge increases.[96] The labour markets of these cities were quite unable to absorb this migration and most of the new arrivals sank into a semi-employed, semi-destitute underclass.[97]

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94 Gurney and Safatgul (eds), *Qum dar Qahti-yi Buzurg*, p. 58.

95 The population movements in the north-west were even greater than this figure implies, as the migration across the border to the Caucasus was substantial. See Hassan Hakimian, “Wage Labour and Migration: Persian Workers in Southern Russia, 1880-1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 17, No. 4, 1985, pp. 443-462.

96 Amirahmadi, *The Political Economy of Iran*, p. 19.

97 Amirahmadi, *The Political Economy of Iran*, p. 63.

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Famine on the scale of the latter nineteenth century resulted in mass mortality but it was also destructive to social bonds.[98] Its appearance destroyed such vestiges of reciprocity as remained between the classes while any lingering sense of responsibility among the wealthy vanished into self-preservation or even profiteering. Examples of the wealthy dying, during even the most severe famine, are rare indeed while accounts in abundance describe paupers starving in the midst of lavish weddings, extravagant dinners held by the rich in Tehran as bread riots raged outside.[99] The immunity of the rich to hunger contrasts with the impact of that other scourge of the nineteenth century, epidemic disease. Epidemics were feared by both rich and poor, although the poor tended to suffer more from the arrival of contagion as they lacked the means to escape infected areas, flight being the principal response of the better off and the authorities. Nonetheless contagion retained a veneer of impartiality in its choice of victims, the rich sometimes dying as well as the poor.

Although there were some local attempts at charity, they were haphazard and grossly unequal to the task.[100] Meanwhile the money newly-made from speculative hoarding funded the adoption by the elite of new and supposedly "modern" patterns of consumption. Indeed famine and dearth had diametrically opposed long-term economic consequences for different classes, permanently impoverishing the poor while enabling the rich to accumulate fortunes. Food shortages, semi-famines and catastrophic episodes of starvation were opportunities for a substantial transfer of resources from the poorest to the better off and the rich.[101] Money and possessions might be squeezed out of the urban hungry while famished peasants, driven into hopeless indebtedness by their landlords, who advanced money to them against the future produce of their labour at exorbitant rates of interest, fled to towns. Fortunes were made in famine years by speculation in grain, that is to say, through hunger.

The famished poor were embittered by their knowledge of the existence of plentiful stocks of food. The bitterness of the starving was matched by the apprehension of the wealthy. The hungry poor, in Iran as elsewhere, were seen by respectable society as a menace, as

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[98] Gurney and Safatgul (eds), *Qum dar Qahti-yi Buzurg*, p. 85

[99] Brittlebank, *Persia During the Famine*, p. 148; Durand to Salisbury, January 9, 1899, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 432.

[100] Amanat, "Of Famine and Cannibalism in Qom," pp. 1018-1020.

[101] The unequal impact of subsistence crises has been noted by Kazemi, "Of Diet and Profit."

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individuals prone to criminality or as mobs of unimaginably destructive power, in either case to be feared, controlled and kept distant. Their hunger and desperation made the starving poor dangerous, both in the imagination of the better off, but also in reality. Famine swelled the numbers of the itinerant poor in the towns and cities, worsening shortages and causing further price rises, and increasing the numbers ready to take desperate action. Furthermore, every famine was inevitably accompanied by the outbreak of epidemic disease. Cholera and typhoid spread like wildfire among the malnourished while their unusual mobility in their search for the means of survival spread contagion far and wide. The starving incubated disease, especially cholera, and the flight of famished peasants from their villages to nearby towns, and of the urban poor from town to city, all possible carriers of famine fever, contributed to heightening the sense among the better-off of the menace they presented. Famine produced a predictable rise in crime, notably theft and murder, adding to the tensions in the cities and the feelings of danger experienced by the better off.[102] The panic engendered by the presence of the desperate starving is perhaps best exemplified by the widespread terror of cannibalism, gangs of the starving committing murder for food, this terror fuelled not only by rumours but by official reports and arrests.[103] Whatever the degree of truth in the reports, the fear of crimes of kidnap and murder for food was real, deep and pervasive.[104]

In the 1890s, another lethal threat to the ability of the poor to purchase bread had emerged in the form of a sharp depreciation of the currency, the silver *qiran*. Cash had by now become newly central to economic activity, largely replacing barter. The urban populations were thus much more vulnerable than in the past to fluctuations in the value of the currency. Inflation was one threat, depreciation another. Again, Iran's exposure to international economic forces was responsible. The depreciation of the *qiran* was the result of the collapsing global value of silver. By 1893-4, the international exchange rate of silver had halved.[105] This crisis was immediately transformed into a catastrophic assault on the living standards of the poor by rings, of officials, merchants and *sarrafs*, colluding to maintain an artificial domestic

102 See Gurney and Safatgul (eds), *Qum dar Qahti-yi Buzurg*, pp. 58-9. For a list of victims of cannibalism in Qum, see Gurney and Mansur Safatgul (eds), *Qum dar Qahti-yi Buzurg*, pp. 192-3.

103 See, for example, the Tehran Gazette, Alison to Granville, 29 May, 1871, FO248/269.

104 For a consideration of the accuracy of reports of cannibalism see Amanat, "Of Famine and Cannibalism in Qom." Such stories, often casting women as perpetrators, vividly captured the prevailing sense of a moral universe violated, unnatural crimes resulting from the perversion of natural instincts.

105 Avery and Simmons, "Persia on a Cross of Silver," p. 262.

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exchange rate and the fraudulent practices of officials associated with the Mint, particularly the unauthorized debasement of the coinage.[106] Iran entered a period of unrestrained price rises, trade contracted, the economy affected by "uncontrollable shock waves" of inflation and depression.[107] The government itself, with little understanding of the causes of this crisis, was unable prevent the monetary system's descent into uncertainty and eventually chaos. The Mint produced *qirans* containing less and less silver but, most disastrously, flooded the country with copper coin, so called *pul-i siah*, "black money," fixing its exchange rate against silver at an official and entirely nominal rate, thus both undermining the actual value of the currency and destroying confidence in it.[108] As with the bread rings, again there were winners as well as losers. The Mintmaster's ring, and smaller rings of *sarrafs* throughout the country, hoarded silver, making vast profits from the artificial exchange rate. Labourers, meanwhile, soon found themselves being paid entirely in copper coin of uncertain but certainly decreasing value.

The standard of living of the lower classes was hit hard by the unpredictable depreciation of the coin in which they were paid but, as was the case with bread price rises, it was the sense of injustice and manipulation, the creation of an artificial crisis, which was strongest. As with the speculation in grain, so it was well-known and widely repeated that that the Mintmaster and other high officials were manipulating the currency and both responsible for and benefiting from its depreciation.[109]

The swollen cities which were the sites of the most notable episodes of bread protests in the 1890s experienced no famine but only famine prices, currency depreciation and inflation lethally undermining the ability of the poor to pay the market prices which bread reached. The 1890s saw severe discontent over currency depreciation throughout the country, especially in the cities of Tehran, Tabriz, Isfahan and Mashhad.[110] Falls were precipitate and often caused an outright panic. In the three years between 1896 and 1899 the value of the *shahi* depreciated by nearly four hundred per cent. Across the country bread or price riots

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106 Avery and Simmons, "Persia on a Cross of Silver."

107 Avery and Simmons, "Persia on a Cross of Silver," p. 279.

108 Willem Floor, *A Fiscal History of Iran*, pp. 461-2.

109 Monthly Summary, May 3 to May 30, 1899, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 573.

110 Summary of Frontier News, March 16 to April 15, 1896, Durand to Salisbury, April 15, 1896, R. M. Burrell, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 322.

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were now also "currency riots."[111] These cities also experienced spectacular inflation. There were two areas of particular concentration of bread riots, the north-west, including Tehran and Tabriz, and the south, especially the cities of Shiraz and Isfahan. Mashhad, on the other hand, the major city of the north-east, experienced only one such protest in the fifty years before 1900.[112] For the cities of the north-west and the south, the 1880s and especially the 1890s were decades of severe inflation. In Tehran and Tabriz in the 1880s and 1890s prices increased by an estimated five hundred to six hundred per cent, prices peaking in the late 1890s. Isfahan and Shiraz and the south generally saw lower inflation, although even here prices doubled. In Mashhad, on the other hand, prices remained more or less stable, inflation only appearing towards the end of the1890s.[113] When inflation hit Mashhad, after 1897, serious bread riots also multiplied.[114]

As food prices in the cities fluctuated wildly in the short term and increased inexorably in the long term, and the money in which they were paid lost its value, the urban poor found themselves facing a crisis which had no apparent solution. The result was a rising sense of desperation and foreboding made acute by memories of the mass mortality and the breakdown of conventional moral and social norms endured during the many famines of the later nineteenth century. Such memories, of speculation and hoarding by the rich, the indifference of the authorities, both secular and religious, their own suffering, starvation and disease, and the desperate and shameful resorts to which they were driven, remained vividly present in the consciousness of the urban poor.

Not only were the urban lower classes becoming much more numerous and confronted by a number of inter-related assaults on their living standards, but the respect for the authorities' legitimacy, conventionally buttressed by an older royal paternalism, was rapidly ebbing away. The 1890s saw the cities of Iran subject to rapid change and seething with discontent, varying in character from place to place but everywhere resulting in multi-layered crises of power and legitimacy.[115]

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111 Or "copper" riots. Avery and Simmons, "Persia on a Cross of Silver," p. 281.
112 Mir Kiyayi, *Nan va Siyasat*, pp. 204-5.
113 Gilbar, "Trends in the Development of Prices," pp. 196-7; Amirahmadi, *The Political Economy of Iran*, p. 71.
114 Wages also rose in this period, but more slowly. Amirahmadi, *The Political Economy of Iran*, p. 73.
115 See Martin, *Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism*.

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By the 1890s, Iran was experiencing an almost permanent bread crisis. Sudden rises in the price of bread had always provoked protests. Now, however, the struggle over bread in Iran appears, to have acquired rather a permanent character, the cities constantly simmering with apprehension, everyone's eyes on the weather, the news, the daily price fluctuations at the bakers' shops, the poor fearing hunger, the rich seeing financial opportunity but also the possibility of disorder and even violence. This struggle arose, not from insuperable difficulties in the actual supply of food, but rather directly from the operations of the market. The determination of the privileged to free themselves from the constraints of an older paternalism and to use the market to maximize profit from food, and the constant attempts of the poor to defend what they saw as their just rights by intervening to regulate prices, may thus be seen as an example of a bitter and permanent class warfare rarely glimpsed in narratives of the Qajar period.

The towns and cities of Iran were scenes of a bitter struggle between rich and poor over the price of bread. In these urban centres bread crises, always announced by sudden hikes in price, became political issues of the most urgent intensity. Cities, and their elites and authorities, were exposed to the dangers of bread riots as never before as the growing numbers of the urban poor, caught between a disintegrating Qajar paternalism and the imposition of a brutal free market in grain, fought to defend what they understood to be their rights. Of all Iran's many towns and cities which experienced bread riots, the most explosive was the capital, Tehran. Here was the greatest concentration of both poverty and wealth, here was the final destination of those fleeing hunger who had been unable to find refuge elsewhere, and here were concentrated the palaces of the rich and the embassies of the foreign Powers. It was in Tehran that a food riot had the potential to become a threat to the existence of the political order, and it was the Tehran poor who presented the most dangerous threat.

The 1860s and 1870s were punctuated by episodic bread riots but the 1890s inaugurated a period of intense conflict. It seems that for the 1890s at least, there is no reliable correlation between bread riots and actual harvest failures and real shortages. Indeed, the worst riots often took place after good harvests, when hoarding led to prices remaining high. This was the case in, for example, Isfahan in 1893 and 1898, Tabriz in 1898 and 1899, and Tehran in 1900. September and October were always months of particular tension. Indeed, it was

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precisely the absence of actual famine, but the presence of fear and anger, which accounts for the frequency of riots.

A series of riots took place over several years in Tabriz, a city then in the throes of change and subject to a range of radical influences.[116] Indeed these riots amounted almost to a bread war. By 1898 the population was so convinced that the entire elite of Tabriz, especially the ulama, was guilty of hoarding and profiteering, that the rioting, which had erupted periodically since 1895, turned into an armed conflict. The properties of a wealthy clerical speculator were besieged by townspeople, rifle fire exchanged for many hours over two days.[117] The local chief of the artillery, another extremely wealthy landowner, even placed a couple of small field guns near the scene of the trouble, though he thought better of actually using them.[118] After the victory of the townspeople, the flight of the cleric, and the looting of his properties, it was reported that thirty men were left dead. The next year the riots resumed.

The cities of southern Iran were experiencing similar eruptions, all following the same pattern. Isfahan and Shiraz were the scenes of serious and repeated bread riots, Yazd at one point enduring daily demonstrations and Kirman seething with barely contained discontent, a full-scale riot occurring in 1902. By the end of the 1890s Mashhad, in the north-east, was also suffering in the same way.

During the same period Tehran was also wracked by an almost permanent bread crisis, although the resulting riots never reached the levels of violence experienced in Tabriz. By the late 1890s, the city was in the grip of hunger and deep discontent while the supply of wheat was tightly controlled by a ring of the highest officials, landowners and ulama. Riots broke out in 1899, recurring in 1900 and again in 1903. An especially ominous development was the tendency of bread riots to become coordinated, to break out in different cities at the same time. In 1898, for example, riots erupted simultaneously in August in Tabriz and in Isfahan, and in Yazd in September. In April 1903 the authorities feared contagion as almost simultaneous bread riots broke out in Mashhad and Tehran.

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[116] For Tabriz in this period see Martin, *Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism*, pp. 44-61.
[117] Consul-General, Tabriz, August 29, 1898, FO248/675.
[118] Consul-General, Tabriz, 29 August, 1898, FO248/675.

In earlier periods, hoarding had been largely an individual activity but by the end of the nineteenth century, coordinated "rings" had appeared, capable of exercising complete control over the market, even in the capital. Between the late 1890s and the constitutional revolution, Tehran was wracked by an ongoing political crisis caused by a ring of high officials operating to keep prices at approaching famine levels. This ring included, among others, most of the members of the government, the governor of Tehran, the Imam-i Jum'ah and the regent acting for the shah during his absence.[119] This powerful ring not only hoarded wheat but took active political measures to guarantee its control of supplies. In 1900, for example, since the new harvest was known to be exceptionally good, the governor of Tehran, in order to guarantee that the "ring" would be able to dispose of its stocks at high prices, issued orders temporarily prohibiting grain from being brought into the city. The stranglehold which this ring exercised over the supply of grain led to repeated bread riots, notably that of April 1903 when the ring still operated by the then governor, together with other high officials, exasperated and enraged the population of the city. Nonetheless, despite their knowledge of the involvement of specific senior officials and members of the ulama, the population reserved its sharpest hostility for the shah himself. By the early 1900s, serious, deep-seated disaffection with the Qajar elite as a result of its failure to address the bread question and its open participation in profiteering, existed throughout the country, but especially in the most important cities of Tehran and Tabriz, within a few years to be the site of the outbreak of the constitutional revolution.

During 1905 the political, economic and social crises which had been sharpening since the1890s erupted into revolution. Rocketing bread prices led to repeated women's demonstrations in Tehran. On May 6 women confronted with the shah himself, two days later, the shah having left for Europe, protesters moved to the crown prince's palace, by the end of May these demonstrations taking place on a daily basis.[120] For many of the plebeian elements who fought for the revolution, particularly in Tehran and Tabriz, an easing of their daily struggle for bread was an important motive. Now the bread problem began to find its way into modern political discourse, complaints about speculation and adulteration appearing in the new critical press. New tactics were also used to deal with speculators. In 1911 the head of the bakers' guild, a well-known speculator, was dealt with by the modern method of

[119] Monthly Summary, Spring-Rice to Salisbury, June 27, 1900, *Iran Political Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 642.
[120] Floor, *History of Bread in Iran*, p. 133.

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assassination.[121] By this time too, the older relative aversion to physical violence on the part of women protesters had vanished. In 1909 in Tabriz, the head of the committee which was in charge of the city's bread supply was attacked by a crowd of women who accused him of hoarding. They killed him and mutilated his body which was then stripped and displayed in the main square. In Isfahan in 1911 a crowd of starving women killed the ehad of te municipality and hung his body in the Maidan-i Shah. They were only dispersed by rifle fire ordered by the governor.[122]

But the older customs were deeply embedded in popular political culture and bread riots of the classical kind, usually led by women, continued throughout the years of the first world war and the rise of Reza Khan, the last major bread riot taking place in the dying days of the Qajar regime, in September 1925.[123] They were much less in evidence during the 1930s, a general decline in popular protest a result of the new monarchy's destruction of urban quarters under the guise of town planning, the removal or neutralization of popular leaders, the cooption of the clergy and the establishment of a modern police force. These decades also saw the growth of a working class in an embryonic industrial environment, and the increasing salience of trade unionism and the prioritizing of demands centring on wages and conditions. Nonetheless bread riots reemerged to be a constant feature of the hungry years of the second world war, even threatening the stability of the government in 1942.[124] Indeed, the choreography of the bread riot, rather than being simply superseded by modern political modes, in fact merged with them, often creating hybrid forms of protest which persisted until the 1979 revolution, this contentious creativity clearly illustrating both the dynamic character of subaltern "traditions" and their utility to protest.

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Although the fear and occasionally the reality of dearth continued to threaten the poorest, the grim years of 1917-1919 were the last in which actual famine stalked Iran. The interwar decades, although they saw hardship and hunger, experienced nothing remotely comparable to the famines of the earlier period.[125] It has attracted little attention, but it seems that the new

[121] Floor, *History of Bread in Iran*, p. 135.
[122] Floor, *History of Bread in Iran*, p. 125.
[123] Cronin, "Popular Protest, Disorder and Riot in Iran."
[124] Majd, *Iran under Allied Occupation*; McFarland, "Anatomy of an Iranian Political Crowd".
[125] Petitions about bread shortages may be found in the Iranian National Archive and in the Majlis library. A few relate to the interwar decades, but they mainly come from

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Pahlavi order was able, finally, to guarantee thats its population would not starve in large numbers. The new Pahlavi authorities experienced deep anxieties and apprehensions of the political consequences whenever dearth threatened the big cities. Existing literature, focusing on the urban elite and the political classes, has assumed that Reza Shah's legitimacy was eroded and finally destroyed by his authoritarianism and eventual arbitrary rule. Perhaps, however, from the perspective of the poor his ability to provide bread demonstrated, on the contrary, his maintenance of the Circle of Justice and gave him at least a veneer of legitimacy so manifestly absent from the later Qajars.[126]

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What did the bread riots in Iran achieve? Pre-modern Middle Eastern polities, the Mamluks, Ottomans, Safavids and others, all possessed long traditions of market supervision, and all valued social stability and political order above the maximization of profit. Bread protest, therefore, which "petitioned as much as it denounced, supplicated a much as it threatened", often eventually succeeded in extracting a satisfactory response from the authorities.[127] It is impossible that the traditional bread riot would have been so widespread a tactic, and would have persisted over such a long period of time, had it not been at least occasionally successful in realizing some of its objectives. Indeed, within the confines of a pre-modern economy, the bread riot functioned to preserve a rough and ready equilibrium, disrupting this equilibrium only momentarily and offering no fundamental challenge. The bread rioters of late nineteenth century Iran operated essentially within this traditional framework. Their objectives were the old limited ones: to rectify immediate problems of supply and price, to restore order to markets, and to force officials and merchants to take remedial action. While the bread riots retained their older key features, however, the context within which they occurred, and the response of the elites and the authorities, was changing rapidly. Certainly they still sometimes resulted in an amelioration of immediate hardship, by the emergency distribution of food or by elite obedience to government proclamation, but this was only ever temporary and declined as the century advanced. The adhesion of both protesters and monarchy to an ideology of paternalism concealed the reality that while rulers and ruled might still, in the second half of the nineteenth century, have shared a common discourse, their economic

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the period of the Second World. The National Archives and Library (Sazman-i Asnad va Kitabkhanih-yi Milli-yi Iran), The Majlis Library, Museum and Document Centre (Majlis-i Shura-yi Islami, Kitabkhanih, Muzih va Markaz-i Asnad).

126 Cronin, "Popular Protest, Disorder and Riot in Iran," pp. 149-152.

127 Grehan, "Street Violence and Social Imagination in Late Mamluk and Ottoman Damascus," pp. 231.

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interests were diverging ever more sharply. Although the "symbolic solidarity" represented by the periodic and crisis-driven reversion to an older paternalism for still available to the authorities, it was increasingly empty. In particular, the demand for setting the price, for market regulation, enabled the government to deal with protest by the dismissal of a governor or by the issue of a royal order. These now largely meaningless tactics merely diverted blame away from speculative landowners, the real culprits, onto the bakers, whose response was simply to close their bakeries and shops rather than sell at a loss, thus aggravating the crisis. The urban poor also remained always vulnerable to savage government repression.

It was this transformation of context and elite behaviour which confirms the late Qajar Iranian bread riot as an example of pre-industrial class war, as Thompson claimed for the English bread riots. Popular protest in Iran and across the Middle East has often been analyzed within the framework of the politics of negotiation or mediated governance, a fundamental "pact" between ruler and ruled containing a tradition of legitimate protest through which conflict between rulers and ruled could be choreographed and ultimately resolved.[128] The narrative above suggests that however cohesive elite and royal paternalism may have been in earlier periods, either as practice or as ideology, by the second half of the nineteenth century it was rapidly breaking down. The transition to the free market in England took place over more than a century. For the Iranian poor, however, this process happened almost overnight. Instead of a rough and ready paternalism, occasionally enforced by popular action, a war over profit erupted, openly pitting classes, the rich and the poor, those with property and those without, against each other. By the late nineteenth century, bread rioters had irrevocably joined the dangerous classes in Iran.

Much of the literature on famine, dearth, and subaltern strategies of survival and resistance in Iran has focused on the speculative practices of the elite as an explanation for periodic food crises, or at least of their intensity. In thus apportioning responsibility, the literature has tended to reflect and echo attitudes found in key source material, records left by British observers, diplomats, travellers and missionaries. It is as if historians of the Irish famine of the late 1840s took at face value the "moralism" of the contemporary British authorities, which attributed the famine to fundamental defects in the Irish national character. The narrative here, on the contrary, does not seek an explanation of bread shortages in Iran in the

[128] See Martin, *The Qajar Pact*; Grehan, "Street Violence and Social Imagination in Late Mamluk and Ottoman Damascus."

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turpitude, singly or collectively, of the Iranian elite. It sees their speculative practices, which were certainly real and extensive, rather as a symptom of a rapidly changing economic environment. They were simply playing by new rules, the rules and the game different to those of their domestic antagonists. Their behaviour resulted from the way Iran's integration into the global economy was structured and was entirely consonant with the logic of the free market

Each of the disasters which befell the urban poor in the second half of the nineteenth century had its origins in financial and economic developments taking place in the globalizing economy. Grains and other staple foods became more valuable as markets opened up beyond Iran's borders and demand grew and transport improved, the trade deficit resulting from European economic penetration following the treaties of Gulistan and Tukomanchai made the search for cash profits by the merchant class ever more urgent, while the collapse in the value of silver originated far beyond Iran's control, exemplified by the disastrous Sherman Silver Purchase Act passed by the United States in 1890. If the Iranian government itself was hardly conscious of the motor and significance of global economic, fiscal and trade developments, and was unable to formulate appropriate responses, how much more opaque did the causes of their distress appear to the urban poor. Able only, at best, to discern the local instruments of these profound changes, the Iranian moral economy had no effective answer to the free market and the globalized economy.

Bread riots offer a glimpse into the lives of those largely unrepresented in the history and historiography of social change in Iran. Through the active role of women, they offer, firstly, a challenge to conventional understandings of gender relations. In another sense too they ask us to reconsider existing interpretations of late nineteenth/early twentieth century history. The attitude of the protesters in Tabriz and Isfahan, and their readiness to take radical action against the most senior clerics, perhaps indicates an undercurrent of popular anti-clericalism which has so far been little investigated. Even the methods of the constitutional revolutionaries, the mass basts of 1906 in the British embassy, appear not as a novel phenomenon, but as a development of a tactic dating back to at least the 1850s. Bread riots suggest further possibilities of penetrating into a subaltern cultural universe through the excavation of the *charivari* practices commonly deployed by rioters to parody and humiliate

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their rulers.[129] In Tabriz in 1857, or example, those impelled "to go to bed every night cold and hungry" paraded the streets leading a mangy dog and calling out that here was the prime minister.[130] In 1925, during a serious bread riot in Tehran, the women in the crowd staged a theatrical parody of a parliamentary sitting, breaking many chairs and chandeliers in the process.

Furthermore, through the prism of popular responses, especially bread riots, to price rises and the ever-present threat of hunger, a more general light may be shed on the ways in which, throughout the nineteenth century, the subaltern presence continually intervened in, and exerted pressure on, elite politics in Iran, constrained elite options and shaped agendas. This may be seen, for example, in the Qajar state's dying paternalism, periodically galvanized into action by popular pressure, its vigilance regarding market fluctuations and its fear of the resulting urban discontent combining with its consciousness of its own coercive weakness to result in erratic attempts at concession and repression. In addition to highlighting the impact on elite politics of the dynamics of class antagonisms, a focus on their active responses to hunger aims at restoring a sense of agency to the rural and urban poor. It was they who bore the brunt of hunger and both famine and its constant companion, epidemic disease, and who have typically been cast, not as combatants in a class war fought out over bread and markets, but rather as helpless victims of unavoidable natural disasters.

The 1890s are often seen as an interregnum, a period between the Tobacco Protest of the early 1890s and the constitutional revolution of 1905, when political activity was in abeyance or semi-clandestine, revolution finally galvanized as much by external events as domestic politics. Yet the story of the bread riots paints a different picture, and writes into the narrative of these years the experience of the urban poor. Iran's cities in these years were convulsed by popular protests at intolerable conditions. From the perspective of the hungry poor, the revolution of 1905-6 appears, not as the project of a discontented intelligentsia, dazzled by European constitutionalism, nor of a modernist, oppositional clergy, but as the logical outcome of a deepening political and social crisis. The Iranian revolution of 1905 can no more be separated from the bread riot that can other revolutions, that of February 1917 in

[129] Charivari (France), skimmington (England) and scampanate (Italy) are varieties of public demonstration by lower class elements of moral disapproval and community censure. They are designed to humiliate an individual or individuals and have been investigated to shed light on the beliefs and attitudes of the European unlettered.

[130] Murray to Clarendon, April 18, 1857, FO60/217.

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neighbouring Russia most obviously. Alienated from their rulers, their cities riven by remorseless class conflict, the Iranian poor during the years of the constitutional revolution demanded both bread and justice.

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