

EDWARD SAID, MICHEL FOUCAULT, AND THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION OF 1979:INTELLECTUALS HAVE CONTROL OVER NATIONAL COMMITMENT

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Abstract:

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, as a noticeable movement of the last century, had a significant impact on globally social movements and Western philosophers. This study analyses the causes of uprising Iranian society against the regime, and Said's view about the revolution in his two articles: *Islam, Orientalism and the West: An Attack on Learned Ignorance* and *Islam through Western Eyes*. Besides, the article analyses Foucault's views about Islamic revolution in his collection of essays, published under the title of *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, after his death. Foucault, by highlighting the pivotal role of Shiite merits in the revolution, revealed how they could organize the fight against the traditional Iranian Kingdom Monarchy. Against, Edward Said highlighted the role of Iranian philosophers of time and their effects on Iranian Revolution but omitted Ayatollah Khomeini's effects on the salient revolution of the last century. Despite the different viewpoints on the propellant of this tremendous change, they both admit the importance of this event as a vigilante activity of humankind.

Key Words: Edward Said, Michel Foucault, The Iranian Revolution, Islam

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Introduction

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, as an accountable movement of the late century, had a significant effect on world's many social movements. It provided a number of surprises to Western governments and policymakers. The movement's quiddity evokes an inordinate hope between cogitative academicians. Edward Wadie Said and Michel Foucault, two prominent literary and social theoreticians, get tough with what they termed as the revolutionary wave of consciousness. Then they took a lot of stick, met their Waterloo, and gave short shifts to the post-revolution identity. This study divided into four main parts and analyses the causes of uprising Iranian society against the regime, and Said's view about the revolution in his two articles: *Islam, Orientalism and the West: An Attack on Learned Ignorance* and *Islam Through Western Eyes*. The third part, analyses Foucault's views about the Islamic revolution in his collection of essays, published after his death under the title of *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*.

The Iranian Revolution: Causes

The Iranian Revolution was one of the biggest turning-points in the lives of many Iranians both living in and outside of Iran. A short look at the written memoirs and other literary works of the last decade shows the importance of it for Iranians. Without any knowledge about the revolution, it is difficult to understand the reactions of Iranians who mirrored in their memoirs or literary works.

From 1953 to 1963 there was a gargantuan gap between the rich and the poor social class in Iran. There were many influential families, such as the Shah, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, and the Shia clerical establishment; each of which owned extensive collocutors in the country. During the reign of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi secularism increased and the impact of Shia scholars decreased. The Shah, who had good relations with the U.S., also allied with secularists who were against Muslims regarding traditional customs and values. He supported by the upper and middle classes in Iran, and he disregarded the notion of some clerics, who were uncomfortable with the presence of Americans in Iran. The Shah signed an agreement with a western oil consortium and some clerics, including the Ayatollah Seyyed Ruhollah Khomeini, offended in the early 1960s

when the Shah gave himself the right to initiate legislation. When the Shah came to power in 1954, he immediately wanted to modernize Iran both socially and economically.

Although outspoken landlords and some clerics were against these reforms, Shah continued modernizing Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa, a religious edict, against these reforms and immediately became an anti-Shah hero in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini were arrested. The Shah declared martial law. In two days, the rioting crushed, and many rioters arrested. The Shah's government sent him into exile in southern Iraq, where he continued attacking the Shah monarchy. The U.S. foreign policy experts saw the Shah as "a stabilizing force in the Middle East and appreciated his acceptance of the existence of Israel"ⁱ. By getting help from the U.S., the Shah tried to modernize Iran and laid plans for "proliferation of atomic power plants, and the new economic development included the introduction of new fertilizers and pesticides. Between 1963 and 1967 Iran's economy rose dramatically. Oil production boomed,"ⁱⁱ however, the shame of repression in 1963 remained. The Shah continued with his attitude towards clerics who were against his modernization precautions.

In 1964, Iranian parliament passed a bill granting full diplomatic immunity to all American military personnel and their dependents in Iran because of American insistence. American soldiers were able to run over the Shah in the street, and no one would punish them. If an Iranian, hit an American's dog, he would be hanged at once. The passage of the bill caused anger against the Shah regime and affected the Iranians deeply since they rejected any form of capitulation or the passage of unfair laws. During the 1970s, Iran's income from petroleum rose to over tens of billion dollars a year, but unexpectedly it declined in the late 1970s. "When oil prices, budget deficits erupted due to projections that were now too high for revenues. Iran was spending millions buying American weaponry it didn't need and its army didn't know how to use. Iran's economy was fast running down the drain."ⁱⁱⁱ

There was opposition against the Shah and the way he used the secret police, the Savak, to control the country was degenerately. The country was on the edge of a civil war, and the opposition led by Ayatollah Khomeini, who lived in exile in Iraq and later in France. This was the beginning of the Iranian revolution. In 1977, Jimmy Carter became the President of the

United States. Human rights were the most crucial issue in Carter's foreign policy agenda. The Carter administration asked Iran to improve its human rights record by saying that it might result in the termination of getting aid from the U.S. The Shah acted as the Carter administration wanted, and he released political prisoners in February, 1977. This situation encouraged the Shah's opponents. In late October, 1977:

Many clerics joined the protests, and 87 religious and secular leaders called on the public to stay away from work. In the demonstrations that followed one demonstrator was shot to death, while the mood of the demonstrators, mainly poor people, was rage. They chanted "Death to the Shah!" They attacked liquor shops and theaters showing movies they considered lewd. And they attacked banks, believing that in attacking the banks they were attacking the rich.... It was too late. Too many of those who had at least tolerated the Shah's rule became lost. Demonstrations continued.... The Shah was determined to control the streets rather than let the demonstrations burn themselves out. He was now fighting for the existence of his dynasty.... There were more demonstrations in Iran and more killings by the army. The work stoppage spread. Oil workers, postal employees, bank employees, journalists, mineworkers, customs officials, transportation workers all went out on strike. So too did almost all universities and high schools... On January 16, 1979, the Shah and his family left for Egypt.^{iv}

On February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini returned in triumph from France. Under his leadership, Iran became a pure Shia theocracy. On April 1, after a landslide victory in a national referendum in which only one choice was offered (Islamic Republic: Yes or No). Ayatollah Khomeini arrayed an Islamic republic thesis reflecting his ideals of Islamic government. He became supreme spiritual leader (Vali-e-Faqih) of Iran.

As an Iranian Shia cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini had a profound impact on the Middle East. His reluctance to the west and the United States, heightened tensions between America and Muslims around the world. He became the supreme political and spiritual leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and ruled the country until his death in 1989.

Edward Said and rejection of Islamic Revolution

The Iranian Revolution was not only a boon for Muslim societies, but also it was a gift for those who saw it as a significant overloaded insurrection against the evil American Empire. For them, it was a diplomatic liberal Renaissance of the Third-World. By keeping afloat of its religious character, the Iranian Revolution was a call for social justice, fairness, sharing of wealth, a productive economy organized around national needs and simplicity of life by lack of dishonesty that minimizes the differences between rich and poor, rulers and ruled. Despite of the fears expressed by Iranian leftists and feminists, the spring of 1979 arose hopes of freedom and economic welfare of the Iranian people. Edward Said's ideas were the words written and spoken by Ayatollah Khomeini, notably in Velayat-e Faqeh (Islamic Government), and the indications they provided for the future path of the Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini's belief that the Jews bent on world domination, and the essence of Sharia law to create an ideal society, made Said's analysis.

Said's analyses of the revolution established in articles written between 1979 and 1981 and can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, Said rejects both the portrayal of the revolution as Islamic by the demonization of Ayatollah Khomeini. These ideas published in *Time Magazine* in April 1979 and the *Columbia Journalism Review* in March and April 1980. The second phase writings –*The Nation* in April 1980 and *Harper's Magazine* in January 1981– register that many of the Americans were coming to terms with the harsh reality of Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini. Said's investigation shifted away from Ayatollah Khomeini and focused primarily on the U.S. media's portrayal of the revolution.

Ayatollah Khomeini from his residence in exile in France on 12 January, 1979, stated that the struggle will continue until the establishment of an Islamic Republic that guarantees the freedom of the people, the independence of the country, and the achievement of social justice, and it is impossible without the Islam and the guidance of the Quran. These statements received much publicity, and Ayatollah Khomeini's words extensively spread through leading news outlets and the American media began to take the revolution as religiously inspired, which gave rise to a concerned debate about the consequences of this new political ideology rooted in Islam. They

had a fear that Iranian Revolution and Imam Khomeini will signal a new revival of Islamic empathy and solidarity and it will affect other Islamic nations in the Middle East.

In *Orientalism*, Said retells history and highlighted that the book's first argument is the question of the Muslim human experience. Orientalism, clearly posits Muslims as only Muslims and not economic, political and rational beings. Thus, Muslim's revolutions could not be rational political acts. America inherited conservative assumptions that Iranian Islamic revolution was not the radical social upheaval as the French and Russian revolutions. They told it was the result of parochial world-views, and not rooted in political grievance for the sake of enhancement and improvement of society. Said in American mainstream discourse became aggressive to any portrayal of the Iranian revolution as Islamic.

Said's first article on Iran, *Islam, Orientalism and the West: An Attack on Learned Ignorance* appeared in *Time Magazine* on 16 April, 1979. As mentioned in *Orientalism*, Said zeroed in on the phenomenon that concerned him the most: the reliance on experts and authorities on a theoretical and essentialist view of Islam to explain all events in the Middle East. The politics of Algeria, Palestine, Egypt, and Iran were all misunderstood as an expression of a shared Islamic view. It seems that Said annoyed about the idea that the Iranian revolution symbolized a Return of Islam. David Zarnett, a scholar at King's College, University of London wrote an article in 2007 entitled *Edward Said and the Iranian Revolution*. It appeared in *Democratiya*, an online journal: "Contrary to how the media reported it Said saw the Iranian revolution as unrelated to Islam. The real roots of the revolution, and of resentment towards the West throughout the Middle East, he thought, lay not within Islamic culture or society but rather Western treatment of the region." If Iranians, Egyptians, or Palestinians resent the West, it is a concrete response to the specific policy injuring them as human beings. Attacking what he saw as the typical American outlook, Said asked: "will it not ease our fear to accept the fact that people do the same things inside as well as outside Islam, that Muslims live in history and in our common world, not simply in the Islamic context?"^v

Accordingly, Said argued that Ayatollah Khomeini should be viewed neither as the symbol of a rebirth of a new political Islam nor an irrational and indigenous religious figure, but rather as a

part of a long tradition of opposition to an outrageous monarchy. Said described him as an oppositionist leader driven by rational and universal political concerns. Therefore, the importance of the Islamic Motivation that Imam Khomeini motivated was the impact that American foreign policy had on his ideas and his feelings of antipathy. In this light, the Iranian revolution is not an Islamic but a political government. According to Said, the media, encouraged by academics, is denying Muslims' humanity and implying that they have no understanding of democracy, seeking only "repression and medieval obscurantism."

Then in the same article, *Islam, Orientalism and the West: An Attack on Learned Ignorance*, Said criticizes the negative image of Ayatollah Khomeini for Westerners. As the revolution progressed, Said observed that Ayatollah Khomeini's vision and spirit took over the media, which was uncompromising, powerful and deeply angry at the United States. Said thought the media were intrinsically fearful, ignorant, and aggressive to Islam and, as a result, portrays Ayatollah Khomeini incorrectly. Said did not take a strong stand against him, nor wrote in detail about why he accuses a leader for the committed carnage. Instead, Said evaded reality by focusing on the United States' media and their characterization of the Iranian revolution as Islamic. This marked the beginning of a second phase in Said's writings on the Iranian revolution.

In another article, *Islam Through Western Eyes*, published in *The Nation* in April 1980, Said states that the excesses of Ayatollah Khomeini are no longer defensible: "What is the Islamic apologist to say when confronted with the daily count of people executed by the Islamic komitehs, or when....Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini announces that enemies of the Islamic revolution would be destroyed?"^{vi} Said's main argument is that the revolution's extravagances cannot be explained by invoking the all- adjectives of Islam. He attacked the American obsession with Islam arguing "no non-Western realm has been so dominated by the United States as the Arab-Islamic world is dominated today."^{vii} America lacked sympathy for Islam: "in the United States, at least, there is no major segment of the polity, no significant sector of the culture, no part of the whole community capable of identifying sympathetically with the Islamic world."^{viii} Said thought American opinions of Islam, defined by American interests. When American interests are not in danger, Islam threatens are forgotten, but when these interests challenged, the

Islamic threats reveals. Said put emphasis on the dangers of linking events in Iran to Islam because this approach would hide the nature of the American presence in the region and the genuine and serious political objection it creates. Said answered the media's narrative by denying the Iranian revolution as an Islamic movement entirely. Said's analysis marginalized Ayatollah Khomeini. When defending Ayatollah Khomeini, Said showed no empathy to the main themes that were at the center of many of the Imam Khomeini's writings and lectures. In effect, Said ignored his ideas. Also, Said helped to highlight his existence and outstanding role in the new Iranian state. Said's rejection of the media's characterization of the Iranian revolution as an Islamic, resulted from his aggression to all American mainstream media discussions of Islam. His scheme blocked political Islamic movements.

Foucault supports both sides of dispute

In a 1984 acclimation of the French author, Michel Foucault, who had an enormous effect on Edward Said, dedicated only a few sentences to the philosopher's very public confirmation of Ayatollah Khomeini and his revolutionary politics that was by no means marginal to his intellectual career. For many years, Michel Foucault's *Iran writings* –a short collection of articles about the Iranian revolution published in the Italian and French presses during 1978 and 1979– omitted. Foucault himself disappointed by the Islamic revolution's rigid turn and criticized his early fervor for it. Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson have finally broken this silence with the publication of *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, which includes the first full appendices of Foucault's Iran writings in English translation. These are contextualize amongst interviews he gave about the revolution, other pieces of secular-left writing about the revolution, and critical responses to his articles from intellectual nobles.

Foucault's personal attraction to the revolution, and also, his own sexual politics, and critique of European modernity, led him to romanticize the Islamist approach to the revolution, and unrecognize its authoritarian elements. The book makes a convincing case that the anti-modernist politics of the Iranian revolution, as well as its religious rituals and symbolism, resonated with Foucault's own critiques of modernity and liberalism. In 1978 Foucault wrote articles that are published in *Foucault, and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of*

Islam. He says, “modernization as a political project and a principle of social transformation is a thing of the past in Iran” (196). The authors also argue that Foucault was nostalgic for pre-modern social relations, which created an Orientalist subtext in his work and prevented him from acknowledging authoritarian tendencies set in traditional forms of politics that construed as alternatives to European modernity, so he was not naively seduced by the Islamist movement. Afray and Anderson suggest that Foucault attracted by a popular revolt against monarchism which he believed challenged all existing concepts of real political change, and disappointed when its new forms of political spirituality routinize into traditional types of religious ideology. Chapter four of *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam* explores the debates surrounding Foucault positions after Ayatollah Khomeini assumed power in 1979 and concentrates on differentiating his analysis of the revolution from those of feminists and other activists writing at the time. Image of Foucault as an illiberal ignores his enthusiasm and are recorded in his articles about the development of new commitments to human freedom. Foucault accused of collapsing all Islam types into a single idealized concept. To the contrary, his articles and interviews seem to be unwilling or unable to detach any form of Islam from authoritarianism and that they thus prevented from seeing the revolutionary potential of religious faith and popular political will in modern society. As a journalist, Foucault endeavored to capture the spirit of the movement, unfinished and unpredictable as evidence for the creation of political alternatives also he accused of ignorance about Iranian society, and he admitted it. However, his willingness and courage to explore and defend the possibility of political spirituality against the chances of official power politics is a crucial lesson to be learned from his come upon with Iran. Foucault just saw the positive points of the Iranian Revolution. He had good reason to be passionate about what was peculiar in Iran’s defiance of modernity. The Revolution did not merely challenge the dominant capitalist global order and rejected the dominant Marxist manner of protesting against it. Iranian Revolution followed Islamist politics that later expressed in Iran. It is also true that its generic methods and liberating spirit continued to inspire revolutions and had a significant impact to finish off socialism in Central and Eastern Europe. The Iranian Revolution admitted that all the armies and secret police of a modern state and its powers are powerless when the public stirs.

Foucault still stands as the philosopher of Iran's revolutionary moment. His books are published in an extent numbers, and his ideas are discussed at the universities of inside Iran. Afray and Anderson in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam* blame Foucault's lack of familiarity with the hidden authoritarianism of an Islamic state. Opposition to imperialism and colonialism, a rejection of modernity and "a fascination with the discourse of death as a path toward authenticity and salvation" (p. 39) shaped the Foucault's interpretation of the Iranian revolution. It led him to interpret Ayatollah Khomeini and his position as a rescuing political desire against domination, power, and the Enlightenment rationality. The institutions of modernity, in his view, overwhelmed western consciousness, culture, and political life.

Foucault's eagerness to modernity lies in the nature of his critique of power as the reality of modern life. In the late stage of his work, he began to develop the Nietzsche's theme of the universality of power and authority. Against Marxist view, power was not something located in any given situation and also, it did not spring from a single source. It is set in every gap of modern life. Therefore, anti-modernism for Foucault was a result of his universal blame of Western rationality and its inability to liberate humanity. The authors claim that this theoretical position convinced Foucault to accept the anti-modern radical Islam. The fact is that Islamists' cultural and political program simply finish up by creating more straightforward and distinct forms of social domination. Like what radical Islamists do, reacting against modernity was spiritually and politically because of liberation. Modernization, as well as modernity, should be seen as an element of the past, and this was what the Iranian revolutionaries were demonstrating. The empathy between Foucault and the radical Islamists was not just a matter of theory but of concrete politics. Because of his opinion about the Iranian Revolution, the attacks against Foucault continued. But Foucault insisted that the events in Iran were unique and he continued to evade a direct confrontation with his critics on the fundamental issues of Islamism and the politics he expressed in his analysis of the revolution. Foucault's ideas, position with his respect to the realities of the revolution in Iran. Even today, it can be seen lingering in many aspects of postmodern view more broadly.

The main difference between Edward Said's view about Iranian revolution and Michel Foucault's view was that Foucault's two 1978 trips to Iran yielded more than a dozen of articles

in the Italian and French press about the growing revolutionary movement against the Shah. Foucault met many activists, including several leading opposition clerics, and even, he was able to arrange meetings with Iranian exiles, including Ayatollah Khomeini.

Against Said, by highlighting the pivotal role of Shiite merits in the revolution, Foucault shows how Shiite could organize the fight into a unified force that could effectively resist the Shah. Edward Said highlighted Dr. Ali Shariati (1933-77) —an Iranian revolutionary and sociologist, who focused on the sociology of religion— and his effects on Iranian Revolution and omitted Ayatollah Khomeini's effects of the remarkable revolution of the last century. Despite Said, Foucault's views about Iranian Revolution changes. He never fully turns up his nose to the positive changes. He says that he does not have second light and did not have all the answers. Foucault's last two essays about Iran, both of which appeared after Ayatollah Khomeini had come to power and Islamic government established, suggested another look at his enthusiastic hopes. These essays characterized with a reexamination of the ideals that had motivated his interest in the Iranian revolution.

Conclusion: The effects Iranian Revolution of 1979 in the life and thought of philosophers and writers is a debatable topic. Edward Said and Michel Foucault are two prominent Eastern and Western oriented intellectuals who have a control over national movements and their international effects. This study aimed to explain the importance of an Islamic rebellion for other international social movements and it strives to show how the Iranian Revolution of 1979 affected the philosophers and writers like Said and Foucault. Showing how the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 was a nomad for other uprisings of the current century, the salient movement emblem the social awareness through the social consequences of the last century.

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NOTES

- ⁱThe Iranian Revolution - MacroHistory : World History. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/ch29ir.html>
- ⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ayatollah Khomeini: Iran's Islamic Revolutionary. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.hyperhistory.net/apwh/bios/b1khomeini.htm>
- ^{iv} The Pahlavi Monarchy Falls - MacroHistory : World History. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/ch29ir2.htm>
- ^v Islam, Orientalism And the West | Veracity Now | Veracity Now. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.veracitynow.com/home/islamophobia/media/3706-islam-orientalism-and-the-west>
- ^{vi} Islam Through Western Eyes | The Nation. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.thenation.com/article/islam-through-western-eyes>
- ^{vii} Ibid.
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