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Patronage Networks of the ʿUlamāʾ in the 19th Century Iran: Suggesting a Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

The sociopolitical role of the ʿulamāʾ is a common element of most of the academic accounts on Shia. The scholars of political sociology of Iran have commonly crafted new theoretical frameworks to explain this unique element role in Iranian society. Here, I present a general framework for the study of the ʿulamāʾ in Iran based on their patronage networks among the political elites, bazar, and grassroots. Apart from their religious functions as spiritual leaders and as the authoritative source (taqlīd) of Islamic rulings, the ʿulamāʾ performed the role of patrons for their networks of clients existed among political elites, bazar merchants, and grassroots. Their religious capital facilitated the ʿulamāʾ with a solid social influence that turned them into a major source of grievance and support for these social networks. In this paper, I start with a critical analysis of the existing literature on Shia ʿulamāʾ, then I present a historical account of the sociopolitical patronage of the ʿulamāʾ which finally helps me to suggest a coherent theoretical framework for sociopolitical analysis of the role of the Shia ʿulamāʾ in the 19th century Iran. In order to social connections in my work, I also relied on the Weberian approach that concentrates on social alliances and group models.

Keywords:

Shia, ʿUlamāʾ, Iran, Patronage networks, bazar.

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Introduction

This paper tries to present a general framework for the study of the ʿulamāʾ in Iran through a political sociology lens. To do so, it starts with a critical analysis of the existing on Shia ʿulamāʾ, then it presents a historical account of the sociopolitical patronage of the ʿulamāʾ which finally helps us to suggest a basic theoretical framework for sociopolitical analysis of the role of the Shia ʿulamāʾ in the 19th century Iran. Through an analytical approach, the historical incidents will be interpreted to illustrate the unknown mechanism behind the acts of the financial, social, and political supporters of the Shia ʿulamāʾ. In all of the discussions presented in this paper, the focus is on the correlation between the choices of the ʿulamāʾ and their patrons. Therefore, in all of the arguments the author tries to situate the ʿulamāʾ in a tripartite network of connections comprising of their socio-political connections with their patronage networks in the Qajar court, bazar, and the grass roots groups.

In this paper, I benefited from the "episodic discourse analysis" model of Mansoor Moaddel to conduct the research in a historical framework. As a type of historian who focuses on the changes, more than the continuities, Moaddel emphasizes the changes of social relations (Moaddel, 2001). He calls the time intervals between such major historical events an episode: "a bounded historical process, having a beginning and an end, and displaying certain distinctiveness by virtue of its difference with the preceding and following episodes" (Moaddel, 2001, p. 676). Relying on this methodological approach, this paper choses pre-Mashruteh period as a specific episode for explaining its discussions within the Qajar period. This period is the zenith of the modernization of the institutional structure of the Iranian society and, therefore, encompasses vast socio-political changes.

In order to add a social history approach to my work, I should choose a sociological method for my analysis. The Weberian approach would be the best method for my research. Since I believe by assuming the Iranian merchants and landlords as social forces struggling against the state one cannot explain different aspects of the reality. The Iranian petty bourgeoisie was connected with the state in various ways benefiting from the political power of the state. Therefore, one can hardly borrow the class struggle models applied by Marxist theorists for explaining social changes in Europe in its transitional period from feudalism to capitalism. Additionally, as the historical documents show despite the fluctuating reactions of the ʿulamāʾ towards the court, they had generally based their relations with the court on mutual respect and support. Therefore, one can hardly rely on the class struggle models to explain the bourgeoisie-court and the ʿulamāʾ-court

relations. On the contrary, the Weberian approach that concentrates on social alliances and group models can better help this research. Moreover, it is more compatible with discursive methodology used in this research (Camic, et al, 2005).

1. Political Historiography Literature on the Shia ʿUlamāʾ

In a thematic description, the existing scholarship on the study of the socio-political roles of the Shia ʿulamāʾ can be classified mostly under three categories: (I) to analyze different historical periods in which the ʿulamāʾ played an active role, such as the Tobacco Movement, the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, Land Reform resistance, etc.; (II) anthropological researches deal with the ʿulamāʾ under their study of popular religion and their exploitation of it in the political sphere, such as the annual ceremonies of the drama of the martyrdom of the Imams, the *taʿẕīyah*, *ruwḍihḫānī*, etc. (III) explanation of the acts and status of the ʿulamāʾ with respect to their theoretical doctrinal sources and their interpretations of the Shia juridical sources. In this context, a research project focusing on socio-political relations of the ʿulamāʾ could fill in a gap which is not adequately investigated in the political historiography of the Shia ʿulamāʾ.

Algar's work on *Religion and state in Iran* is one of the classical works of the field (Algar, 1969). He depicted the ʿulamāʾ as a religious class among various social groups in the Iranian society which engaged in a struggle for power *vis-à-vis* Qajar court; a contest in which the religious classes were the articulators of popular grievances against oppressive rulers, and one which culminated in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 (Algar, 1969, 258). He presented a broad picture of the Shia ʿulamāʾ in the two centuries preceding the Constitutional Revolution. His theoretical frame work was developed later by some researchers to describe the Islamic Revolution of 1979 a new development of this clerical tradition. Algar's theory, however, failed to explain the long-lasting story of the divisions among the ʿulamāʾ and their relations with different social groups. By assuming the Shia ʿulamāʾ as a unanimous and homogenous class it could not explain the interconnections of the ʿulamāʾ with the pre and post Constitutional Revolution social groups.

In *Mysticism and Dissent*, Bayat concentrates mostly on the internal relation of different Shia trend (Bayat, 1982). She argued that during the nineteenth century the religious classes were much less concerned with their relations with the state than they were with their own internal affairs. Referring to the Shia tradition of religious dissent, Bayat argues that during Qajar period this traditional religious dissent, previously expressed in the

mode of Sufi mysticism, evolved through different phases to emerge in the form of the modernist intellectuals. This new reformist religious stratum became an influential stream at the end of the nineteenth century, advocating constitutionalism and nationalism. The modernists allied with oppositionist clerical groups forming the backbone of the 1906 revolution, against the orthodox religious leaders and the state (Bayat, 1982, 120-144). She built up her discussions on the structure of the relations of different religious groups; namely orthodox clergymen, Shaykhis, Babis, Ismaʿilis, etc. Bayat's concentration on the internal cleavages of the Shia religious groups is thoughtful; however, it does not give an overwhelming picture of the relation of these religious groups with the canons of socio-political power in the Iranian society.

As an example, for the first category, one can refer to Aghaie's work of *The Martyrs of Karbala Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Aghaie, 2004). Relying on the anthropological evidences and analysis, Aghaie presents a historical account about the role of religion from Qajar period to the present. In order to arrange a coherent account of the anthropological aspects of Shiʿism, he traces the continuities and changes in the symbols and rituals of the anniversary ceremonies of the third Shi'i Imam, Husayn b. Ali. The research's unique feature is the use of the religious life and activities of the ʿulamāʾ and their political role of these ceremonies especially for mobilizing the people and legitimizing the political system. As a part of the works dealing with the internal affairs of the Islamists and the ʿulamāʾ in particular, Dabashi discusses in *Theology of Discontent* that in the deeply religious Iranian society, the Islamists spent a long time preparing for the Islamic takeover of 1979. Through the institutions of mosque, Hawzeh (theological seminary) sermons, preaching, and publications, they were busy with redefining Shi'ism for different periods (Dabashi, 1993). The explanation of the political implications of the religious values, institutions, and organizations in these two works are the outstanding features of these works; however, the authors' do not adequately explain how these elements of religion could connect the ʿulamāʾ with their social supporting groups.

Litvak's work of *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth Century Iraq* is to connect the internal connections with the external context of the ʿulamāʾ (Litvak, 1998). In his monograph of the development of the two Iraqi shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala, he studied the activities of the Shia ʿulamāʾ in 1791-1904. The work is divided into two parts. In the first part he described the internal relation and social connections of the ʿulamāʾ in these two Shia holy cities. The study is placed in the overlapping contexts of different

aspects of the ʿulamāʾ's educational, professional, and patronage systems. His emphasis on the patronage network of the ʿulamāʾ in different countries from India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Ottoman Empire is unique and opens new approaches to the field. He also tried to engage with some thematic discussions from *fiqh* especially *Aḫbārī-Uṣūlī* debates which are sometimes crude and inadequate. The second part of the book concentrates on the relation of the ʿulamāʾ with politics. Litvak's comprehensive work brought back the study of the ʿulamāʾ to its historical context by focusing on the relation of the ʿulamāʾ with centers of political power such as Ottoman state, Qajar princes, and British ambassadors. Apart from his weak *fiqh* discussions and political orientations of the author, the work has drawn a unique picture of the relation of the ʿulamāʾ with society and politics in the Qajar era (Litvak, 1998).

Each of these authors has been the founding fathers of novel theories and approaches in the scholarship and prepared enlightening notions for any study on the Shia ʿulamāʾ; however, they have also some inadequacies. As an example, the existing studies on the Shia ʿulamāʾ tend to assume them as a homogeneous hierarchical class consisting of different attitudes classified around the issues of *Aḫbārī* or *Uṣūlī* and politically quietist or activist. Notwithstanding their commonalities, the Shia ʿulamāʾ are highly diversified. We cannot study them as a monolithic stratum; they had different ideas in critical periods and events such as Constitution Revolution, nationalization of oil in Iran, and 1979 Islamic Revolution. To fill in the gaps in the literature, we can use different lenses borrowed different field of Islamic legal studies, political history, foreign relations, or government studies. However, here we just want to focus on the political sociology field to depict our theoretical model for the role of the Shia ʿulamāʾ in the 19th century Iran.

2. Situating the ʿUlamāʾ in their Sociopolitical Connections

By the eighteenth century, the Shia ʿulamāʾ had consolidated their position as a social force in the Iranian society. This was partly due to the overwhelming support Shia Islam received under Safavid rule (1501-1722), leading to the expansion in the influence of the ʿulamāʾ at the court as well as in society. In this period the ʿulamāʾ came out of madrasas into Shia society changed their role into social activists. However, the new social and religious influence of the ʿulamāʾ found social manifestations in some special episodes of the history of the 19th century such as the Tobacco Movement.

The expansion of social role of the Shia ʿulamāʾ went through a new phase by the eighteenth century with the revival of the *Uṣūlī* School. In the absence of the Imam, the ʿulamāʾ tried to initiate some rules for reproduction of Fiqh to respond to the new events of their time. The revival of the *Uṣūlī* approach in Najaf and Karbala by Ayatollah Wahid Behbahani (d. 1118) and later on by Sheykh Ansari (d. 1281) was the continuation of the trend initiated by Mohammad Baqir Majlesi (d. 1111) which shifted the scholarly character of the ʿulamāʾ into social activists and brought them out of Madrasas into the Shi'i societies. This process continued by the initiation of the Marjayat institution in Qajar period.

However, the domination of this discourse required some social or political conditions which were prepared in the upcoming events in period. A good example of such events was the initiation of Iran-Russia wars. Although the concept of Marjaʿiyat existed in the works of some of the previous ʿulamāʾ such as Ahmad Muqadas Ardibili in *Zubdat al-Bayān* (d. 993) (Arjomand, 1984), it did not come to the social arena till the wars with Russia. During the war time the ʿulamāʾ, introducing themselves as the authoritative source (*taqlīd*) of Islamic rulings for their followers, declared some binding orders (*fatwā*) for Jihad and the necessity of the defense of the Shia territories. This event connected more and more the ʿulamāʾ with the body of the Iranian society. Introducing new role for the ʿulamāʾ as the representatives of the Twelfth Imam was accompanied by the coinage of some new titles for the ʿulamāʾ such as "ʾUlu-al-ʾAmr," "Nāʾi-i Imām Zamān," "Mujtahid-i Zamān," "Mujtahid-i ʿAʾlam," and even "Dastgāh-i Ruḥānīyat" as a social institution.

The new definition of the statues of the ʿulamāʾ in the *Uṣūlī* School was accompanied by the right of the ʿulamāʾ for collecting financial religious charges such as *Khums* (Fifth) and *Zakāt* (Tenth). *Khums* which inclusively belongs to Shia assumed as Imam's right and specified for definite purposes according to classical Shia text (Muqniyih 1386). Although the *Aḫbārī* scholars such as Mulla Muhsin Fiyz Kashani (d. 1090) and Bahrani had exempted the Shia Muslims from payment of the Fifth of the benefits earned from business, handicraft, and agriculture, in this period the concept of *Khums* (Fifth) was expanded to include these kinds of earnings and including even new businesses and properties (Shiykh Hurr Al-ʿAmili, 1414 q. 479, 481, 482 & Fiyz Kashani 1401 q. 325). Such rulings expanded the financial relations of the ʿulamāʾ and peoples from different social classes, especially bazar.

The social and financial networks of connections of the ʿulamāʾ led the Qajars to be cautious in their relations with them, building the relations

upon a form of dual respect. The kings of Qajar admitted their respect in different occasions publicly or privately. The formal letters from court to the ʿulamāʾ in different occasions can explicitly manifest a special form of language in the politics of the state towards the ʿulamāʾ(Tiymuri, 1328). As a part of this form of the dual respect policy, Fathali Shah and Nasir al-Din Shah used cultural ceremonies and events such as *ruḍihḫānīs* and *mīlāds* to go to considerable number of sessions held by the various famous ʿulamāʾ (Afshar, 1345). A very good sign of Nasir al-Din Shah's attempt to improve his relations with the ʿulamāʾ was that her sister married into a *rūḥānī* family, known as Imami. Sayid Abulqasim Imami, Nasir al-Din Shah's son-in-law who later became the *imām jumʿah* of the city of Tehran, played an important role in mediating between the ʿulamāʾ and the court during the Tobacco Movement (Tiymuri, 1328, pp. 92-132). After coming back from his first trip to Europe, in an attempt to propitiate the angry ʿulamāʾ Nasir al-Din Shah visited some of them such as Mulla ʿAli Kani (Sasani, 1338, p. 81).

The respectful relations of the court and the ʿulamāʾ had also expressed through sending money as gift to the ʿulamāʾ for charity or personal use. It became a common tool for the state to show its good will toward the *rūhānīyyat*. For example, when Fathali Shah received financial support from the British government during the war against Russia, he sent 100 *tumān* to Mirza Qumi (d. 1816) (Modarissi Tabatabayi, 1354, p. 274). He also spent huge amount of money to construct the central madrasa and Dar al-Shafaʾ in Qum (Modarissi Tabatabayi, 1354, pp. 249-250). This form of financial relations between the court and the ʿulamāʾ continued during Nasir al-Din Shah's rule. In one of these cases after an important victory against the British army in Afghanistan, the king sent 10 thousand *tumān* as *shukranih* to Shiykh ʿAbdulhusayn Mujtahid, the well-known ayatollah in Karbala, to spend for reconstruction of the holly tombs (Khurmuji, 1344, p. 191). Thereafter, financial exchanges is a common component of between the Qajar court and the ʿulamāʾ.

The relations of the ʿulamāʾ with the Qajar court extended beyond the King and reached as far as the political elites too. Both Amir Kabir and his main court rival, Aqa Khan Nuri had close relations with Aqa Sayid Muhammad Bihbahani and Shiykh ʿAbdulhusayn Tihrani. Before Amir Kabir's death, he denoted one third of his property for completing the construction of a madrasa, a mosque, a bazar, and a caravanserai in Shahririy city near the capital city of Tehran as well as a madrasa in Karbala in Iraq. He even assigned these two religious figures as his attorneys. Here, again Aqa Khan Nuri used his solid connection with Bihbahani to convince him

that these waqfs should be titled under a name other than "Amir" to avoid possible disagreements by the King's court; therefore, the madrasas called "Sadr Madrasa" (Sasani, 1338, pp. 42-43).

However, the court and the ʿulamāʾ had bilateral relation in which the Qajar court received support from the ʿulamāʾ when needed. The Iran-Russia wars were the historical critical episode in which the state could benefit from the support of the ʿulamāʾ uprising the people for resistance against the Russian troops. In wartime the ʿulamāʾ, who embodied the *šarīʿah* and were the sources of *taqlīd* in the community, issued *fatwā* (binding religious orders) for *jihād* and the necessity to defend Shia territories. During the Russo-Persian war leading *mujtahids* issued different *fatwās* for the obligation to engage in *jihād* and even Mirza Qumi issued a *fatwā* stipulating that *zakāt* could be spent by the state to cover the military expenses (Nayyiri, 1386, pp. 102-105). Kashif al-Qitaʾ (d. 1812) had also issued *fatwās* even more binding than that of Mirza Qumi. He gave the permission to Fathali Shah to receive different sorts of religious financial duties to spend in the war. Kashif al-Qitaʾ proclaimed that the obedience to rules of Fathali Shah is an obligation for all Muslims (Zargarinezhad, 1377, p. 65).

Similar *fatwās* issued in support of Nasir al-Din Shah's rule by the ʿulamāʾ. As an instance one can mention Shiykh al-Sharaʿih Isfahani (d. 1921) who mobilized people against British occupation in the south of Iran. Some of the ʿulamāʾ even played as the mediator in the relation of the court members with the foreign states. Mirza Safa (d. 1291 q) who had good relations with Ottoman court during the rule of ʿAli Pasha and Fuʾad Pahsha could help the court to solve different diplomatic problems. In several cases, Nasir al-Din Shah's court tried to reduce the pressure on the Shia population in Iraq and the Shia pilgrims in Mecca and Medina (Sarabi, 1344, p. 112). Additionally, when Mirza Husayn Khan became the ambassador of Istanbul, he used Mirza Safa as a means to reach to the Ottoman court (Sasani, 1338, pp. 60-66).

As we see, the relation structure between the ʿulamāʾ and the court had a reciprocal nature. This form of interaction could elevate the court's legitimacy and provide it with the social support in time of political hardships. While the concept of *taqlīd* existed in the classical Shia sources, the concept was given practical expression during Russo-Persian wars (Amir Arjomand, 1984). This political support helped the ʿulamāʾ to strengthen their connection with Shia society, and reinforced their social position in later periods (Algar, 1969).

Among different layers of the social supporters of the ʿulamāʾ, merchants from bazar had always been able to organize their relation with the ʿulamāʾ, playing the leading role in this patronage network (Keddie, 1983, pp. 583-584). The coalition of the ʿulamāʾ and the petty bourgeoisie can be explained by emphasizing on the commonalities of these two social forces than their challenges with a common enemy. The relatively independent ʿulamāʾ could easier rely on the funds from non-political sources. On the other hand, the central position of the "bourgeoisie" in the patronage network helped them to benefit from the support of the ʿulamāʾ. The support of the ʿulamāʾ was critical for the traditional bazaar sector, since due to the expansion of foreign economic activity, inability of central government to control the customs, and foreign concessions, the bazaar had become vulnerable to government pressure.

Accordingly, as far as the court shared the same idea with the bazaar the support of the ʿulamāʾ was more probable. The best example of this coalition can be seen in a riot in 1878 in Tabriz (Safayi, 1349, pp. 9-50). In a sudden riot the shopkeepers and farmers in Tabriz attacked some of the main coal and grain retailers in Iskandariyyih bazar. During this event Haj Mirza Javad Mujtahid played an important role to control the people. He harbored the governor of Tabriz who was one of the merchants accused of scandal and mediated between the state officials, merchants and the angry people. Since the merchants and the court had common position in this case, Haj Mirza Javad Mujtahid could help them to solve their problem with the people; though the result did not necessarily harm the people (Moaddel, 1991, p. 328).

However, whenever the merchants tried to challenge the state, the court was failed to receive the support of the ʿulamāʾ. Social manifestations of this bilateral relation can be traced in different historical episodes. A historical example of this sort of reactions of the ʿulamāʾ can be traced in the assassination of Aleksander Griboyedov, Russian ambassador in Tehran in 1828. After Griboyedov threatened the family and honor of well-known figures such as Asif al-Duwlih, Mirza Masih Mujtahid (d. 1846) wrote letters to the Court and the people that led to the sudden uprising and the death of the Russian ambassador. The close connection of Asif al-Duwlih with the ʿulamāʾ during the Russo-Persian war secured him their support in his confrontation with Griboyedov (Bamdad, Zuwwar 1347).

In the Tobacco Movement (1891), in which the merchants and landlords challenged the government for the Tobacco Concession, the historical support of the ʿulamāʾ toward the state changed dramatically. Ayatullah Shirazi (d. 1894) issued *fatwā* and banned tobacco and finally,

after abolition of the Concession and in response to the complaints of the tobacco merchants, Shiykh Fazlullah asked Shirazi to end the prohibition decree (Safayi, 1349, pp. 148-151). The conflict between the merchants and the court not only led to deterioration of relation between the ʿulamāʾ and the king but also undermined the position of the people affiliated to the court. The major role of the Prime Minister Amin al-Sultan in the Concession (Sarabi, 1344, pp. 102-103) even pushed Ayatullah Shirazi to issue a *takfīr fatwā* (anathematizing) against him; however, after the mediation of ʾItimad al-Saltanih and serial lobbies with Ayatullah Mirza Hasan Ashtiyani this *fatwā* did not published (Afshar, 1345, p. 901). The letters of Ashtiyani shows his close contacts with Amin al-Sultan and his positive role in favor of Amin al-Sultan (Safayi, 1349, pp. 152-149). Tobacco had been one of the main Iranian exports, especially in Tehran and Isfahan, and was shipped through Basra and Muhammarah to Europe (Gillard, 1984). Although the Tobacco Concession was decided by the court and supported by the state, it directly aimed to impede the Iranian merchants.

The patronage network around the ʿulamāʾ, made a dual connection between them and their supporters which in different periods led the ʿulamāʾ into political realm. In the Tobacco Movement the disagreement of merchants and landlords led Ayatullah Shirazi into the political action. And after the Kind cancelled the Tobacco Agreement, the merchants requested Sheykh Fazlullah asked Shirazi to end the prohibition *fatwā* (Safai, 1349, 48-50). The first reaction of the ʿulamāʾ in the Constituency Revolution began by the sugar merchants' complaints. As the upper level of the patronage network, the state benefited from the influence of the ʿulamāʾ. During the Iran-Russia war Grand Mujtahids issued different Fatwas for the obligation of Jihad and even Mirza Abul-Qasim Qomi (d. 1231) issued a fatwa that people can spend Zakat for the expenses of war (Qomi, 1371). Prior to the World War I, Shaykh ul-Shariat Isfahani (d. 1339) mobilized people against the British occupation in the southern of Iran. In the Ottoman territory, the ʿulamāʾ helped the state mobilizing voluntary forces against the British forces during the World War I. Meanwhile, the alliance between the ʿulamāʾ and those groups which fallen out of the patronage networks had been short lasting as we see in the case of the alliance of the ʿulamāʾ with largely westernized intellectuals during the Revolution of 1905-1909 (Keddie1980). Foreign embassies also tried to bridge some connections with the ʿulamāʾ, using even financial tools. For several years British diplomats channeled varying amounts of money to the ʿulamāʾ in *ʿAtabāt* so as to foster good relations with them; this money was provided through the Oudh Bequest (Rayin 1346, 97-112). However, British attempts to build relations

with the ʿulamāʾ through financial means were unsuccessful (Litvak, 2000, pp. 69-89).

3. Religious Capital as the Medium of Connection of the ʿUlamāʾ and Reproduction of with their Patronage Network

The support of the court, the petty bourgeoisie, and the ordinary people facilitated the ʿulamāʾ with high degree of social influence in the Iranian Shia society in the advent of the 20th century. In a comparison between the *fatwās* of the three great *mujtahids* discussed in the previous lines one can easily find trace of this change. The *fatwā* of Mirza Qomi is restricted to *zakāt* giving the king the permission for spending *zakāt* for the war expenses (Nayyirī, et al., 1386, pp. 102-105). However, Kashif al-Qita expanded the extent of his permission to various religious taxes (Zargarinizhad, 1377, p. 65.). Then, there is a huge difference between these two *fatwās* and that of Ayatollah Shirazi. The previous *mujtahids* described clearly themselves as the experts in the tradition of the Prophet; while in his prohibition *fatwā* saying "At the moment any use of tobacco is tantamount to waging war against the hidden Imām" (Isfahani Karbalayi, 1382, pp. 90-93), Shirazi mentioned the authority of the *marjaʿ* to express the will of the Imām Zamān. Additionally, the link between tobacco and waging war against the Imām uncovers expansion of the realm of *fiqh* surpassing boundaries of the traditional *fiqh* in the end of the Qajar rule.

The Tobacco Movement was a critical moment in the relation of the ʿulamāʾ with two branches of their patronage system, i.e. the court and the bourgeoisie; in this episode of the Iranian history the *bona fides* principle in the ʿulamāʾ-court relation was violated. This period of the history can show clearly how the Iranian merchants managed their relations with the ʿulamāʾ to defend their economic benefits against the court. In the other words, bazar could insert itself into a three patriate network relation.

For a comprehensive understanding of the Shia ʿulamāʾ we should study the Shia ʿulamāʾ exchanges with their patronage network. Patronage networks play the role of the financial and social supporter for the ʿulamāʾ; however, in return different social groups receive religious capital in their relations with the ʿulamāʾ. Here I suggest the researchers to follow the discussions of Pierre Bourdieu and other sociologists on "social capital," and develop it to religiously founded relations (Bourdieu, 1986). The performance of religious rituals, using religious discourse, and assimilating with religious symbols and elements provided the patronage networks of the ʿulamāʾ with a sort of social capital that had religious nature. Therefore, one could be able to expand the term social capital to craft a new type of social

capital specified to religious life and called “religious capital”. This concept needs more theoretical discussions that could be used as an enlightening research question by the scholars of political sociology that contribute to our discussion about the ulama and their patronage network.

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