

ISLAMISM AND POST-ISLAMISM IN IRAN

An Intellectual History

Yadullah Shahibzadeh



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PREFACE

More than three decades ago, Hayden White distinguished between political and interpretative authorities. Whereas interpretative authority is achieved through argument, political authority is imposed through the use of force. White argued that the interpretative authority of an interpreter reaches its limit the moment he or she appeals to force to resolve his or her interpretative disputes with other interpreters.¹ The history of the contemporary Middle East is, to a certain extent, the history of the interpreters who knowingly or unknowingly have appealed to force to resolve the interpretative conflicts in the region. Convinced of the authority of Western governments to resolve interpretative conflicts by force in the Middle East, many interpreters stopped being interpreters. Instead, they have been mapping out different social forces' proclivity to accept or resist Western governments' solutions to the various situations in the region. In the mid-2000s, the USA and its allies speculated on the construction of an Iraqi nationalism to resist Iranian influence in the region, which led some researchers to explore how a new Iraqi nationalism could be constructed. The indecisiveness of the USA and its European allies during the Arab Uprisings deepened the divide between two groups of specialists of the Arab world. Despite the dedication of both groups to *the neoconservative project for democracy* in the Middle East, one group favored the *Islamists* and the other supported the *seculars* as the more qualified to implement the "democratic project." In the case of Egypt, many specialists of the region encouraged Western governments to resolve the interpretative

¹ Hayden White, *The Content of The form: narrative discourse and historical representation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 58–59.

conflict between the Islamist and secular Egyptians in favor of one side or the other. In the spring of 2013, the secular Egyptians appealed to their military generals to resolve their interpretative conflicts with the Islamists on the nature of the government in their country. When the military coup became a fact, the backers of Egyptian secular forces in the Western academia were busy telling their governments that the military coup would guarantee the democratic process in Egypt. Those who hailed the Islamists in Egypt had lost their claim to any interpretative authority long before the coup in Egypt. Long before the Arab uprisings, these interpreters were “democratizing,” “moderating,” or rather *domesticating* the Islamists of the Arab world to fit the political authority of their government in the region. They pointed to the *Turkish Model of Islamism* in the same way that Bernard Lewis advertised the *Secular Turkey*, as a model for the rest of the Middle East. The degree of *domestication* of every Islamist movement, organization, and state was determined according to a simple but decisive criterion. The extent to which every movement, organization, and state was willing to incorporate the “democratic project” in their political goals, programs, and policies was that simple and decisive criterion. The rest would be categorized as radical, extremist, or terrorist. Many scholars have invested their hopes, energies, and research capabilities in *the neoconservative project for democracy* in the Middle East. These scholars have mistaken the political authority of Western governments to resolve interpretative conflicts in the region for their own interpretative authority.

In Norway, like every other Western country, scholars and politicians have been enthusiastic about *the neoconservative project for democracy* in the Middle East. In defense of this project and with total public consensus, Norway participated in the bombing of Libya in 2011. As we know, the “democratic bombs” did not work in Libya. When I was preparing this preface, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet for its contributions to the democratic transition in Tunisia. The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet took shape while the coup in Egypt was taking place. Since its inception in 2013, the Quartet has been telling the Islamist and secular Tunisians that they have two choices. They either accept *the neoconservative project for democracy* or experience the Egyptians horror after the coup, or worse, the Libyan and Syrian civil wars. What is peculiar with the Norwegian Nobel Committee is that it consists of the former leaders of the same Norwegian political parties which decided to bomb Libya. On other occasions, these same political parties endorsed the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. They remained silent when the prodemocracy movement in Bahrain

was viciously quelled, and the military coup in Egypt was massacring and incarcerating thousands of anticoup protesters. According to the Nobel Committee, the Peace Prize was meant to strengthen the democratic process in Tunisia and promote it as a model for democratization in the region. Now that the secular-Islamist Turkish Model has been exposed as a sham, it seems that *the neoconservative project for democracy* in the Middle East needs a new model. Let us assume the transition to democracy in Tunisia has been so successful that it deserves being advertised as a model for democracy in the region. A legitimate question to be raised is why have thousands of Tunisian youth been recruited by *ISIL* and other terrorist groups in the region, during this democratic transition? A possible answer can be that there are only two alternatives before the young Muslims in Tunisia. They either embrace *domesticated Islamism* or become extremists. The choice between domesticated and extremist Islamism excludes the possibility of any Islamism or post-Islamism which is peaceful but critical and democratic but sovereign. In fact, what is absent in Tunisia and the rest of the Arab World and Turkey is a critical Islamism, which rejects any appeal to force as a means to resolve interpretative conflicts. Such critical Islamism emerged in Iran. The advocates of critical Islamism in Iran sought to resolve interpretative conflicts by supplementary interpretations, public speeches, and public arguments. Post-Islamism in Iran is a result of critical interpretations of Islamism and its political consequences. This book is a history of the interpretative supplements of Iranian Islamism and post-Islamism to the interpretative conflicts in Iran since the 1960s.

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Introduction

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt argues that “Idealism, foolish or heroic, always springs from some individual decision and conviction and is subject to experience and argument. The fanaticism of totalitarian movements, contrary to all forms of idealism, breaks down the moment leaves its fantasized followers in the lurch, killing in them any remaining conviction that might have survived the collapse of the movement itself.”¹ This book is a history of such heroic idealism, which has been subject to experience and argument in the Middle East, a history of a politico-intellectual transformation in Iran. It deals with the intellectual underpinnings of the 1979 Revolution and struggle for reform and democracy since the 1990s. Some scholarly works have conceptualized this politico-intellectual transformation through two key concepts, *Islamism* and *post-Islamism*. I employ the same concepts to explain the same transformation. However, my understanding of these concepts and the content of this politico-intellectual transformation is substantially different from previous studies. Islamism means, according to one analyst, “the political ideologization of Islam on the model of the great political ideologies of the 20th century.”² Others define Islamism as a nativist ideology constructed by marginalized Muslim intelligentsia to overcome their marginalization. The marginalized Muslim

¹Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1985), pp. 307–308.

²Olivier Roy, *The Politics of Chaos in The Middle East* (London, Hurst Publisher, 2007), p. 57.

intelligentsia presented Islam as a “divine system with a superior political model, cultural codes, legal structure, and economic arrangement,” capable of solving all problems of humankind. Thus, Islamism’s main objective was the establishment of an Islamic state.³ Islamism in Iran resulted in a successful popular revolution and establishment of an Islamic Republic. The belief in the comprehensiveness of Islam as ideology led the Islamists to marginalize all non-Islamist social forces.⁴ According to another analyst, Islamism was the expression of Iranian nativism. As the expression of Iranian nativism, Islamism was flawed epistemologically, ethically, and politically. It reduced “everything in the context of the binary opposition between the *authentic* and the *alien*.” It denied “the authenticity of the other” and suppressed other voices in the Iranian society.⁵

According to some analysts, after realizing their political and ideological failure in the post-Khomeini era, the Islamists took a critical approach toward the ideological foundations of Islamism. When the critical approach to Islamism developed into multilayered critiques expressing new social, religious, intellectual, and political trends in Iran, post-Islamism became a reality.⁶ Post-Islamism was both an awareness of “anomalies and inadequacies” of the Islamic political system⁷ and “a conscious attempt, to conceptualize and strategize rationale and modalities of transcending Islamism in social, political, and intellectual domains.”⁸ Thus post-Islamism was about appreciating “rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures, and the future instead of the past.”⁹ The question, which is worth discussing, is how this epistemologically, ethically, and politically flawed ideology and movement gave birth to post-Islamism. Was Post-Islamism an “*unintended consequence[s]* of the Khomeinist state?” In that case “the Khomeinist state” empowered the members of the Iranian political community to

³ Asef Bayat, *The Coming of a Post-Islamist Society*, Critique: Critical Middle East Studies, No. 9 (Fall 1996), p. 44, and Nathan J. Brown and Emad El-din Shahin (Edited by), *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 63–64.

⁴ Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 7.

⁵ Mehrzad Boroujerdi: *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), pp. 18–19.

⁶ Bayat, *The Coming of a Post-Islamist Society*, pp. 43–52

⁷ Bayat, *The Coming of a Post-Islamist Society*, p. 45.

⁸ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 307.

⁹ Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, p. 11.

challenge “the intellectual, political and social foundations of the Islamic Republic.”¹⁰ The logical consequence of this line of argument is that the Islamist discourse should be considered as the discursive condition of possibility of post-Islamism. Islamism made visible and audible individuals and social groups, which had been invisible and inaudible in the public space, so that they could make their situation intelligible and their visions of their emancipation from the situation reliable. The Islamists rejected Western democracy, but they did not reject democracy as such. They categorized Western democracy as a formal democracy because it concealed the reality of the economic exploitation and class domination. The Islamists searched for true democracy as the realization of their emancipation because it was supposed to be a classless society free from social antagonism. On the contrary, Post-Islamism was an intellectual and political struggle to force the state to recognize the political and civil rights of Iranian citizens.

Post-Islamists criticized the Islamist authoritarianism and advocated democracy and human rights, but they have been aware of the significance of the sovereignty of the state and the integrity of the public sphere in the democratic struggle in Iran. Iranian post-Islamists are self-educated politically and intellectually. They are not the representatives of the so-called *moderate Islam*, constructed by Western scholars and NGOs. Iranian Islamists established the Islamic Republic and made Khomeini the supreme leader of the state, *Vali-ye Faqih* because they saw him as the expression of *the general will*. The Islamic Republic was also a constitutional political system based on popular vote, in which one could argue against the discrepancies between the rights of the people inscribed in the constitution and the practices of the state institutions. In the post-Khomeini era, the Islamists realized that the new *Vali-ye Faqih* was no longer the manifestation of the general will. Rather than reflecting the will of the people, he reflected the will of the state institutions that violated the Iranian constitution. In its pre-revolutionary phase, Iranian Islamism was not an ideological and political movement to establish an Islamic state based on Islamic *Sharia*/Islamic law. Few months after the 1979 Revolution, a popularly elected assembly discussed the draft of a secular constitution, modeled on the current constitution of France and endorsed by Ayatollah Khomeini.¹¹

¹⁰ Mojtaba Mahdavi, Post-Islamist Trends in Post revolutionary Iran, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Vol. 31, No. 1. 2011. p. 105.

¹¹ Mohsen M. Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 154–155.

The present form of the Islamic Republic is a result of the constitutional debates, revolutionary situation and armed rebellion, the war with Iraq, the American effort for regime change, and the democratic struggles. The Islamists of the Arab countries establish their ideology on fundamental principles of Islamic Sharia, whereas Iranian Islamists constructed an ideology with borrowed concepts from the French Humanist Marxism. The Islamists of the Arab countries focused on Islamization of the state and legal system, whereas Iranian Islamists propagated political revolution to achieve a classless society. Post-Islamism can be described as an attempt to recognize “plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures.” However, it is more than emphasizing on people’s “rights instead of [their] duties” or appreciating “the future instead of the past.” In fact, both Iranian Islamists and post-Islamists emphasized people’s rights rather than their duties and looked forward to the future than the past. The peculiarity of the Islamists was that they subordinated the people’s rights to the decisions of revolutionary leaders in the transitory revolutionary period toward a real democracy in the future. On the contrary, the post-Islamists argued that democracy was the expression of the rights that people have at the present.

DEMOCRACY: A NEOCONSERVATIVE PROJECT

This book intends to challenge the two central assumptions upon which the neoconservative projects for promoting democracy in the Middle East rely. The projects for promoting democracy in the region is encouraged and supported by a great number of Western scholars, NGOs, and governments.¹² According to the first assumption, there is no room for nation-states in the age of *globalization* because a *global civil society* that consisted NGOs has gone beyond nation-states. This supposedly global civil society represents, “millions of ordinary citizens who are prepared to challenge political and economic decisions made by nation-states and intergovernmental organizations.”¹³ This global civil society is supposed to establish “a democratic global government” or “a cosmopolitan democracy.” The cosmopolitan democracy is supposed to be “based on Western cosmopolitan ideals, international legal arrangements, and

¹²Roy, *The Politics of Chaos in The Middle East*, pp. 33–36.

¹³Manfered B. Steger. *Political Dimensions of Globalization* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2010), p. 84.

a web of expanding linkages between various governmental and non-governmental organizations.”¹⁴ According to the second assumption, democracy in the Middle East is reconcilable with the interests of the USA and its European allies in the region because it will be based on Western democratic values.¹⁵ An advocate of the project for promoting democracy in the Middle East argues that it is not enough to support democratization in the region in its consolidating phase. The local people expect that the advocates of the democratic project stimulate democracy in its “initial steps.”¹⁶ Obviously, this democratic project does not need independent public spheres and autonomous political subjects because even opening steps for democracy in the region are delegated to the guardians of the democratic project. As the guardians of the democratic project in the Middle East, Western scholars, members of NGOs, and government officials explain liberation to the local people. They know that “democracy can be built from nothing; once stripped of all ideology, the “other” is putty that can be remain.”¹⁷ The history of democratic struggle in Iran demonstrates the logical contradiction between the universality of democracy and the particularity of Western governments’ interests. It attests that democratic achievements of every society can be protected in a public space, which is free from outside interventions. A few examples may illustrate the contradictions between the universality of democracy and particularity of Western interests in the Middle East. The British backed a coup against the Iranian constitutional government in 1921, which led to Reza Shah’s dictatorship. The US-British-organized coup in 1953 overthrew the democratically elected Mohammad Mosaddeq. Western governments supported the Iraqi dictatorship against Iran in the 1980s while Iran was the only constitutional democracy in a Muslim country. The USA labeled Iran as part of the axis of evil in 2002 while prodemocracy forces led the government and dominated the parliament and local councils.

THE CULTURALIST VIEW OF POLITICS AND HISTORY

Political culture explains the relation between politics and culture. It identifies sociocultural factors determining political systems’ democratic advantages or deficits. It establishes a hierarchy of political systems and

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁵ Roy, *The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East*, pp. 35–38.

¹⁶ Brown and Shahin (Edited by), *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East*, p. 24.

¹⁷ Roy, *The Politics of Chaos in The Middle East*, p. 36.

distinguishes societies with democratic modes of being or ethos from societies whose modes of being are lagging behind. It considers democratic modes of being or cultures and its intrinsic social patterns and values as a result of long processes of socialization and learning. The growing significance of the concept of unconsciousness and the unconscious elements in the social and human sciences since the 1960s made the culturalist view of politics more popular. As the Marxist influence began to diminish since the late 1970s, the culturalist approach to historiography became the dominant mode of the historiography of the Middle East in Europe and the USA. A great number of scholarly works employed the culturalist view of politics and history to conceptualize the formation of the ideology of the Iranian revolution and its later transformation. For them, Islamism indicated that Iran lagged behind in political culture and post-Islamism is the manifestation of an improved political culture expressed through the democratic demands of a new, powerful, and educated middle class. Though Islamism was the reaction of the nativist self, injured by the consequences of colonialism, to the Western other, post-Islamism is the expression of cosmopolitan aspects of the Iranian political culture. Unconvinced by the evolutionist narrative of the current political culture in Iran, an analyst argues that Iran possessed a democratic and cosmopolitan political culture, but the radical Islamists destroyed these aspects of the Iranian political culture. According to this analyst, the post-Islamism indicates

the resurgence of the Iranian cosmopolitan political culture that caused and conditioned their [the Iranian people's] 1979 revolution. However, the Iranian cosmopolitan culture has been eclipsed under the violent absolutism of a militant Islamism that is institutionalized in a fundamentally flawed republic and a thinly disguised theocracy.¹⁸

According to this argument, the Islamist ideology was the expression of a particular social group's desire to suppress the Iranian cosmopolitan culture to subordinate the entire society to its modes of being. This line of reasoning corresponds to the conception that sees the Islamist ideology as the expression of vengeance of the educated Muslim for their marginalization in the public space against the Iranian cosmopolitan culture. Based on the cosmopolitan nature of the pre-revolutionary Iranian polit-

¹⁸Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran* (Edited with an Introduction by Navid Nikzadfar) (New Jersey: New Brunswick, 2011), p. 79.

ical culture, this line of analysis argues that the hegemonic position of the Islamists in the 1979 Revolution was not historically predetermined.¹⁹ Thus, any statement or action, which contributes to freeing the Iranian cosmopolitan political culture from the captivity of Islamism, is a contribution to the democratic struggle in Iran. According to another line of reasoning, the Shah's authoritarian modernization disconnected Muslim masses from their traditional social ties, thus rendering them incapable of finding their proper place in the modernizing social order.²⁰ This reasoning shares some of the presuppositions of the previous argument. The Shah's oppression of the secular progressive forces created an ideological and political void occupied by the Islamist ideology and the Islamists' political leadership. We may put colonial modernity instead of the Shah's modernization projects in this line of argument, but it does not change the logic at work in this line of reasoning. According to this logic, the Iranian people responded to the ideological and political appeal of the Islamists because they reflected their undemocratic mode of being. The Shah did not realize that the secular progressive forces were the only capable social force who could offer intellectual and political education to the wondering masses to fit in his modernist project. Hence, instead of inviting the secular forces and progressive intellectuals to play their mediating role between the state and the masses, the Shah denied their full access to the public space and political participation. Against the secular forces, he offered the Islamists free access to the public space and the masses.²¹ The Shah and the secular opposition failed to see their modernity and rationality vis-à-vis the convergence between the Islamists' manipulative antimodernism and the masses' irrationality. Consequently, neither could expose manipulation of the masses through the Islamist ideology's "xenophobic nationalism" its "conspiratorial mind-set" and "garrison-state mentality and anti-Westernism."²² Accordingly, the shallowness of this ideology is revealed through its combination of Islamic terminology with simplified and degenerated fragments of modern European thought. The argument is not new. It combines Bernard

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 77–79.

²⁰ Ali Mirsepassi: *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 94.

²¹ Ibid., p. 13.

²² Boroujerdi: *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*, p. 19.

Lewis's approach,²³ with a psychoanalytical view of Iranian intellectual and political history to conceptualize the 1979 Revolution as the expression of the irrationality of the people and cultural schizophrenia of Iranian intelligentsia.²⁴ In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, scholars of the Middle East incorporated this psychoanalytical view of politics and history in the concept of political culture. The combination of a psychoanalytical view of politics and political culture are supposed to explain the region's democratic deficits, ideological tendencies, political disputes, and its underdeveloped political culture.²⁵ In the early 1990s, Islamism was the expression of Iranian nativism, a result of the traumatic experience of the Iranian people in their encounter with colonial modernity.²⁶ The author of this argument tries to balance Islamism's monolithic construct of the "West" with the Western construct of "Islam" as false dichotomies. The argument implies that the agents of Iranian Islamism and by extension the Iranian people were unable to express their intellectual and political subjectivity toward their emancipation. This line of argument represented the Iranian people as victims of a historical trauma who needed intellectual, ethical, political, and even esthetic therapy to overcome their traumatic past and revise their anti-Western outlooks. Conceptualization of Iranian Islamism as the expression of nativism and a lagged behind political culture indicates that the Iranian people should go through a process of political education on the value of democracy and human rights. We have seen societies such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, whose needs for political education were established as a justification for them being liberated militarily from their situation. Now, the same societies are entrapped in civil wars or are on the brink of collapse. If Western governments did not support the military coup against Egypt's first democratically elected president in 2013, the situation in Egypt could have been the same. In fact; the proponents of political education in the Middle East are divided between

²³ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 158–159.

²⁴ Daryush Shayegan: *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West* (London: Saqi Books, 1992), pp. 9–10.

²⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Roots of Muslim Rage: Why so many Muslims Deeply Resent the West, and Why Their Bitterness, Will Not Easily Be Mollified* (The Atlantic Monthly: September, 1990), pp. 56–57.

²⁶ Hamid Dabashi: *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 14.

those who advocate secularism and those who consider Islamists as an indispensable force who need a long-term education in democratic values. Even those who saw the contradiction between Western interests and democracy in the region described the coup as a “democratic coup” and explained its consistency with the democratic process in the Middle East.²⁷ The uncritical response of Western governments to the military coup in Egypt even after the massacres of hundreds of anti-coup demonstrators refuted the assumption that Western interests correspond to democracy in the region. It was predictable, even before the failure of military intervention in the region and the Arab uprisings, that outside interventions would derail the region’s political dynamism.

The economic sanctions, initiated by the USA and its European allies, supposed to curb Iran’s nuclear program coincided with the outbreak of the *Green Movement* in 2009. American and European neoconservative forces supported both the sanctions against Iran and the Green Movement. In response, the advocates of the Green Movement who conceived of Iran’s state sovereignty as part of the people’s struggle for prodemocracy condemned the economic sanctions. They calmed down the political tension and used ballot boxes in the 2013 presidential election to impose the democratic will of the people on the system. The prodemocracy forces participated in the 2013 presidential election to declare their fidelity to the state and popular sovereignty as the indivisible aspects of the Iranian struggle for democracy. They verified that “every situation can be cracked down from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification.”²⁸ The culturalist view of history fails to reflect on the speech acts that challenge the existing relations between “the order of discourse and the order of the state of affairs.”²⁹ It is rather preoccupied with conceptualizing people’s modes of being and ways of doing which correspond to their social positions.³⁰ Iranian Islamism in the 1979 Revolution and post-Islamism since the 1990s have revealed that there is no necessary relation between the social position of the social agents to their way of feeling, seeing, thinking, and speaking. By calling into question the order of discourse and the order of bodies in the region, they transgressed

²⁷ Samir Amin, *The Fall of Morsi*, http://samiramin1931.blogspot.no/2013_07_01_archive.html

²⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso Books, 2009), p. 49

²⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 97.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

social boundaries between those who think and those who act. Thus, they reconfigured the Iranian public sphere politically and esthetically toward individual and collective emancipation. The history of the Islamist ideology and its transformation into the post-Islamist discourse refute the Hobbesian argument according to which ordinary people should not use the same words that the kings use. According to Hobbes, ordinary citizens cannot make a distinction between good and evil, in the same way that the kings do. To Hobbes, the ordinary people's use of royal words causes sedition and rebellion in the state.³¹ Some analysts blame Iranian Islamists and post-Islamists for their excessive use of the borrowed words from Western discourses, the meaning of which they do not master. However, the critics are not interested in the fact that through the borrowed words, the Islamists and post-Islamists have challenged "the relations between the order of discourse and the order of bodies,"³² locally and globally.

TOTALISM AND PERSPECTIVISM

Islamism and post-Islamism in Iran represent two different approaches to democracy, freedom, and equality. The former is inspired by the Marxist totalist conception of human history and its future-oriented approach. The latter is a critique of the Islamist *totalism* and conceives of democracy as the realization of political and civil rights of the people, here and now. The Islamist ideology emerged within a *universalist* intellectual and political discourse. It aimed to overthrow the Shah and establish a revolutionary state to prepare the conditions of true democracy on the national and global level. The guerilla organizations such as Fadaïyan-e Khalq, Mojahedin-e Khalq, and Ali Shariati's discourse in the late 1960s and 1970s expressed this universalism. Shariati as the ideologue of the Iranian revolution put forward a theory of revolutionary political leadership in his *Leadership and the Community (Ommat va Emamat, 1970)*. The revolutionary Islamists used this theory to rationalize Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership in the 1979 Revolution, as the expression of the general will. They institutionalized Khomeini's leadership in the Islamic Republic through the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*.³³ The Islamic Republic led by

³¹ Thomas Hobbes; *On the citizen* edited and translated by Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 131.

³² Rancière, *The Names of History*, p. 61.

³³ Brumberg, Daniel: *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 106.

Khomeini excluded secular forces from political participation, but it created a nationalized public sphere, free from intervention and influence of world powers for the Islamists to participate in intellectual and political contestations. Since the late nineteenth century up to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Iranian public sphere was the sphere of private interests of world powers. The impact of Britain and then the USA on the Iranian public sphere paved the way for the 1921 and 1953 coup d'états. The 2013 coup in Egypt, cheered by many Egyptian secular intellectuals including Samir Amin,³⁴ was reminiscent of the 1921 and 1953 coups in Iran. The intellectual and political contestations in the Islamic Republic resulted in the critique of the Islamist totalism and the emergence of a *perspectivist* intellectual discourse, which dominated the public space in the 1990s. Post-Islamism in Iran is, in fact, the political expression of intellectual perspectivism in the 1990s. The generation of the Iranian intellectuals and political activists who supported the reform movement (1997–2005) supported the 2009 Green Movement and Rouhani's candidacy in the 2013 presidential election as well. The latter events indicated that the dichotomy between the secular-religious and the Islamist–post-Islamist discourses had lost their intellectual and political significance in the public sphere.

THE INTELLECTUAL

This book is an inquiry into the ideas of Muslim intellectuals. Thus, the term intellectual and its Persian substitute require some clarifications. The term *Roushanfekr*, the Persian equivalent of the intellectual, is a synonym for *Monavar ol-fekr* coined in the late nineteenth century. *Monavar ol-fekr* defines the enlightened individual thinker as one who has reached a high position of modern learning and is capable of making disinterested judgments on public affairs and transmitting his or her knowledge to the public. The term intellectual entered the Iranian public space at almost the same time that the Dreyfus Affair was transforming French intellectuals into a distinct group with a moral mission. Many Iranian intellectuals who were active participants in the constitutional revolution (1906–1909), adopted the Leninist conception of the intellectual in the wake of the 1917 Russian revolution. Equipped with Lenin's conception

³⁴Samir Amin, The Fall of Morsi, http://samiramin1931.blogspot.no/2013_07_01_archive.html

of the intellectual, they saw themselves as the real carriers of class-consciousness into the masses and as the agents of a future socialist revolution. Jean-Paul Sartre's conceptualization of the intellectual entered the Iranian intellectual discourse in the 1960s. Jalal Al-e Ahmad held Sartre's argument against the educated Iranians who offered their services to the regime of the Shah. Sartre argued that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers' negation of their contemporary sociopolitical order served the bourgeois class, because the interests of the bourgeoisie contradicted the existing order. On the contrary, the twentieth-century scientists who serve the interests of the bourgeois class do not oppose the existing sociopolitical order, because they have common interests in preserving the existing order. Sartre described both the eighteenth-century thinkers and the contemporary scientists and philosophers as *technicians of practical knowledge*. Whereas, the eighteenth-century technicians of practical knowledge universalized the bourgeoisie's ideals of *the rights of man and citizen* against the particularism of aristocracy, the twentieth-century technicians of practical knowledge use the same universalist vocabulary to conceal the particularism of the bourgeois ideology. An intellectual is according to Sartre, a technician of practical knowledge who discovers the particularism of the seemingly universalist character of the bourgeois discourses. Furthermore, an intellectual demonstrates how this particularistic discourse legitimizes exploitation of the majority by a minority, imperialism, colonialism, and racism and transmits his or her knowledge to the masses.³⁵ Thus, genuine intellectuals are, according to Sartre, those technicians of practical knowledge who distinguish between false and true universalities.³⁶ According to Sartre, these intellectuals distinguish the imperialist violence as a major evil and the violence exerted in the anti-imperialist struggles as a minor evil.³⁷ For Sartre, genuine intellectuals always take the side of the oppressed and adopt the point of view of the most underprivileged members of society.³⁸ Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Shariati were among the most distinguished Iranian intellectuals who embraced Sartre's position wholeheartedly.

³⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), p. 240.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

PRIVATIZATION VERSUS ENLARGEMENT
OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Jacques Rancière argues that democracy is neither the name of a political regime nor a mode of living or being,³⁹ but the name of the political struggle that is capable of enlarging the public space.⁴⁰ The history of democratic struggles in Iran indicates that struggles for democracy within a wholly sovereign state are more successful compared with those within a state that is subjected to foreign intervention and influence. Hobbes argued that a body is free to the extent that its movements depend on its will.⁴¹ In every representative democracy, the elite “tend to shrink the public sphere, making it into its own private affair” but democratic struggles enlarge the public sphere.⁴² The democratic struggles for popular sovereignty in Iran were at the same time struggles for state sovereignty, which included a nationalized public space with the Iranian people as potential or actual political agents. Even though nationalized public space has been the chief quality of many modern democracies, this subject has never been conceptualized in the study of democracy in the Middle East. A genuine study on democracy has to deal with democracy from within and identify local political agents who are intellectually and politically self-educated and do not rely on foreign governments. “The lack of enthusiasm by the United States towards popular indigenous pro-democracy struggles could not be better illustrated than in the case of Bahrain, which brutally suppressed the overwhelmingly nonviolent challenge to the autocratic monarchy on that island nation earlier this year.”⁴³ Iranian Islamists and post-Islamists were intellectually and politically self-educated agents. Based on Humanist Marxism and its *philosophical totalism*, Shariati constructed his Islamist ideology. As I discuss the subject in the opening of Chap. 2, philosophical totalism is not the same as *totalitarianism*. In Chap. 5, I discuss that post-Islamism is a democratic political discourse resulting from the philosophical, theological, and artistic *perspectivism*. In the European context, from the 1950s to 1990, we can identify an intellectual transformation

³⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 55.

⁴¹ Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 7.

⁴² Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, p. 54.

⁴³ Stephen Zunes, <http://www.mci.edu/content/united-states-and-arab-pro-democracy-insurrections>

from Humanist Marxism to post-Marxism. We can also conceptualize this transformation as a discursive shift from totalism into perspectivism. I employ the history of this transformation as a conceptual framework to reveal the intellectual context within which the Islamist totalism and the post-Islamist perspectivism emerged and developed. Understanding this transformation may help us understand one of the significant components of the logic of the Iranian struggle for democracy. This study is thematically limited to Iranian Islamism and post-Islamism and chronologically confined between the 1960s and the present. In addition to this chapter, this book is divided into seven other chapters. I discuss, in Chaps. 2 to 4, the historical formation of the Islamist ideology and its share in the Iranian revolution and the foundation of the Islamic Republic. In Chaps. 5 to 7, I discuss the formation of the intellectual perspectivism and political post-Islamism and their impacts on the contemporary prodemocracy movement in Iran. Chapter 2 deals with the intellectual and political climate of the 1960s and 1970, and Chapter 3 is a detailed study of Shariati's Islamist ideology. Chapter 4 demonstrates the convergence of Shariati's Islamist ideology and Ayatollah Khomeini's politics. In Chaps. 5 and 6, I discuss the emergence of the philosophical and artistic perspectivism and post-Islamist politics that underpinned the 1990s reform-oriented democratic discourse. In Chap. 7, I deal with the impact of the dialog between the post-Islamist perspectivism and the Islamist totalism that took place after the conservative takeover led by Ahmadinezhad (2005–2013). Chapter 8 presents a few concluding remarks on the achievements of the dialog between Islamism and Post-Islamism expressed in the Green Movement and the election of Rouhani as Iran's president in 2013.

The Crisis of Political Leadership

In the late-eighteenth-century German idealism, the concept of *totality* constituted the metaphysical base for an optimistic conception of humanity and its future perfection, free from conflicts and controversies.¹ Totality indicated an ideal state where all members of the human society share a common truth.² Hegel employed totality as his principal theoretical framework to demonstrate the transformation of the historical differentiation of subject and object into the final unity through *good infinity* or *bad infinity*. Though Hegel viewed bad infinity as open-ended, he defined good infinity as the identity of the past and the future in the present.³ The Marxist idea of the historical subject, the proletariat that leads all other elements toward the end of history, is very close to Hegel's concept of good infinity. Hence, a historical understanding based on the concepts of totality and good infinity requires the presence of a historical subject to lead human society toward its happy end. Marx outlined, in his early writings, human history as a process of man's separation from his essence, a process of alienation, and the capitalist society as the climax of his alienation. Man overcomes his alienation through revolutionary praxis toward

¹ Jost Hermand, (ed), *Postmodern Pluralism and the Concept of Totality: The Twenty-Fourth Wisconsin Workshop* (New York: P. Lang, 1995), p. 3.

² Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 23.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

the communist society.⁴ Marx argued that human unity is fragmented into different parts in the state of alienation. For Marx, alienation reduces man's ability to control various aspects of his social practice because he does not understand their internal relationship. Man can overcome his alienation only in the communist society.⁵ Marx understood human history as a totality; it has generated alienation as well as the condition of possibility of human perfection in the future. Marx made the exploited proletariat as the expression of the history of human alienation, and their class-consciousness through daily experience as the condition of possibility of human emancipation and de-alienation. The 1917 Russian revolution, led by determined revolutionary intellectuals, minimized the role of the proletarian consciousness. It indicated that the revolutionary intellectuals were ahead of the proletariat. To Georg Lukács, the revolutionary intellectuals are conscious of a reality that "is by no means identical with empirical existence. This reality is not; it becomes."⁶ The revolutionary intellectual promised the total man of the future.

The total man is both the subject and the object of becoming. He is the living subject who is opposed to the object and surmounts this opposition. He is the subject who is broken up into partial activities and scattered determinations and who surmounts this dispersion. He is the subject of action, as well as its final object ... The total man is the living subject-object, who is first of all torn asunder, dissociated and chained to necessity and abstraction. Through this tearing apart, he moves towards freedom; he becomes nature, but free. He becomes a totality like nature but by bringing it under control. The total man is "de-alienated" man.⁷

For Lefebvre, the total man is a result of the process of alienation, self-consciousness, revolution, and the abolition of alienation. The total man is a free individual who exercises total control over his actions because he controls both the external nature and his own nature because he is united with nature. For Sartre, the meaning of history can be discovered only

⁴Karl Marx, *Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 79 and 132.

⁵Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 227–228.

⁶Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 203.

⁷Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), p. 162.

in terms of future totalization. "It is our theoretical and practical duty to bring this totalization closer every day ... Our historical task, at the art of this polyvalent world, is to bring closer the moment when history will have only one meaning."⁸ Sartre argues that the concept of totality summarizes the multiple meanings of history as one single meaning. Totality signifies the end of history through the reduction of different meanings of history into a single meaning. There remains only a historical subject as the single totalizer in the figure of the proletariat or the oppressed class to lead history toward total society and total man.⁹ To Merleau-Ponty, the concept of totality was the key to Marxism.

To be a Marxist is to believe that economic problems and cultural or human problems are a single problem and that the proletariat, as history has shaped it, holds the solution to that problem. In modern language, it is to believe that history has a Gestalt, in the sense German writers give to the word, a holistic system moving towards equilibrium.¹⁰

This single problem is buried within a totality of historical, economic, and social relations. The totality of these relations is only recognizable for those who grasp history as a rational movement and the revolutionary role of the proletariat as the guarantee of this rationality. What distinguishes Marxist-totalism from fascist-totalism, in Merleau-Ponty's view, is that totality is a method for Marxism, but for fascism it is an ideology.

Of course, the idea of totality plays an essential role in Marxist thought. It is the concept of totality which underlies the whole Marxist critique of the "formal," "analytic," and pseudo-objective nature of bourgeois thought ... The opponents of Marxism never fail to compare this "totalitarian" method with the fascist ideology which also pretends to go from the formal to the actual, from the conceptual to the organic.¹¹

To Merleau-Ponty, the proletariat as the subject of revolutionary praxis is identified with its universality, because its interests represent the interests of all humanity. He not only defines Stalin's practice of violence as legitimate because it represents the proletariat and the universal, but he

⁸ Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 353.

⁹ Ibid., p. 351.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 370-371.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 371.

also defines the fascist violence as illegitimate because it represents the race, the nation, and the particular. French Marxism inspired by the early writings of Marx, known as Humanist Marxism, dominated the French intellectual scene from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. To Gramsci, totality is not only a fundamental epistemological concept of Marxism, but also the foundation of its ethics. Instead of a meta-subject manifested in a communist party that creates totality expressively at the beginning of the process, Gramsci suggests an intersubjective totalization to achieve a *linguistic community*. The linguistic community is a community of shared meanings to increase the possibility of revolutionary leadership.¹² Gramsci argues, “Leadership is exercised over allies and associates; that is, precisely over those groups who consent to be led.”¹³ For Gramsci, cultural space is the space of different blocs of knowledge that compete with one another. To impose their cultural hegemony, the intellectuals should impose their authority on other blocs of knowledge and become the “educators” of the coming “linguistic and cultural community. In doing so, they become the mediators of the new socialist totalization, bridging the gap between the old society and the new.”¹⁴ Gramsci argued that the difference between intellectuals and ordinary people would disappear only after the achievement of socialism. To Gramsci, the popular element “feels” but it does not always understand. On the contrary, the intellectual element “knows” but it does not always understand. Thus, to form an “intellectual and moral bloc,” intellectuals should integrate their knowledge with the passion of the masses.¹⁵ To Gramsci, understanding means the identity of knowing and feeling. I understand *totalism* as an intellectual approach, which sees human history as a history of separation of man from his essence and his attempts toward the reunification with the lost essence. Totalism signifies universality, which means it does not exclude any member of humanity from the process of man’s alienation to his de-alienation. Humanist Marxism based on Marx’s early writing was the expression of Marxist totality or totalism. Through his understanding of Humanist Marxism and through his totalist interpretation of Islam, Shariati offered a totalist Islamist ideology which had the same goal as Marxism, where revolutionary praxis was

¹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 159–160.

¹³ Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 141.

¹⁴ Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 166.

¹⁵ Fontana, *Hegemony and Power*, p. 158.

heading toward a classless society consisted of total human beings. There is an enormous difference between totalism and totalitarianism. Contrary to totalism, which was about universality and human equality, totalitarianism signified particularism and superiority of particular races, nations, ideologies, and political parties over the rest of humanity. *Totalism* instigated intellectual and political subjectivity, whereas *totalitarian* ideology and movements know only conformism and submission that destroys the human capacity for experience.

STALINIST TOTALITARIANISM AND ITS CONTENDERS

The intellectual and political climate of the early 1960s in Iran was the legacy of the 1953 coup d'état. The coup and its aftermath demonstrated the political defeat of the popular liberal nationalist and socialist forces represented by the Popular Front (*Jebheh-ye melli*) and the Tudeh Party. At the time, a new political and intellectual tendency inspired by the ideas of a marginal political group called the Third Force (*Niron-ye Sevvom*), started to play a role in Iran. The Third Force was a group of breakaway members of the Tudeh Party who had rejected Soviet socialism in the mid-1940s and advocated democratic socialism. The Freedom Movement (*Nebzat-e Azadi*) and the Theist Socialists (*Sosialist'ha-ye Khodaparast*) also represented liberal and socialist tendencies among dedicated Muslim activists. Though the Freedom Movement was established only in 1961, the Theist Socialists had been active since the 1940s. Despite their dedication to Islam, the members of these two groups did not seek an Islamic state governed by the Islamic law. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, a very well-known intellectual at the time, a former member of the Tudeh Party, supported the Third Force. The Marxist *Fadaiyan-e Khalq* and the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* emerged in this period.

The Persian Social Democratic Party propagated socialist ideas before the constitutional revolution (1906–1909).¹⁶ With the victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917, Iranian intellectuals were attracted to Marxism. Iran's Communist Party was established in 1920. Because of internal disputes, Reza Shah's oppression, and the Stalinist persecution when the party's leadership moved to the Soviet Union, it ceased to exist

¹⁶Mohsen Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), p. 76.

in the late 1930s.¹⁷ In the early 1940s, the Marxist-oriented Tudeh Party became, soon after its establishment, the most popular political party in Iran.¹⁸ During the movement for oil nationalization, the party did not see the cause of oil nationalization as Iran's priority. As a result, it lost much of its popular support. The party described Mosaddeq as a representative of the "regressive national bourgeoisie," an anti-British aristocrat whose actions served the interests of "American Imperialism."¹⁹ After the 1953 coup, the party members were killed, imprisoned, or immigrated to Eastern Europe. By the 1960s, the party had no popular base in Iran. According to Nouredin Kianouri, its leader for many years, the party "did not have even one connection or unit inside Iran."²⁰ Despite its organizational absence, the party's Stalinist interpretation of Marxism shaped the ideologies of the Fadaïyan and Mojahedin in the late 1960s. Based on the Tudeh Party's ideology, these two organizations were focused on the question of political leadership to resist the dictatorship of the Shah and how to start a mass movement. These organizations appeared after the failure of the pro-Mosaddeq opposition to force the Shah to hold a free parliament election. Many leaders of the pro-Mosaddeq opposition were arrested in 1962. Many more were imprisoned after the anti-Shah demonstrations instigated by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1963.

These events made significant impacts on Al-e Ahmad, who combined the Sartrean conception of the intellectual and the Gramscian idea of intellectual hegemony to argue for the political mission of Iranian intellectuals. To the founders of the Fadaïyan and the Mojahedin, Al-e Ahmad's politics was reformist and conciliatory toward the regime of the Shah. They proposed armed struggle as the only means to gain political leadership of the masses. Al-e Ahmad argued in his *Westoxication (Gharbzadegi)* published in 1962 that the past political failures in Iran were a result of the *intellectual infertility* of the Iranian intelligentsia. He discussed several years later, the means through which Iranian intellectuals could overcome rival blocs of knowledge to impose their hegemony on the masses. He

¹⁷ Afshin Matin-Asghari, *From Social Democracy to Social Democracy: The Twentieth Century Odyssey of the Iranian Left in Revolutionaries and Reformers in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*, Edited by Stephanie Cronin (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 40–41.

¹⁸ Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic*, p. 76.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

encouraged secular intellectuals to form an alliance with Muslim intellectuals and the clergy against the Shah. Although secular intellectuals were the chief target of his criticism, Al-e Ahmad became the leading founder of the *Association of Iranian Writers (Kanun-e Nevisandegan-e Iran)* in 1969. This organization has ever since been the central base of the Iranian secular intellectuals.²¹ Al-e Ahmad hoped to bridge the gap between the *Association of Writers* representing secular intellectuals and the clergy. He viewed the former as traditional and the latter as organic intellectuals. Despite his efforts, the majority in the association did not approve the membership of Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani and Ali Shariati.²²

While the Fadaiyan and the Mojahedin adopted Stalinist Marxism of the Tudeh party, Al-e Ahmad tried to make sense of Gramsci's and Sartre's Marxism. One of his critics described Al-e Ahmad as an anti-Stalinist who rejected the dictatorship of the proletariat and did not distinguish between socialism and liberalism.²³ Despite the fact that many intellectual and political activists of the early 1960s denounced the Tudeh Party's political strategies, they endorsed its Marxist-Leninist ideology. "From 1941 on, Iranian activists were introduced only to the Stalinist version of Marxism and, therefore, saw it as the norm."²⁴ The result was an oversimplified perception of philosophical and political issues among Iranian Marxists. However, the foremost cause of the underdeveloped Iranian Marxism or the Iranian Marxists' poverty of philosophy was not their lack of access to the writings of Marx in European languages as a historian of Iranian politics claims.²⁵ In fact, many leaders of the Tudeh Party knew one or more European languages and had access to the works of Marx in European languages. In order to find the cause of the lack of deeper intellectual reflections on Marxism, we should look elsewhere. For a theorist of the

²¹ Massoud Noqrehkar, *Bakhsbi az tarikh-e jonbesh-e roushanfekri-ye Iran: barrasi-ye tarikhi -tahlili-ye Kanun-e Nevisandegan-e Iran*, Jeld-e Avval (Spånga, Sweden: Baran, 2002), pp. 113–147.

²² Massoud Noqrehkar, *Bakhsbi az tarikh-e jonbesh-e roushanfekri-ye Iran: barrasi-ye tarikhi-tahlili-ye Kanun-e Nevisandegan-e Iran*, Jeld-e panjom (Spånga, Sweden: Baran, 2002), p. 721.

²³ Amir Parviz Pouyan, *Khashmgin az emperialism tarsan az enqelab* (Tehran: Unknown publisher, 1969).

²⁴ Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), p. 160.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Tudeh Party, Marxism discovers totality and unity in class-divided human societies because

1-The movement of history is a progressive movement toward fullness. Hence, the new integrates the truth, the justice and the beautiful toward happiness. 2-Human intellect is capable of discovering the mysteries of nature and history, understand their laws, to overcome natural and social impediments gradually. Contrary to the nonsense claims of Jasper, scientific progress makes the [human] life more miraculous and more glorious. When the false gods are deposed the real gods of truth, social justice, artistic beauty and so on and so forth will ascend the throne.²⁶

According to this view, any intellectual attempt to question the Marxist view of history, its philosophy, its esthetics, and futurology produces disappointed intellectuals who are incapable of understanding their historical mission.

The accuracy of the Marxist prediction regarding the antiquity of capitalism, its inevitable collapse, the growing revolutionary condition, the birth of a new [social] system called socialism and its higher stage called communism has been verified. The future will also verify this prediction. Marxism has founded the main pillars of the science of futurology. Therefore, its teachings on revolution, socialism, and communism are nothing but the description of man's conscious effort to reveal the historical laws.²⁷

When Nietzsche's work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was published in the mid-1970s, the same theorist of the party warned Iranian intellectuals about the bad influence of Nietzsche's bourgeois philosophy. The Tudeh party's conception of Marxist philosophy was quite similar to what I have previously described as the totalist conception of man and history. However, the party's totalism assumed the general laws of development in nature and human history as identical. The ideologues of the Tudeh party avoided concepts such as alienation discussed in the early writings of Marx and confused theory with practical instruction of the young recruits. They never tried to initiate a genuine intellectual reflection on Marxism and thus remained a part of the infertile intellectual landscape of the 1960s. According to Henri Lefebvre, Russian Marxism

²⁶ Ehsan Tabari, *Dar bareh-ye sevesht va sarnevesht-e ensan*, Donia (Winter 1963).

²⁷ Ehsan Tabari, *Marksisim va shenakht-e ayandeh*, Donia (Winter 1967).

rejected the concept of alienation, because it could go beyond the analysis of the capitalist societies. It could “uncover and criticize ideological and political alienation inside socialism, particularly during the Stalinist period.”²⁸ Through the concept of totality, the Tudeh Party considered itself as the agent of human history in the Iranian context to lead the oppressed people toward the classless society of the future. However, its chief ideologues failed to be creative intellectually within the totalist framework of Marxism. One analyst links the party’s stagnant philosophical totalism to its failed political strategies and its total submission to the Soviet Union’s foreign policy.²⁹ A creative totalism would call the policy of the Soviet Union into question. Many young people recruited by the Tudeh Party in the early 1940s become well-known writers, poets, academics, and politicians in the 1950s and 1960s. However, as members of the party, they became disillusioned with the party’s blind support for the policy of the Soviet Union. In fact, the earliest voices of dissent came from within the party in the mid-1940s by Khalil Maleki, one of the founders of the party. Maleki described the Soviet Union socialism as state capitalism (*Kapitalism-e doulati*) and rejected the Tudeh Party’s blind submission to the Soviet policy toward Iran. Maleki propagated socialism within a democratic framework and argued that socialism and democracy were interconnected principles.³⁰ Al-e Ahmad viewed Maleki as one of the few independent socialist intellectuals and political activists in Iran who did not obey intellectual or political authorities.

The time of idols, great expectations, and false prophets is gone. The time of intellectual intervention, the time for taking responsibility and the time of freedom has come. These qualities make Maleki not only a very good social and political analyst but also make him a theorist with his own school. The intellectual foundation through which [Iranian] intellectuals try to understand socialism, communism, colonialism and neo-colonialism and the third world was presented first by Maleki.³¹

²⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968).

²⁹ Maziar Behrooz mentions, in *Rebels with a Cause*, that the Tudeh Party’s stagnant philosophy resulted in disastrous political strategies throughout its entire history.

³⁰ Afshin Matin, *Az sosial demokrasi ta sosial demokrasi*, Faslnameh farhangi-ejtemaei-e, Gotogou, 31:42.

³¹ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e roushanfekran* (Tehran: Kharazmi, 1978), pp. 343–344.

Maleki became known as the founder of the Third Force unnecessary. He inspired a generation of Iranian intellectuals who were critical of the Tudeh Party and its dependency on the politics of the Soviet Union.³² The ideas of the Third Force destabilized the ideological base of the Tudeh Party, and thus contributed to the formation of new types of intellectual discourse. Maleki remained a socialist and a democrat until his death in 1969. He rejected both Stalinism as early as the 1940s for its antidemocratic nature and Maoism in the late 1960s. In a letter written in 1967, he criticized the Maoist tendencies among Iranian intellectuals in Europe:

The gentlemen do not retreat one step from their scientific socialism of Marx in its Leninist interpretation. Unfortunately, they are incapable of understanding the significant events that have taken place since Marx and Lenin. We fought against Stalin once, and we came out victorious.³³

Maleki criticized Al-e Ahmad's *Westoxication* for its depiction of the West as a unified whole without class contradictions. Despite his harsh critique, Al-e Ahmad admired Maleki's intellectual creativity and political courage. "Everything I say, I learned from him since, before anyone else in the world of politics, he introduced the *third way*."³⁴

THE STORY OF INFERTILITY

Maleki's Third Way, between liberalism and communism, between the Tudeh Party and the Popular Movement, and his rejection of both Western imperialism and the imperialism of the Soviet Union, inspired Al-e Ahmad who was trying to take a mediating role between secular intellectuals and the clergy. Despite his critique of the secular intellectuals as Westoxicated and antireligious, he remained an authority among secular intellectuals until his death in 1970. The *Association of Iranian Writers*, of which he was one of the leading founders in 1969, has symbolized the resistance of the secular intellectuals to the Islamic Republic's Islamization of culture. Critics of Al-e Ahmad argue that he defended, in his *Westoxication*, an

³²Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 170.

³³Amir Pishdad & Homayon Katuzian, *Nameh'ba-ye Khalil Maleki* (Tehran: Markaz, 2002), p. 9.

³⁴Ibid.

imaginary Iranian cultural identity and anti-Western posture. What Al-e Ahmad really offers in *Westoxication* is a critique of the Iranian intellectual approach toward the state projects of modernization.

The point is that we have not been able to maintain a well-thought-out and considered position vis-à-vis this monster of the modern age. The fact is that until we have actually grasped the essence, basis, and philosophy of western civilization and no longer superficially mimic the West in our consumption of western products, we shall be just like the ass who wore a lion skin.³⁵

He argues that Iranian intellectuals have failed to understand the essence, basis, and philosophy of Western civilization, because they are ideologically and politically subjugated to the West through its products. We can find the rephrasing of this statement in almost every academic or journalistic critical treatment of Al-e Ahmad since the 1990s, which indicates the originality of Al-e Ahmad's ideas vis-à-vis his critics. Al-e Ahmad wrote his life story, *Sangi bar guri*, right after *Westoxication*. He described, *Sangi bar guri* as a story about infertility.³⁶ In fact, the subject matter of *Sangi bar guri*, *Westoxication*, and *On the Service and the Treason of Intellectuals* is nothing but infertility. *Sangi bar guri* deals with the impacts of infertility on particular individuals and the way it forms their experience of everyday life. In line with *Sangi bar guri*, *Westoxication* and *On the Service and the Treason of Intellectuals* deal with the social, political, and intellectual infertility. Al-e Ahmad also discusses the impact of infertility on the state whose legitimacy is in question by the people. He also sees the inherited barrenness in the political parties, which lack people's support, and the secular intellectuals incapable of generating a creative discourse and inept to impose their hegemony on the masses. In *Sangi bar guri*, Al-e Ahmad describes how his infertility puts him in tragic-comic situations. Thus, his infertility becomes the source of his intellectual reflections on the infertility of the Iranian intellectuals and their Westoxication, which he considers as a tragic-comic situation. For Al-e Ahmad, the situation of the Iranian intellectuals who suffer from the repression of the state and are mocked by the population is similar to his

³⁵ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Plagued by the West (Gharbzadegi)* (New York: Caravan Books, 1982), p. 7.

³⁶ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Yek chah va dou chaleh va masalan sharb-e ahvalat* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Ferdows, 1995), p. 54.

personal experience described in *Sangi bar guri*.³⁷ Al-e Ahmad investigates not only the sources of intellectual infertility in Iran and describes its tragic-comic character, but also explores the possibilities through which the Iranian intellectuals could overcome the infertile situation. He believes that a political alliance between the secular intellectuals and the clergy would be a first step to overcome the infertile situation. Al-e Ahmad's encouragement of the secular intellectuals to form a political alliance with the clergy does not prevent him from criticizing the clergy's rejection of the democratic rights of Iranian women.³⁸ To Al-e Ahmad, the clergy has a privileged social and cultural position within Iranian society, and it has its disagreements with the Shah, which makes it a potentially powerful political agent. He is well aware that the clergy opposes the Shah from a reactionary stance, to preserve tradition and the past.³⁹

Due to its defense of tradition, the Shia clerical establishment presents a type of resistance against the colonial invasion of the local tradition and culture. In this way, the clerical establishment is a barrier against *Westoxication* of the intellectuals as well as against the total obedience of the (Iranian) states to the West and the colonial powers. That is why the progressive section of the clerical establishment shows its discontent to the status quo. This aspect [of the clerical establishment] would be crucial for the intellectuals who do not look at the real world through *Westoxicated* lenses but through an anti-colonial one.⁴⁰

Al-e Ahmad argues that the *constitutional revolution* and the *oil nationalization movement* were results of alliances between the intellectuals and the clergy. He criticizes radical Iranian intellectuals for their preoccupation with imported theoretical problems and encourages them to focus on local issues.⁴¹ For Al-e Ahmad, the imported ideas dissociate the intellectuals from the local people and prevent them from taking a hegemonic role in their society. *Westoxication* is, in fact, a description of the predicaments of infertile intellectuals who are discontent with the political and social situation of their people, suppressed by their state, and ignored by the masses.

³⁷ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Sangi bar guri* (Tehran: Entesharate Ravaq, 1981), Chapter 3..

³⁸ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e roushanfekran*, p. 252.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 251–252.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

While their experience of the repression of the state indicates their tragic situation, their alienation from the masses results in their comic situation.

That is why the Iranian intellectual has become a melancholic, drug-addicted, or *Westoxicated* modernist. Instead of creating things that can be used by the native people, he has become a passive consumer of the material and intellectual products of the West. As a result, he forgets all the intellectual ideals bit by bit and becomes socially irrelevant and intellectually infertile.⁴²

According to Al-e Ahmad, the mistake of the intellectuals is that they treat both the state and the clerical establishment in the same way. Relying on one of the principal articles of Gramsci, included in *On the Service and the Treason of the Intellectuals*, Al-e Ahmad analyzes the relation between Westoxicated secular intellectuals, the clergy, and the masses. Al-e Ahmad believes that the masses are religious because they live in poverty. To Al-e Ahmad, because of their unfamiliarity with the nature of the modern technology, the poor people's consumption of the technology cannot help them eradicate their material and spiritual poverty. Only those who produce machines can control them, and only those who can control technology can use it creatively.⁴³ Al-e Ahmad used this notion of control over machines to other regions of human creation, such as intellectual production. Al-e Ahmad concludes that only those who produce intellectual goods can put into effect these intellectual products. Those who have not contributed to the formation of modern political ideologies are subjected to the destructive impacts of these ideologies. Al-e Ahmad's understanding of damaging effects of the imported political ideologies combined with his personal experience of infertility led him to construct the concepts of intellectual and political infertility. He assumed that these concepts explained both the state's lack of legitimacy and absence of democracy in Iran.⁴⁴ Al-e Ahmad argues that in the same way that ordinary Iranians are perplexed by the machines, Iranian intellectuals are confused by modern discourses. While the former has not been engaged in the production of modern machines, the latter has not contributed to the formation of modern ideologies and discourses.⁴⁵ He argues that these

⁴² Ibid., p. 408.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

intellectual confusions guarantee the political domination of the West over countries such as Iran. *Westoxication* is the name that Al-e Ahmad gives to these intellectual and cultural misunderstandings. Al-e Ahmad claims that in being mere consumers of the Western discourses, educated Iranians have become intellectually infertile. The result of the intellectual infertility is the limited intellectual production in Iran since its encounter with the West. Because *Westoxication* is understood as the precondition of Western political domination and ideological justification of dictatorship in Iran, any resistance against *Westoxication* and its intellectual and cultural impacts is considered as a resistance against external domination and local autocracy. Thus, any critique of *Westoxication* is taken to be a critique of Western intellectual and political domination. However, Al-e Ahmad is not totally disappointed. He notices the emerging middle class as the source of the coming intellectuals because These new intellectuals will discard the aristocracy that has survived the constitutional revolution. Furthermore, he detects the power of this new class in its future alliance with the clergy, which in his view has dominated the Iranian mentality.⁴⁶ He assumes that contrary to the secular intellectuals who are the product of modern bureaucracy and technocracy, the clerics are self-made intellectuals and are surrounded by the ordinary people. Al-e Ahmad is looking for a common political ground between the intellectuals and the clergy. He believes that such a common ground existed during the constitutional revolution, in 1906 and the oil nationalization movement. As an intellectual critical of *Westoxication* as the source of intellectual infertility, he tries to form a secular anti-*Westoxicated* discourse as a precondition of political changes in Iran. Many analysts link the discourse on *Westoxication* to the Islamist Ideology. "Al-e Ahmad's writings thus constitute the first crucial link in a chain of cumulative ideological statements that collectively constitute what was later to be called "the Islamic Ideology."⁴⁷ Al-e Ahmad's vision of a new intellectual becomes a reality through Shariati's discourse. However, it does not mean that he has contributed to the formation of the Islamist ideology, because he is not looking for a new revolutionary ideology. Al-e Ahmad's political affiliation is toward social democratic tendencies such as the Third Force and the Freedom Movement, which sought to implement the Iranian constitution. His encouragement of the secular intellectuals to form an alliance with the clergy is about the empowerment

⁴⁶ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va kbiyanat-e roushanfekran*, p. 431.

⁴⁷ Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, p. 41.

of the intellectuals to impose their intellectual and moral leadership on the masses. He viewed the clergy as traditional intellectuals in a Gramscian sense.

An important characteristic of a group ascending to power is that it assimilates and conquest the traditional intellectuals ideologically. However, the assimilation and conquest of the traditional intellectuals takes place faster and more effective if the group has generated its organic intellectuals.⁴⁸

Al-e Ahmad was a secular intellectual and remained secular until his death. He had been well-known within intellectual circles in Iran, but his immense popularity and his association with the Islamist ideology is due to Shariati's discourse.

THE THEIST SOCIALISTS

While Al-e Ahmad appreciates Maleki's independent ideological and political stance, he does not mention the *Theist Socialists*. It seems strange that Al-e Ahmad does not pay attention to these Islamist socialists whose history is as long as the Third Force of Maleki. Maybe he dislikes the anticlerical stance of the intellectuals affiliated with this group. The ideas of intellectuals and political thinkers such as Nakhshab, who have been members of this group, have had a significant impact on the emerging generation of the Islamists, such as Shariati. In the 1940s, socialist ideas made an enormous effect on a group of young political activists with religious backgrounds. They discovered that the Tudeh Party prophecy was in fact part of the Qoranic teaching. Equipped with Marxist terminology, the Theist Socialists (*Sosialistha-ye Khodaparast*) rediscovered that the Qoran represents a humanist socialism.⁴⁹ The Theist Socialists can be considered as the father of the Islamist left in Iran. In 1944, *The World Wide Movement of Theist Socialists*, led by Mohammad Nakhshab, was founded, and a year later, the name of the organization was shortened to *The Movement of Theist Socialists*.⁵⁰ The Theist Socialists conceived themselves as a socialist

⁴⁸ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va kbiyanat-e roushanfekran*, p. 107; "The Intellectuals," in Gramsci's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 3–23.

⁴⁹ Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), p. 25.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

political organization working for international solidarity and emancipation of humankind. Like later Iranian Islamists, they believed that socialism was the essence of Islam and that it was much easier to disseminate socialist visions among the masses through Islamic concepts. However, they saw themselves in competition with Marxism, even though their understanding of Marxism was limited to the ideas disseminated by the Tudeh Party. The Theist Socialists saw a contradiction in the ethics represented by the Tudeh Party. They asked if people's actions were the direct result of their material conditions and their interests, why disinterested people, namely the intellectuals, fought for the happiness of the other people. For the Theist Socialists, there was a contradiction between socialism as a higher ideal and materialist philosophy's description of man's nature. They believed that socialism as a struggle of disinterested and selfless individuals whose ethical responsibility and political principles had nothing to do with their social and economic background. They concluded that dialectical and historical materialism was unable to provide a rational explanation of why some social and political forces fought for socialism. For the Theist Socialists, Islam provided an adequate answer to the question of why people struggled for socialism since it could also provide the spiritual strength to defend freedom of the individual in a socialist society. The Theist Socialists' primary goal was not to defend Islam. It was not a reaction against nonbelievers or non-Islamic ideas or culture. Nakhshab, the leading ideologue of the Theist Socialists, argues that *Touhid* as the essence of Islam is about freedom and justice. Thus, Islam is identical to socialism.⁵¹ For Nakhshab, the success of socialism is, in fact, the triumph of Islam.⁵² Nakhshab argues that the Theist Socialists and socialists of other countries are fighting for the realization of collective ownership of the means of production. He claims that socialism means political and economic democracy.⁵³ He is critical of both Western democracies and Soviet Union socialism, because the former does not care about economic justice, and the latter undermines individual freedom and democracy. For Nakhshab, humankind will realize democracy and socialism shortly.⁵⁴ The ideas of Muslim intellectuals such as Nakhshab made a huge impact on the

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 303–304.

⁵² Hasan Yusefi Eshkevari, *Nougerayi-ye dini* (Tehran: Qasideh, 1999), p. 341.

⁵³ Mohammad Nakhshab, *Majmueh-ye asar-e Mohammad Nakhshab* (Tehran: Chapakhsh, 2002), pp. 305–306.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 341.

emerging generation of the Islamists of the 1960s and 1970s, and especially Ali Shariati.⁵⁵ For the Theist Socialists, Islam is a *mediated worldview* (*Maktab-e Vaseteh*). Its philosophy stands between idealism and materialism, and its politics stands between communist and capitalist systems. However, the Theist Socialists did not believe in a moderated socialism as some analysts claim.⁵⁶ They believe that their socialism is a democratic socialism. Thus, it is superior to Soviet socialism. The Theist Socialists criticize the clergy for its political quietism and for preventing the revolutionary and progressive aspect of *Shia* to flourish.⁵⁷ Thus, long before Shariati and the Mojahedin, the Theist Socialists criticized the apolitical clergy and promoted Islam as a political ideology to combat poverty, dictatorship, injustice, and colonialism.⁵⁸ In the early 1950s, the Theist Socialists dissolved into new political organizations and Nakhshab left Iran in the early 1960s. However, his intellectual legacy was developed by the Islamists such as Ali Shariati. The interest in socialist ideas and Marxism continues with Taleqani's book *Islam and Ownership*, written in 1953. The Mojahedin and Shariati intensified this interest in the 1960s. In April 1961, some pro-Mosaddeq Islamist liberals and socialists established the Freedom Movement to fight for full implementation of the Iranian Constitution. Bazargan, the leader of the Freedom Movement, explains the main objectives of the organization. "We say that the Shah has no right to make law, to install [or] dismiss a government. He cannot interfere in things minor or major, impose his will and exercise unlimited power, yet be considered as unaccountable. This is reactionary despotism and dictatorship."⁵⁹ According to Bazargan, one of the main reasons for the failure of constitutional governance is the abandonment of public affairs by religion and religious leaders. Bazargan argued that when pious religious people "left the conduct of social affairs to those not committed to Islamic values. One result of this divorce was the emergence of a class of religious men totally oblivious to practical concerns."⁶⁰ What Bazargan sees in the religiously oriented people is their piety, integrity, and dedication to justice. Similar to Al-e Ahmad, Bazargan encourages the clergy to take part in

⁵⁵ Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, p. 34.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 33–34.

⁵⁸ Eshkevari, *Nougerayi-ye dini*, pp. 302–303.

⁵⁹ Nehzat-e Azadi, http://www.nehzateazadi.org/bayanieh/40_44_j1/pdf/40_04.pdf

⁶⁰ H. E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran Under the Shah and Khomeini* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 53.

the political struggle against the Shah, but he does not specify what role the clergy should play in the political struggle. What distinguishes Bazargan from many Islamist-oriented political activists is his defense of political freedom. Bazargan was a nationalist who used to say after the 1979 Revolution: "Ayatollah Khomeini wants Iran for the sake of Islam, but I want Islam for the sake of Iran." Of course, he rejects tribal nationalism and advocates an inclusive nationalism. He claims that the chief characteristic of the Iranian nation is its inclusion of different races and ethnic groups such as Aryans, Assyrians, Arabs, Mongols, and Tatars. Because of this adaptability, he claims, Iranians never resisted their invaders actively, but rather assimilated them over time and thus survived as a nation.⁶¹ While Bazargan fought for the implementation of the Iranian constitution to limit the power of the Shah by elected governments, his colleague Ayatollah Taleqani is more revolutionary and more socialist oriented. Taleqani claims that ownership is the source of inequality, disharmony, and class-war within human societies.⁶² He describes primitive societies as harmonious and peaceful because personal property sufficed for immediate human needs. As soon as the accumulation of property exceeds people's immediate needs, it causes greediness, rivalry, and enmity.⁶³ To Taleqani, there is a relationship between ownership and moral decay in human societies, because some people own more than they need, and others do not have access to the sources to satisfy their basic needs. Taleqani gives a survey of political theories from Plato to Thomas Campanella and Thomas More, to the economic theories of Adam Smith and Ricardo. More than 60 pages of Taleqani's book deal with the ideas of Marx. However, what Taleqani knows about Marx's ideas is a result of his reading of the Stalinist version of Marxism propagated by the Tudeh Party. He writes, that

To cut a long story short, by Dialectical-Materialism and Historical-Materialism Marx means that nature and the entire range of natural phenomena are in constant development. Every natural phenomenon should be understood with regard to the changes and developments taking place in its past as well as through its current contradiction. Economic and social conditions are the driving forces of human history that will finally result in a communist society. Therefore, in the same way, that nature determines

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Mahmoud Taleqani, *Eslam va malekiyat dar moqayeseh ba nezam'ba-ye eqtesadi-ye gharb* (n.d.), p. 9.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 10.

man's will and ideas, the economic conditions determine his actions. It is the economic conditions, which produce ideas and theories and determine their development.⁶⁴

These themes are not part of Marx's discourse since he never discusses Dialectical-Materialism, and he does not discuss the dialectics of nature: this is a product of the Tudeh Party's ideology. However, Taleqani's interpretation of Marxism is not a misrepresentation of Iranian Marxism. It is, in fact, an excellent presentation of the Iranian Marxism of his time and beyond. According to the Tudeh Party, dialectics of nature and history and historical determinism are principal components of Marxism. Therefore, when Taleqani criticizes Marxism, he criticizes what the Tudeh Party has been presenting as Marxism in Iran. It is in this type of Marxism that Taleqani sees the devaluing of human determination in history by historical determinism and historical materialism. Taleqani admits that oppressors use religion to justify their social and political position, but this does not mean that religion in its essence takes side with the exploiters and the oppressors. Taleqani claims that property-owners and oppressors such as the Pharaohs, Roman Emperors, and the Quraish aristocracy fought against Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, whereas the oppressed people defended these religions and their prophets against the oppressors.⁶⁵ To Taleqani, the historical materialism cannot explain why prophets came from wealthy families but worked to liberate the exploited and the oppressed from exploitation and the oppressors. He claims that Marx cannot explain why he and his colleagues who came from wealthy families tried to prepare the working class and the dispossessed for socialist revolutions. Taleqani praises the communist movement for its struggle for economic justice but criticizes Marxism for its justification of dictatorship in the Soviet Union. Taleqani argues that the Russian Revolution did not live up to its promises. It produced a new class-divided society in which the working class cannot exert any influence in decision making and is exploited by a new ruling class of bureaucrats and military personnel. For Taleqani, Islamic economy is:

Neither unlimited private property, which results in capitalism nor collective property that results in total rejection of individual freedom nor [a] mixed

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

economy whose borders are vague and confusing. Islamic Economy is based on the organization of collective and private wealth to satisfy people's different needs. It is a system of total justice. In this economy, private property is preserved because it empowers individual freedom, and collective property is promoted because it serves the shared interests all members of the society.⁶⁶

Taleqani argues that Islam does not reject private ownership, as Soviet socialism does. Nor does it allow private property to dominate the whole economy, as capitalism does. He claims that the means of production and private property should satisfy basic human needs. Taleqani's *Islam and Ownership* is a critique of the Marxism of the Tudeh Party and an endorsement of the ideological position of the Theist Socialists. Taleqani's *Islam and Ownership* becomes the link between the Theist Socialists and the Mojahedin. The presence of socialist ideas in the Freedom Movement, founded by Bazargan and Taleqani, attracted young people with socialist ideals and religious persuasions. It is not by accident that the chief founders of the Mojahedin come from the Freedom Movement. The Freedom Movement participated actively in the 1963 uprising, instigated by Khomeini. The leading and younger members of the movement were imprisoned after the event. A few years later, disillusioned with peaceful political activities, younger members of the organization founded the *Mojahedin-e Khalq*. The young members of the Freedom Movement were students at the University of Tehran. They formulated an ideological synthesis of Marxism and Islam. They argued that Islam represents truth through revelation, whereas Marxism represents truth through the scientific study of history, society, and economics. They claimed: "Islam is compatible with the theories of social evolution, historical determinism, and the class struggle."⁶⁷ "Although we worship God, we accept Marxism as the science of revolution. Revolutionary Marxists and we have the same ideal, the creation of a classless society, or as we call it, a *Touhidi Classless Society*."⁶⁸ Historical materialism constitutes the Mojahedin's philosophy of history. For the Mojahedin "to separate the class struggle from Islam is to betray Islam," since "the prophet had been sent to liberate humankind from all forms of oppression: from class exploitation, political repression,

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 225.

⁶⁷ Sadeq Zibakalam, *Moqadameh'i bar enqelab-e eslami* (Tehran: Ruzaneh, 1996), p. 242.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

and false consciousness.”⁶⁹ For the Mojahedin, the teachings of the traditional clergy represented false consciousness, because their teachings justified the status quo. The Mojahedin argued that Lenin’s creative reading of Marx resulted in the formation of a revolutionary political party and the October Revolution. Thus, an innovative interpretation of the Qoran will result in a revolutionary organization and sociopolitical revolution in Iran. The Mojahedin made tireless efforts to get Ayatollah Khomeini’s approval to no avail. After several meetings with the Mojahedin’s representatives, Khomeini came to the conclusion that the Mojahedin’s ideological stance was un-Islamic and its armed struggle premature and unproductive. As a result, he refused to endorse the organization. According to one of Khomeini’s associates:

I supported this organization. I tried to talk to the Imam [Khomeini], to convince him to give the slightest sign of approval to the organization without success ... I had a close relation with the organization. In four or five years, I tried to get one word that could indicate that the Imam supports the organization, but I could not make it, nobody could make it. Ayatollah Taleqani, Zanjani, Motahari, and Montazeri asked the Imam to support the organization, but they did not succeed either.⁷⁰

Although Shariati admired the Mojahedin’s courage, he did not approve of their ideological position, including their theory of revolutionary leadership. It is a mistake to understand the intellectual differences between Shariati and the Mojahedin as a minor point.⁷¹ In the next chapter, I challenge the claim that Shariati was influenced by the Third-Worldist ideology while the Mojahedin rejected the Third Way and Third-Worldism. According to an analyst, the Mojahedin rejected a “third road,” but this is not the same as the Third-Worldism.⁷² They did not criticize Nasser’s Egypt, Bourguiba’s Tunisia, and Numeiri’s Sudan for their Third-Worldist stance but for their dependency on Soviet Union’s prescriptions for economic independence from the global capitalism. In fact, the Mojahedin’s criticism is not directed at Ali Shariati’s ideas. They targeted all those leftist political forces that supported the anti-imperialist stance of the

⁶⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mujahedin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989), p. 93.

⁷⁰ Interview with Seyyed Mahmud Doayi, *Ettelaat*, 04.04.1359 (25.06.1979)

⁷¹ Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 103.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Islamist left loyal to Khomeini. The Tudeh party, the Fadaiyan Majority, and the Movement of the Militant Muslims led by Habibollah Peyman were among the organizations that were supportive to the Islamist left. The Mojahedin saw the liberal forces such as the Freedom Movement and Bani-Sadr as their potential allies. They considered the Islamist left loyal to Khomeini as a reactionary force. Thus, the difference between Shariati and the Mojahedin is more than a debate on approval or rejection of Third-Worldism.

Islamist Totalism

Almost every academic study of the 1979 Revolution demonstrates Shariati's decisive role in the configuration of the Islamist ideology as "the single most important mobilising force" in the revolution.¹ This ideology branded Khomeini as the undisputed leader of the revolution. Khomeini instigated a mass uprising against the Shah in 1963, which was brutally suppressed, and as a result, he was exiled to Turkey and then Iraq. Khomeini experienced a political exile because he lacked a powerful ideological backing.

Khomeini's 1963 uprising was no ideological match for the combined attraction of [the] nationalism of the National Front or [the] socialism of the Tude-Party and the Fada'ian-e Khalq Organization. Khomeini had to be defeated in 1963, as it were, for Shariati to emerge in [the] late 1960's (*sic*) and early 1970's (*sic*) in order to prepare the ideological foregrounding of Khomeini's second coming.²

Shariati's ideology is, according to the author of this comment, an expression of "Iranian psyche," an "injured Self," which constructed the West as an imaginary and hostile *Other*.³ Thus, despite its political strength,

¹Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 41.

²Hamid Dabashi, *The End of Islamic Ideology*, http://www.drSOROUSH.com/English/On_DrSOROUSH/E-CMO-20000600-The_End_of_Islamic_Ideology-Hamid_Dabashi.html

³Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, p. 5.

Shariati's Islamist ideology fails to introduce an original and systematic political theory.⁴ Shariati Islamist ideology is defined as nativist discourse devoid of any epistemological, ethical, or esthetic potential. As a result, the academic discourse does not see the epistemological, ethical, and esthetic contributions of Shariati's discourse to post-Islamism in Iran. Some analysts argue that we can find the intellectual underpinnings of the post-Islamist turn in Iran in Shariati's discourse on democracy, which consisted of freedom, equality, and spirituality (*Erfan*). They divide Shariati's intellectual life into the earlier and the later periods and his ideas into intrinsic and contingent ideas.⁵ They argue that Shariati's core ideas include the trinity of freedom, equality, and spirituality. "For Shariati, the trinity of freedom, equality, and spirituality is not a mechanical marriage of three distinct concepts, it is a dialectical approach toward self- and social emancipation; it puts together three inseparable dimensions of individual and society."⁶ However, periodization of Shariati's intellectual activity does not discard the significance of his Islamist ideology as a total project, a universal theory of intellectual, esthetic and ethical (spiritual), political and social emancipation. To realize his emancipatory ideals, Shariati had to equip the Islamist ideology with a total view of man, history, and society, "a *total* (*Tam va tamam*) ideology."⁷ Shariati believed that his Islamist ideology had the potential to include the entire humanity as a united community, and an *Ommat* representing a more inclusive universality than Marxism.

The boundaries of *ummah* are not a geographical demarcation; they are not the fixed barriers of a place; *ummah* is a group in "the way," a way that passes "through" humanity and from the heart of the people, because the boundaries of Islam are expanded to wherever that man is, that people are.⁸

Shariati cannot be universalist and nativist at the same time. With the dominance of the post-Islamist discourse since the late 1990s, new readings of Shariati claim that Shariati "rejects the concept of an Islamic state and

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁵ Mojtaba Mahdavi, *One Bed and Two Dreams: Contentious Public Religion of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati*, *Studies in Religion*, Vol. 43 (1), pp. 38–39.

⁶ Mahdavi, *One Bed and Two Dreams: Contentious Public Religion of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati*, *Studies in Religion*, Vol. 43 (1), p. 41.

⁷ Ali Shariati, *Ma va eqbal*, *Collected works* (Vol. 5) (Tehran: Entesharat-e Elham, 2011), p. 148.

⁸ Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, p. 119.

advocates a secular, or *Urfi*, democracy.”⁹ Almost every piece of Shariati discourse approves this statement. However, Shariati argued in some of his works that the transitional revolutionary state must politically educate the ordinary people toward “true democracy.” The fact that Shariati did not theorize an Islamic state should not overshadow a more significant fact that the majority of his disciples defended the concept of the Islamic Republic led by a Vali-ye Faqih. Shariati’s *transitory revolutionary state* was a synthesis of the Leninist conception of revolutionary leadership, *Shia* tradition, and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s philosophy of transcendentalism, especially his *Representative Men* (1850).¹⁰ Individual ideas of Shariati should not be discussed in isolation but within his Islamist ideology. For instance, the multiple meanings of the concept of *Touhid* have ontological and epistemological functions in his Islamist ideology.¹¹ Shariati competes with Marxism, yet he remains entirely dependent on Marxism because he borrows elements of French Humanist Marxism to criticize Iranian Marxism disseminated by the Tudeh Party. Ehsan Shariati argues that Shariati was interested in a Marxism that was very different from the Iranian Marxists and the Mojahedin. Iranian Marxism was a replica of the Soviet Marxism-Leninism, whereas Shariati’s Marxism was a result of his reading of European thinkers such as Lefebvre, Lucas, and Gramsci.¹² In my view, Shariati’s reliance on Humanist Marxism made his Islamist ideology thought-provoking, intellectually and politically, to hundreds of thousands of Iranian revolutionary youth in the late 1970s. A great number of the same generation became the most ardent advocates of post-Islamism in the 1990s. Even his interests in the ideas of radical Catholics who supported left-wing causes and national liberation struggles in the third world can be explained through his understanding of Humanist Marxism.

Despite the influence of Massignon and *Esprit* Shariati later scrupulously avoided any mention of Radical Catholicism. To have done so would have weakened his claim that Shiism was the only world religion that espoused social justice, economic reality and political revolution.¹³

⁹ Mahdavi, *One Bed and Two Dreams: Studies in Religion*, Vol. 43 (1), p. 43.

¹⁰ Even a detailed work of a biography such as Ali Rahnema’s *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari’ati* (2000), does not discuss this obvious fact.

¹¹ Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, p. 130

¹² Ehsan Shariati, *Bishtar Salman bud ta Abuzar*, (1), <http://talar.shandel.info/Thread->

¹³ Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 108.

In my view, the claim that Shariati's synthesis of Islam and socialism is a result of the influence of Massignon and *Esprit* simplifies Shariati's intellectual formation. Shariati was a socialist before moving to Paris. He had been a supporter of the Theist Socialists. He translated and wrote a long introduction to Abdol Hamid Jawdat Asahar's *Abuzar the Theist Socialist* in 1956. Scholars and thinkers such as Georges Gurvitch, Roger Garaudy, Georg Lukacs, Jacques Berque, and Henri Lefebvre did not teach Shariati anything about socialism, as a commentator claims.¹⁴ What he learned from these thinkers was the intellectual depth of Humanist Marxism compared with the official Marxism of Communist parties. In fact, the radical Catholics were inspired by the Humanist Marxism's conceptualization of alienation taken from the young Marx. "It was likewise this humanist aspect of Marxism which rendered it attractive to Christian Socialist groups around Mounier and *Esprit*."¹⁵ The concept of alienation explains how, because of the interaction between humans and nature through labor, humans are alienated from their nature. Thus, Humanist Marxism based on Marx's Early Writings inspired Shariati to find the revolutionary potentials of Islam. Humanist Marxism provided the seeds of the post-Islamist intellectual debates in the 1990s because the totalist Islamist ideology created a base for the formation of an Islamist intellectual community in which the post-Islamist perspectivist discourse emerged.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS

In his passionate lectures, Shariati combines his personal experience with the subjects he intended to discuss. He reminds his audience of his roots, coming from a family subsisting on a meager income but well educated, whose passion for knowledge is tied with indifference toward material wealth. He claims that he has been trying to unite his passion for philosophy, esthetics, and literature and his ethical choices to overcome ignorance and poverty. Taking the first route would have provided him with the position of a respected conformist intellectual and scientist. "I felt that I had a commitment to take the part of the people, my people ... who despite their glorious remote past had become known to the outside world as

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 107–108.

¹⁵George Lichtheim, *Marxism in Modern France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 105.

a greedy, illiterate, backward and uncivilized people.”¹⁶ Here, Shariati makes the Sartrean distinction between the intellectual and the technician of practical knowledge.

Ali Shariati Mazinani was born in Kahak, a village in the Khorasan province, in 1933. Khorasan produced the mainstream of anti-Shah militants of the late 1960s and 1970s. Two of the main founders of the *Fadaiyan-e Khabalq*, many founders of the Mojahedin, and Iran’s present supreme leader come from that province. He entered a Teacher Training College for primary schools in 1949. In his college days, he participated in the oil nationalization movement. After finishing college, he became a school teacher in the suburb of Mashhad. He entered the University of Mashhad in 1955 and received a state scholarship to France to continue his studies in 1959. He went to Paris and took a doctorate in *hagiology* in 1963. He was arrested when he returned to Iran in June 1964 and spent six weeks in prison. He had a problem getting a university post because of his degree in Persian literature from France. For a teaching position at an Iranian university, a PhD degree in Persian literature from a foreign university was not acceptable. However, according to Jalal Matini, the dean of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Mashhad at the time, the title of his degree was mistakenly translated into History by the Department of Higher Education. In other words, Shariati was very lucky to get a position as a university lecturer, a position his wife could not gain although she had the same degree.¹⁷ At the time of Shariati’s appointment as associate professor of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Mashhad in 1965, Marxism was the dominant intellectual force at the university. Marxist students who considered Shariati as religious and anti-Marxist were amazed to see him watching a drama based on the works of Berthold Brecht. “I was completely surprised because religious people were not in the habit of going to see movies or theater at that time. Very soon, I was with the group acting in a drama written by him. The name of the play was *Abuzar*.”¹⁸ Shariati’s popularity grew beyond his university and was invited to give lectures at different universities throughout Iran. In 1971, he was forced to leave his teaching position at the University of Mashhad, to become a researcher in the Department of Higher Education in Tehran. In Tehran, he gave a series of lectures at Hosseiniyeh Ershad which resulted in his 2 years of incarceration from

¹⁶ Ali Shariati, *Bazgasht* (Tehran: Qalam, 2000), p. 208.

¹⁷ Pouran Shariat-Razavi, *Tarbi az yek zendegi* (Tehran: Chapakhsh, 1995), p. 94.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

1973 to 1075. He moved to London in May 1977. Less than a month after his arrival in London, he died at the age of 44, caused by a heart attack. He became, for millions of Iranians, the teacher of the 1979 Revolution. Shariati's relationship with Islam did not develop within a traditional religious environment. His father was the founder of the *Centre for Spreading Islamic Truths* (*Kanun-e Nashr-e Haqayeq-e Eslami*). The center aimed to formulate a universal social and political theory based on Islamic teaching and Western knowledge and unite *Shia* and *Sunni* Muslims against "Western intellectual and cultural colonialism."¹⁹ The center, conceived of Islam as a mediated ideology (*Maktab-e Vasete*), between the socialist idea of collective prosperity and the liberal ideal of individual freedom. The *Theist Socialists* and the *Centre* played a significant role in the formation of Shariati's intellectual world, which included his skeptical view of the clerical establishment. He invested his hope in the formation of a new intellectual bloc. His stay in France and familiarity with the French left of the 1950s and early 1960s convinced him that intellectual intervention was the most effective form of protest against the brutal and unjust world. Referring to Albert Camus, he claimed that the *raison d'être* of an intellectual is his or her protest.²⁰ Shariati's idea of intellectual intervention entailed a critique of both the secular intellectuals and the religious scholars.²¹

Shariati entered Iran at a time when Ayatollah Khomeini was in exile and the secular nationalists and the Marxist discourses dominated the Iranian intellectual scene.²² Similar to Al-e Ahmad, Shariati criticized the perverted nationalism of the secular intellectual and their obsession with Iran's pre-Islamic past or Western ideologies to overcome all the social, political, and cultural shortcomings of the nation. Similar to Al-e Ahmad, Shariati aimed to impose the leadership of the intellectuals on the masses as a means of political changes. However, unlike Al-e Ahmad, Shariati did not promote a political alliance between the secular intellectuals representing democratic visions within the existing political and social order and the clergy as the representative of the masses. Shariati did not yearn for democratic changes within the existing political order. He propagated a revolutionary struggle based on the formation of a new intellectual community

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁰ Ali Shariati, *Eslam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)] (Tehran: Qalam, 2000), p. 180.

²¹ Ibid., p. 172.

²² Dabashi, The End of Islamic Ideology, http://www.drSORoush.com/English/On_DrSoroush/E-CMO-20000600-The_End_of_Islamic_Ideology-Hamid_Dabashi.html

inspired by an Islamist revolutionary ideology.²³ Shariati thought of a radical change of the intellectual and religious discourse, a discursive transformation of the existing ideas and beliefs of the intellectuals as well as the masses. He searched for a Gramscian *modern Prince* to bridge “the gap between the *alta cultura* of the intellectuals and the *cultura popolare* of the masses.” He believed that the result would be “a new conception of the world and a new way of life.”²⁴ Instead of social positions, Shariati was preoccupied with the worldviews and ideological persuasions of the members of different social strata. Unlike Marxism, Shariati understood the concept of class as a theoretical construction, which corresponds to a common perception of a group of people of themselves as a unified community. To Shariati, the concept of class explains the correspondence between the political orientation of a social group to their place in the economic situation. He was unconvinced by the relevance of the concept of class in an analysis of the Iranian situation. He argued that the Iranian working class did not have class-consciousness because it was unable to theoretically construct its position in the society. To Shariati, it is religion, which constructs the two economically opposing social groups, the exploiter, and the exploited as a united social group. Thus, Islam as an ideology, when distinguished from the institutionalized Islam, can generate class-consciousness among the working class.²⁵ However, the Islamist ideology goes beyond the political potentials of a particular social class. It aspires to unite members of different social groups as an *ommat*.²⁶

POLITICS OF THE ISLAMIST DISCOURSE: NEITHER SECULAR NOR RELIGIOUS

Shariati, argues that in addition to the will of God, the historical movement is conditioned by class struggle and man’s innate desire for perfection. He sees the Biblical history of the conflict between Cain and Abel as the beginning of the class struggle. Abel represents the struggles of the oppressed of the world (*Mostazafin*), against Cain representing the

²³ Ali Shariati, *Bazgasht* (Tehran: Qalam, 2000), pp. 208–209.

²⁴ Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony & Power, On the Relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 148.

²⁵ Ali Shariati, *Nevesteh’ba-ye asasi-ye Shariati beh kushesh-e Bijan Abdolkarimi* (Tehran: Naqd-e Farhang, 2014), p. 241.

²⁶ Ali Shariati, *Ma va eqbal*, p. 131.

oppressors (*Mostakberin*). The struggle's final goal is human perfection.²⁷ According to Shariati's philosophy of history, the archaic communism consisted of free and equal individuals. Class struggles begin after the dissolution of the ancient communism and the emergence of class-divided societies. Borrowing the Marxist terminology, Shariati claims that every society consists of infrastructure and superstructure. Though the infrastructure consists of material relations between the exploiting and the exploited classes, the superstructure contains the state, the legal system, dominant ideologies producing false consciousness, and revolutionary ideologies generated by self-consciousness. To Shariati, religious controversies in every society are expressions of ideological struggles between conservative and revolutionary ideologies. The rulers' religion justifies the unjust status quo, whereas the religion of the ruled articulates the struggle for justice.²⁸ Shariati views the message of Islam in general and *Shia*, in particular, to be social justice, equality, and classless society. His concepts of *Nazm-e Toubidi* is synonymous with the Mojahedin-e Khalq's *classless Toubidi society*.²⁹ He asserts that after the death of the Prophet Mohammad, a new ruling class relinquished the real message of Islam and its yearning for liberation and justice and suppressed the people in the name of Islam. Imam Hossein, the third Imam in Shia and as the true successor of the Prophet, insisted on the revolutionary essence of Islam.³⁰ However, the *Shia* clergy, invented the *Safavid* dynasty, extinguished the revolutionary character of Islam to respond to the ideological needs of the *Safavid* political order. As a result, the clergy has become a social class whose relations with the masses and the rulers are motivated by their personal interests.³¹ For Shariati, modern intellectuals are the only social group capable of discovering the revolutionary meaning of Islam against the clergy's ideological justification of the existing order.³² He distinguishes three types of technicians of practical knowledge in Iran. The first type consists of the religious teachers and students in the seminaries who study and teach religion and the Islamic law. Their function is to depoliticize the ordinary religious people. The second type includes people educated in modern sciences, and their function is depoliticization of the students of modern education.

²⁷ Ali Shariati, *Eslam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)], p. 62.

²⁸ Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 111.

²⁹ Ali Shariati, *Ommat va emamat* (n.d.), p. 193.

³⁰ Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 112.

³¹ Ali Shariati, *Man and Islam* (Mashhad: University of Mashhad, 1982), pp. 112–113.

³² Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 113.

The third type of technicians of practical knowledge, who call into question the dominant norms and values and reject the existing social and political order, represent the intellectuals in Iran. He divides the latter group into two distinctive groups: one that has already chosen its own way accepting convenient solutions to the problems confronting Iranian society—and another group who calls these solutions into question. The latter group resembles the Sartrean conception of the intellectual, who in their search for true universalism, exposes false universalism of the existing order.³³ Shariati asserts that Islam as an ideology transforms this group of Iranian intellectuals into *universalist* intellectuals.³⁴ He assumes that the universal intellectuals understand the Hegelian explanation of the original relationship between philosophy, religion, and art and their reintegration in the future. To Shariati, when religion is separated from philosophy and art, it loses its depth and becomes a series of rituals and dogmas. When the art is separated from philosophy and religion, it loses its depth and soul and becomes an instrument of triviality and absurdity. The primary task of the intellectual is, according to Shariati, intellectual reintegration of these three aspects of human life.³⁵ The *totalist* character of Shariati's discourse is expressed in his understanding of the historical separation of philosophy, religion and art and their reunification in the future. The effort to reunite different perceptions of the world into a total picture is the most important presupposition for a *totalist* perception of reality. To this *totalist* view, if different views of the world come together in a single discourse, all social contradictions are resolved, and humanity gets back the harmonious community that it once had. According to Shariati, there is a gap between Iranian intellectuals and the masses, because the modern conceptual framework the Iranian intellectuals employ is utterly unknown to the masses. He argues that the intellectuals can overcome the distance between the intellectuals and the masses if they understand their terminology.

The difference between the intellectuals of the French Revolution and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution lay in their different backgrounds. Whereas the French revolution was the result of a century of new thinking that illustrated new horizons for social and political action, the Iranian constitutional revolution started with some Fatwa and religious commands.³⁶

³³ Jean Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), p. 253.

³⁴ Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)], p. 362.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

³⁶ Ali Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (2),] (Tehran: Qalam, 2000), p. 166.

Although Shariati does not deny the significance of the constitutional revolution, he criticizes its intellectual origins. He asserts that as a historical document, the Iranian constitution is not the result of the social, economic contradictions and intellectual practices of Iranian society, but a copy of the Belgian constitution with few adjustments. Shariati argues that the progressive intellectuals should reveal the fundamental contradictions of the society and formulate them as a theoretical problem to transform the collective consciousness of the masses toward revolutionary changes. Thus, the Iranian intellectuals have to be careful and avoid trampling on the religious sensibilities of the masses.³⁷ For Shariati, an intellectual is the one who respects the religion of the masses to establish a dialog with them and convince them that the existing reality has to be changed radically. He argues that the role of the intellectual does not stop when a revolution takes place. It should be the responsibility of the intellectual to lead the people in the post-revolutionary period.³⁸ Shariati defends an elitist view of governments, although he claims it would be for a transitory period.

THE RETURN TO THE SELF

Shariati criticizes the third world intellectuals and Iranian secular intellectuals as alienated assimilés, and as displaced individuals who have lost their identity. He also challenges the leftist internationalism as false universalism, because it justifies Western ideological domination that serves the economic and political supremacy of the West. This critical stance of Shariati is sometimes coupled with his discourse of the *return to the self* (*Bazgasht beh Khishtan*) as indications of his discourse of authenticity versus the Western other. Shariati's concept of the return to the self is more than a duplication of "Fanon's discourse of 'the return of the oppressed' with a peculiarly Iranian twist."³⁹ In a critical response to the issue of the return to the self, Shariati claims:

Responding to the European denial of the history of black Africa, intellectuals like Fanon and Sezer encouraged the Africans to return to their past. They tried to show that they had a distinctive history, culture and civilization ... The fact is that Europeans did not deny our history. On the contrary,

³⁷ Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 113.

³⁸ Shariati, *Neveshteh'ha-ye asasi-ye Shariati beh kushesh-e Bijan Abdolkarimi*, p. 248.

³⁹ Mehrzad Boroujerdi: *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: the Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 112.

they insisted more than we do on our culture, religion, moral values and history. If you look at the historical texts in the European capitals, you see that they value our history much more than we do... they have not denied our past. In contrast, this same emphasis on our past forces us to look back to the past and turn our back on the future. Accordingly, they have reinvented our past to show Islam belongs to the private sphere. It is otherworldly, ascetic, and spiritualist. Then they tell us that our brain is not a disciplinary-administrative machine, and we naively believe it.⁴⁰

As indicated here, Shariati is not concerned with the past, cultural identity, and the preservation of an autonomous Iranian or Islamic culture. His concern is the future, and his project of the return to the self is against the domination of the present and the future by the past. He rejects the type of spiritual Islam promoted by Western scholars such as Henri Corbin and his Iranian colleagues because it deprives Islam of its potential as a religion of protest and political engagement. He sees almost nothing in the local culture to be proud of unless it serves the cause of revolutionary changes. He argues that since the existing social and political reality is a result of historical processes, the changing of this reality requires an understanding of its historical context. Shariati understands the problem of return to the self within the framework of a reformed Islam or Renaissance of Islam.⁴¹ What does Shariati mean by reformed Islam? The Islam Shariati is referring to is an Islam that is not there, the revolutionary intellectuals would reinvent it. The reinvented Islam would challenge the submissive character of the Western-oriented humanist discourses, which justify the existing relations of domination between the West and the third world. The reinvented Islam would reveal that the current relations of domination between the West and the East have been established by the military, political, and economic forces, and then reinforced through discursive relationships.

In this way, we, the natives, alienated from the self and without culture, enter into a relationship with you who produce everything, a master-slave relationship. As Sartre says, from the point of view of the colonial master, there are only five hundred million humans, and the rest are natives. Thus, if the non-Westerners participate in the noble humanity of the West, their relation would be one of the producers and the consumers and one of the speakers and the audiences.⁴²

⁴⁰ Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)], pp. 195–196.

⁴¹ Shariati, *Bazgasht*, p. 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

Shariati is critical toward the discourse advocated by thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, because of its defensive and reactive nature. He argues that because of their reactive, defensive, and exclusive nature, nationalist movements are condemned to fail. He rejects *the perverted Iranian nationalism* based on the glorified pre-Islamic past as a defensive and reactive discourse. To Shariati, the pre-Islamic Iran is no longer a part of the Iranian self or identity, because the Islamic civilization created an unbridgeable gap between the Islamic and pre-Islamic Iran. He praises *Shia* Islam because it is the only living culture in Iran and the only worldview that is present in the people's consciousness.⁴³

There is no other way; we should rely on our Islamic cultural self. A return to this self, which is the only self familiar to us, the only culture that is already alive, and the only source that Iranian intellectuals can refer to. However, Islam must be released from repetition and superficial traditions, which are the source of decadence and an obstacle toward an emancipated, progressive and critical Islam that is an enlightened and conscious ideology.⁴⁴

Shariati's return to the self is, in fact, a return to both the present and the future because it is the reinvented Islam that is supposed to be the foundation of the Iranian self. In the process of the discovery of the self, Iranian intellectuals become familiar with the Islam that is present in the mind of the masses. Then they try to purify it from prevalent customs, *Safavid* components, and mystical elements. Shariati's project on the reformed Islam or Islamist ideology has common characteristics with Marxists who tried to liberate *real Marxism* from Stalinism, Maoism, Trotskyism, and Khrushchev's revisionism. Shariati's return to the self is a return to the future because it is a result of the reinvented Islam, an Islam of the future. Even if Shariati's attempt to create an emancipated Islam is successful, his Islam is not the Islam of the majority of the Iranian masses, but the Islam of the like-minded visionary Islamist intellectuals. Shariati's Islam would be a new invention, similar to the Iran of the Iranian nationalists he is criticizing. According to Shariati, the Iranian intellectuals misinterpret and misjudge their situation, their function, and their mission. They confuse their functions and missions with those of Western intellectuals.⁴⁵ He distinguishes between the social function and political mission of the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 85–86.

Western and non-Western intellectuals, which is similar to the distinction the Marxists made between the roles of the proletariat of the two societies. Though the functions of the Western and non-Western proletariat are similar, their missions are different. The Western proletariat is aware of its interests and has organized itself to defend those interests, whereas the non-Western proletariat is disorganized and unaware of its interests. As a result, the immediate political demands of the two proletariats are different. For that reason, the Western intellectuals demand expansion of social justice and democracy in their societies, whereas the non-Western intellectuals fight for the democratic rights, which their governments do not recognize.⁴⁶ Shariati describes as *Westoxicated* a section of the Iranian intellectuals who because of their ignorance of their real missions imitate the outlooks of Western intellectuals.⁴⁷ Shariati responds to the questions Al-e Ahmad put forward, but his answers are different from him.⁴⁸

ISLAM AND HUMANIST MARXISM

In the post-Islamist climate of the 2000s, some of Shariati's interpreters rediscovered him as a postmodern thinker because he used the term *the geopolitics of discourse or the geopolitics of knowledge* (*Jogbrafiya-ye harf*).⁴⁹ Others found similarities between his approach to the Marxism of the Frankfurt School.⁵⁰ The latter argued that Shariati conceptualized historical breaks, whereas the former argued that his conception of unity and continuity of human history contradicted the postmodern concept of historical breaks.⁵¹ I doubt that Shariati had ever heard of the Frankfurt School, while the impacts of Humanist Marxism including Sartre's Existentialist-Marxism are obvious in his work, through which he shapes his Islamist ideology to challenge Iranian Marxism.⁵² Equipped with Humanist Marxism, Shariati reminds his audience of the superficial

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 254.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ali Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (3)] (Tehran: Qalam, 2000), p. 25.

⁴⁹ Bijan Abdolkarimi, *Naqdi bar qaraat-e postmodern az Shariati*, Majeleh-ye elmi-pazhouheshi-ye daneshkadeh-ye olum-e ensani daneshgah-e Isfahan, doureh-ye dovvom shomareh-ye chehl-o sheshom, paiyz 85/fall 2006, p. 68.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 71–72

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵² Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (3)], pp. 71–72.

and journalistic knowledge of Marxism in Iran.⁵³ He claims that Iranian Marxists have reduced Marxism to atheism, and in so doing, they disconnected themselves from the Muslim masses. For Shariati, “Success might accrue to whoever was able to clothe Marxism in the tradition language of Islam, and herein lay the genius of Ali Shariati, long regarded as the true ideological forebear of the Islamic Revolution.”⁵⁴ Unlike Iranian Marxists who wanted to be connected with the masses, Shariati focused on university students, professionals, and intellectuals. For him, a successful revolutionary politics depended on the formation of a linguistic and cultural community in which the intellectuals imposed their hegemony on the masses. For Shariati, “true Islam” and “true Marxism” are preoccupied with the concept of alienation as a history of separation of the human beings from their true essence. Marx’s socialist revolution indicates a path toward de-alienation of human beings as a return to their true essence. Shariati argues that the concepts of alienation and de-alienation make more sense within the religious conceptual frameworks than within Marxism. In his exchange with Marxism, he explains Marxist concepts through religion and religious concepts through Marxism. His interpretation of the conception of blasphemy in the Qoran is very different from the clergy. He argues that faith and blasphemy are not about the opinions of faithful or unfaithful individuals, but about their deeds. Thus, he defines blasphemy as actions that are unjust by nature.⁵⁵ Blasphemy is about both Muslims and non-Muslims who are socially and politically indifferent and do not protest against injustice and repression. To Shariati, every religion and ideology should be judged according to its social and political roles, and the extent it contributes to social and political changes. He argues that what discerns true Muslims from *kafers* (infidels) is not their subjective belief in God, the soul, and the afterlife, but their readiness for concrete and objective action for the cause of justice. He claims that if we examine the Qoranic use of the term *kafir* carefully, we realize that the term describes those who refuse to take action for the realization of truth and justice.⁵⁶

Shariati’s Islam is the Islam of justice and freedom, the Islam of responsibility and protest, the Islam of innovation and reason standing against

⁵³Shariati, *Islam’shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (2)], p. 107.

⁵⁴Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 189.

⁵⁵Shariati, *Islam’shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (2)], p. 156.

⁵⁶Ali Shariati, *Jahanbini va ideolozi* (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahami-ye enteshar, 2000), pp. 170–172.

the Islam of imitation, prejudice, and submission.⁵⁷ Though Shariati perceives Marxism as a theoretical rival, he sees institutionalized Islam represented by the clergy as an enemy. However, neither Marxists nor the clergy approves Shariati's reflection on the synthesis of Islam and Marxism. While the clergy call him a disbeliever or eclectic, Marxists accuse him of being an agent of the regime or a demagogue. Shariati criticizes institutionalized Islam for its preoccupation with rituals and its escape from the real problems of this world. He claims that institutionalized Islam ignores the essential Islamic concepts such as community (*Ommat*), leadership (*Emamat*), and the Touhidi system (*Nezam-e Touhidi*). Shariati predicted that the clergy's role in Islam may result in "clerical despotism" (*Estebdad-e Rouhani*). He described clerical despotism as "the worst and the most oppressive form of despotism in human history."⁵⁸ Infuriated by Shariati's critique of the institutionalized religious discourse as the ideological base of the existing political and social order, many religious scholars condemned him as an enemy of Islam. Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, who after his assassination a few months after the revolution has been introduced as the chief ideologue of the Islamic Republic, is among those who opposed Shariati. Motahhari, a former student of Khomeini and a professor of theology at the University of Tehran, considered Shariati as a threat to Islam. Even after Shariati's death, Motahhari signed a joint statement with Bazargan criticizing him for his misconception of the main principles of Islam. Motahhari and Bazargan warned young Muslims of the danger of Shariati's ideas. They claimed:

Since his [Shariati's] education was Western, he had not found enough time to devote himself to the acquisition of the Islamic body of knowledge and he is sometimes ignorant of certain basic truths of the Qoran, the Sunna, Islamic studies and Jurisprudence. Although he was, with great effort gradually adding to his knowledge on these matters, he committed many errors on Islamic problems, even on the questions of principle.⁵⁹

Motahhari even sent a letter to Ayatollah Khomeini, claiming that Shariati had insulted Islam.⁶⁰ It seems that one of the main reasons behind Motahhari's dislike of Shariati is the level of the popularity the latter

⁵⁷ Shariati, *Islams'henasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)], pp. 70–71.

⁵⁸ Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 119.

⁵⁹ Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism*, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Rahnama, *Ali Shariati*, pp. 503–504.

gained in Hosseniyeh Ershad. In my view, Motahhari's contribution to the formation of the Islamist revolutionary ideology is exaggerated. Motahhari aimed to generate good Muslims in the traditional sense rather than making radical intellectuals and revolutionary cadres. He blamed both Shariati and the Mojahedin for their misconception of the term *Mostazaf*, which they understood as *the oppressed masses* and *the exploited*.

According to Quran, Mostaz'afins are not necessarily the driving force behind revolutions as these leftist groups understand it. The general meaning of the substantive Estez'af does not merely refer to the material aspect of human life, but also to its spirituality. In this way, Pharaoh is both *Mostakber* (the oppressor) and *Mostaz'af* (the repressed), which means that Pharaoh fluctuates between two personalities. The one indicates his inner and essential nature or *Fetrat*, which is repressed, and the other points to his acquired or external character, known as Pharaoh's character.⁶¹

Both Motahhari and Shariati conceive *Fetrat* as a human's essence. They disagree, however, on the ultimate meaning of the concept and its implications. Shariati argues that as the result of human alienation, human *Fetrat* is lost, but it would be reintegrated in the de-alienated man of the future. For Motahhari, in contrast, *Fetrat* is a constant and unchanged element of human nature, because it is through *Fetrat* that a human being is related to God. Motahhari argues that there is no need for revolutionary praxis to regain the *Fetrat*, because it has never been lost. In response to Shariati's lectures on *Ommat va Emamat*, which I discuss in the following pages, Motahhari addressed the subject in his lectures on *Emamat va Rabbari* in 1970. According to Motahhari, *Emam* is the perfect or total human being (*Ensan-e Kamel*), that represents the highest degree of human spirituality.⁶² Motahhari specifies that *Emam* as a total man is inevitably a religious leader.⁶³ Nevertheless, the aim of the total human of every age is not necessarily seizure of the power of the state since the question of political power is a minor issue in the theory of *Emamat*.⁶⁴ To Motahhari, the question of leadership in the Islamic context is only relevant when the relation of a religious leader or *Marja-e Taqlid* and his followers is at stake. It is, in fact, such interpretations that Shariati tries to devalue

⁶¹ Morteza Motahhari, *Piramon-e enqelab-e eslami* (Tehran: Sadra, 1979), p. 75.

⁶² Morteza Motahhari, *Emamat va rabbari* (Tehran: Sadra, 2000), pp. 55–56.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

because he views such readings as the normal function of the institutionalized Islam protecting the existing order. There are two types of Islam for Shariati: one Islam represents a revolutionary ideology and the other represents false consciousness. Islam in the first sense is the Islam of *Mojahed* (Militant Muslim), Islam in the second sense is the Islam of *Mojtabed* (the Islam of the clergy). Shariati claims that not only intellectuals, but also the uneducated masses understand the first type of Islam better than the religious jurist (*Faqih*) and the religious scholar (*Alem*). He refers to *Abuzar Ghaffari* as one of the earliest members of the Muslim masses who discovered the first type of Islam at the time of the Prophet Mohammad. Shariati argues that the decay of Islam from a revolutionary ideology to a submissive culture resulted in the formation of a clerical class. Naturally the clergy either is indifferent to the existing social inequality or takes part in justification of the social and political relations that sustain the present relations of inequality.⁶⁵ Shariati's stance toward the clergy contradicted Al-e Ahmad's posture because the latter believed that the clergy's independence from the state would strengthen the struggle for democracy in Iran. Shariati's revolutionary zeal, on the contrary, leads him to argue that the dependence of the clergy on the existing relations of social inequality is an indication of their antirevolutionary character. To Shariati, the clergy has an ideological function in preserving the interests of the dominant classes. It produces the knowledge or false consciousness that justifies the system of social inequality. Shariati argues that the clergy's income derived from tithes (*Khoms*) and the Imam's share (*Sahm-e Emam*) attest at its dependence on the dominant classes and the state. However, Shariati reminds his readers that there was a time the clergy was not an organic part of the dominant classes. In the pre-*Safavid* era, the members of the clergy acted as the real intellectuals.⁶⁶ Shariati's Islamist ideology as an attempt to synthesize Marxism, a post religious discourse, with Islam is a paradoxical project. It aims to create a systematic body of knowledge to surpass Western emancipatory discourses to respond to the social and political problems of contemporary Iran. Shariati was well aware that Marx tried to criticize the class-divided society as the condition that produces religion. However, he reminds his readers that Marx mistook the corrupted institutionalized religion for true religion. Shariati argues that the search for true Islam is similar to the quest for true Marxism because both existing Islam

⁶⁵ Ali Shariati, *Jahatgiri-ye tabaqati-ye islam* (Tehran: Qalam, 1999), pp. 100–105.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 100–105.

and official Marxism suppress true Islam and Marxism.⁶⁷ He maintains that: “Praxis is the fundamental concept upon which the Marxian conceptual framework lies.”⁶⁸ He claims that Iranian Marxists forget this simple principle of Marxism and reduce Marx’s thought into a few dogmas, such as base and superstructure.⁶⁹

Vulgar Marxism has answers to all questions. According to its [vulgar Marxism’s] view, human beings are the result of their social and natural environment. It claims that objective reality, nature, and economic forces shape man’s mind like a mirror. Man is a raw material shaped by objective and external circumstances, and, therefore, subject to causal relations.⁷⁰

ACTIVE AND REACTIVE CONCEPTS

Shariati makes a distinction between active concepts with revolutionary effects and reactive concepts, which justify the established order. As revolution cultures are institutionalized, dynamic concepts tend to become stagnant. Instead of encouraging change and transformation of the existing social and political order, the reactive concepts suppress revolutionary ideas.⁷¹ “The inversion of a revolution starts when the ideology that gives birth to the revolution becomes decadent and is transformed into a culture and civilization.”⁷² Shariati refers to two stages of the *militant* and the *cynical* in every ideology, nation, and revolution. Christianity, for instance, was militant in its origin, but it has been transformed into its cynical stage in the modern age. France was a militant nation during the French Revolution but became cynical by the Algerian war (1954–1962).⁷³ Islam undergoes the same processes from being a revolutionary ideology to becoming a cynical religion. However, Islam has, according to Shariati, the capacity to be reconstituted as a militant and revolutionary ideology. It becomes the mission of the revolutionary intellectuals to restore the revolutionary meaning of Islam. Shariati emphasizes the role of conscious avant-garde agents to bring about the revolutionary situation. He makes

⁶⁷ Shariati, *Islam’shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (2)], p. 183.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 188–189.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁷¹ Shariati, *Islam’shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)], p. 356.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁷³ Shariati, *Islam’shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (2)], p. 63.

distinctions between reality and its perception, and between experience and the conception of that experience. He argues that it is not deprivation that instigates social struggles, but the way the people participating in the struggle conceptualize their experience of the deprivation.⁷⁴ At the time Shariati presented his argument, the Iranian Marxist discourse was fluctuating between two theoretical positions. Though the Tudeh Party denied the existence of the objective conditions of a revolutionary struggle, *the Fadaiyan* and the *Mojahedin* argued that the impoverished people and the Shah's dictatorship constituted the objective condition for the revolutionary struggle. Challenging both positions, Shariati presented a more sophisticated reflection on the nature of objective social reality in Iran, the experience of social agents of this reality and their understanding or conceptualization of that experience. "Our perceptions of the world affect our actions, our ideas, and our social practice. Our worldviews direct our actions."⁷⁵ For Shariati, the intellectuals of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have a privileged position, since they are participating in the formation of a new type of consciousness. They represent a new intellectual who synthesizes Western knowledge and the local culture. The new knowledge reveals the infertility of the imitated Western knowledge detached from the local culture and negates their dominant position in these regions.⁷⁶ Shariati considers the new knowledge as a prerequisite for Iranian intellectuals to make real sense of their experiences within the Iranian context. He finds the link between the Greek-Indian term *Vidia*, and the Persian word *Binesh* or *Binaci* (to see). He claims that; "*Vidia* neither discovers laws nor makes machines, creates good poetry or good painting, but it finds new roads."⁷⁷ *Vidia* is like a primitive state of mind similar to the way bees organize their existence. It is the state of mind of human beings, who become self-conscious and lead others toward emancipation.⁷⁸ Shariati's *Vidia* has similarities with the Marxist class-consciousness described in Georg Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness*, as well as Gramsci's concept of understanding as a bridge between feeling and knowledge. Here Shariati follows the Marxian dictum. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected

⁷⁴ Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (3)], p. 147.

⁷⁵ Ali Shariati, *Jahanbini va ideolozhi*, p. 13.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 142.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 143.

circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”⁷⁹ He concludes that while human creations are the expressions of their freedom, they limit their freedom of action. Shariati defines history as the creation of human praxis, which restricts his actions.⁸⁰ He criticizes Engels for his reduction of Marxism to dialectical materialism and historical determinism.⁸¹ He rejects the official Marxism’s assertion that human beings are a product of unconscious material forces, which act beyond their control and determine their will and consciousness. He compares Marxist determinism with the role of God’s providence in religion.⁸² Shariati repeats another Marxian dictum that, “The sensible human world is not an essence separated from man but a result of his praxis.”⁸³ Thus, the concept of praxis plays a decisive role in Shariati’s version of Marxism containing the human will and agency. He prefers to use historical and dialectical determinism, instead of historical materialism, because the latter concept understates conscious human actions in the formation of historical events.⁸⁴

HUMANIST ISLAMISM

Shariati’s reliance on Humanist Marxism leads him to deal with other concepts, such as being and becoming. He claims that Marxism criticizes the notion of being because being is a concern of philosophy, and Marx criticizes philosophers for their sole preoccupation with interpreting the world of being while the world needs to be changed. Following the distinction between being and becoming, Shariati concludes that *reality* belongs to the realm of being, but *truth* belongs to the realm of becoming. Becoming indicates the historicity of man and his world and their potentials for change.⁸⁵ Shariati’s conception of the human historicity presupposes that humans possess an essence from which they have been alienated, because history is a process of alienation. For Shariati, history is the result of human praxis and labor and his interaction with nature. He argues that

⁷⁹Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm#1.1>)

⁸⁰Shariati, *Bazgasht*, pp. 201–202.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 223–224.

⁸²Shariati, *Islam’shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (2)], p. 224.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 261–262.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 223–224.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 264–265.

humans lose their control over the product of their labor in the process of their alienation.⁸⁶ Shariati argues that the concept of alienation as the central theme of Humanist Marxism presupposes the human essence. Essence in its turn is originally a metaphysical phenomenon and a religious idea. Shariati concludes that Islam cannot be transformed into a revolutionary ideology unless it becomes synthesized with Humanist Marxism. “I remind you of a simple truth: an Islam, which is inferior to human sciences, Marxism, and Existentialism, is condemned to fail.”⁸⁷ However, he intends to go beyond Marxism. What “we are looking for is beyond Existentialism, Socialism, and Mysticism. If we are truthful towards Islam, we should present or discover an Islam, which is superior to Marxism, Existentialism, and Mysticism.”⁸⁸ There is a paradox in Shariati’s project of the Islamist ideology. If Shariati understands Islam as a system in crisis that can only survive with the help of Marxism and Existentialism, then how can Islam maintain its authenticity? It is obvious that Shariati has an image of an ideology, which can compete with the current Islam, Marxism, and Existentialism. However, his claim that the focal point of this ideology should be Islam is an exaggeration of the weight of Islam in his conceptual framework. As soon as Shariati analyzes an Islamic concept, he tends to describe it in Marxist terms, which in his view constitutes the intellectual prerequisite of the understanding of true Islam.

In order to understand the truth of Islam we should understand and reflect on the intellectual, philosophical and ideological positions of our time. The contemporary modern intellectual positions, philosophical schools and ideological persuasions are introductory to an understanding of Islam.⁸⁹

This statement indicates that there is a connection between modern intellectual discourses and the true Islam as Shariati understands it. The question is how these intellectual positions have created the condition of understanding of his concept of true Islam. Shariati hopes that his Islamist ideology will create a universal ideology rather than a local one. In fact, the focus on Shariati’s anti-Westernism understates his acknowledgment of his intellectual indebtedness to Western sources. Of course, he challenges the Iranian intellectual discourses of his time, which are also Western-oriented.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 226.

⁸⁷ Shariati, *Islam’shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (3)], p. 222.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 223.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 239.

However, his critique of these discourses is not due to their Western orientation, but to the *infertile* nature of these discourses. Some issues are more important in Shariati's ideas than those supposedly anti-Western ideas. The meaning of the Islamist ideology, for Shariati, is similar to the science of ideology theorized by the eighteenth-century French ideologues, such as Destutt de Tracy as "the knowledge of all knowledge."⁹⁰ For Shariati, it is much easier to be a Marxist or Existentialist philosopher than a Muslim intellectual, because being a Muslim intellectual requires mastery over these systems of thought. The intellectual position of an intellectual Muslim is, according to Shariati, a post-Marxist and post-Existentialist position.⁹¹ Similar to Humanist Marxism, Humanist Islamism includes a philosophy of history and anthropology to explain the human essence and human historical existence. Islamist ideology is, in fact, another name for Humanist Islamism. For Shariati, "three pillars hold the ideology based on *Touhid* (the Islamist ideology) in place. These three pillars are *man*, *history* and *society*."⁹² He relates the ideology based in *Touhid* to modern human sciences, which have demonstrated through empirical methods that, "there is no human being beyond the historical."⁹³ He rejects both the metaphysical discourse in the religious seminaries as well as the cults of Mysticism and Sufism because they approve the status quo. Contrary to Muslim intellectuals and activists such as Mehdi Bazargan, who sought to find signs of natural sciences in the Qoran, Shariati claims that the Qoran is compatible with modern human sciences.

Without a doubt the Qoran is a literary, intellectual, ideological and humanist book. It deals with the domain of human sciences such as psychology, anthropology, economy, sociology and the philosophy of history. In the same manner, an [Islamic] ideologue rather needs to reflect on modern sociology, philosophy of history than chemistry and physics.⁹⁴

Shariati tries to demonstrate the philosophical, ethical, and political validity of Islam to challenge the existing social and political order in the contemporary world. He argues that the Qoran emphasizes the continuity of the history of humankind, evident in the Prophet Mohammed's claim

⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 241.

⁹¹ Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (3)], p. 241.

⁹² Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (2)], p. 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

that Islam completes previous religions. Regarding the Islamist ideology, Shariati intends to do the same: as the continuation of other revolutionary ideologies. For Shariati, the story of Adam is the story of the first total human, and the history of *Abel* and *Cain* represents the origin of alienation and class struggle. Shariati claims that in the early communism, in the *Abelian system* as he calls it, human labor is in harmony with nature, and basic human needs are satisfied generously by nature. However, in the *Cainian system*, a minority enslaves the rest of humanity for its self-interest.⁹⁵ Human society is divided between the exploiting *Cainian class* and the exploited *Abelian class*. Shariati describes the capitalist society as the final stage of the divided human society. While the working class and the oppressed represent the Abelian system of common property, freedom, justice, and harmony of man with himself and nature, capitalism causing alienation, dictatorship, and war represent the *Cainian system*. Thus, the Islamist philosophy of history aims to reveal the oppressive character of the *Cainian system* and envisions human emancipation toward the Abelian system of total humans in the future. Shariati adopts the whole procedure of the Humanist Marxist's theoretical approach to interpreting Islam. For every Marxist concept, he finds a counterpart in Islam. Shariati argues that with the emergence of private property, the original total human, who had been in full harmony with his or her inner self, disappeared. The total man was transformed into an alienated man. Shariati predicts that with the abolition of private property in the total society of the future, the total man reemerges. The total society and total man represent, according to Shariati, the final reunion of the subject and object, and the "unity of man and God." For Shariati, the "perfected man" (*Ensan-e Kamel*) of Islamic mysticism and the total man of Humanist Marxism are identical. He describes the total man as "a Godlike man in whom his divine essence prevails over his evil half, a man emancipated from his confusion and contradictions between two infinities."⁹⁶ To Shariati, polytheism justifies the existing social and political order, which causes fragmentation, division, and antagonism, whereas the unity of God (*Touhid*) searches for unity and harmony of human beings. "*Touhid* interprets and explains the unity of nature with the supernatural, man with nature, man with other men, and man with God and the world. *Touhid* illustrates these relationships

⁹⁵Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)], p. 54.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 73.

within a total, harmonious, dynamic and self-conscious system.”⁹⁷ *Touhid* as a philosophy of history reveals the direction of historical development from the past to the present, and it can predict the road to the final goal. It is both the discoverer of past and the predictor of future history.⁹⁸ The concept of *Touhid* is more than a description of radical monotheism; it defines a series of relations in the world, between the natural and the social world. It gives meaning to the relationship of human with human, between human and nature, and between human and God. In so doing, it is the sum of the total relations in the world, an expression of the struggle of humans toward higher stages of material and spiritual life. According to Shariati, there is a dualism in the nature of humans, but he maintains that human dualism does not refer to the dualism between God and his adversary. To Shariati, evil is not God’s adversary because it is an event in the human world, within humans and between humans. Evil is a historical event.⁹⁹ Shariati’s conceptualization of evil convinces him that the mystical idea of human annihilation in God contradicts the notion of human movement toward the future ad infinitum.¹⁰⁰

Religion is the name of the path from dirt to God. Religion is not the goal but an instrument and a path. All the misery of humankind lies in the misunderstanding of the revision of religion from being an instrument and a path, into the goal. In so doing religion has lost its real function and mission.¹⁰¹

Shariati’s idea of religion as a path or instrument and his conception of *Touhid* as self-consciousness requires ethics. He understands ethics as the principle of judgment and conscious actions. He views the cognizant actions of an intellectual against the existing norms and cultural practices as the expression of his or her ethics. Shariati argues that in our language, and our society, ethics means submission of man to values and social practices accepted by the majority. Thus, the one who revolts against these norms and cultural practices, is conceived as an unethi-

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46. In a footnote Shariati reminds us that the terms he uses here have nothing to do with metaphysical discourses, especially with what is known as *Hekmat* and theoretical mysticism.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

cal individual.¹⁰² Contrary to this notion of ethics, Shariati encourages rebellion against cultural norms and dominant social practices as an ethical imperative. He sets forth another ethics, the ethics of what humans ought to be.¹⁰³ This ethics encourages every human being to transcend their private interests.¹⁰⁴ Shariati does not recognize moral values and norms judging what is right and what is wrong in society as absolute. He considers these values and norms as products of human interactions. By dissociating good and evil from their perceived metaphysical origins, Shariati argues for the historicity of human values. They are the products of historical human society, and they will vanish when the condition of their existence, which is a human society, disappears. While Shariati was promoting his Islamist ideology, the Iranian intellectuals held the notion that religion, in general, and Islam, in particular, generated individualism, fatalism, social irresponsibility and political indifference. Within such a climate, Shariati was determined to rediscover the revolutionary essence of Islam and its liberating ideology.¹⁰⁵ However, *Shia* Islam, as the reality of Iranian society are expressed in the religious, cultural, and social practices, which are partly legacies of *Safavid Shia*. Consequently, an ideological *Shia* would be a negation of the existing *Shia*, both in theory and practice. According to Shariati's argument, Iranian intellectuals should know *Shia* because it is the reality of Iranian society and at the center of its ontology. However, this ontological approach would be completed with an ideological approach, which is the discovery of the true *Shia* that Shariati calls *Alavi Shia*. Shariati is convinced that in the process of becoming familiar with the existing *Shia*, and through their critical evaluation of this existing *Shia*, intellectuals will rediscover the true Islam as a revolutionary ideology. As a result, Shariati argues that understanding Iranian culture and its sociopolitical condition is impossible without understanding Islam as its essence.¹⁰⁶

In Shariati's view, every religion starts as a revolutionary ideology, but it is transformed into an institution to justify the status quo. Its former active intellectuals, now in the garb of a new class of clergy, safeguard the now conservative ideology and the relations of inequality. Shariati

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁰⁵ Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (2)], p. 175.

¹⁰⁶ Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Mashhad University Lectures] (Tehran: Chapakhsh, 2002), p. 13.

points to the history of Marxism as the most recent transformation and institutionalization of a progressive revolutionary ideology into a conservative ideology to verify his claim. Nevertheless, there are always forces of resistance against the institutionalization of a revolutionary ideology, which rediscover the original revolutionary spirit of the institutionalized ideology. The revolutionary essence of Islam, according to Shariati, is apparent in its notion of *equality*, since everyone is created equal, from the same parents, and belong to the same family of humanity. Consequently, this fundamental principle of the origin of humans leads to another principle: that all humans, regardless of their color, class, nation, gender, and religion, are equal.¹⁰⁷ Shariati's reflections on many modern concepts, with which I have dealt previously, constitute an attempt to form a conceptual framework, to construct a *totalist* discourse, to present Islam as a modern revolutionary ideology. Islam as an ideology is for Shariati a rediscovery of the totality of Islamic ideas, meanings, and concepts, which have lost their true sense throughout history. It is an attempt to rediscover the true meaning of the concepts that once operated as a unified system and a total ideology in the early times of Islam. Shariati does not deny that there are absolute truths in Islam, which are valid for all times. He rather argues that for human beings who are products of history, the meanings of these concepts of truth are historically dependent. In this way, words that operate as concepts may have a particular meaning in one historical setting, and the same word or concept may be transformed into new meanings later. Following this history of conceptual changes, Shariati claims that the Islamist ideology, or *maktab*, is a harmonic system of total relations between philosophical thoughts, religious beliefs, moral values, and practices that shape a dynamic, meaningful, and practical body of knowledge.¹⁰⁸ It is an ideology, as opposed to institutionalized Islam. This ideology represents the ideals of the early Islam. It is the consciousness of the totality of relations between human existence and his social environment, and his revolutionary practices toward the harmonious society of the future. It reminds us of an Islamist *maktab* or revolutionary ideology that contradicts the institutionalized religion, cultural traditions, and static dogma producing false consciousness.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰⁸ Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)], p. 11.

TOTAL SOCIETY AND TOTAL MAN IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY AND MYSTICISM

Shariati finds the ideas of *virtuous city* (Madineh Fazeleh) and *perfect man* (Ensan-e Kamel) in Islamic philosophy and mysticism as equivalents to Marxism's *total society* and *total man*.¹⁰⁹ We can find the earliest systematic analysis of the virtuous society and perfect man in the philosophy of Farabi (870–950). Farabi's conceptualization of the virtuous city is indebted to Plato's political philosophy in the *Republic*. In the *Republic* Book VI, Plato discusses who has the right to govern a city-state. Plato argues that governance of a city-state is similar to the command of a vassal. In the same way that a vassal needs a captain with the knowledge of sailing the ship into the security of the shore, a state needs a philosopher king with the knowledge of just governance.¹¹⁰ Following Plato, Farabi argues that a philosopher's demonstrative, dialectical, and rhetorical power qualifies him to take the role of legislator and governor of the virtuous city. Farabi maintains that the highest goal of the ruler of the virtuous city is true happiness or perfection of the citizens. However, as he argues, man's perfection depends on "certain science" and "certain way of life."¹¹¹ For Farabi, the science in question is the science of being in general, and the certain way of life in question is the satisfaction one experiences in his search for the science of being. The philosopher's experience of this particular way of life is different from the material satisfaction and pleasure of ordinary citizens. While the philosopher's way of life brings him true happiness, ordinary citizens are satisfied with the untrue happiness that they gain through material pleasure. By virtue of his experience of true happiness, the philosopher is qualified to organize and educate ordinary members of the community toward true happiness. Thus, in a community that is transformed into a virtuous city, citizens duplicate the philosopher's way of life. The art of organizing the city and educating the citizens toward happiness by the Philosopher-ruler is called politics. This art is called the royal art because it is in the monopoly of the philosopher. According to Farabi, there are two essential qualifications which the philosopher-ruler possesses. First, he has intellectual mastery over the order of being. Second, he is the master of

¹⁰⁹ Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)], pp. 31–32.

¹¹⁰ Plato, *Republic*; Book VI.

¹¹¹ Leo Strauss, *Farabi's Plato*, American Academy for Jewish Research, Louis Ginzberg: Jubilee Volume; 1945, p. 361.

the royal art or politics because he knows that the city's perfection or corruption depends on whether or not its order emulates the order of being. The question that can be raised here is, can the citizens of the virtuous city expect to experience the perfection and happiness that the philosopher-ruler experiences? To answer this question, Farabi distinguishes between perfection and happiness. He asserts that as a theoretical art, philosophy generates perfection, but to produce happiness it must be supplemented by the right way of life. "More generally expressed; he accepts to begin with the orthodox opinion that philosophy is insufficient to lead man to happiness. Yet he makes clear, the supplement to philosophy which is required for attaining of happiness, is supplied, not by religion, or revelation, but by politics."¹¹² Politics is to Farabi "not just the royal art, but the actual exercise of the royal art by the philosopher within a definite political community."¹¹³ Thus, both the happiness of ordinary citizens and the philosopher's perfection and happiness depends on the realization of a virtuous city. Farabi does not provide empirical evidence of a real virtuous city since it does not exist in reality. The virtuous city becomes a reality through the intervention of the city's legislator who knows citizens' capacities for happiness and perfection and their propensities toward evil, imperfection, and wickedness. That is why in Farabi's virtuous city, because of their differences of capabilities, citizens do not equally enjoy the state of happiness and perfection. Because of citizens' different capacities, the city or the state is hierarchical. Because of his theoretical perfection, the philosopher is on top of the city's hierarchy. Though the entire community serves him, he does not serve any citizen because the citizens of the higher ranks do not serve citizens of the lower ranks. According to this logic, no one serves citizens of the lowest rank.¹¹⁴ Farabi argues that the virtuous city mirrors the order of the universe and the hierarchy of beings: in the same way that God rules the universe, the philosopher rules the virtuous city.¹¹⁵ Citizens of the virtuous city can reach the state of happiness if they learn practical, ethical, and theoretical virtues, which prepare them to accept their social position in the virtuous city. Farabi argues that the virtuous city must use violence against those citizens who resist the

¹¹² Ibid, p. 378.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 379.

¹¹⁴ Reza Davari Erdakani, *Farabi* (Tehran: Tarh-e Nou, 1995), p. 157.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 160–161.

city's educational system.¹¹⁶ In Farabi's view, human beings do not come together to establish political communities to respond to their material needs but to reach perfection. He describes happiness as the expression of perfection in the virtuous city.¹¹⁷ However, the citizens' experience of the state of happiness in the virtuous city does mean that the social hierarchy of the city and its social and political orders are changed.¹¹⁸ To remain virtuous, the city's social and political hierarchy must stay uninterrupted. Virtuous cities depend on virtuous leaders. If the leaders are no longer virtuous, the city is not virtuous anymore.¹¹⁹ Farabi defines cities in which citizens are looking for a ruler who can increase their wealth, pleasure, and domination over others as unvirtuous or *Ignorant Societies*.¹²⁰ Virtuous or perfect men and cities are the conceptual ancestors of the total man and total societies. All these concepts theorize a condition of harmony within oneself and with the external world. These concepts aim at creating perfect individuals who are free from internal conflicts and live in accord with their social environment.

Ibn Arabi as one of the grand figures of Islamic mysticism conceptualizes *perfect man* (*Ensan-e Kamel*) in his detachment with the human society. The perfect man of Ibn Arabi is an isolated individual who shares God's qualities. The early Persian mysticism introduced by Mansur Al-Hallaj and Bayazid Bostami argued that man becomes perfect through his separation from the human society. For them, because separation allows man to enter a spiritual journey to reach God's qualities and become united with God, it enables man to claim Anal-Haq: I am God. Bostami conceptualizes the perfect man as the one who relinquishes his material concerns and annihilates his individual self in God (*fana fi 'Allah*). These conceptualizations of the perfect man are within a theory of *the unity of being* (*Vahdat al-wojud*) which becomes the central principle of Ibn Arabi's theoretical mysticism. According to the theory of the unity of being, God is the only self-sufficient existence and reality because his being does not depend on any other being. As an absolute reality, God can manifest himself through his power of creation in various ways and different forms. Thus, the coexistence and dependence of the created world of appearance with God are the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 158–160.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 166–167.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 170–171.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 182.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 183–186.

expressions of unity and multiplicity. What for God is unity is a multiplicity for humans in the world of appearance. Though God's unity is expressed in his essence, his multiplicity is displayed through his embodiment or manifestation; that is the world of appearance.¹²¹ We can raise the question; if the world of appearance is God's manifestations, then how do we define the nature of God-man relationship because man is part of the world of appearance?¹²² Islamic mysticism's answer to this question is that God created man to reflect his own qualities, which means man and God need each other for different reasons. Though man needs and depends on God because of his imperfection, God does not depend on man. He created man to see his own qualities and actions in their futurity and exteriority. Before man's creation, God could see his qualities and actions in his interiority. However, by creating man, God uses man's capacity to reveal his own secrets to himself. Consequently, God's relation with man's actions is the same as the relation of an agent with his own actions rather than to the actions of the other. According to Ibn Arabi, since man's actions are reflections of God's qualities, man is a total being in whom all truths of the world of appearance are present. However, this does not mean that all men are capable of reflecting God's qualities. In fact, reflections of God's qualities are the prerogative of the perfect man. That is why, for Ibn Arabi, man should know his own nature before he attempts to know God.¹²³ Ibn Arabi does not believe that all human beings have the capacity to become perfect human beings because the capability of every human being toward perfection depends on his propensity toward faith, and faith is a God-given privilege. Some have the capacity to become believers, others who lack this capacity become heretics. It seems that the idea of the God-given capacities undermines the role of human free will. However, God-given capacity for perfection is not the only preconditions of perfection. In addition to this privilege, man must undergo a long and extraordinary endeavor toward perfection, which includes a regime of silence. The regime of silence consists of the silence of the tongue and the silence of the heart as a result of which man stops talking with and thinking about anyone and anything but God. Through this regime of silence, man discovers God's manifestations

¹²¹ Gholamreza Avani, Asghar Dadbeh, Hasan Badanj, *Ensan-e kamel beh revayat-e Ibn Arabi*, Fasnameh Andisheh-ye dini daneshgah Shiraz, Shomareh-ye 34 Bahar 1389 (Spring 2010), pp. 136–137.

¹²² Ibid, p. 138.

¹²³ Ibid, pp. 40–41

through his heart. At the second stage, man continuous with a regime of solitude through which he distances himself from any human emotion and feeling, because feelings and emotions cause dependence of humans on one another. Human dependency results in humans' detachment from God. At the third stage, man refrains from eating. He experiences hunger which generates humbleness, courtesy, and renunciation of greed. In the final stage, man undergoes the insomnia of the eye and insomnia of the heart. At the end of all these experiences, man becomes aware of the past and future and masters moral and religious virtues. When man's mastery of the past and future and his mastery of moral and religious virtues are completed, he will be reunited with God provided that he recites and praises him ceaselessly. Man's reunification with God is the status of the perfect man in which God can see his own secrets and essential qualities.¹²⁴ Thus, the perfect man becomes a mirror in which God can see himself. That is why as the manifestation of God's essential qualities, the perfect man's knowledge is the same as God's knowledge. As a result, the perfect man has the same divine virtues as God and just like God he can impose his authority on the world of appearance.¹²⁵ Contrary to Islamic mysticism that conceptualizes perfect or total man as isolated cases, Marxism argues that the total man emerges only in the total society generated by social and political revolutions. While Islamic mysticism does not consider all human beings as potentially perfect, Marxism universalizes the concept and includes the whole humanity. Moreover, while the perfect man of Islamic mysticism is an individual who in his disconnections from the material world acquires the status of perfection, Marxism's total man remains within the material world. While the total man of Marxism appears after the disappearance of the division of labor, allowing individuals to become poets, musicians, farmers, and fishermen at the same time, the perfect man of mysticism tries to make labor disappear in its entirety. The perfect man of mysticism does not need anything that is a product of human labor.

ISLAMIST LENINISM

A Shariati's interpreter is asked about Shariati's Leninism in his *Ommat va Emamat*, his response is that Shariati was more interested in Trotsky, but was not Trotsky a Leninist? In fact, he was a Leninist par excellence whose

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 151–153.

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 154–155.

famous dictum is; “The historical crises of mankind is reduced to the crises of the revolutionary leadership.”¹²⁶ Shariati’s lectures on *Islam’sbenasi*, are an attempt to demonstrate the ability of the Islamist ideology to make the masses conscious of their situation to start revolutionary practices toward the perfect society promised by Marxism. Nevertheless, in his *Ommat va Emamat* written in 1970, he argues that revolutionary intellectuals should seize political power and raise the people onto a new level of human experience. He excludes the masses from political power because the masses may lose their revolutionary passion as soon as the revolutionary zeal is over. They may demand better economy, individual liberty, and liberal democracy, which Shariati considers as the opposite of the real democracy supposed to reign in the *total society* organized by the *total humans* of the future. For Shariati, what distinguishes a revolutionary leadership from dictatorship is not their form but their content.¹²⁷ Real democracy needs citizens who are aware of the value of their votes. Until that happens, the revolutionary intellectuals should give political education to the ordinary people. In this way, the masses become the objects of the experiments of the revolutionary intellectuals who lead the revolution. Shariati attributes virtues to the revolutionary intellectuals, which make them more than political partners to the masses. The Intellectuals are qualified to form a government on behalf of the politically immature masses.¹²⁸

We should not be deceived by words and phrases such as freedom, people, the government of the masses, and democratic elections. The meaning of these terms depends on particular social and historical contexts. These words do not have an abstract, universal and absolute relevance. They are not the law of gravity, or the centrifugal force, or the blood circle constant and pertinent everywhere.¹²⁹

Shariati held his lectures on *Ommat va Emamat* in 1969, and the resulting book can be ranked as his most influential book on the ideology of the Iranian revolution. In the same year, Ayatollah Khomeini held his lectures on Islamic Government (*Hokumat Eslami*), which I discuss in the

¹²⁶ Eugene Gogol, *Toward a Dialectic of Philosophy and Organization* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 184.

¹²⁷ Shariati, *Neveshteh’ha-ye asasi-ye Shariati beh kushesh-e Bijan Abdolkarimi*, p. 249.

¹²⁸ Cheryl Benard & Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Government of God: Iran’s Islamic Republic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 45.

¹²⁹ Shariati, *Bazgasht*, p. 290.

next chapter. The ideological formation of the Marxist Fadaiyan and the Islamic Mojahedin took shape around the same year. Despite their different ideological orientation, the central aim of all these attempts is the search for a revolutionary leadership. In the *Ommat va Emamat* lectures, Shariati outlines the main characteristics of the post-revolutionary state, guided by Islamist ideology and led by revolutionary intellectuals. The revolutionary state should not, according to Shariati consider the character of human beings as fixed but as ephemeral, ready to be transformed into new shapes.¹³⁰ Shariati tries to conceptualize politics in a new way. He claims that *politics* and its Persian synonym *Siyasat* have different connotations. Though politics is about administration, *Siyasat* is about education and the state is either an administrator or educator.¹³¹ The literal meaning of the word *Siyasat* is “Taming of the Wild Horse.” *Siyasat* would be the policy of the revolutionary state to educate the citizens spiritually, ethically, intellectually, and socially. Furthermore, *Siyasat* is the program of the state to transform institutions, social relations, and ideas into what ought to be. *Siyasat* does not deal with the welfare of the citizens, but with their search for truth, progress, and perfection.¹³² The Islamic Republic of Iran can be viewed as a liberal state compared to Shariati’s ideas expressed in the *Ommat va Emamat*. In Shariati’s revolutionary society, the state defines good and evil, and the members of the society have to act in accordance with the state commands. The masses must submit to the supervision of the revolutionary intellectuals who, according to Shariati, will only be concerned with the perfection of human beings. The concept of *Ommat* plays a decisive role in Shariati’s conceptual framework. *Ommat* is a known concept within the Islamic tradition that refers to the community of Muslims. For Shariati, however, the term *Ommat* indicates a community of people with a universal purpose. The *Ommat* has the same goal as the league of communists. Both aim to create a classless society. For Shariati, *Ommat* is a community of “disinterested intellectuals” who leads the masses toward a “perfect society.” It signifies the general interests of humanity and is more inclusive than *nation* and *class* because these concepts stand for particular interests.¹³³ To Shariati, goal, intention, and

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 339.

¹³¹ Ali Shariati, *Doktor Shariati majmueh-ye asar (26): ommat va emamat* (Tehran: Nashr-e Amun, 2014), pp. 343–344.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 348–349.

¹³³ Shariati, *Islam’shenasi* [Ershad Lectures (1)], p. 72.

conscious choice signify the original meaning of the word *Ommat*. It indicates a movement directed at a higher goal. It necessitates the emergence of an *Emam* who leads the people regardless of their race, nationality or class as an *Ommat*.¹³⁴ Shariati claims that *Ommat* is an active concept because it signifies a common goal, based on united leadership, toward an ideal society.¹³⁵ “It might take years, and even after the first generation of the revolutionary leaders pass away, anti-revolutionaries may emerge from within and become a danger to the revolution.”¹³⁶ Thus, the members of the *Ommat* must obey the leader without question. Although Shariati claims that the obedience is a matter of choice, he is not concerned with what will happen to the members of a particular *Ommat*, who first choose their leader, but later disobey him. For Shariati, the prerequisite for the total obedience of the members of the community, or *Ommat*, to the leader, or *Emam*, is that the movement remains progressive.¹³⁷ Shariati does not specify the criteria deciding the progressive or reactionary character of the movement at different times. He claims that the leader of *Ommat* cannot become a dictator because what is at stake in the revolutionary state is not the domination of man by man but education of a student by a teacher toward perfection.¹³⁸ In fact, Shariati relies on the good intentions of the revolutionary leader. He refers to three communities, which correspond to three different ideologies and political systems. The first community, based on the solidarity of human beings regardless of their race, class origin, and religion corresponds to political liberalism. The second community based on the solidarity of the proletariat corresponds to Marxism. The third community is *Ommat*, based on the solidarity of the people who share the same beliefs. The *Ommat* have a “higher common goal expressed in the Islamist revolutionary ideology, which transcends race, class, and blood toward the total society rather than a prosperous society.”¹³⁹ Shariati argues that the ideal society is a free community, but in what sense is this society free? By freedom, Shariati does not mean realization of political and civil rights of the individual citizen or his or her material pleasure and tranquility. In Shariati’s free community citizens receive the revolutionary education, which leads them toward total

¹³⁴ Ali Shariati, *Doktor Shariati majmueh-ye asar*, (26), p. 342.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 341.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 433.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 342.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 361.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 360.

freedom and perfection.¹⁴⁰ Shariati considers humans as unfree until they are transformed into the total humans inhabiting a total society. He claims that the total human (*Ensan-e Kamel*) in Islamic Mysticism indicates humanity's inner striving toward perfection. He argues that heroic actions and heroic figures signify aspects of the total man, which indicates that the inner forces striving for perfection are at work in every human being.¹⁴¹ Shariati refers to Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Representative Men*, as a starting point for his conceptualization of the revolutionary leader or *Emam*, because it represents different human qualities in one individual.¹⁴² Despite Shariati's claim that mysticism is the origin of the idea of the total man, he conceives mysticism as depoliticizing ventures because its aim is *self-perfection*. Contrary to mysticism, he considers his Islamist ideology as a politico-intellectual endeavor to lead humanity toward perfection. Was the establishment of the revolutionary state in 1979 in Iran a realization of Shariati's political ideal? The Iranian revolutionary state has continuously propagated for human perfection. It renamed the Iranian people as the Islamic *Ommat* and tried to reeducate them toward perfection. A decade after the revolution, many of Shariati's followers who supported the revolutionary state, realized that their dream of the total society and total humans was on the verge of becoming a nightmare. Like many other thinkers whose particular ideas, concepts, and books get more attention than their complete oeuvre, Shariati's *Ommat va Emamat*, made an enormous impact on the formation of Iranian revolutionary Islamists. The importance of Shariati is not in the originality of his ideas, but his attempt to change the intellectual discourse from a secular discourse into a Humanist Islamic discourse. History is full of thinkers who were original but did not make an impact on the dominant intellectual discourse of their epoch, either during their lifetime or immediately after their death. Shariati made, on the contrary, a great impact on the Iranian intellectual discourse both in his lifetime and immediately after his death. Shariati's Humanist Islamist discourse breaks with God's predetermination, which has dominated the religious discourse, and translates the *Shia* expectation of the *Imam Mahdi* into an intellectual engagement in modern revolutionary discourse. Thus, Humanist Islamism as an Islamist ideology makes Islam the dominant discourse among the students, the educated and the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 360–361.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 364.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 373.

professionals. In many respects, Shariati's discourse is superior to his contemporary discourse. His skill in translating modern concepts into Islamic vocabularies disarmed the Iranian Marxist discourse and even the religious-Marxist discourse of the Mojahedin. It paved the way for the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. Both Marxism and Shariati's Islamist ideology promised de-alienated and free individuals in their promised societies, but the Marxist promise ended up in totalitarian states. A classless but totalitarian society was not perceived as a bad idea in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was supposed to be a period of transition toward the perfect society and the total human. The totalitarian period was seen as a time of education and rehabilitation of alienated people. The intellectual elites who have discovered the source of consciousness would rather impose their consciousness upon the formless masses than delegate their power to them. Shariati's Islamist ideology inspired a great number of young people to engage in the revolution and the majority of former revolutionary Islamists acknowledge their indebtedness to him. Hamid Dabashi's observation regarding the relation between Shariati and Khomeini is fascinating:

more than anyone else, he paved the way for Khomeini's arrival. He and Khomeini were worlds apart: Shariati the young composer of freshly dreamt melodies of revolt, Khomeini the old master of unflinching moral austerity in matters public and private. But in that vast and blossoming field of public imagination where logic rises obediently to meet the myth, they coincided in orchestrating a massive ceremony of revolt: Shari'ati prophesying a universal revolt of the glorified masses against the tyranny of ideological multiplicity and Khomeini fulfilling, almost unknowingly, that prophecy.¹⁴³

The aspect of Shariati's thought with which I have dealt in this study can be viewed as one among many other aspects of his thought. What I have tried to demonstrate in this study is that it is not sufficient to claim the impact of standard Marxism or classical Marxism on Shariati. We should find out the extent and the meaning of the influence in Shariati's conceptual framework. Inspired by the Humanist Marxism of the 1950s and early 1960s, Shariati formulates his Islamist ideology, which is neither an "Orientalism in reverse" nor a "discourse of authenticity." What the critics perceive as Shariati's weakness, I view as his strength and vigor.

¹⁴³ Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, p. 145.

Shariati is well aware that an important aspect of modern concepts is their ambiguous, unclear character, which makes them open to multiple interpretations. Shariati's Leninist conception of the role of the revolutionary intellectuals, his Gramscian conception of the linguistic and cultural community, his idea of alienation borrowed from the French Humanist Marxism and the conception of freedom taken from Existentialism are the main components of his revolutionary Islamist ideology. Shariati's attempt to reunite knowing and understanding, thinking and feeling, and being and becoming are identical with the effort of the Marxist tradition to unify theory and practice and consciousness and social existence. Shariati's emancipatory Islamist ideology was not a religion with which the majority of Iranians could identify themselves in the pre-revolutionary Iran. Here lies the difference between Shariati's discourse on the self and other Iranian intellectuals who thought of the return to the self as a return to the past. Shariati's idea of a return to the self would be realized in the future; the *self* is not the traditional self; it has to be invented. Shariati criticizes the false universality, which claim that all intellectuals have a universal mission regardless of the sociopolitical and historical situation of their societies. Despite his refusal of the universal mission of intellectuals, Shariati regards Marxist principles as truly universal and compatible with Islam. His view of the compatibility of Islam and Marxism mirrors the intellectual climate of the time. His allusion to Marxism as a method of discovering the direction of history indicates that he believes that he can use this method and combine it with Islam. He understands Islam not as an end in itself but as a means in the service of human emancipation. Although Shariati's reliance on Humanist Marxism extended his intellectual horizon, he remained an opponent of liberal democracy until his death. Like Merleau-Ponty, he viewed liberal democracy as a liberal comedy. For the hundreds of thousands of young people who became familiar with Shariati's revolutionary ideas, Ayatollah Khomeini embodied his idea of the ideal revolutionary leader. There is a paradox within Shariati's intellectual project. Shariati is a true militant intellectual, but his militancy is rather a critical theoretical approach toward the existing ideas, cultural, religious, and political practices. According to Ehsan Shariati, a few years before his death, Shariati was no more preoccupied with the question of political power but with the mission of the intellectuals. "Contrary to *Ommat va Emamat*, he argues in the *Bazgasht beh Khishtan* (*return to the self*) that the intellectuals should refrain from political and executive affairs of their society. They should focus on changing people's outlook (making them aware

of their situation) so that they can choose leaders who can govern their society.”¹⁴⁴ Shariati might have refrained from discussing political power, but he had never refrained from transgressing social, cultural, and intellectual norms and practices, which justified his contemporary political order. His Islamist ideology captivated the imagination of young revolutionaries and led them, for a while, to submit their will to the will of the leader of the revolution. Since the early 1990s, the same revolutionaries used Shariati’s criteria and performed the same degree of intellectual curiosity to evaluate the post-revolutionary social and political reality. Their arguments resulted in quite different conclusions, which we deal with in the next chapters.

¹⁴⁴Ehsan Shariati, *Man Shariati ra ba shart va sborut mipaziram*. <http://talar.shandel.info/Thread->

Islamism in Power

Ali Shariati died in London in 1977. The event did not get the immediate attention of ordinary people. Nevertheless, in the following year Shariati became the martyr teacher of the Iranian revolution who anticipated Ayatollah Khomeini's position as the undisputed leader of the 1979 Revolution. The younger one became the teacher of the revolution, and the older one became the leader of the revolution. The natural order of things was changed. The father started to follow in the footsteps of the son. Ayatollah Khomeini followed not only the ideas and vision of a revolutionary state held by Shariati, who could be a son to him, but also the young Islamist revolutionaries, who could be his grandchildren. The relation between Khomeini and Shariati was similar to the relation between Marx and Lenin. Marx had founded the theoretical base upon which Lenin led a revolution in the name of socialism. Likewise, Shariati reinvented Islam as an ideology, which branded Khomeini as the Lenin of the Islamic revolution. The Islamist ideology generated an Islamist leftist faction, which adhered to Shariati's ideas of a revolutionary state and advocated Khomeini's leadership in the post-revolutionary political system in Iran. This political faction dominated the Islamic Republic until Khomeini's death. In the early 1980s, the Islamist left supported by Khomeini and conservative religious forces defeated all who opposed the new political system. While the Islamist left focused on social and economic justice, the Islamist conservatives defended the market economy, advocated a restricted interpretation of Islam, and opposed cultural and intellectual freedom. The political and intellectual conflicts between the

Islamist left and the conservative faction within the Islamic state created a condition for the emergence of a new intellectual and political discourse in the early 1990s. The Islamist left emphasized more social justice and equality than the Islamic character of the society and politics.¹ They were allied with the conservative religious forces to contest the secular left and liberals. They could not imagine that the conservative forces would try to exclude them from the political system. However, the conservatives got the bigger share of power after Khomeini's death, and they have tried ever since to eliminate the Islamist left. The members of the Islamist left began to understand, after Khomeini's death, that the Islamic Republic they had built was not congruent with their revolutionary ideals. Mir Hossein Mousavi intended to stand as a presidential candidate in 1997. The conservatives exposed unveiled photos of his wife, Zahra Rahnavard, taken in the early 1970s. The photo exposure was supposed to reveal Mousavi's flaws regarding official Islamic morality. As a result, Mousavi withdrew his candidacy. The conservatives' gesture indicated their willingness to exclude all unwanted elements who opposed the conservative narrative of the revolution and tried to rewrite the revolution according to their own conservative views. They would exclude people such as Emadoddin Baqi, an Islamist leftist, who portray the secular climate of the early days of the revolution.² They aimed to erase memories of Khomeini's tolerance toward what they call un-Islamic etiquettes. In a meeting with Khomeini in 1980, Bani-Sadr's opponents tried to question the integrity of the first president of the Islamic Republic by pointing to his disrespect for Islamic values and Islamic *Hejab*. Khomeini's response was that all people have flaws, and they had better cooperate with Bani-Sadr.³

THE IDEOLOGY OF KHOMEINISM

After Bani-Sadr had been ousted, the Islamist conservatives played a larger role in the post-revolutionary state. In the 1980s, in alliance with the Islamist leftists, the conservatives restricted the Iranian public sphere, imposed the "Islamic codes of conduct" such as compulsory *Hejab*.

¹ Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 180.

² Emadoddin Baqi, *Forudastan va faradastan: khaterat-e shafahi-ye enqelab eslami* (Tehran: Jameh-ye Iranian, 2000), p. 78.

³ Mohammad Quchani, *Jomburi-ye moqaddas boresh'hai az tarikb-e jomburi-ye eslami* (Tehran: Naqsh-o Negar, 2002), p. 36.

Although the ideology of the Islamic Republic was the legacy of Shariati's discourse, he did not argue for anything resembling "the Islamic codes of conduct." What characterized Islamist left in Iran was the connection its advocates made between Shariati's Islamist ideology and Khomeini's leadership in the revolution. The Islamist left consisted of young revolutionaries and some clerics. Ayatollah Asadollah Bayat, now a supporter of the prodemocracy movement in Iran, claimed in the early 1990s that Shariati's intellectual project converged with Khomeini's politics. Bayat claimed that Khomeini endorsed Shariati's idea of transforming Islam into a revolutionary ideology and recognized his effort to take Islam "out of the hands of those who had viewed it merely as a spiritual religion."⁴ The emphasis on the ideological importance of Shariati in the 1990s was, in fact, a reaction to the post-Khomeini era, when the Islamist leftists were losing their influence in the Islamic Republic. The leftist clerics reminded the conservatives that Shariati's intellectual preparation of the new generation of clerics secured Khomeini's leadership in the revolution and the post-revolutionary state. Khomeini was surprised by the protests against the Shah in the first months of 1978.⁵ The sporadic demonstrations in early 1978 developed into mass demonstrations in late 1978. The young revolutionaries who saw the sudden eruption of the revolution as a result of the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini called him *Emam-e Ommat*. The speed of the revolutionary events changed not only the nature of the movement against the Shah but also the ideological view of the young revolutionaries. As Khomeini became the *Emam*, young revolutionaries were divided between revolutionary Marxism and revolutionary Islamism. According to Emadoddin Baqi, a post-Islamist historian of the revolution, the majority of his classmates with religious tendencies joined either the Mojahedin or the Fadaiyan, or other leftist groups such as Peykar. All these organizations stood against the Islamic Republic.⁶ Baqi saw Ayatollah Khomeini's book *Velayat-e Faqih*, a collection of lectures during the year 1970, for the first time in November 1978.⁷ However, the impact of the book had not been very great a year later. In the summer of 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini approved the draft of a constitution which did

⁴ Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini*, p. 163.

⁵ Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1985), p. 45.

⁶ Baqi, *Forudastan va faradastan*, p. 54.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

not include the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*. Khomeini suggested that the draft of the Iranian constitution without *Velayat-e Faqih* be submitted to a referendum. Mehdi Bazargan, who was the prime minister, and Bani-Sadr, who later became Iran's first president in 1980, rejected Khomeini's proposal. They argued that an elected constitutional parliament must discuss and approve the draft.⁸ The point is that the acceptance of the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, during the revolution, and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, based on *Velayat-e Faqih*, were two separate processes. Mohsen Kadivar, a distinguished cleric and reformist, argues that Khomeini's undisputed position in the Iranian revolution was not so much due to the religious and cultural situation in Iran. It was rather a result of the picture that Shariati had created of a revolutionary leader.

When Shariati died in 1977, the theory of *Ommat va Emamat* had invaded the minds of the Iranian Muslim intellectuals as a new interpretation of Islam. Thus, when Imam Khomeini appeared as the leader of the Islamic movement in Iran, the Iranian intellectuals had known this "Emam-e Ommat" through Shariati's theory in "*Ommat va Emamat*."⁹

Shariati described the main qualifications of a revolutionary leader, and the young revolutionaries discovered that Khomeini possessed all those qualifications. The decisive factor in Ayatollah Khomeini's popularity was his public speech in 1964 against a law proposal, which he believed violated Iran's state sovereignty. According to the law proposal, Iran would extend diplomatic immunity to American military advisers. Khomeini argued that the Iranian people would not accept a law that treated them as unequal vis-à-vis American citizens. He claimed the lawmakers did not represent the Iranian people, because if they represented the people, they would not have endorsed the law proposal.

Our dignity has been trampled underfoot: the dignity of Iran has been destroyed... Other people imagine that it is the Iranian nation that has abased itself in this way. They do not know that it is the Iranian government, the Iranian Majles – the Majles that has nothing to do with the people... [since] The Iranian people did not elect these deputies.¹⁰

⁸ Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, p. 74.

⁹ Mohsen Kadivar, *Daghdagheh'ha-ye hokumat-e dini* (Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 2000), p. 241.

¹⁰ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 122–123.

Khomeini's opposition to the law proposal rather than his religious credibility branded him as a popular political leader. In his speech, Khomeini established a link between the state sovereignty and popular sovereignty. He claimed that the Iranian people were losing their freedom because a nation is free to the extent that they freely legislate the laws of their community. The law proposed by the *majles* indicated that the Iranian people did not have the right to make the laws of their community. Ruhollah Mousavi, known later as Ayatollah Khomeini, was born to a religious family in Khomein, a village at that time, near the city of Qom in 1902. Khomeini received a religious education as a child. He went to Arak at the age of 16 to study religious sciences under the supervision of Abdolkarim Haeri Yazdi, the leading *Shia* theologian in post-World-War-I Iran. When Haeri Yazdi went to Qom to lead the Qom seminaries, Khomeini followed him. In Qom, Khomeini studied Islamic sciences, philosophy, ethics, and mysticism or *erfan*. As a teacher, he taught jurisprudence and philosophy. His interest in philosophy made him the target of personal attacks by orthodox religious scholars. Khomeini had not been involved in politics until 1962. Khomeini neither questioned the legitimacy of the monarchy nor offered a political alternative until the late 1960s.¹¹ Even during the oil nationalization Khomeini seemed reluctant to be engaged in politics. An explanation for his political silence is the respect he had for the grand Ayatollah Boroujerdi, who disapproved of clerical engagement in politics.¹² After Boroujerdi's death, Khomeini dedicated his life to a politics of dissension.¹³ In 1962, the government of Asadollah Alam presented a law proposal, which recognized women's right to vote.¹⁴ Khomeini and other religious leaders claimed that the law proposal was against Islam, and it intended "to corrupt our chaste women."¹⁵ Another issue that angered the clergy was the land reform, which they viewed as a violation of the Islamic principle of the sanctity of private property. Nevertheless, Khomeini went beyond these particular issues and criticized the general state of the country, poverty, Iran's support for Israel, and its reliance on what he called the *Bahai* agents in the government.¹⁶ Although Khomeini remained within

¹¹ Bakhsh, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, p. 23.

¹² Mojtaba Mahdavi, *One Bed and Two Dreams: Contentious Public Religion of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati*, *Studies in Religion*, Vol. 43 (1), pp. 27–29.

¹³ Bakhsh, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

the framework of the Iranian constitution, he challenged the Shah ferociously. “He [the Shah] says, ‘I have no business with the clerics.’ Sir, the clerics, have business with you.”¹⁷ Later, the antigovernment protests in the Qom seminaries resulted in army commandos attacking the *Fezviyeh* seminary on March 22, 1963. As a result, a student was dead. Khomeini’s response was harsh criticism of the Shah, which distinguished him from all other religious leaders. He claimed, in his speech of June 3, 1963, that the entire political system in Iran serves the interests of Israel. “It [Israel] crushes us. It crushes you, the nation. It desires to take over the economy. It desires to destroy our commerce and agriculture. It desires to seize the country’s wealth.”¹⁸ Khomeini remained silent until July 1964. After the Iranian Senate had approved the law that extended diplomatic immunity to American military personnel and their families in Iran, Khomeini made a public speech. He condemned the law, which he described as “a document for the enslavement of Iran.” He called on the religious leaders, the people, and the army to protest against the law. He encouraged them “not to permit such a scandal to occur in Iran.” He called for bringing down the government.¹⁹ Khomeini was arrested and expelled to Turkey and then to Iraq. He stayed in the city of Najaf until the summer of 1978 when he moved to Paris. Until the publication of his lectures on Islamic government in the early 1970s, Khomeini did not make any noise. From the early 1970s, he became more politically active.

The colonial powers led us to believe that Islam does not have a plan for government and governmental institutions. They claim it is true that Islam can legislate, but it is unable to form a government. It is obvious that the imperialist propaganda prevented the Muslims from being engaged in politics and the foundation of the state.²⁰

Similar to Shariati, Khomeini started to draw attention to the political nature of Islam. Whereas Shariati depicted the outlines of a political and social revolution to create a total society, Ayatollah Khomeini tried to formulate the outlines of an Islamic government. Khomeini believed that Islam was a system of legislation. It needed a government to implement the laws originating from its system of legislation. “It is necessary to

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁰ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Velayat-e Faqih* (Tehran: Amirkabir, 1978), p. 20.

form an executive power to implement the Islamic laws..., mere legislation cannot guarantee the prosperity of the people. Therefore, the legislation requires an executive power. The executive and the legislative power complement each other in every state."²¹ Khomeini declared that creation of an Islamic state was a religious obligation.²² He claimed that the duty of Muslims in all Islamic societies was to start Islamic revolutions to put an end to the existing repressive, unjust, and corrupt governments.²³

Establishment of an Islamic state would bring together the Islamic *Ommat*, and emancipate the homeland of Islam from colonial powers and their influence, and their puppet regimes. To achieve Islamic unity and the freedom of the Muslim nations, we should overthrow the unjust puppet states and create a just Islamic government to serve the people. The establishment of an Islamic government is in the service of the unity of the Muslims.²⁴

Instead of focusing on the Iranian people, and implementation of the Iranian constitution, Khomeini focused on the creation of a unified Islamic state for the entire Islamic *Ommat*. We can find elements of such Islamic internationalism in Shariati's *Ommat va Emamat*. Thus, the young Islamists familiar with Shariati's ideas were convinced that Khomeini and Shariati shared a common conceptual framework and common goals. The difference was that Shariati did not seek an Islamic state ruled by Islamic laws. Khomeini, in contrast, propagated an Islamic revolution and an Islamic government based on the Islamic laws. Whereas Shariati propagated a sociopolitical revolution toward a total society, the content of which (not its form) would be Islamic, Ayatollah Khomeini's aim was the implementation of *Sharia* in an Islamic state. An Islamic state, in this way, would reveal the truth of Islam and would organize Islamic society according to Islamic truth. However, both Khomeini and Shariati agreed that the leadership of the Islamic revolution would not create a democratic state. Previously, I have discussed Shariati's view on Western democracies and his suggestion for a strong leadership and the organization of a collective ascetic life toward the total society and the total man. Khomeini tried to illustrate the underpinnings of his ideal Islamic state in more detail.

²¹ Ibid., p. 21.

²² Ibid., p. 29.

²³ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

Islamic government is neither tyrannical nor absolutist. It is rather a constitutional government. It is not conditioned by the popular vote, but by the conditions articulated in the Qoran and Sunnat of the Prophet. These commands and Islamic laws have to be followed. Henceforth, the Islamic government is a government based on divine laws. There is an essential difference between an Islamic government and a constitutional monarchy or a republican government. Whereas God is the only legislator in an Islamic state, the king or the people are the legislators in a constitutional monarchy or republic. God is the lawmaker, and its laws go beyond all man-made laws. Therefore, in an Islamic state, instead of a legislative parliament, there would be an assembly of planning that defines the job of different ministries to serve the people according to Islamic commands.²⁵

Khomeini remained true to this blurred conception of an Islamic state as long as he believed that there was little chance of real political protests and mass demonstrations against the Shah in Iran. Thus, in the absence of a mass movement, he claimed that

Iran's recent, sacred movement ... is one hundred percent Islamic. It was founded by the able hands of the clerics alone, and with the support of the great, Islamic nation. It was and is directed, individually or jointly by the leadership of the clerical community. Since the 15-year-old movement is Islamic, it continues and shall continue without the interference of others in the leadership, which belongs to the clerical community.²⁶

However, there is no mention of the term "Velayat-e Faqih" in this text. While still in Iraq, and not very sure of what direction the movement was going to take, he expressed his previous ideas regarding the role of the clerics. His ideas were traditional, an imagery of the Iranian society frozen in 1963. However, he changed this restricted picture of the movement and his alternative political system a few months later in Paris. As I have shown, Ayatollah Khomeini's total Islamic government was not based on the popular vote but divine laws. Nevertheless, this political view was radically democratized when he suggested in Paris that an Islamic Republic would replace the regime of the Shah. In an interview with *The Guardian* on November 16, 1978, Khomeini asserted, "I don't want to

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 52–53.

²⁶ Bakhsh, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, p. 48.

have the power or government in my hand.”²⁷ He claimed that the goal of the movement against the Shah was the establishment of an Islamic Government based on the popular vote. He maintained further that the people would decide the final form of the government. Therefore, the future state would reflect the people’s demands.²⁸ He went further saying that the government that was going to replace the regime of the Shah would be a just political system based on Islamic democracy, which he deemed as superior to Western democracies.²⁹

THE ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY AND KHOMEINI AS IMAM

By November 1978, Khomeini had become the undisputed leader of the movement against the Shah. The movement had been a democratic movement within the framework of the constitution thus far. The Popular Front and Freedom Movement represented this stage of the revolution. These two political parties aimed to force the Shah to become a constitutional monarch. This goal contradicted Khomeini’s political strategy to overthrow the Shah and establish an Islamic Republic. At that time, most Iranians did not know Khomeini’s theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*, and Khomeini did not mention his ideas on the subject during the revolution either. Khomeini’s Islamic Republic was an ambiguous idea, supposed to include the political ideals of all Iranians. At that time, Shariati’s ideas on the total society and total man dominated the minds of the young Islamist intellectuals and activists. Iranian Marxists expected a socialist revolution to follow the overthrow of the Shah which they termed as the democratic phase of the revolution. According to Mohsen Kadivar, Shariati’s vision of the ideal society was not clear.

One of the important aspects of the Iranian Revolution was the absence of an explicit model of government. ... A great many theoretical aspects of our revolution were shaped through the process of revolutionary practice. All of us had possessed general ideas taken from the Qoran and the Sonnat. However, the details were neither in the mind of the leader of the revolution

²⁷ Press conference with Ayatollah Khomeini, *The Guardian*, November 16, 1978, as quoted in Jalal Matini, “The Most Truthful Individual in Recent History,” *Iranshenasi* 14, No. 4 (Winter 2003).

²⁸ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Neda-ye Haqq: A Collection of Lectures and Interviews From 26.Okt.1978-20.Nov.1978* (Tehran: Qalam, 1978), pp. 41–42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

nor the minds of the people. The political programs and procedures took shape in the course of action.³⁰

In Paris, Khomeini proposed the establishment of an Islamic Republic to respond to the wishes of the people demonstrating throughout Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini's change of position from the Islamic government (*Hokumat-e Eslami*) to the Islamic Republic took place in the process of interaction between the leader and the masses.³¹ The leader discovered the power of the masses, and the masses attributed their own power to the leader's extraordinary strength and his charismatic status. As the masses recognized Khomeini's leadership, he tried to adjust his political ideals with the people's real demands. Khomeini's change of position from theorizing an Islamic government into promoting an Islamic Republic, based on the popular vote, happened quickly.³² Through his ideological and political flexibility, Khomeini managed to unite all the revolutionary Islamists under his leadership. The Islamic Republic Khomeini created combined his vision of political authority with Shariati's Islamist ideology. The change of position went unnoticed by the masses. Thus, for most people, Khomeini's change of position did not become an issue. The reciprocal impacts of the masses and Khomeini on each other had never stopped until his death. Khomeini's influence on the revolutionary practice made him the *Idol smasher*, the great leader, and finally the *Emam*: the privilege of having the last word on every revolutionary matter.³³ Michel Foucault was blamed for supporting the Iranian revolution. However, his claim "The problem of Islam as a political force is one of the essential problems for our times and for the years to come" is of historical importance.³⁴ He described the role of Islam in the revolution as follows:

On cite toujours Marx et l'opium du peuple. La phrase qui précède immédiatement et qu'on ne cite jamais dit que la religion est l'esprit d'un monde sans esprit. Disons donc que l'Islam, cette année 1978, n'a pas été l'opium du peuple, justement parce qu'il a été l'esprit d'un monde sans esprit.³⁵

³⁰ Kadivar, *Daghdagheb'ha-ye Hokumat-e Dini*, p. 582.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 584.

³² Khomeini, *Neda-ye haqq*, p. 95.

³³ M.J. Fisher, *Iran from Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 212.

³⁴ Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 288.

³⁵ Claire Briere & Pierre Blanchet, *Iran: La révolution au nom de Dieu* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979), p. 234.

It seems we have realized the importance of Foucault's observation on the political role of Islam. However, we pay little attention to the flaws in Foucault's notion of the future of the political role of Islam. Foucault's understanding of the political role of Islam is blended with his understanding of Khomeini's political role in the future of Iran. In fact, Foucault repeated the view of the majority of Iranians on Khomeini's role during the revolution. Foucault claimed that Khomeini was *not a politician*. "There will be no Khomeini party; there will be no Khomeini government. Khomeini is the point of fixation for a collective will."³⁶ Shariati had never endorsed the concept or politics of *Velayat-e Faqih* for the simple fact that he did not mention anything about the content of the revolutionary state. We should bear in mind that Khomeini's political leadership was institutionalized when the majority of the Constitutional Assembly in 1979 allocated him the title of *Veli-ye Faqih* to supervise elected presidents and prevent their misuse of state power. They argued that Khomeini's leadership would guarantee the post-revolutionary state building. In the mid-1980s, many years after it had been the fact of the state power in Iran, it became a comprehensive theory. Has Shariati contributed to the formation of the imposition of *Velayat-e Faqih* doctrine? Many of Shariati's disciples became advocates of the Islamic Republic, and some became its critics. According to the *neo-Shariatist* Reza Alijani,³⁷ Shariati's disciples used and abused the *Omat va Emamat* text to justify Ayatollah Khomeini as *Emam* during the revolution and as *Vali-ye Faqih* after the overthrow of the Shah. Alijani claims that Shariati's followers (*dustdaran-e Shariati*), who were critical of the Islamic Republic, began denouncing the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih* fully only after they realized that the post-revolutionary state was violating human rights. He argues that a few years before his death, Shariati revised his idea of the revolutionary leadership.³⁸ However, Shariati's change of view does not discard the fact that the Iranian revolutionaries found plausible and available arguments in his *Omat va Emamat* to rationalize their political visions. They used Shariati's arguments to legitimize their support for Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership during the revolution and justified his position as *Vali-ye Faqih* in the post-revolutionary state building.

³⁶ Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, p. 287.

³⁷ Mojtaba Mahdavi, *Post-Islamist Trends in Postrevolutionary Iran*, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 31, No. 1. 2011, pp. 105–106.

³⁸ Reza Alijani, *Bad fahmi-ye yek toujib-e namovvafaq: barrasi-ye tablili-enteqadi-ye nazariyeh-ye "omat-emamat" doktor Shariati*, <http://rezaalijani.com/images/kebab/omat1.pdf>, pp. 9–12

POST-REVOLUTIONARY DISPUTES

In February 1979, the Shah's regime collapsed, and the new revolutionary government under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini seized political power. In fact, long before the official collapse of the Shah's regime, the new power structure had been taking its place, and the representatives of Ayatollah Khomeini had imposed their authority throughout the country. The whole administration had already been in the hands of the revolutionaries when the Shah left the country. Empowered by the people, Khomeini appointed Bazargan as Iran's prime minister on January 3, 1979, and declared the official government of Bakhtiar appointed by the Shah as illegal. After Bazargan's appointment, young revolutionaries affiliated to Shariati and Khomeini's ideas organized revolutionary councils and committees. Right after the official collapse of the Shah's regime, in February, Bazargan government faced the disobedience of revolutionary council and committees. Bazargan's critics had discovered that he was a Western-oriented liberal who was not as persistent in his anti-imperialist posture as he should be. Parallel to these councils and committees, the like-minded political activists established *Sazeman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami* a few months after the revolution. The organization was an amalgam of leftist, moderate, and rightist Islamists.³⁹ The members of the *Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami* established Iran's revolutionary guard. Whereas Bazargan's government held formal political power, the revolutionary committees and councils (*Islamic Councils*) exercised the real power. These councils and committees became the power base of the Islamist left in the 1980s. As the Shah was removed from power, diverse political groups declared different political goals. The post-revolutionary political disputes resulted in insurgencies in Khuzestan, Kurdistan, and Turkmansahra. The committees and the newly organized revolutionary guard led by members of the *Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami* crushed these rebellions. The events that took place in the period between February 1979 and June 1983 are of great importance for the understanding of Iran's post-revolutionary intellectual history. The importance of this period lay in the fact that there existed possibilities, which, in my view, could have contributed to the change of the course of the revolution toward different directions. Bazargan had to deal first with the armed

³⁹ Abbas Shadlou, *Ettelaati dar bareh-ye abzab va jenab'ha-ye siyasi-ye Iran-e emruz* (Tehran: Gostareh, 2000), pp. 243–244.

struggle in Kurdistan, Khuzestan, and Turkmansahrah as well as daily protests organized by the leftist organizations and the Mojahedin. He had to control the revolutionary tribunals and the arbitrary executions of the members of the Shah's regime and the opposition and the excessive use of power by the revolutionary guards against opposition forces. He also had to deal with the interference of the clergy, organized by *the Islamic Republican Party* established in the summer of 1979, into the daily matters of the country. Finally, he had to cope with the Hostage Crisis, which forced him to resign.

Since its establishment in February 1979, the Islamic Republic confronted some serious challenges. The takeover of the US Embassy in November 1979, the closing down of the universities in June 1980, the war with Iraq, and the *Mojahedin-e Khalq's* armed struggle in the early 1980s were among these challenges. These challenges reinforced the position of the *Islamic Republican Party* and the *Mojahedin Enqelab-e Eslami*. These two organizations dominated the parliament and the Revolutionary Guard. We should bear in mind that while Khomeini could run the country because of the overwhelming popular support he had, he chose a lay and liberal-minded politician to form the first post-revolutionary government. He did not need the hostage crises to force Bazargan to resign. He could order him to step down. If the hostage crises indicated hijacking of the anti-imperialist discourse, an originally leftist discourse in Iran, what use did Ayatollah Khomeini have of such discourse? In 1980, Iranian left was divided between supporters and opponents of the Islamic Republic. In the view of the radical secular left which included *Fadaiyan Minority (Fadaiyan-e Aqaliyat)*, *Peykar* and the *Mojahedin*, the Islamists in power were a catalyst to reintegrate Iran in the global capitalism. A large section of the secular left, which included the Tudeh Party and the *Fadaiyan Majority (Fadaiyan-Aksariyat)*, had a reformist approach toward the Islamic Republic. The secular reformist left argued that they were defending the socialist tendencies represented by the Islamist left in the Islamic Republic. The latter group considered the Islamist left as a natural ally in the struggle for socialism. The main ideological dispute in the wake of the revolution was not a secular state versus a religious state, but rather a liberal versus a socialist state. "The left as a whole was volunteer partner in the fundamentalist's [Islamist's] crusade to defeat Bazargan."⁴⁰ To the Iranian

⁴⁰ Mohsen Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), p. 152.

left, in general, Bazargan government defended the interests of the liberal bourgeoisie that aimed at “[confining] the Revolution within the content of its own narrow class interests.”⁴¹ Accordingly, the real ideological rivalry was between Islamist and secular left. The notion that Marxism was an ideological rival for the Islamists originated from Shariati.⁴² However, a critique of Marxism came from the conservative Islamic circles. *End of Marxism (Payan-e Omr-e Marksism)* by Naser Makarem Shirazi, now a grand Ayatollah in Qom, was one such book. These books had the aim of disqualifying dialectical and historical materialism and revealing the repressive practices of socialist governments against their own people⁴³ and the African and Asian people.⁴⁴ *Pseudo Philosophers (Filosofnama’ha)*, which was in wide circulation after the revolution, argued against dialectical Marxism. The book was written in 1954 by the same author as a critique of the Tudeh Party. The two volumes of *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism (Osule Falsafeh va Ravesh-e Realism)* were authored in the early 1950s by Allameh Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabayi. They included long footnotes by Morteza Motahhari. These books were widely circulating within the Islamist circles during the revolution. Abdolkarim Soroush’s lectures directed against Marxism were supplemented to these books.

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

Bazargan’s government acted according to the rules of political democracy, liberal economy, and good relations with the West and the USA. Contrary to Bazargan’s government, the new institutions and political organizations affiliated to the Islamist left were anti-imperialist, stood for social and economic justice. They demanded the nationalization of large industries, distribution of land, and the export of the revolution beyond Iranian borders. Radical secular leftist organizations such as *Peykar* considered the Islamic Republic in its entirety as antirevolutionary regime soon to be overthrown as the revolution was going to be radicalized. The first problem Bazargan had to deal with was controlling the weapons in the hands of the young revolutionary Islamists, the Mojahedin, the Fadaian, and

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 153.

⁴² Ali Shariati, *Khodsazi-ye enqelabi* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Elham, 2000), pp. 18–19.

⁴³ Naser Makarem Shirazi, *Payan-e omre-e- marksism* (Qom: Madrasat ol-emam Amir al-momenin, 1979), p. 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

other political groups. Bazargan encouraged these political organizations to give up their arms, but they refused, because they wanted to be prepared, as they claimed, against any imperialist conspiracy. The government of Bazargan shared its power with the council of the Revolution, which included prominent clerics such as Taleqani, Motahhari, Bahonar, Mahdavi-Kani, and Rafsanjani. The decisive moment in the formation of the Islamic Republic might have been the March 31 referendum, held by the provisional government on the issue of changing the political system based on the monarchy to the Islamic Republic. The referendum was about, "Should Iran be an Islamic Republic?" The overwhelming majority of the people approved the Islamic Republic. By late April, the draft of the constitution was ready, and instead of a large constituent assembly promised before, a smaller *assembly of experts* (*Majles-e Khobregan*) worked on the draft of the constitution. In August 1979, the election of the *assembly of experts* took place. Of the seventy-two elected members, forty-five were clerics and thirty-six of them connected to the Islamic Republican Party, founded by Ayatollah Beheshti, Rafsanjani, Khamenei, and Bahonar. The Islamic Republican Party also had the majority of the lay members of the *assembly of experts*. The draft of the constitution presented to the Iranians in April 1979 did not include the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*. Nevertheless, when the elected assembly started to discuss the draft, the majority in the assembly inserted the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih* into the constitution. In a very simplistic view of the 1979 constitution, Sami Zubaida claims, "It is conducted exclusively in traditional Islamic discussions with hardly any reference to Western or Western-inspired politico-ideological notions."⁴⁵ As I discussed previously, Shariati prepared the young revolutionaries intellectually to embrace Khomeini as the leader of the revolution. It was not the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* that made Khomeini the *Emam of Ommat* and the charismatic leader of the Iranian revolution. It was rather his real leadership in the revolution and its convergence with Shariati's theory of revolutionary leadership which made the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih* appealing after the victory of the revolution. It is true that Ayatollah Khomeini did not use the terminology of nationalism, socialism, or democracy, but he unintentionally combined all of them in the ideology and politics of the Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Shariatmadari, who at the time was the second most significant religious leader in Iran,

⁴⁵ Dilip Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 117.

opposed the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*. "It is the duty of the government to govern. There should be no direct interference from spiritual leaders."⁴⁶ He argued that the doctrine was controversial and referred to it as the "guardianship of minors and widows."⁴⁷ With the 1979 referendum on the draft constitution, the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih* became the decisive article of Iran's constitution. It authorized *Valiy-e Faqih* to supervise elected presidents and governments. Neither Shariati nor Khomeini went in details of the post-revolutionary state. The post-revolutionary state in Iran was a result of the revolutionary contingencies. Khomeini's lectures published under the title *Hokoumat-e Eslami* in the 1970s and *Velayat-e Faqih* after the overthrow of the Shah does not offer a theoretical base for the establishment of an Islamic state. The lectures are general ideas about the ability of Islam and religious leaders to lead a constitutional government. In fact, Ayatollah Montazeri provided a systematic theoretical base for *Velayat-e Faqih* in the mid-1980s, years after its inscription in the Iranian constitution. *Velayat-e Faqih* became the manifestation of Khomeini's political leadership to overcome the armed struggle waged by the opposition and the Iraqi aggression supported by Western powers.

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND ITS AFTERMATH

Abolhassan Bani-Sadr became Iran's president in February 1980. Two of the most important events that took place during his presidency were the Cultural Revolution and the war with Iraq. At the same time Bani-Sadr became Iran's president, Khomeini appointed Ayatollah Beheshti, the leader of the Islamic Republican Party, as the attorney general while Rafsanjani was elected as the parliamentary speaker in May 1980. Beheshti and Rafsanjani were the leading members of the Islamic Republican Party, the most powerful political force that opposed Bani-Sadr's policies. In early 1980, the party decided to expel the secular leftist organizations and the *Mojahedin-e Khalbq* from Iranian universities. These organizations were the most popular political forces in the Iranian universities. On April 18, 1980, the Council of the Revolution gave a 3-day ultimatum to the leftist parties to leave their bases in the universities. By the deadline, the *Mojahedin* left their headquarters. Other political parties refused to leave. On April 22, Bani-Sadr led a group of Islamic students into the University

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

of Tehran and declared the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁸ On the same day, clashes began between the Khomeini loyalists backed by the revolutionary guard on the one side and the leftist students on the other in the universities all over the country. As a result many were dead and injured. Despite the differences between Bani-Sadr and the Islamic Republican Party, they were united on the subject of driving the leftists out of universities. They believed that the leftist groups had made universities their political base to plan and instigate revolts, not only in the universities, but also in other places such as Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Turkmansahra, and Baluchistan. All factions within the Islamic Republic, from Bazargan and Bani-Sadr to the leaders of the Islamic Republican Party, believed that the leftist organizations used universities to instigate problems in other parts of the country.⁴⁹ There were conflicting reports as to whether the Islamic Republican Party or Bani-Sadr initiated the attack on the students. Some claim that Beheshti and Bazargan were for moderation, but Bani-Sadr did not want to compromise.⁵⁰ Others claimed that Bani-Sadr had been the moderating force who discovered that the Islamic Republican Party intended a bloody confrontation with the leftist students. They claim that he informed the leftist organizations of the danger of resisting the decision of the Council of Revolution.⁵¹ After the closing down of the universities, Khomeini appointed Abdolkarim Soroush, Shams Al-e Ahmad, Jaleddin Farsi, and Mehdi Rabani-Amlashi as the heads of the *Committee of Cultural Revolution*. Khomeini appointed these people because of their different credentials. Soroush's appointment was because of his scientific and philosophical background. Amlashi was a philosophically minded cleric. Farsi was appointed for his political experience and knowledge and finally, Shams Al-e Ahmad (Jalal Al-e Ahmad's brother) who represented the intellectuals who defended the Islamic character of the revolution.⁵² Khomeini still believed that he could unite different sections of society around an Islamic core. Shams Al-e Ahmad's collaboration with the Islamic Republic was rejected by the mainstream of Iranian intellectuals, who were secular and leftist. Sadeq Zibakalam,

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

⁴⁹ Sadeq Zibakalam, *Daneshgah va enqelab: revayat-e bimehri'ha-ye enqelab beh daneshgah* (Tehran: Ruzaneh, 2001), p. 87.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

⁵¹ M. Fatapur, *Pasokbi beh Edea'ha-ye Soroush dar bareh-ye naqsh-e chap dar daneshgah'ha-ye Iran dar douran-e enqelab*, www.Iran-emruz.com

⁵² Zibakalam, *Daneshgah va Enqelab*, p. 92.

who had been an active supporter of the Cultural Revolution, claims that the whole idea of the Cultural Revolution was unrealistic and wrong and the whole project was a big mistake.⁵³ The outcome of the *Cultural Revolution* was the expulsion of thousands of lecturers and professors from universities because they disagreed with the Islamist students and the new administration. The Islamist students expelled any professors they did not like.⁵⁴ After the reopening of the universities in 1983, thousands of students were absent from the university campuses because they had been executed, imprisoned, or expelled because they were accused of being un-Islamic. The motto was the Islamization of universities and human and social sciences. However, those who supposed to Islamize sciences soon discovered that there was no such thing as Islamic pedagogy, Islamic sociology, or Islamic political sciences.⁵⁵ According to Zibakalam, the Islamist student association, *The Office of Consolidating Unity (Daft-e Tahkim-e Vahdat)*, was the most enthusiastic organization that believed in the *Islamization of Sciences*. Some militant clerics' teaching in the universities created an illusion for the Islamic students that the senior clerics in Qom might have greater access to the original sources of modern sciences. Since the revolutionary Islamist students believed that they had found the source of all science in the religious schools, they followed the clerics blindly. The students believed that if the *Committee of the Cultural Revolution* showed more vigor and enthusiasm, they would have received packages of modern Islamic sciences produced by the religious scholars in Qom ready for use in the universities. The result was a few texts under the title of Islamic knowledge and morality, which made the students furious. They blamed the Committee for the failure of the *Islamization of sciences*. In response to these protests, Jala'eddin Farsi, the most radical member of the Committee, who would have liked to expel all un-Islamic elements in universities, responded angrily to the students. He claimed that the seminaries in Qom had not shown any willingness to assist the Committee of the Cultural Revolution on the issue of the *Islamization of sciences*. He claimed that the clerics in Qom did not give anything at all to the project of the *Islamization of sciences*. Later the Islamist students realized that there had not been such a thing as Islamic human

⁵³ Ibid., p. 84.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

and social sciences.⁵⁶ Perhaps the impact of this experience was so crucial for the young Islamist revolutionaries who began to understand that the clerics were not the store of all knowledge. They began to realize that knowledge was a process of redescription and opening new perspectives. According to Zibakalam, the great lesson the Islamist students learned from the *Cultural Revolution* was that there was no such thing as Islamic, Western, or Marxist sciences.⁵⁷ The irony of the *Cultural Revolution* was that Soroush, who had criticized Iranian Marxists' notions of class-based sciences, had to respond to the Islamist students who demanded modern Islamic sciences. Soroush had advocated the objectivity and impartiality of knowledge. Former Islamists claim that the *Cultural Revolution* aimed to reform the university system to reply to the needs of the country and its cultural characteristics. The opponents of the Islamic Republic have been saying that the *Cultural Revolution* had a political aim, the expulsion of the secular leftists from universities. Both arguments seem plausible. The *Cultural Revolution* sought to realize both purposes.⁵⁸

Ali Shariati's Leninist notion of the intellectual vanguard as the expression of collective consciousness was affirmed by the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih*. Although Shariati's illustration of the revolutionary leadership in the *Emam-e Ommat* was decisive in branding Khomeini's leadership, he did not elaborate on the nature of the post-revolutionary state and society. Khomeini's Islamic Republic did not become a democratic system as he had promised in Paris in 1978. However, he changed his previous position on the nature of an Islamic government: from a state based on the Islamic laws to the Islamic Republic based on popular vote. He returned to the idea of the Islamic government as he saw the support for the inscription of *Velayat-e Faqih* in the constitution. These ideological changes show Ayatollah Khomeini's flexibility to new ideas and new situations. The interactions of the masses and Khomeini with each other made him the *Emam* and the central pillar of the revolution and the Islamic Republic. As choice was between secular and Islamist *totalist* ideologies, the Islamist ideology came out as the strongest one, because it attracted the attention of more people. The Islamists offered a more colorful intellectual product, because, in addition to their intellectual reflections on Islam, they reflected on the problems raised by the Marxist discourse.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 109.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

POLITICAL RADICALISM AND CONSERVATISM

Conservatism and radicalism were the terms used to portray two distinctive political factions, which shared political power in Iran in the 1980s. Both factions were Khomeini loyalists. There are some major and minor events, which exemplify the schism between Khomeini devotees in the government, within the *majles* (parliament), and between the parliament and the Guardian Council. The means of distinguishing between different political factions have been unclear. For instance, as late as 1993, the term *traditional Right* and *moderate* were used to designate those who were called conservative in the late 1990s. Islamist leftists or *radicals* in the 1980s have been redescribed as reformists since the late 1990s. The Islamist right and left had different understandings of the nature of the post-revolutionary political system. The *Islamist right* “believed in the sanctity of private property and opposed state taxation of the private sector, wanted strict implementation of Sharia in the sociocultural sphere, and opposed the export of the revolution to other Islamic countries.”⁵⁹ Contrary to this standpoint, the *radicals* or *the Islamist left* “advocated the cause of the poor, believed in the export of the revolution, maintained a more tolerant sociocultural views, and supported state-sponsored redistributive and egalitarian policies.”⁶⁰ Since the early 1980s, the leading organizations that had supported Khomeini against all his opponents became involved in ideological and political disputes. The disagreements resulted in the formation of leftist (radical) and rightist (conservative) factions within these organizations. By the late 1980s, as a result of the internal disputes organizations such as the *Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution* (*Mojahedin-e Engelab-e Eslami*), the Islamic Republican Party (*Hezb-e Jomhuriy-e Eslami*) ceased to exist. With Khomeini’s backing, the leftist faction within the *Society of Militant Clergy* (*Jameeh-ye Rouhaniyat-e Mobarez*) left the organization and established the *Association of Militant Clerics* (*Majma-e Rouhaniun-e Mobarez*). Khomeini described the establishment of the new association of clergymen as a noble action. He told the breakaway clerics that their separation indicated their desire to express their views freely.⁶¹ The two factions within the *Society of Militant Clergy* represented two ideological positions within the Islamic Fiqh. While the

⁵⁹ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), p. 48.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 69.

remaining faction represented *Traditional Fiqh* (*Fiqh-e Sonnati*), the breakaway faction represented *Dynamic* or *Progressive Fiqh* (*Fiqh-e Puya* or *Fiqh-e Motaraqi*).⁶² The advocates of the *Traditional Fiqh* argued that the primary ordinances (*Abkam-e Avvaliyeh*) expressed in the *Qoran* and the *Sonnat* were sufficient to govern an Islamic state. Contrary to the adherents of *Traditional Fiqh*, the advocates of the *Dynamic Fiqh* argued that contemporary Muslims' experience of sociopolitical and cultural conditions are radically different from the time of the Prophet Mohammad. As a result, Islamic Sharia has to consider the contemporary political, economic, and cultural situations.⁶³ Supporting the view of the *Dynamic Fiqh*, Khomeini claimed:

I believe in *sonnati* and essential [*javaheri*] *fiqh* and agree that it is the correct and proper form of *ijtihad*. However, this does not mean that Islamic *fiqh* is not dynamic [*puya*]. Time and place are two decisive components of *ijtihad*. A thorough [*jame'*] mojtahid must be familiar with the ways and means of confronting the deceits of [Western] worldly hegemonies, culture, and economic systems.⁶⁴

Khomeini blames the conservative faction and advocates of the *Sonnati Fiqh* for their inability to understand that their restrictive sociopolitical and cultural views and capitalist-oriented economic stance serve Western hegemony and interests in the region. It is worth to quote Khomeini's last remarks on the undeclared alliance between conservative forces in Iran and the American hegemony in the region.

There are people in the *howzeh* who, while pretending to be highly religious, are eradicating religion, the revolution, and the system. Certainly God-less [people] whose aim is to destroy the revolution label immediately anyone who wants to work for the poor and the needy as communists. Aimed at defeating the revolution, America and [world] arrogance have such people under their thumbs. I have, on numerous occasions, warned of the dangers of these religiously "narrow-minded," "mentally ossified," and "reactionaries." Through their deceit, in universities and *howzehs* these pseudo-religious people destroy the essence of the revolution and Islam

⁶² Ibid., p. 49.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

from within. With self-righteous faces and in support of religion and *velayat [faqih]*, they accuse every one of irreligiousness.⁶⁵

With Khomeini's backing, the Islamist leftists dominated the parliament from 1982 to 1992. In 1987, Rafsanjani asked Khomeini to intervene in support of the parliamentary approval of a bill that had been rejected by the *Guardian Council*. Khomeini responded by suggesting that when the majority of the parliament approve a bill, its implementation does not require the approval of the *Guardian Council*.⁶⁶ A few months later, in the summer of 1987, the *Guardian Council* vetoed a labor law because it contradicted, according to the Council, Islamic principles. As a response to the parliamentary speaker who had asked him to support the labor law, Khomeini ordered the *Guardian Council* to accept the legislation. He told the *Guardian Council* that the Islamic state had a divine authority to undermine Islamic principles which endanger the welfare of the Islamic community. Ayatollah Safi, a senior member of the *Guardian Council*, challenged Khomeini's claim and argued that such statements would open the way to change the nature of the existing socioeconomic order. When Iran's president, Ali Khamenei, defended Ayatollah Safi's interpretation by saying that the Islamic state should operate within the limits of the Islamic laws and Islamic principles, Khomeini's response was very harsh.⁶⁷ He blamed Khamenei for his failure to understand that the *Vali-ye Faqih* was more than an interpreter of the Islamic law. According to Khomeini, the *Vali-ye Faqih* was the embodiment of the Islamic law. In January 1988, he made one of his most controversial statements.

Your interpretation of what I said, that is, the government [or state] has jurisdiction within the framework of the divine injunctions, is ... contradictory to what I said ... The government, which is part of the total [or absolute] vice-regency of the Prophet ... is one of the foremost injunctions of Islam and has priority over all other secondary injunctions, even prayers, fasting and the hajj ... The government is empowered unilaterally to revoke any lawful agreement ... if the agreement contravenes the *interests* of ... the country. It can prevent any matter, whether religious or secular, if it is against the interest of Islam.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

⁶⁶ Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini*, p. 129.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 135.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

This statement resulted in the formation of the *Expediency Council* (*Majma-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat*) in February 1988. *The Expediency Council* was a combination of clerical members of the *Guardian Councils*, the president, the head of legislative and judiciary powers, the prime minister, and the minister related to the particular case in dispute between the parliament and the *Guardian Council*. The composition of the *Expediency Council* was in favor of the Islamist leftists.⁶⁹ The notion of the total vice-regency of the *Velayat-e Faqih* was welcomed by the parliament speaker Rafsanjani, the Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi, and the *Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat*.⁷⁰ Rafsanjani argued that Khomeini did not want to give the person who acts as the *Vali-ye Faqih* the absolute power but to empower the Islamic government, since he had delegated his power to the parliament.⁷¹ In the course of this dispute, Ayatollah Montazeri, who few years earlier had been appointed by the *Assembly of Experts*, as the next *Vali-ye Faqih*, was forced to resign. Now, the question was whether the next leader would be a *Marja-e Taqlid* (*grand Ayatollah*) or not. The solution, which could get some justifications through Khomeini's arguments, was the separation of the position of *Faqih* from the status of *Marja*. The solution should not jeopardize the identity of the Islamic state based on the unity of politics and religion. The most radical response came from Mousavi Khoiniha, one of the distinguished leaders of the Islamist left. He claimed that the question was not that of the "religious leadership being separated from a political one. [Rather] the issue was to see if the condition for being a leader was fulfilled then the political leader could be the source of emulation." He continued his argument by saying that selecting a *Marja* "was a personal matter, rather separate from affairs of the country or running the nation." And he claimed, further, that the Islamic nature of the government did not depend on whether its leader was a *Marja*, but on its emphasis on Islamic principles. According to Khoiniha, those who held the view that *Veli-ye Faqih*, or the leader, should be a *Marja* were, in fact, promoting the separation of politics from religion.⁷² The changes in the constitution to respond to the new situation coincided with the death of Khomeini. The result of the changes did not serve the Islamist leftists. It rather empowered the conservative faction. After the changes

⁶⁹ Quchani, *Jomburi-ye moqaddas*, p. 69.

⁷⁰ Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini*, pp. 137–138.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.

in the constitution, the *Assembly of Experts* elected Ayatollah Khamenei as the supreme leader, and the prime minister position occupied by the Islamist leftists since 1980 disappeared. The result was the approval of the policy of economic construction, led by Hashemi Rafsanjani, and supported by Ali Khamenei. The new situation led to the expulsion of the majority of the Islamist leftists from key political positions. With the support of Khamenei and Rafsanjani, the *Guardian Council* disqualified the Islamist leftists from running as candidates for the *Assembly of Experts* and parliament. Expecting the *Guardian Council* to disqualify the candidacy of many leftist members of the third parliament in the next parliament elections, the parliament majority tried to pass an amendment to the election law. The amendment excluded practical commitment to Islam and to the political system as two criteria for being qualified to stand as a parliament candidate. This act infuriated the *Society of Qom Seminary Scholars* (*Jameeh-ye Modaresin-e Houzeh-ye Elmīyeh Qom*), a powerful conservative organization that supported the *Guardian Council*. The association accused the Islamist leftists of paving the path for the return of the liberals and anti-*Velayat-e Faqih* elements into the Islamic parliament. In response to the accusation, Mehdi Karoubi claimed that the majority of the parliament would stand against the liberals, the capitalists, and the reactionaries at the same time.⁷³ However, such actions did not prevent the *Guardian Council* of disqualifying the majority of the Islamist leftists from standing as candidates in the national elections.⁷⁴ A great number of Islamist leftists such as Behzad Nabavi and Hadi Khamenei were excluded from the election, and Khatami, who had been cultural minister since 1982, was forced to resign in 1992. Dissatisfied with Nicolai Ceausescu's visit to Iran, the Islamist leftists prevented the new *Veli-ye Faqih* from meeting the Romanian president, on the basis that he represented an oppressive regime. Khalkhali claimed "the Iranian Republic as a protector of the oppressed ... should not have received a bloody dictator on its soil."⁷⁵ The leftists in the parliament demanded the foreign minister to explain to the parliament why Ceausescu had been invited. Dissatisfied with the parliament's noisy protest against Ceausescu's visit, Khamenei demanded that the parliament should not weaken the state institutions such as the ministry of foreign affairs. However, the parliament, under the control of

⁷³ Quchani, *Jomhuri-ye moqaddas*, pp. 131–132.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁷⁵ Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini*, p. 167.

the majority of Islamist leftists, would not be silenced. In the early days of 1990, parliament speaker Karoubi and 217 other members of parliament sent a letter to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to remind him that Ayatollah Khomeini had delegated his power to the parliament. They reminded Khamenei that Khomeini described Iranian parliament as the essence of the nation's virtues and the center of all powers and law preserving "the system's general interests and contributing to the implementation of popular sovereignty."⁷⁶ The letter did not achieve the expected results. The Islamist leftists, who had excluded their political opponents in the parliamentary elections, in the early 1980s, began to defend the individual and political rights of the citizens. After Khomeini's death, they became more vocal in their defense of political and cultural pluralism.⁷⁷ Islamist leftists defended a degree of cultural liberalism when Khatami was in office as cultural minister. Khatami claimed that the restraints on intellectual freedom contradicted the fundamental idea upon which the Islamic Republic had been based. Hadi Khamenei, the brother of the *Veli-ye Faqih*, accused the conservative adversaries of presenting the Islamist leftists as the enemies of cultural and social freedom.⁷⁸ Despite its hard-line policy against the USA and its harsh treatment of its secular political adversaries, the Islamist left respected a degree of intellectual freedom. They helped Soroush to publish his controversial essays, *Qabz va Bast*, in the newspaper *Keyhan* while Mohammad Khatami was cultural minister. "If Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* was a radical departure from traditional Shia political thought, his political legacy has contributed to another paradigm shift from Islamism to post-Islamism."⁷⁹

POST-ISLAMIST INTELLECTUALS

I use the terms *perspectivism* and *post-Islamism* to signify the intellectual and political discourses, which emerged in Iran since the late 1980s. The agents of these two discourses have sometimes been called *religious intellectuals* (*Roushanfekran-e Dini*). I employ *perspectivist* and *post-Islamist* intellectuals to identify Muslim intellectuals whose ideas inspired

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 168.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 178.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 181.

⁷⁹ Mahdavi, *One Bed and Two Dreams: Contentious Public Religion of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati*, *Studies in Religion*, Vol. 43 (1), p. 48.

a generation of Islamists in the late 1980s and 1990s. Soroush's ideas opened the way for Islamist thinkers such as Mojtaba Shabestari, a distinguished theologian and a member of the *Jameeh-ye Rouhaniyat-e Mobarez*. Soroush and Mojtaba Shabestari's effort was enhanced by the younger generation of Islamists such as Mohsen Kadivar, Alireza Alavitarbar, Saeed Hajjarian, and Akbar Ganji in the early 1990s. When Soroush's popularity rose in the early 1990s, senior clerics in Qom seminaries accused him of conspiring against Islam.⁸⁰ Soroush had never been a member of the Islamist left, but he got their support and inspired them in return. The influence of Soroush on the leftist Islamists became so evident that he became associated with leading Islamist leftist clerics, such as Mousavi Khoiniha.⁸¹ Soroush's ideas made an enormous impact on the Islamist leftists and led them toward a critical evaluation of *totalist* worldview and ideologies, in general, including the *totalist* interpretation of Islam expressed in the Islamist ideology.⁸² Daryush Ashuri, a well-known secular intellectual in Iran and one of the founders of the *Association of Iranian Writers*, has an interesting comment on the Islamist and post-Islamist intellectuals. Ashuri said that whereas the future of the religious intellectuals (Islamist intellectuals) depends on Soroush, the future of the intellectual discourse in Iran depends on the *religious intellectuals* (post-Islamist intellectuals).⁸³ Soroush's association with the Islamist leftists in the late 1980s resulted in the publication of the monthly *Kiyan*, which became a post-Islamist magazine. The more politically active Islamist leftists who had worked with Mousavi Khoiniha in the *Centre for Strategic Studies* and were connected to *Kiyan* circle published the daily *Salaam*. *Salaam* was the only Islamist leftist newspaper that took a critical approach toward the Rafsanjani-Khamenei alliance in the early 1990s. The Islamist leftists' dialog with Soroush resulted in an intellectual movement, which targeted the *totalist* aspects of the Islamist ideology and the totalitarian and authoritarian politics it generated in the Islamic Republic. According to some analysts, the cultural, social, and political demands of a new middle class initiated the prodemocracy movement in the post-Khomeini era

⁸⁰ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Siyasatnameh* (Tehran: Sarat, 1999), p. 5.

⁸¹ Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini*, p. 217.

⁸² Ali Reza Alavitarbar, *Roushanfekri, dindari, mardomsalari* (Tehran: Farhang va Andisheh, 2000), pp. 123–136.

⁸³ *Rah-e Nou*, No. 9 (June 1998): 20.

that challenged the state ideology.⁸⁴ According to this narrative, in the first stage of the Iranian revolution, the new middle class was marginalized, but it re-emerged in the early 1990s. Whereas because of their economic tranquility, the upper middle classes did not resist the cultural, ideological, political, and social restrictions of the Islamic state, the downtrodden classes adopted the ideology of the Islamic Republic. University teachers, students and professionals, intellectuals, artists, and writers were the main pillars of the new middle class, which according to some statistics, numbered more than 2.5 million in 1995. There were more than a million students in the Iranian universities in 1995.⁸⁵ The majority of this new middle class, which had emerged in the post-revolutionary Iran, distanced itself from the Islamist ideology. They rejected its utopian notion of politics because they realized that politics was not about creating a utopian society in the future, but rather about making concrete changes in the present. The new middle class found its historical ideals either in post-Marxism or the ideas of the post-Islamist intellectuals loyal to the Islamic Republic. In contrast to the late 1960s and 1970s, no single leftist organization of any sort appeared during the 1980s and 1990s. The disappearance of Marxism in post-revolutionary Iran cannot be explained by referring either to the political brutality of the Islamic Republic or the collapse of the Soviet Union. The unpopularity of *totalist* ideologies, including Marxism, in the Iran of the 1980s, attested to an intellectual rapture. The *totalist* ideologies lost their power over the intellectual in Iran, because the Iranian intellectual had experienced the promises of a mass revolution and its failure to establish a “true democratic order.”

The formation of the *post-Islamist* or *religious intellectuals* reflected the changes that were taking place in the Iranian intellectual life. The Islamic Republic's inability to impose the official ideology on the cultural domain in general and universities, in particular, indicated the power of an emerging intellectual discourse. What characterized this discourse was its incessant critical approach toward *totalist* ideologies.⁸⁶ For the pre-revolutionary *Islamist* intellectuals, the future was a result of a return to the self, through acquiring knowledge of the past as the condition of the emergence of the self. Unlike the Islamist intellectuals, the *post-Islamist*

⁸⁴ Hossein Bashiriyeh, *Dibacheh'i bar jameeh'shenasi-ye siyasi-ye Iran: doureh-ye jomhuri-ye eslami* (Tehran: Negah-e Moaser, 2002), p. 130.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

and *perspectivist* intellectuals saw the future as something to be created at the present, and their discourse was discarding Shariati-Khomeini's ideological alliance. The most articulated expression of this intellectual transformation was the new picture of the Self.⁸⁷ To some analysts, this new Self was the result of the extension of higher education and the expansion of *Free Universities* in remote parts of the country. The new Self was the expression of hundreds of thousands of educated people who demanded their political and civil rights. They responded to the political situation, not by creating a utopian society, but by demanding real and concrete changes. It was, of course, partly a result of the rejection of the traditional idols and "[yearn] for a non-heroic, non-puritanical, and pluralistic social life."⁸⁸ The new generation of intellectuals was more preoccupied with individual freedom and political democracy. The critical approach of the new religious intellectuals toward the Islamic system expressed this new intellectual stance. I understand post-Islamism in Iran as the political expression of intellectual *perspectivism*. I have identified Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf as representatives of epistemological, theological, and artistic *perspectivism* in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I discuss five political intellectuals, Mohsen Kadivar, Akbar Ganji, Alireza Alavitarab, Saeed Hajarian, and Mohammad Khatami as representatives of post-Islamism. The list of both *perspectivists* and *post-Islamists* can be extended, but such a list cannot include those disciples of Shariati, who did not support the *Velayat-e Faqih* principle in the 1979 constitution. They have been by far the most courteous opposition to the Islamic Republic Khomeini since the revolution. The Islamic Republic has never treated them with the respect they deserved. The fact is that before Khomeini's death and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of Marxism in Iran, this particular group of Shariati's disciples considered the secular left as their political allies. What is called *neo-Shariatism* is, in fact, a result of the debate of these *Shariatists* with the post-Islamist intellectuals taken place since the 1990s. In the 1990s, they formed an alliance with well-known political figures such as Ezatollah Sahabi and Habibollah Peyman. Sahabi was a former member of the *Freedom Movement* with leftist tendencies who because of his disagreements with Bazargan's government left the *Movement* in 1979. Peyman

⁸⁷ Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Anthropology of Democratization", *Critique*, No. 16 (Spring 2000): 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

is a veteran Muslim socialist. They published *Iran-e Farda* from 1992 to 2000. Iran's judiciary banned the magazine in 2000. As the post-Islamist discourse on democracy intensified in the public space in the 1990s, the Shariatists became closer to the *Freedom Movement* ideologically. Ever since, they have been known as *Melli-Mazhabi* groups to the public. *Post-Islamism's* dominance of the public space in the late 1990s unleashed a climate of hostility rather than painstaking critique against Shariati and Al-e Ahmad. Being anti-Al-e Ahmad or anti-Shariati became chic intellectually. They became easy targets for former Islamists and secular intellectuals. The Shariati disciples could not believe that the same Islamists, who had repressed and imprisoned them for more than a decade, now were making unfair judgments on Shariati's ideas from a post-Islamist posture. Shariati's disciples saw that the new post-Islamist posture was achieved at Shariati's expense, and it was completely ignoring his intellectual merits. He was blamed for ideologization of religion, for his critique of liberal democracy and for his theory of revolutionary leadership in *Ommat va Emamat* supposed to have encouraged the totalitarian tendencies in the Islamic Republic. Shariati's disciples found the post-Islamism epistemologically inadequate, ethically unreliable, and politically opportunistic.⁸⁹ In the early 2000s, commentators sympathetic to Shariati used the term *Shariatism* to signify Shariati's disciples who misinterpreted his intellectual legacy.⁹⁰ Thus, a proper understanding of Shariati's legacy required a critique of *Shariatism*.⁹¹ Accordingly, *Shariatism* became the names of an ideology, which has buried Shariati's core ideas and prevented his texts as a source of intellectual innovations. *Shariatism* seemed to be a post-Islamist intellectual construct to criticize ideological exploitation of religion for political means in the Islamic Republic.⁹² It appears that what happened to Marx at the global level has been happening to Shariati in Iran. There is a familiar Shariati, which has little to do with the Shariati of the text.⁹³ The preoccupation with revisiting Shariati has increased in recent years. Bijan Abdolkarimi, a distinguished post-Islamist intellectual and scholar

⁸⁹ For one of the earliest responses to the post-Islamist critique and Soroush's critique in particular of Shariati's thought see Reza Alijani, *Ideolozhi alyb-e Ideolozhi* (Tehran: Qalam, 2001)

⁹⁰ Seyyed Reza Shakeri, *Andisheb-ye siyasi-ye shariati va naqd-e shariatism* (Tehran: Jahad-e Daneshgahi, 2003), pp. 261–265.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 265–266.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

who criticized Shariati's ideologization of Islam in the past, offered a new reading of Shariati. It is worth reviewing Abdolkarimi's idea of ideologization of religion in the early 1990s. "Similar to all ideologies Islam is reduced either to an ideological foundation for the realization of political and social ideals or the protection of the interests of a particular social group... As a result, the political defeat of ideological Islam is conceived by those affiliated to this ideology as the defeat of Islam as religion."⁹⁴ Abdolkarimi began his rereading of Shariati in the late 2000s. He argued that the "literalist" reading of Shariati's by Shariatists reduce his multilayered ideas to one simplified aspect of his thought.

Similar to our traditionalists who because of their poor historical understanding do not grasp the spectacular historical changes we have been experiencing, Shariatists do not pay attention to the difference between the intellectual horizons of Shariati's epoch and the contemporary postmodern intellectual condition. Repetition of Shariati's ideas taken shape in an entirely different intellectual horizon cannot satisfy the intellectual yearnings of the young people who are experiencing a different historical time and a new intellectual climate.⁹⁵

In his new intellectual posture Abdolkarimi calls for a return to Shariati.⁹⁶ According to Abdolkarimi's argument, the revolutionaries of the late 1970s were reading Shariati to rationalize their attempts to build an Islamic state. "Today, learning from our experience with a religious state, our [political] expectations are different. This time, Shariati's texts have quite different meanings for us."⁹⁷ For Abdolkarimi, Shariati's significance lies in his successful attempts to establish a dialog between the Iranian tradition and modern rationality. Whereas, Soroush made a Kantian distinction between religion in itself as *noumenon* and religious knowledge as a *phenomenon*, Shariati tried to come closer to the spirit of religion.⁹⁸ Shariati was critical of both ideological presupposition, which

⁹⁴ Bijan Abdolkarimi, *Shariati va secularism*, Quoted by Seyed Reza Shakeri, *Andisbeh-ye siyasi-ye shariati va naqd-e shariatism*, pp. 224–225.

⁹⁵ Bijan Abdolkarimi, *Zarurat-e baghsht beh Shariati, leyk na dar ofoq-e diruz*, Maqalat-e Bijan Abdolkarimi, <http://talar.shandel.info/Thread>

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Bijan Abolkarimi, *Padidar'shenasi-ye fahm va faratarikh*, Maqalat-e Bijan Abdolkarimi, <http://talar.shandel.info/Thread>

⁹⁸ Bijan Abdolkarimi, *Shariati va padidar'shenasi-ye tarikhhi-ye din*, Rooznameh Etemad, 29.12.1391.

disabled the clergy to understand modern rationality, and the secular intellectuals' understanding of the Enlightenment and modern rationality as the negation of tradition.⁹⁹ Abdolkarimi argues that the return to Shariati is similar to Shariati's *return to the self* as the rethinking of the intellectual and cultural forces that had shaped the social and political world he was experiencing. The return to Shariati is necessary, for Abdolkarimi, because he is an integral part of the tradition, which has shaped Iran's contemporary cultural, political, and intellectual environment. The return to Shariati may, according to Abdolkarimi, offer a solution to the intellectual deadlock caused by the dispute between the official guardians of tradition and the advocates of secularity and modernism. Whereas, the former fails to recognize the modern characters of its experience, the latter fails to comprehend that enlightenment means tradition in the contemporary Europe. Unable to understand the value of historical knowledge beyond their political aims, both groups use history to protect the existing political order or destroy the order in its entirety.¹⁰⁰

Recent studies on post-Islamist discourse in Iran identify *neo-Shariatism* as an essential part of this discourse.¹⁰¹ *Neo-Shariatism* divides Shariati's intellectual life into the young and the mature period to rescue his *intrinsic* ideas from his *contingent* ideas. For *neo-Shariatism*, "Shariati is an *unfinished project*, and there is much *unthought* in Shariati's thought."¹⁰² Revolutionary Islamism is identified as the first *unthought* in Shariati's thought.¹⁰³ However, this *unthought* seems to be a burden for the *neo-Shariatist* project, because it prevented Shariati's core ideas such as *freedom*, *equality*, and *spirituality* (*Azadi*, *Barabari*, *Erfan*) to be cultivated.¹⁰⁴ Now, what is the nature of the *unthought* in Shariati's intellectual life? Is *neo-Shariatism* a replication of Althusser's *symptomatic reading* of Marx? The *unthought* in Marx's thought is according to Althusser the domain of the rupture between *science* and *ideology*. Do Shariati's *intrinsic* versus *contingent* ideas correspond to Althusser's *science* versus *ideology*? Althusser argues for discontinuity in Marx's thought from 1844 to 1867, from young Marx, who wrote *the German Ideology*, to mature Marx, who wrote

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Mojtaba Mahdavi, Post-Islamist Trends in Postrevolutionary Iran, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Vol. 31, No. 1. 2011. p. 102.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

Capital. Althusser argued that there is a *scientific problematic* in *Capital*, ignored by those who read Marx through his concept of alienation. Thus, through symptomatic reading, one can distinguish between the concepts belonging to the problematic, and signs that do not belong to the problematic. The revealing of the signs related to the problematic signify the unthoughts in Marx's thought.¹⁰⁵ The problem with Althusserian discourse was that it did not connect rational politics to empirical politics and politics of the intellectual to politics of the people. Such connections would put the privileged position of the intellectual in danger.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Althusser's search for the unthought in Marx's work ignores the critical dimension of Marx's texts and delays political action. If we conceptualize revisiting Shariati's work as *neo-Shariatism*, then here are at least two *neo-Shariatist* trends in Iran. One trend is represented by Abdolkarimi, who reads Shariati's texts phenomenologically within the intellectual context and horizon of his time and its impacts on the contemporary intellectual context and perspective. The other trend tries to read Shariati within the conceptual structure his texts offer and through differentiation of his intrinsic and contingent concepts. Whereas the first trend considers the Islamist ideology an integral part of Shariati's thought, the second tendency tries to disconnect Shariati from the Islamist ideology. Should we study Reza Alijani's effort to defend Shariati against unfair critiques or misrepresentations of Shariati's intellectual project as Shariatist or *neo-Shariatist*?¹⁰⁷ Alijani argues that Soroush's critique of ideology begins with dividing ideologies into good and wicked ones. Whereas wicked ideologies produce totalitarian politics, good ideologies generate freedom and democracy. Based on this simplified conception of ideology, Soroush accuses Shariati of reducing Islam to a totalitarian ideology.¹⁰⁸ To Alijani, Shariati's ideology is not wicked, because its insistence on *freedom, equality, and spirituality (erfan)* makes it a universalist and humanist ideology.¹⁰⁹ Against the post-Islamist critique of Shariati's theory of the revolutionary leadership presented in the *Omat and Emammat*, Alijani claims that Shariati's has a radical conception of democracy, which differed from Western liberal democracy. Shariati's democracy aims to lead human

¹⁰⁵ Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: New Left, 1969), p. 38.

¹⁰⁶ Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's lesson* (New York, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), p. 55.

¹⁰⁷ Reza Alijani, *Ideolozi Alyh-e Ideolozi* (Tehran: Qalam, 2001), p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 156–160.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

societies toward perfection.¹¹⁰ Shariati's democracy is a post-liberal democracy.¹¹¹ I have demonstrated that Shariati believed in "true democracy." He distinguished between formal democracy in the West and the true democracy of the future as the common goal of humanity. Shariati's adopted the Marxist description of Western democracy as formal democracy and the classless society of the future as true democracy. Marx criticized the nineteenth-century European constitutional governments, which institutionalized the Rights of Man and Citizens as formal democracies.¹¹² In the late 1990s, Alijani still believed in Shariati's critique of formal democracy and his vision of true democracy. Alijani claims, "Shariati's popular democracy differs from the elitist and aimless Western democracy because it is a purposeful democracy."¹¹³ He claims that Shariati's democracy has a legitimate authority through popular vote, because it gains its authority from its ideology (its ideals and political program), and its legitimacy from the popular vote.¹¹⁴ Alijani's reading of Shariati does not pay attention to Shariati's vision of true democracy as an event, which takes place in the future classless society of dealienated humans who express their full humanity. Shariati understood true democracy as the realization of human freedom, equality, and spirituality and as the condition of possibility of full humanity. Full humanity means liberation from material necessity, political coercion, ideological domination, and social alienation. Full humanity is the expression of the self-consciousness of the dealienated human beings whose existence reflect their essence. To Shariati, the process from full economic exploitation, political coercion, ideological domination, and social alienation in the modern societies toward the true democracy is a process of *the withering away of the state*. For Shariati, despite its seemingly dictatorial appearance or form, a guided democracy is more democratic in reality than any formal democracy because its aim is the realization of a true democracy in the future.¹¹⁵ Whereas formal democracy is aimless, Shariati's guided democracy is toward a goal that is true democracy. Shariati's revolutionary state

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 215

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 189

¹¹² See, for example, Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, in David McLellan (ed), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

¹¹³ Alijani, *Ideolozhi alyh-e Ideolozhi*, p. 188.

¹¹⁴ Alijani, *Ideolozhi alyh-e Ideolozh*, pp. 188–189.

¹¹⁵ Ali Shariati, *Neveshteh'ha-ye asasi-ye Shariati beh kushesh-e Bijan Abdolkarimi* (Tehran: Naqd-e Farhang, 2014), pp. 248–249.

is not a state in the traditional sense. It is not a means of administration of the daily affairs of the citizens to increase their material pleasure, but a state that is well aware of its disappearance in the process toward true democracy. In Shariati's vision of the process toward true democracy, the people are transformed from the masses to the real or full citizens who are aware of the value of their votes. Only people who are fully aware of the value of their votes can achieve true democracy because only true democracy can guarantee full citizenship. True democracy becomes a reality when the vote of every citizen is liberated from the economic necessity, political coercion, ideological domination, and social alienation. The full citizen is a perfect human being whose vote reflects his or her experience of Truth, Good, and the Beautiful. Consequently, a full citizen is the one whose existence is reunited with his or her essence, overwhelmed by divine spirituality and reunification with God. Now, the question is, does such a perfect human being, overwhelmed with Truth, Good, and the Beautiful, need to use his or her vote? What does politics mean in a classless and stateless and thus *politicsless* society? Alijani is aware that Shariati's conceptualization of democracy and political leadership is inadequate.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, he instructs Shariati's readers to go beyond *Ommat va Emamat* and read his numerous books to realize the significance of *freedom, equality, and spirituality (erfan)*, which he terms as *radical democracy* or *spiritual social democracy*.¹¹⁷ Alijani claims that Shariati's *radical democracy* indicates that the *Ommat va Emamat* does not fit in his political theory.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, Alijani claims that the concept of *Ommat* in the *Ommat va Emamat* means classless society envisioned by Marx.¹¹⁹ He quotes Shariati saying, "New revolutionary regimes never hand over the fate of the revolution to the trembling hands of democracy." The explanation following the quotation is that Shariati was "talking about a traditional and backward society."¹²⁰ Other *neo-Shariatists* support this argument.¹²¹ Alijani believes that Shariati made a mistake by explaining

¹¹⁶ Reza Alijani, Fahm-e yek toujih-e namovvafaq: barrasi-ye tahlili-enteqadi-ye nazariyeh-ye "omat-emamat" doktor Shariati, <http://rezaalijani.com/images/ketab/omat1.pdf>, p. 64.

¹¹⁷ Alijani, Fahm-e yek toujih-e namovvafaq, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

¹²¹ Ehsan Shariati, *Man Shariati ra ba shart va shorut mipaziram*. <http://talar.shandel.info/Thread->

Emamat in *Shia* tradition through modern concepts, because in so doing he decontextualized the concept of *Emamat*. By criticizing Shariati's decontextualization of *Ommat va Emamt*, Alijani decontextualizes Shariati's own discourse because it isolates it from both his oeuvre and the intellectual and political context of Shariati and his work. There are other *neo-Shariatists*, such as Sara Shariati, who infer the meaning they wish from Shariati's concepts, through decontextualization of the concepts. Sara Shariati argues that the emphasis on Shariati's concept of equality has undermined the significance of his concept of freedom. She claims that Shariati conceptualized human freedom as part of the human essence, expressed in the individual's existential experiences or their collective social and historical agency. She claims that Shariati saw freedom as deviation from the chain of causality, because freedom constitutes humankind as the cause. However, nature, history, society put limits on human freedom. For Sara Shariati, human freedom means emancipation from these confinements, through self-consciousness, political engagement, and liberation from economic necessities.¹²² As I demonstrated previously, Shariati argued that humans could achieve freedom, equality, and spirituality only in the real democracy of the future. He indicated that one cannot discuss one of these instances of the coming humanity without taking into account human propensities to *freedom, equality, and spirituality (erfan)* to be realized in the future total society. In the next chapters, I deal with another rewriting of history through the discourse of intellectual *perspectivism* and post-Islamism elaborated by the former Islamist intellectuals.

¹²² Sara Shariati, *Maflum-e azadi dar asar-e Shariati*, Matn-e sohbat dar bonyad-e Shariati, June 2014, <http://sarahshariati.blogspot.no/>

Post-Islamist Perspectivism

For many years, Merleau-Ponty was one of the most significant exponents of the concept of totality and a militant defender of Stalinist totalitarianism. He revised his understanding of the concept of totality and total man in 1953. “The philosopher does not say that a final transcendence of human contradictions may be possible, and that the complete man awaits us in the future. Like everyone else, he knows nothing of this.”¹ He argued that Marxism does not acquire a total view of history. He rejected the Marxist promise of total unity of subject and object and total man in the total society through social and political revolutions. He claimed, “revolutions inevitably pervert in their transformation from negativity to positivity, from critique and destruction to reconstruction. They are ‘true as movements’ but ‘false as regime.’” He argued that true movements are transformed into false regimes because the social forces that break down the old political system have to sustain the new system through new forms of repression and new mechanisms of control.² Merleau-Ponty argued that revolutions are not the expressions of truth, because politics is not about truth, but about change and democracy. He endorsed parliament as the only legitimate means of democracy and political change because parliament is the only place where oppositions can be publicly and fairly

¹Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality, the Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1984, p. 376.

²Nick Crossley, *The Politics of Subjectivity: Between Foucault and Merleau-Ponty* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1994), p. 94.

fought out.³ In his *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche claims that knowledge of the world means the countless meanings we infer from our interpretations of the world. This he calls *Perspectivism*.⁴ For Nietzsche, every interpretation is an expression of the *will to power*, because interpretation is “a means of becoming master over something.”⁵ The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset developed Nietzsche’s *perspectivism*. Ortega’s political opinion is as important as his philosophical innovation, even though his political ideas are limited to Spain. Ortega claims that “political prescription should be drawn up in the light of what is politically possible” in Spain, and what is politically possible in Spain is basically defined by the existing political institutions. Thus, “we begin to work in Spain as we find it. We are monarchists, not so much because we insist in being so, but because it – Spain – is a monarchy.”⁶ He argues that every construction of a future society would necessarily be based on existing institutions. Ortega’s *perspectivism* is expressed in his doctrine of the point of view.

[F]rom different positions two people see the same surroundings. However, they do not see the same thing. Their different positions mean that the surroundings are organised in a different way: what is in the foreground for one may be in the background for another. Furthermore, as things are hidden one behind another, each person will see something that the other may not.⁷

For Ortega, perception is subjective because “perspective is one of the components of reality” which “preserves the subjective nature of perception and responds to facts of our everyday experience.”⁸ Thus, “Truth is not whimsical: it is something I need in order to achieve intellectual security and thus to feel at peace with myself.”⁹ For Ortega “Man has no nature; he has only ... history.”¹⁰ We can trace Richard Rorty’s concepts of *historicity* and *contingency* to Ortega’s *perspectivism*. In his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty asks the same question as Ortega: What is the

³William L. McBride and Calvin O. Schrag (edited by), *Phenomenology In A Pluralistic Context* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 46

⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 267.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 342.

⁶Andrew Dobson, *An Introduction to the Politics and Philosophy of José Ortega y Gasset* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 26.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 144–146.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 169.

relation between reality and its interpretations? For Rorty, the world is out there, but the descriptions of the world are not, because the world and its descriptions do not correspond to each other. Referring to Nietzsche's *perspectivism*, Rorty argues that only descriptions of the world can be true or false because the conception of truth is a result of a war between different discourses. Any discourse that subordinates other discourses presents itself as the truth.¹¹ Thus, speaking differently, rather than arguing well, is the chief instrument of intellectual, cultural, and social changes.¹² In his attempt to show the historicity of the present, Rorty appeals to the concept of the *ironist*, who contrary to *metaphysician* has radical doubts about the final vocabulary. Rorty's *ironist* is well aware that her or his vocabulary does not correspond more to reality than another vocabulary. He or she is well aware that the validity of his or her vocabulary depends on whether or not his or her vocabulary dominates other vocabularies.¹³ Whereas, *metaphysicians* think that human beings have a natural desire to know, and their vocabulary is the knowledge that relates human beings to their reality, the *ironist* believes that anything can be redescribed.¹⁴ Whereas, the *metaphysician* sees the modern Europeans as particularly good at discovering how things really are, the *ironist* sees them as particularly rapid in changing their self-image, in recreating themselves.¹⁵ Let me use the term *totalist* instead of *metaphysician* and the term *perspectivist* instead of the *ironist*. The *totalist* thinks his or her vocabulary is the truth about reality or has discovered the criteria for the truth about reality. On the contrary, the *perspectivist* knows that his or her vocabulary does not signify reality and soon or later, a new vocabulary will replace it. The ethical implication of this epistemological *perspectivism* is that the *perspectivist* does not see people with different vocabularies as his or her enemies. Whereas, the *totalist* is preoccupied with "large subjects," the *perspectivist* tries "to increase our skill at recognizing and describing the different sorts of little things around which individuals or communities centre their fantasies or their lives."¹⁶ Similar to Foucault, Rorty sees local intellectuals instead of universal intellectuals as the agents of real changes. With the rejection of the

¹¹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

universal subject of knowledge and ethics, the *ironist* or local intellectual reduced politics to ethics in the Western and global context. Thus, instead of contributing to real changes the *ironist* has contributed to the emergence of a new ideological order. This new ideological order assumes the end of politics and history in the West to which the rest of the world must catch up. In fact, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Foucault's local intellectual and Rorty's *ironist* started to assume that they were experiencing a post-historical time because they have reached what Hegel called good infinity. The post-historical time gives the *ironist* a privileged epistemological position to redescribe not only his or her own reality in the West but also the reality of the world in its totality. In fact, the dominant interpretation of the Middle East and Iran is the work of scholars who believe in the Western context as the expression of the post-historical time. From the post-historical time, these scholars interpret the meaning of the 1979 Revolution in Iran and the Islamists ideology, which constructs the West as the other. They discover the essentialist and nativist character of the Islamist intellectuals and his epistemological, ethical, esthetic, and political flaws. They describe Iranian post-Islamism as the effort of former Islamists who try to catch up the intellectual, ethical, and esthetic and political position of the *ironist* of the post-historical time. I shall demonstrate that no historical subject lives in a post-historical time because history is an open-ended process.

TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE

Despite authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies within the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini not only tolerated but also encouraged ideological diversities and political differences within the post-revolutionary political system. After Khomeini's death, *Velayat-e Faqih* lost its position as the primary source of unity of the political system. The Islamist leftists supported the inscription of *Velayat-e Faqih* in the constitution as the expression of the *general will* in 1979. However in the post-Khomeini Iran, they found the text of the constitution the primary source of national unity and the political system's popular legitimacy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, former Islamists began to revise the Islamist ideology and criticize the Islamic Republic' totalitarian tendencies. They criticized the very political system they had built because it was unable to recognize the concrete political rights of the people. Learned in Shariati's Islamist ideology, they distinguished between the Islam of submission and tradition and

the Islam of criticism and protest.¹⁷ In many ways, the post-Islamist intellectual discourse is a logical consequence of Shariati's intellectual project. The history of the transformation of the *totalist* Islamist ideology into the *perspectivist* post-Islamist discourse is a history of the Muslim intellectuals who believed in a single truth connecting religion, philosophy, art, and politics together. After experiencing the embodiment of their belief in the official ideology of the Islamic Republic and its practices, these Muslim intellectuals began to investigate the historical condition of possibility of their previous truth claim.

The leaders of the Tudeh Party appeared on Iranian TV screens in April 1983 and confessed that they had been spying for the Soviet Union in their entire political life. The confessions of the party marked the end of an era for both secular and Islamist intellectuals. It is true that the Tudeh Party leaders were forced to confess. However, this fact cannot overshadow another essential truth that Marxism as the ideology and political force they believed in was on the verge of extinction locally and globally. Two years earlier, the leaders of the Tudeh Party and the Fadaïyan-e Khalq appeared on the national television and participated in a debate with Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti and Abdolkarim Soroush. Beheshti was the most influential cleric after Khomeini, and Soroush was a member of the *Committee of Cultural Revolution*. The leaders of the Tudeh Party and the Fadaïyan defended the Marxist position philosophically and politically. Thanks to Soroush's skills in the philosophy of science, the team of Beheshti-Soroush came out victorious from the debate. However, in the same year that the Tudeh Party leaders were forced to confess on national television, Soroush left the *Committee of Cultural Revolution*. Five years later, in 1988, he published a series of essays called *Theoretical Expansion and Contraction of Sharia (Qabz va Bast-e Teorik-e Shariat)*. The central claim of the essays was that whereas the Quran and the Hadith were sacred, their interpretations were not. Soroush argued that individuals with different intellectual backgrounds read these texts with different questions in mind and produced dissimilar answers. This *perspectivist* approach to religious knowledge made Soroush the most debated Iranian intellectual from 1988 to the late 1990s. Another Islamist intellectual who made a breakthrough in the same period was the filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. The third prominent Islamist intellectual with a new approach was Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari.

¹⁷ Shariati, *Islam'shenasi* [Ershad lectures (1)], p. 391.

He employed hermeneutical models of interpretation in his reading of religious texts. These three Islamist intellectuals produced the main components of a perspectivist intellectual discourse. Whereas Soroush and Mojtabeh Shabestari structured the philosophical and the theological components of this intellectual discourse, Makhmalbaf elaborated on its artistic component. This intellectual discourse made an enormous impact on the younger Islamists who had realized that the Islamic Republic did not live up to their revolutionary ideals. Thus, the new *perspectivist* intellectual discourse became the theoretical condition of possibility of a post-Islamist democratic political discourse. Islamist leftist intellectuals such as Mohsen Kadivar, Saeed Hajjarian, Ali Reza Alavitabar, Akbar Ganji, and Mohammad Khatami became some of the most distinguished representatives of this discourse.

CONTINGENCY OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

Totally unknown before the revolution, Soroush became the master of the post-revolutionary discourse. From the 1980s until the late 1990s, Soroush had been the most influential Iranian intellectual. He argued that the questions posed rather than the answers given differentiated one mode of thought from another, because the questions predetermine where the answers are located and define the character of the answers.¹⁸ Soroush took an anti-Marxist stance in the post-revolutionary Iran, which suited the ideological war that Islamist left and right waged against Iranian Marxists. In addition to his challenge to the Marxist philosophy of history and its idea of class struggle, he criticized the Iranian Marxist division of proletarian science and bourgeois science and the division of ideas into progressive and reactionary. He blamed the Iranian Marxists for their unwillingness to work hard on theoretical problems and their inability to distinguish true statements from false statements.¹⁹

For these fanatics what is important is not an idea, but its origin. They are more interested in who presents the idea. They would like to find what motivations are behind a particular idea. We do not say that motivations are not significant, but we cannot reduce ideas into motivations. We say we should search and examine ideas instead of motivations. Otherwise, we

¹⁸ Soroush, *Siyasatnameh*, p. 174.

¹⁹ Soroush, *Ideolozhi-ye Shbeytani*, p. 25.

deprive ourselves of the ideas our opponents present and become imprisoned in self-deception.²⁰

Abdolkarim Soroush was born in 1945 in Tehran and went to Alavi High School. Ali Akbar Velayati and Kamal Kharazi, former Iran's foreign ministers, Gholam Ali Hadad Adel, former speaker of the Iranian parliament, and Mehdi Abrishamchi, a leader of The *Mojahedin-e Khalq*, were among Soroush's classmates. For a while, he became a member of the Anti-Bahai Association, known as *Anjoman-e Zed-e Bahaiyat* or *Anjoman-e Hojjatiyeh*. However, his affiliation with the association did not last long.²¹ In 1968, he graduated in pharmacology. In 1972, he went to Britain, where he studied chemistry, and then the philosophy of science, until the Iranian revolution. After 3 years as a member of the *Committee of Cultural Revolution* (1980–1983), he started as a researcher in the Association of Wisdom and Philosophy (*Anjoman-e Hekmat and Falsafeh*). He played an active role in restructuring educational programs within the humanities and social sciences. On the one hand, he defended freedom of scientific research and freedom of speech as early as 1979. On the other hand, he was a member of the *Committee of Cultural Revolution* that expelled university professors and students because of their political orientation. Despite his involvement in the Islamic Republic during the early 1980s, Soroush was neither a radical *Khomeinist* nor an anti-Western intellectual. There are three phases in Soroush's intellectual production.²² First, when he wrote *What Is Philosophy and What Is Science, Satanic Ideology and, Knowledge and Values*, he was preoccupied with a critique of Marxism and historicism. In the second period, Soroush's concern consisted of an epistemological approach toward religious knowledge discussed in *Qabz va Bast-e Teorik-e Shariat*, which introduced his thought to a new generation of Islamist intellectuals. According to one of his critics, Soroush's concern in this period was a rationalist approach toward religion and religious knowledge, with no interest in the discourse on democracy.²³ The third phase in Soroush's intellectual development started with his articles on *Religious Pluralism* in 1996. Although the division into periods would seem simplistic to a reader of Soroush, I use the division for the sake of

²⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

²¹ Soroush, *Siyasatnameh*, p. 187.

²² Ali Reza Alijani, *Ideolozi alayh-e Ideolozi* (Tehran: Qalam, 2001), p. 124.

²³ Ibid., p. 128.

clarity. For instance, his essay *Roushanfekri va Dindari* was originally a lecture in 1986 but was developed in the early 1990s. As Soroush established himself as one of the chief authors of the *perspectivist* discourse and a mentor for the new generation of Muslim intellectuals, he was accused of taking part in the *Cultural Revolution* in 1980. He was blamed for his role in the “Islamization” of the Iranian university system and for the unjust treatment of university scholars who did not consent to the Islamic Republic.²⁴ In response to the accusations, Soroush frequently claims that his involvement in the *Cultural Revolution* affair came after the violent actions and the closing down of the Iranian universities. Further, he claims that he resisted the Islamist conservatives’ attempts to keep the Iranian universities closed indefinitely and used all his power to reopen the universities and defend scientific freedom. He claims that he has transformed the Department of Philosophy at the University of Tehran from an unproductive entity into a dynamic department dealing seriously with philosophical research.²⁵ Soroush criticized the domination of what he regarded as a vulgar type of historicism in the academic and intellectual climate of pre-revolutionary Iran. He maintained that this same historicism made a significant impact on Islamist intellectuals and the ideologues of the Iranian revolution, such as Shariati. This historicism, Soroush asserted, paralyzed the intellectuals from asking serious questions regarding historical events. Despite his affinity to analytical philosophy, Soroush’s contribution to the *perspectivist* post-Islamist discourse happened through his use of different schools of history. There has been much talk about the debate between Reza Davari and Soroush, but the fact is that such debates did not produce any tangible results because, for Soroush, Davari’s intellectual position was politically motivated. Soroush was infuriated when he saw that secular intellectuals such as Ahmad Fardid and Reza Davari justified the totalitarian tendencies within the Islamic state because they perceived the Islamic revolution as the starting point of the downfall of modernity. In fact, Soroush’s criticism against Davari in the mid-1980s was a continuation of his campaign against Marxism and vulgar historicism.

²⁴Zibakalam, *Daneshgah va enqelab*, p. 96. Zibakalam recalls a meeting with Soroush, asking him to stop the expulsion of university scholars from Tehran universities, but Soroush’s response was that there were “more important” issues at stake than the job security of certain university professors.

²⁵Soroush, *Siyasatnameh*, p. 209.

Soroush's publication of the *Qabz va Bast-e Teorik-e Shariat* essays in the *Keyhan-e Farhangi Magazine*, from April–May 1988 to May–June 1990s, signified an intellectual turning point in Iran. The collected essays were published later as a book with the same title, and it became the most debated book Soroush has published so far. Unlike Shariati who tried to discover the true Islam and liberate it from the misunderstood and institutionalized Islam, Soroush raised doubts about the very question of whether the true nature of Islam could be discovered or not. He also questioned the reductionist and essentialist conception of Iranian secular intellectuals of the West and modernity. Soroush argued that any interpretation of Islam, of the West, or of any historical event would always remain an interpretation, and the interpreter would never discover the true essence of its objects. He claimed that religious knowledge is a result of interpretation of religious texts, which will always remain distinct from the essence of religion. Soroush argued that the religious knowledge produced by Khaje Nasiruddin Tusi, the eleventh-century *Shia* scholar, is very different from pre-Tusi's religious knowledge in which philosophy and theology were seen as two distinct branches of thought.

Khaje Nasiruddin Tusi did not approve of the philosophical investigations of theologians and claimed that philosophy was the only rational science. Thus, theologians' statements were valid as long as they confirmed the viewpoints of the philosophers. Otherwise, philosophical statements should have priority over theological statements.²⁶

Soroush does not examine whether Tusi's accounts, on the relation between philosophy and theology, are true or false. He seeks to demonstrate Tusi's long-lasting impact on the relationship between Islamic theology and philosophy. Soroush concludes that *Shia* religious knowledge has been a result of this paradoxical relationship, which produced great amounts of false and true statements.²⁷ In contrast to Shariati, Soroush does not make a contrast between an Islam, which represents the truth and emancipatory consciousness, and the institutionalized Islam producing ideology in the sense of false consciousness. He intends to show the historicity of knowledge in general and religious knowledge in particular.

²⁶ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Qabz va bast-e teorik-e shariat: nazariyeh-ye takamol-e marefat-e dini* (Tehran: Sarat, 1995), p. 68.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Soroush argues that other branches of knowledge have always made their impacts on religious knowledge and determined its directions.²⁸ This conception of the ephemeral nature of religious knowledge questions the monopoly of the Iranian clergy on religious interpretations that justified their dominant position in the Iranian political system. Soroush took the same approach toward the history of the religion of Islam as Kant toward the history of Western philosophy. According to Soroush, Kant's most significant contribution to modern philosophy was his critical-epistemological approach, which allowed him to distance himself from the object of his study. Soroush argued that Kant did not look for true philosophy. He avoided being involved in the traditional philosophical questions and did not add new questions to the old philosophical questions, but evaluated the ancient questions from a historical and critical standpoint. Kant divided the knowledge produced by the traditional philosophy into *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge.²⁹ He demonstrated the limits of human knowledge in space and time and characterized it as a historical event.³⁰ Adopting the Kantian approach did not lead Soroush to view religion as the creation of humans because he saw religion as a thing in itself whose fundamental nature cannot be the object of study. However, the nature of religious knowledge as human knowledge can and should be investigated and clarified. "Religion is the work of God. However, man generates religious knowledge. Sharia (religion) is holy, but its understanding is the work of man. In the same way as God creates nature, man makes sciences such as physics and mathematics."³¹ For Soroush, religion remains true for those who believe it. The preoccupation with the nature of the religious knowledge is not a fixation with the discovery of the essence of religion, but about interpretations of religion. Whereas religion as the object of knowledge remains unchanged, religious knowledge is in continuous transformation. Soroush asked the same question as Ortega and Rorty on the relation between reality and its interpretations. Rorty made a distinction between finding and making or creating truths. He claimed that the world or reality is out there, but descriptions of the reality are not. There is a gap between the reality and its descriptions. The gap will always remain unfilled. Only descriptions or interpretations of the reality can be true

²⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 102–103.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 111.

³¹ Ibid., p. 112.

or false.³² If we replace the concept of religion with the concept of reality, then we have the same problem in dealing with the relation between the object and the interpretation of that object. In the war of discourses, according to Rorty, any discourse that subordinates other discourses presents itself as truth.³³ In the same way that Rorty rejects the idea that reality could be evaluated in terms of truth or falseness. Soroush argued that no interpretation can represent the truth of religion and exclude other interpretations as false.

The world does not say what secrets it has. It is we who make it speak. This world is in itself a voiceless and silent world, although it answers us when we pose it questions. These questions and answers are underpinnings of our knowledge. There are no questions without a theory. Without a theory, the answers cannot be understood.³⁴

Accordingly, any knowledge depends on the context of its appearance. The theoretical innovation of the younger generation of Muslim intellectual and scholars in Iran is the most recent proof of Soroush's argument regarding the historicity of religious knowledge. Soroush's final argument that ideas external to religion make a decisive impact on religious knowledge challenged the conservative religious scholars who claimed that they have a monopoly on truth.

HISTORICITY OF MAN AND KNOWLEDGE

For Soroush *mysticism*, *theology*, and *Fiqh* are different forms of religious knowledge and they are results of different approaches toward religion. These types of knowledge are internal elements of religious knowledge. The external knowledge to religion is the knowledge the religious scholars acquire through their encounters with other branches of knowledge outside religion. The impacts of the knowledge external to religion lead the religious scholar to read a religious text in a way that is different from his or her colleagues. The interaction and synthesis of these two elements would consequently result in a new understanding of religion. This new understanding would in turn create a new foundation for interpretation

³² Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁴ Soroush, *Qabz va bast-e teorik-e shariat*, p. 138.

of religious texts. Religious interpretations, including *Fiqh*, are in continuous transformation because they are product of changing intellectual climates. Soroush argues that *Tafsir-e Almizan* by Tabatabayi, *Partovi az Qoran* by Taleqani, *Mafatih al-ghayb* by Fakhr-e Razi and *Molla Sadra*, *Tusi*, *Naraqhi Naeini*, and *Akhond Khorasani's* texts, indicate the diversity of the religious interpretations.³⁵ These texts are the main components of the contemporary religious knowledge. Soroush refers to Tabatabayi's critical evaluation of Mohammad Baqer Majlesi, a sixteenth-century scholar and contemporary of the Safavid dynasty, as an indication of disagreements within the domain of the modern religious knowledge.

In my view, a glance at the footnotes (Tabatabayi's footnotes on the *Bahar-Alanavar-e Majlesi*, known as the great Shi'a lexicon consisting of 110 of volumes of Hadith) and the ideas expressed in the text of Majlesi reveals two different modes of understanding of Islam. The former [footnotes] shows a rational Islam, which values reason and argument, and the latter [the text] indicates a Hadith-oriented Islam, which does not need a reason. This decisive strategic difference has made an enormous impact on all branches of Shari'a [Islam].³⁶

In this way, Soroush demonstrated the distance between Majlesi's context in the Safavid period and Tabatabayi's modern context. The critical readings of religious scholars of one another indicate, according to Soroush, their different approaches toward religion and their diverse intellectual climates. Whereas the difference between Majlesi and Tabatabayi was a result of their historical distance, the difference between two contemporary *Faqihs* refers to their social and cultural contexts. Soroush pointed to a contemporary of Tabatabayi, namely Motahhari who claimed that

A comparative study of different *Fatwas* of different *Faqihs*, would demonstrate that the intellectual background of a Faqih and his general knowledge affect his fatwas. In that way, the fatwa of an Arab is different from the Fatwa of a Persian, and the Fatwa of a village dweller is different from that of a town inhabitant.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., p. 202.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 244.

Based on the historicity of human knowledge, Soroush claimed “man has no nature but history.”³⁸ The statement is identical with Ortega’s claim that humans have no nature; they only have history. However, Soroush went a step further when he claimed that the human of contemporary world is constructed by the contemporary theories, and the human of the past was constructed by the past theories. There is no human beyond theories.³⁹ Thus, the idea of human as constructed by theories and ideas of every historical epoch renounces the view that human essence is beyond historical circumstances. *The Idea of History* by R.G. Collingwood, who saw history as the study of problems of different epochs, was a source of influence on Soroush’s conception of history. Soroush claimed that historians with different questions wrote different histories. However, the scientific and intellectual conditions that have shaped the historian’s horizon determine the nature of their questions. So the emergence of new sciences gave birth to new problems and new approaches toward history.⁴⁰ Soroush argued that because of the decline of theoretical sciences, historical sciences have become unproductive and stagnated in the Islamic world. As a result, Muslims failed to recognize scientific understanding as a historical event and as a process of making sense of different forms of human experience. He concluded that the current theoretical practice of Muslims reflected their understanding of their experiences.⁴¹ Soroush argued that similar to any knowledge, religious knowledge has a selective nature and subject to the impact of other branches of knowledge, perspectives, and theorizations. It depends on the questions religious people and thinkers ask and the answers they find. If knowledge in general and the conditions of its appearance are changing, religious knowledge will undergo expansion and contraction. Soroush sought to investigate the conditions legitimizing certain questions and excluding other questions. He argued that raising a new question within the domain of the existing knowledge in general and religious knowledge in particular leads to more new questions.⁴² Soroush’s reflection on the nature of religious knowledge led him to investigate the nature of modern religiosity. He examined, further, the way *Fiqh* responds to modern scientific methods and sociopolitical

³⁸ Ibid., p. 294.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 296.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 259.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 268.

⁴² Ibid.

questions and the response of religious individuals to the question of political power and human rights.⁴³ Soroush concluded that if religious scholars deal with these problems, they would recognize the ephemeral nature of religious knowledge, whether they admit it or not. He claimed further, “If we consider God to be unchangeable and total, does it mean that our understanding of him is unchangeable and total?”⁴⁴ For Soroush, the perception of God is different in different historical periods. The God of every individual is the God that he or she knows, and consequently, the religion of every individual is the religion he or she knows.⁴⁵ Soroush argued that dominant interpretations of religion in every period do not deliver all possible interpretations, because there is no limit for new understandings of religious texts and because religious knowledge will always remain relative knowledge.⁴⁶ The result of Soroush’s investigation is an epistemology of religion. This epistemology is about clarification of the condition of possibility of religious knowledge and its limits.⁴⁷ Soroush clarified the historicity of religious knowledge and refuted one type of religious knowledge as absolute truth, yet he did not hold a relativist view on truth. He did not say that all interpretations of Islam have the same value. He maintained that, although religion and in his case Islam is a constant entity, all interpretations of it are in constant transformation.

The point is not that everything changes, but that our understanding of everything changes. The difference between these two statements is like the difference between hell and paradise. Relative understanding is distinguished from relative truth, and the transient and epoch-dependent understanding is not the same as transitive and epoch-dependent truth.⁴⁸

I have discussed Rorty’s conceptualization of the relation between truth and reality and the impossibility of the identity between human knowledge and reality. Rorty argued true or false are the particularities of the knowledge of reality constructed through language. True or false are the attributes of the descriptions of reality, because knowledge would never become identical with its object. The impossibility of identifying

⁴³ Ibid., p. 270.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 276.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 295.

⁴⁶ Soroush, *Qabz va bast-e teorik-e shariat*, p. 305.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 329.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 332.

knowledge with its object results in multiple interpretations that claim possession of the truth. According to Soroush, every science is the sum of contradicted and recorded ideas that all scientists of that branch of knowledge have produced in the past and the present.⁴⁹ Thus, the question of whether a statement is true or false is a problem within a particular body of knowledge. According to Soroush, whereas Motahhari's and Shariati's statements regarding religion can be evaluated as true or false, they did not transgress the realm of Islamic knowledge. They represented two different theoretical approaches toward Islam.⁵⁰

Science is not identical with a particular theory. A new theory may replace an old theory within a particular science, but it does not mean that a new science has replaced the old one. A science is a collection of theories articulated through specific practices, exchanges and comings and goings.⁵¹

Soroush specified that the entire body of religious knowledge is a whole; it is a distinct scientific discipline within which different and contradictory theories emerge and disappear. This indicates that there are different theoretical positions within the body of religious knowledge, which do not damage the totality of religious knowledge as an autonomous discourse. For instance, the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* had never been included in the science of *Fiqh* but added to the *Shia Fiqh* after the Iranian revolution and became one of the main foundations of the Islamic Republic. Thus, with or without the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*, *Fiqh* would remain a valid science. If we assume the body of religious knowledge to be an independent science with its own epistemological foundations, we can study the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* within the historical context of its appearance. Soroush's epistemological evaluation of religion has the history of the religious knowledge, which is in constant transformation and development, as its foundation. Soroush called his theory a radical realist epistemology.

The theory of *Qabz va Bas-e Teorike Shari'at* is a realist theory. This theory makes a distinction between the object of investigation and the perception of that object, whether true or false. Idealism' does not distinguish between man and the external reality, which results in the identity of reality and its perception. The minimum condition for a realistic epistemology is

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 333.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 334.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 335.

the distinction between a thing or phenomenon and the knowledge of that thing or phenomenon. Thus, our understanding of Shari'a [Islam] is different from Shari'a [Islam] itself.⁵²

According to Soroush, religion is the truth about God, but religious knowledge is not identical with religion itself. Consequently, religious knowledge cannot reveal the truth about God. Even the truest knowledge of religion is still human knowledge and human knowledge cannot disclose the truth about God.⁵³ For Soroush, the distinction made between religion and religious knowledge enable religious scholars to understand the impact of knowledge external to religion on religious knowledge.⁵⁴ Soroauh argues, first, religious knowledge is in continuous exchange and dialog with other branches of religion. Second, contraction and expansion of human knowledge results in the contraction and expansion of religious knowledge. Third, human knowledge in general and religious knowledge, in particular, are in constant transformation.⁵⁵ Soroush asserts religious scholars trained in *Fiqh* have to respond to the questions posed by religious people who experience the modern situation and are equipped with secular knowledge. The questions were related to political power, women's rights, and the status of art, ethics, and technology in the society.⁵⁶ Soroush defines his approach to religious knowledge as an operation within the second-degree knowledge. Consequently, he explains Shariati's approach to Islam as an operation within the first-degree religious knowledge. Soroush claims that Muslim philosophers' use of Greek philosophical arguments to demonstrate their own ideas indicates the exchange between the religious and secular knowledge. That is why, Allameh Tabatabayi's use of the *Aristotelian* concept of causality in his interpretation of the Qoran contradicts Rumi's claim that the Qoran demonstrates that causes do not exist.⁵⁷ Soroush touched upon the diversity within the Islamic discourses as an indication of the constant exchange of religion with external knowledge. Otherwise, how could such contradicting ideas as Rumi's and Tabatabayi's be included as part of the Islamic discourse? This indicates that religious understanding can never escape the impact of secular

⁵² Ibid., p. 341.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 343.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 346.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 347.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 347–48.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 359.

knowledge because it is the result of interactions between the internal elements (Qoran and tradition) and external elements (secular knowledge).

Our understanding of everything including Shari'a is ephemeral. A transformation in one branch of knowledge would affect other branches of knowledge. It would either falsify or verify some elements of knowledge. The invisible relation between different parts of our knowledge is the discovery of modern epistemology.⁵⁸

For Soroush, knowledge, in general, is a result of collective practices and the exchange of cognitive elements in their constant transformation. He argues that the transformation of understanding of particular objects is not the same as the negation and falsification of the previous knowledge of the object because the object can be grasped from different perspectives.⁵⁹ Since a deeper understanding of an object does not mean that the knower negates the object, religious people's deeper understanding of the nature of the religious knowledge does not weaken their religious belief. Thus, different discourses within the Islamic knowledge are results of the impacts of the external knowledge on the religious knowledge. Different discourses such as *Fiqh*, *Mysticism*, and *Islamic philosophy* indicate three different anthropologies.⁶⁰ Soroush pointed to the influences of the Marxist conception of man, as a social and historical existence, on religious thought in Iran during the past century, as an example of the impacts of secular knowledge on religious knowledge. He claimed that nothing could stop the Islamic discourse from reflecting on modern Western philosophy and modes of thought. "And as soon as our philosophy begins to respond to the questions of modern sciences, it will not remain what it has been so far."⁶¹ Soroush's ideas received a negative response, not only from the conservative religious establishment but also from Islamic leftists such as Habibollah Peyman, who were critical of the Islamic Republic. Peyman criticized Soroush for his reduction of religion into religious ideas and argued that Soroush confused the true essence of Islam with an Islam that disseminates false consciousness that served the interests of particular social groups. Peyman claimed that Soroush should have distinguished between the progressive nature of true religion and

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 371.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 374.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 392.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 422–423.

false religion cultivating reactionary ideologies. Peyman claimed further, “if we consider religion as complete and valid for all times, then there is no need for reform and new *Ejtehad*.”⁶² Apparently, for Peyman, the understanding of the essence of Islam and the Quran lay in the class position of the interpreter. Thus, people with a leftist orientation could understand the real kernel of the Quran, which was justice, equality, and freedom, but others would use it as an ideological device to justify the status quo. Peyman, similar to Shariati, rejected the entire body of literature on Islam that did not approve progressive politics as false and invalid. Peyman’s position and interpretation, according to Soroush, would be another position within the Islamic science as a first-degree knowledge. In his response to Peyman, Soroush called into question the notion of completeness of religion. He argued that man can only know religion as religious knowledge, and religious knowledge, in its constant transformation, includes both true and false knowledge of religion.⁶³ According to Soroush, the unresolved problem of Islamist intellectuals such as Peyman is that they are incapable of distinguishing between different approaches toward religion manifested in various texts within religious literature. Whether true or false, they are part of the first-degree religious knowledge and should not be confused with the epistemological approaches dealing with the nature and limits of the religious knowledge.

A POST-ISLAMIST LIBERAL

Contrary to Shariati, who described liberalism as false democracy masking the reality of the social oppression, Soroush praised political liberalism. He argued that according to liberalism, no human is considered as infallible, and no authority has a monopoly on truth.⁶⁴ In contrast to Shariati, who believed in Existentialism as a liberating philosophy, Soroush claims that whereas Existentialism collaborated with fascism, liberalism resisted it.⁶⁵ Another aspect of Shariati’s ideas, which Soroush criticized, is the idea of the total man.⁶⁶ Before the 1979 Revolution, the intellectual had been associated with secularism and atheism. That is why Shariati had not been

⁶² Ibid., p. 612.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 613.

⁶⁴ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Razdani va roushanfekri va dindari* (Tehran: Sarat, 1998), p. 128.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 149.

recognized as an intellectual by his contemporary secular intellectuals.⁶⁷ In the wake of the emergence of the Marxist organizations and the Mojahedin in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the term intellectual got a negative connotation. It became synonymous with pacifism and detachment from the masses. Al-e Ahmad described the Iranian intellectuals as infertile and *Westoxicated*. In response to the secular intellectuals' reluctance to recognize the legitimacy of the Islamic political system, Khomeini loyalists accused the secular intellectuals of being antirevolutionaries. The fact that no prominent secular intellectual supported or showed any sign of sympathy to the post-revolutionary political system or the ordinary people sacrificing their lives during the 8-year war with Iraq enlarged the gap between the secular and Islamist intellectuals who saw the war as an imperialist aggression. In this context, Soroush tried to explore the possibility of being religious and intellectual at the same time. After years of accusing intellectuals of being a problem, Soroush aimed to reconcile Islamist and secular Iranian intellectuals within a shared intellectual space.

In our society and particularly after the Islamic revolution, the word “intellectual” got a negative connotation. There was an unverified claim that the intellectuals opened a new front against the clergy. Historically, the European intellectual movements stood against the church and religion, and since our intellectuals were supposed to have been influenced by this European tendency, they have not been treated kindly.⁶⁸

Soroush saw the absence of a shared view of the concept of the intellectual as the central problems dividing the secular and Islamist intellectuals. The question of common ground between Islamist intellectuals and secular intellectuals warned the conservative forces who did not trust critical intellectuals. Soroush continued his effort toward a shared public sphere to include both the secular and Islamist intellectuals. He described the disagreements among the contemporary Islamist intellectuals on Islamist thinkers such as Shariati, Taleqani, and Motahhari and on *Fiqh-e Puya* and *Fiqh-e Sonnati* as indications of diversity and vitality among the Muslim intellectuals. He concluded that there were both secular and religious elements in these intellectual disagreements.⁶⁹ Soroush believed that the animosity of the political establishment against the secular intellectuals was

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 297–298.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 252.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 253–254.

a result of its misunderstanding of Western intellectual history and conspiracy theories. He claimed that a part of the political establishment in Iran saw the Free-Masons, the Jews, and the Liberals conspiring against the world in general and Islam in particular. Soroush found it strange that the Iranian conservatives targeted the same groups, which were persecuted by the Fascists.⁷⁰

If we desire to understand the history of thought in both the West and the East we should stop thinking of the history of the conspiracies. We must comprehend the history of thought as a history of problems. We should recognize other people's theoretical and practical concerns. We should stop thinking of intellectuals as enemies of God because we believe that the faith in God is in the nature of man. Why should we interpret history against this obvious truth? The conspiracy theory tells us that man rejects the Truth because of his nature. Thus, we must force him toward the Truth.⁷¹

Soroush claims that he is a religious Muslim and a believer in God and believes that intellectual pluralism and religious tolerance are not in contradiction to his religious beliefs. He attributes the inner belief in God to all, the religious as well as irreligious individuals. Addressing the religious and the political establishment in Iran, Soroush asks why Iranian intellectuals turn their backs on religion. Why are they receptive to Western ideas? What is the source of their apprehension? Why would they look for answers in other sources than Islam?⁷² He encouraged the Iranian conservatives to study the way Sheykh Fazlollah Nouri dissociated the educated Iranians from Islam and the way Shariati and Motahhari made Islam attractive to them. He asked the conservatives to refrain from blaming secular intellectuals for alienation of the educated people from Islam. He asked them to investigate the underpinning of secular critique of Islam as a theoretical, historical, and intellectual problem.⁷³

We had better take an epistemological approach toward the problem and follow the analytical procedure to reach better answers. The truth is that our society has experienced a wave of ideas that have not been prepared for

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 260–261.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 265.

⁷² Ibid., p. 266.

⁷³ Ibid.

intellectually. Therefore, what has happened later could not be either predicted or controlled by anyone.⁷⁴

Instead of accusing his opponents of being responsible for the existing situation, Soroush tried to understand the internal contradictions within the Iranian intellectual discourse and the relation of these contradictions to the current cultural and political situation. To Soroush, if Iranian intellectuals asked epistemological questions rather than ideological ones, the internal contradictions could be identified and debated. Hence, one should not decide who is to be blamed from the outset of such investigations. He argued that instead of blaming each other for the current situation, Iranian Muslims and secular intellectuals should study the history of the blame game in Iran. He maintained that history was not about approval or refusal of a point of view but about understanding. He saw the gulf between the Islamist and secular intellectuals as natural. "The difference between the West and us is that modern ideas generated and developed in the West gradually ... However, these ideas infiltrated our societies simultaneously. Our intellectuals of the past did not have the opportunity to live with and absorb the modern ideas. Therefore, instead of being cured by these ideas, they became sick of them."⁷⁵ As I have discussed previously, in his study of the historicity of religious knowledge, Soroush accepted both false and true statements as parts of the religious knowledge. Soroush intended to take the same approach toward the modern Iranian intellectual discourse, its Islamist and secular aspects, and its contradictions. He claimed that despite their different perspectives, the Islamists, seculars, radicals, and conservatives have been taking part in the same discourse. Their contribution to this discourse has not been a conscious effort, but a result of an unconscious interaction of ideas. Neither seculars nor Islamist intellectuals can escape from their contribution to the current intellectual discourse. They should understand, appreciate, and critically evaluate this discourse.⁷⁶ According to Soroush, the views of both secular and Islamist intellectuals of the Iranian experience of modernity have been ideological. They believed that they knew the answer before their investigation of the Iranian society's encounter with the modern world as a theoretical

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

and empirical problem.⁷⁷ He also criticized Shariati's ideological approach toward Islam, because he believed that Islam could give precise solutions to the questions of the modern world.⁷⁸ Here Soroush misunderstands Shariati's intellectual posture toward Islam. Shariati did not consider Islam as a solution to all the social and political ills of the modern world, but as a foundation of a revolutionary ideology to deal with the repressive aspects of the modern world. Soroush as the most influential intellectual in the post-revolutionary Iran constructed theories and produced ideas, which touched thousands of Iranian students in the 1990s.⁷⁹ He learned from his experience with the *Committee of Cultural Revolution* that intellectuals had better produce ideas and concepts and leave politics to the politicians. Referring to Kant's *What is Enlightenment?* Soroush claims that the most important slogan of enlightenment was *dare to know* (*Sapere Aude*). This slogan became the focal point of modern sciences and philosophy and Liberalism. It generated the motto that humans should not glorify but analyze.⁸⁰ Soroush's study of religious pluralism is a synchronic study of the relation between different religions through an understanding of their texts and interpretations of the believers' experiences in every epoch.⁸¹ The central idea in *Qabz va Bast* is that Islam has always been and will always remain true, yet its interpretations have always been and will always be changed. Soroush rejects the idea of an essence in Islam beyond interpretation because there is no reality beyond interpretations.

Islam is nothing but the interpretations of Islam, and Christianity is nothing but its interpretations. There has been a variety of interpretations. Nobody can grasp religion in its purity. Anyone who is not satisfied with one interpretation tends toward a new interpretation. Religious knowledge consists of nothing but "correct" and "incorrect" interpretations.⁸²

Religious pluralism indicates that the religion cannot be grasped in its purity and its essence. Before his discussion on pluralism, Soroush had proposed the idea that the truth of religion could be distinguished from religious knowledge. The question Soroush asks this time is quite

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 304–312.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 299.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 127.

⁸¹ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Serat'ha-ye mostaqim* (Tehran: Sarat, 1998), p. 2.

⁸² Ibid., p. 4.

different. He claimed first that the essence of religion would never be attainable. Second, all approaches toward religion are interpretations, and no interpretation is the manifestation of the truth. Third, the position of Islam and its relation to truth is not far different from Christianity or other religions and modes of thought. In his new approach, Soroush studied religion on two levels: on the basis of religious texts and on the basis of religious experiences. In his *Qabz va Bast* Soroush was preoccupied with the interaction of different forms of knowledge. In his new approach, he focused on how the knowledge attained is interpreted, how this interpretation generates new experiences, and how the new experiences become objects of new interpretation. In the same way that there is no religion without interpretation, there could not be any experience without interpretation. Soroush saw the religious experience as an encounter of the individual with the absolute, but this experience is not understood unless it is interpreted.⁸³ Soroush relied on John Hick's concept of religious pluralism based on different conceptions of God in different religions.⁸⁴ This time neither *Shia* nor *Sunni* represents the pure Islam and Truth. Neither Ashari nor Motazali or other Muslims and Christians represent the absolute religious truth.⁸⁵ Soroush's idea of religious pluralism took a political turn when he claimed that a pluralistic society is a nonideological society that understands itself not through official interpretations but through pluralistic reason. Whereas Shariati saw similarities in nature and society, Soroush saw differences.⁸⁶

Neither Shi'a nor Sunni is the absolute Truth. There are significant disagreements among Shi'a scholars [on what is the truth of Shi'a]...There is a noteworthy difference between the Shi'a of Sheikh-e Tusi, Alam-e Majlesi, and Feiz-e Kashani, Alame Tabatabaiyi, and finally Ayatollah Khomeini... Every attempt to combine some ideas and construe a body of knowledge and introduce them as true Shi'a or Sunni would lead to nothing more than adding a new sect to the existing Shi'a or Sunni sects....Shi'a is nothing but the history of Shi'a and Sunni is nothing but the history of Sunni.⁸⁷

⁸³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 49.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

Soroush argued that the truth of every religious sect could not be valid for other religious sects. To Soroush, Muslims, like all human beings, are subject to ephemeral circumstances and experiences that cannot culminate in any unified identity. Thus, Muslims have never had a unified identity, and there will never be a Muslim identity in the future. For Soroush, the insistence on an Islamic identity is a sign of the failure of Muslim societies to recognize that their reality contradicts their illusory identity.⁸⁸ He refuted the reduction of multifaceted aspects of life into one particular perspective. In so doing, he transformed Shariati's project on ethics into esthetics of existence or the art of living. However, this art of living does not recognize the exercise of power on others but invites the self to be more tolerant and less cruel toward the others. This art of living is aware of the fact that human differences are the expression of different life experiences beyond the control of human consciousness. The central claim of religious pluralism was that pluralism exists in reality, but it needs recognition.⁸⁹ Pluralism is, for Soroush, not about common beliefs. It is rather about the co-existence of different belief systems.⁹⁰ In response to critics who claimed that he was weakening the religious values of common people, Soroush claimed that the ordinary religious people whose faith and belief are results of religion of imitation will never pay attentions to his theoretical reflections. To Soroush, a religion that has not originated from rational arguments cannot disappear through such arguments.⁹¹ Soroush criticized the Iranian religious authorities for covering their inability to offer rational argument by appealing to the feeling of the ordinary people.

SORUSH'S PERSPECTIVISM

Perspectivism became very apparent in Soroush's view when he questioned the position of truth in relation to a particular discourse. Soroush argued that one's belief in his or her religion as truth does not mean that other religions are untrue because a postulate within a particular religion is irrelevant in another religion. To Soroush, any religion is a body of knowledge. Thus, every religion is an autonomous social and intellectual

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 67–68.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

⁹¹ Soroush, *Serat'ha-ye mostaqim*, p. 152

discourse with its criteria for examining true and false statements within its discursive borders.

All religions are systems [of thoughts], which means they are comprised of many postulates. Hence, every postulate is meaningful in relation to other postulates in that system. It is not possible to compare two postulates, which belong to different systems. Thus, we can compare systems to each other rather than their isolated postulates.⁹²

Soroush's argument was based on the validity of every system of thought for those who operated within the system. Accordingly, Islam's claim of truth would not have a privileged position compared to other religions' truth claims, which indicates the equality between Islam and other religions and other systems of thought. Consequently, there is no absolute truth, only truth for the subject. "From the pluralist position, there are different truths out there, and all of them are qualified to guide the believer toward salvation... We cannot define guidance toward salvation beyond human relations and capabilities."⁹³ As a Muslim believer, Soroush cared for the way religious scholars presented Islam, and he tried to influence their methods of presenting Islam. He argued that invitation to a particular religion was a form of presentation similar to a painter who presents his understanding of the world through his paintings.⁹⁴ Soroush's religious pluralism was criticized for contradicting the way prophets invited people to their own faiths. Soroush's response was that human beings are not the prophets because there are things that the prophets did but prohibited others from doing. Soroush claimed that he did not say that all systems of thought were equally true but that every system of thought was true for those who believed in and operated within the system.

Kant claimed that we cannot discover the truth about the noumenon, but we can know the phenomenon. Schopenhauer claimed, contradictory to this view that there could not be an absence of relations between noumenon and phenomenon, and there must be at least one type of relation between the two. This led Schopenhauer to claim that the real world must be ugly and cruel. Thus, only art can make the ugly and cruel world beautiful.⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., p. 157.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 182.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 186.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 190.

The truth is not out there, humans make truth, and the making of truth is a result of a human experience of reality. Human beings make sense of the ugly and cruel reality in their societies, and they make their reality more humane. Soroush argues that modern Iranian intellectuals have tried to discover truth through politics. They take refuge in mysticism when they become disappointed by their politics. He interpreted the warm reception of the work of Paulo Quoiló, Krishnamurti, and Carlos Castaneda in the late 1980s in Iran as a result of the intellectual's political disappointment. Because of their political despair, Iranian intellectuals escape from their social reality and take refuge in the artistic and mystical experience of another reality. Soroush interprets the new interests in the poetry of Attar, Rumi, Hafez, and others as a result of the disappointment of the Iranian intellectual with political changes. According to Soroush, there have always been two distinct modes of thought in Iran during the past millennium. There have been thinkers such as Farabi and Ibn-Sina, who search for accuracy and precision, and those like Sohrevardi and Molla Sadra, who are overwhelmed by the mystical experience. The former stand for the cause of philosophy, theology, logic, and mathematics, and the latter propagate mysticism and a poetic view of the world. Soroush's own project is an effort to find an equilibrium between these two kinds of thoughts to save Iranian culture from a tragic fate.⁹⁶ The *Qabz va Bast* made Soroush not only the most influential Muslim intellectual in Iran but also one of the most persuasive intellectuals in Iranian modern history. The impact of Soroush was not confined to Islamist circles. He made significant impacts on Iranian intellectual discourse as a whole. Of course, Soroush's ideas are not original in their nature, but they were new within the context of Iranian intellectual discourse. In fact, Soroush went beyond Shariati's *Islamist ideology*. Whereas Shariati's discourse led to a totalistic ideology and totalitarian tendencies in Iranian politics, Soroush's discourse has destroyed that totalitarian utopia. For Soroush, every attempt to create a utopian and harmonic society would force into silence all nonconformist political and ideological tendencies. Soroush has revealed the flexibility of religious knowledge in its historical formation. His discourse on the historicization of religious knowledge in *Qabz va Bast* and his later reflection on religious pluralism are shared with many other former Islamist intellectuals. Soroush's intellectual effort was an immense contribution to the formation of a *perspectivist* intellectual and *post-Islamist* political discourse

⁹⁶ Soroush, *Siyasatnameh*, p. 200.

in Iran. Soroush's intellectual effort was supplemented by the theological interpretations of Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

Since the outbreak of the Reform movement in the 1990s, Mojtahed Shabestari has been a significant representative of the post-Islamist perspectivism. Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari was born in 1936 in Shabestar in Azerbaijan province. He studied theology and Islamic law at the Qom seminaries. In 1980, he was elected to the first post-revolutionary parliament. Since 1983, he has been teaching at the faculty of theology at the University of Tehran. Up to the early 2000s, Mojtahed Shabestari had published several books. His best-known books are *Hermeneutics, Books and the Tradition* (*Hermenoutik, Ketab va Sonnat*), *Faith and Freedom* (*Iman va Azadi*), and *A Critique of Official Reading of Religion* (*Naqdi bar Qaraat-e Rasmi-ye Din*). Whereas Soroush's starting point is religious knowledge, Shabestari's concern is the faith (*Iman*). The fundamental question of *Hermenoutik, Ketab va Sonnat* is the condition within which texts in general and religious texts, in particular, are interpreted. At a theoretical level, Shabestari searches for a deeper understanding of certain religious concepts such as faith and belief (*Eteqad*). At a practical level, he deals with the political implications of Islam. Shabestari claims that what distinguishes Shariati from Motahhari is that while the former is preoccupied with religious faith as an existential experience, the latter believes that the Islamic faith consists of philosophical knowledge.⁹⁷ Shabestari claims that, we cannot understand the historical horizon of a particular people in a specific age without knowing the way they understood their experience of their contemporary world.⁹⁸ Shabestari asserts that prejudgments, interests, and expectations of an interpreter limit the way he or she formulates his or her questions and the answer he or she expects to find in the texts. The interaction of all these instances plays a decisive role in defining the primary meaning of the text.⁹⁹ Shabestari knows very well that the interpreter cannot escape from his or her own historical situation, which favors a particular question as more important than others. Accordingly, the

⁹⁷ Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, *Hermenoutik, ketab va sonnat* (Tehran: Tarh-e Nou, 2000), p. 167.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

primary meaning of the text is decided by the interpreter's favored questions prompted by his or her past experiences.¹⁰⁰ For that reason, the gap between the author's past experiences and the interpreter's experiences cannot be bridged entirely. Experiences are not only different due to historical changes, but also due to diverse cultural conditions confining the author and the interpreter. "Man's experience of the world in the previous ages, his submission to nature and his passive relationship to it is far different from the experience of a man who dominates nature."¹⁰¹ Therefore, the interpretation of an ancient text in the Middle Ages is far different from the interpretation of the same text in modern times. It is the same with the study and interpretation of the Qoran. Those who intend to study the Qoran to find its concept of justice and its view on human rights begin with specific modern presuppositions. They render, consciously or unconsciously, concepts such as *Touhid*, *Akherat* (resurrection), *Emamat*, and *Velayat* into a modern framework.¹⁰²

General knowledge, persuasion, interests and expectations of a Faqih have an impact on his political and social views as well as on his Weltanschauung. If a Faqih is influenced by the concept of freedom and justice and believes in liberal values, he will surely seek for Qoranic verses that deal with such subjects. If he is for a dictatorial government and the type of justice within a despotic system, he seeks Qoranic verses that confirm his ideas. If a Faqih learns that the gap between rich and poor is natural, he concludes that a Muslim does not have the right to revolt against the political system. If a Faqih discovers that the conditions of the poor are the result of the exploitation and the unjust social and political system, then he concludes that the political system is not legitimate and demands its disappearance.¹⁰³

Thus, any *Faqih*, who is an interpreter, reads the Qoran and other religious texts to find answers to his own questions. The questions do not lie in the Qoran but in the mind of the interpreter. The examples Shabestari outlines above are an interpretation of *Shia* history. Whereas some religious interpreters supported various autocrats, others stood against them and took part in the people's revolt against the despots.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 28–29.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 29–30.

¹⁰² Mojtabeh Shabestari, *Hermenoutik, ketab va sonnat*, p. 37.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 39.

HERMENEUTICAL FIQH

Shabestari's approach regarding the practice of Islamic *Fiqh* starts with the distinction between basic principles of jurisprudence declared by the Qoran and rational conclusions based on the underlying principles. According to Shabestari, a *Faqih's* encounters with new cases that have no antecedence in *Fiqh's* practice have to be based on rational conclusions of the *Faqih* and his understanding of the *Fiqh's* principles. Each new and concrete case presents itself to the *Faqih* as a new problem and demands a new answer. The question that remains is, how does the *Faqih* distinguish the main principles from the peripheral instances within the *Fiqh's* literature? Shabestari claims that a trained *Faqih* differentiates between two types of Qoranic verses: *decisive verses (Mokham)* which are eternal and *indecisive verses (Motashabeh)* that are transitory and limited in time and place. Every *Faqih* justifies his interpretations in correspondence with these distinctions. However, the question is through what mechanisms the *Faqih* can deduce a verdict from those decisive commands in the concrete case.¹⁰⁴ "Verses do not speak for themselves" but are subject to interpretation. The interpreter (*Mofasser*) raises a question first and then through his interpretive operation produces meanings. However, the question that remains unanswered is, from what sources does the interpreter derive his fundamental assumptions? Shabestari argues that contemporary questions that are raised by religious interpreters do not originate from the Qoran, but from the central assumptions, originated from modern human science instigated by and based on modern human experience.¹⁰⁵ Shabestari makes a distinction between what is eternal and fixed in religion and what is subject to change. Shabestari argues that the Qoran is not concerned with the form of the state, but the fundamental values involved in governing.¹⁰⁶ He concludes that new methodologies are necessary to produce proper philosophies of law, ethics and politics, or economics in the *Shia* seminaries.¹⁰⁷ He claims that one of the important questions within the *Fiqh* discourse is the legitimacy of the government, or the right of people to revolt against an unjust government. The modern history of Iran, from the *constitutional revolution* to the 1979 Revolution, indicates different

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁰⁵ Farzin Vahdat, *Post-Revolutionary Discourse of Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari and Mobsen Kadivar Part I: Mojtahed Shabestari?* (Critique: No. 16, Spring 2000), p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

approaches of the *Shia Faqih*s toward politics. Whereas Sheykh Fazlollah Nouri was against the constitutional government, the great *Faqih*s of the time, Ayatollah Akhond Khorasani, and Ayatollah Naeini, endorsed the constitutional revolution. The *Faqih*s, who supported the constitutional revolution, claimed that a constitutional monarchy would prevent the monarch from repressing the people and violating Islamic principles. Accordingly, in the case of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini as a *Faqih* interpreted the fundamental principles of Islam in agreement with politics.¹⁰⁸ Through all these historical events, the religious interpreters justified their political positions according to eternal and variable religious principles, which are supposed to reflect the invariable and variable aspects of human life. The problem Shabestari sets forth is how a *Faqih* can discern the border between the invariable and the variable aspects of human life.¹⁰⁹ Shabestari claims that answers to these questions have always been the result of a *Faqih*'s interpretations conditioned by sociohistorical situations. For Shabestari, the interpretation of *Fiqh* has always depended on the political and social position of the religious interpreter and his or her use of sources of knowledge external to religion. "*Fiqh* is a human knowledge, which originates from religious texts ... Without attention to new theories of man and society, there will never be a comprehensive and valid *Fiqh*, as it had been the case in the previous ages."¹¹⁰ Shabestari's main argument here is that *Fiqh* cannot dissociate itself from other branches of knowledge, which make conscious or unconscious impacts on the Islamic thinkers of the modern time. He argues that the *Fiqh* should recognize the role of modern knowledge and modern human sciences because they are part of the human self-understanding in the contemporary world.

During the twenty-three years of Mohammed's life as a prophet and the head of the Islamic state, he made laws and regulations to administrate the religious and social practice of the Muslims. To deal with social changes after his death, it was necessary to interpret the laws and the regulations he commanded. Such interpretations could resolve new problems that had been raised. *Ejtehad* of *Fiqh* is nothing but an interpretation of these laws and regulations, which becomes necessary when a new question appears. New questions appear when a new social event takes place.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Shabestari, *Hermenotik, kitab va sonnat*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Shabestari argues that administrative orders, penal systems, and regulation of the Muslims are not the creation of the *Fiqh*. The significant parts of these orders and organizations have been integrated parts of the Arab's life in Mecca and Medina. For instance, *Bei'at* and *Shura* had been practiced among the Arabs before Islam.¹¹² In fact, almost all social practices and penal codes had become modified within the Islamic commandments and values. Islam did not create a new social practice and penal system at that time but improved the existing systems. There were laws for war and peace, trade, marriage and divorce, codes of punishment such as *Qesas* that had been practiced among the Arabs long before Islam. In Shabestari's view, the role of Islam in this regard was preventive. Thus, the prevention of excessive practices in Muslim society became an important part of the Islamic laws. For Shabestari, prohibitions against the excessive and violent practice are the key concept in this regard.¹¹³

HERMENEUTICS AND POLITICAL ISLAM

In the previous chapter, I discussed the convergence of Shariati's Islamist ideology with the political leadership of Khomeini, which can be called the *Khomeinist* ideology. However, Shariati's Islamist ideology was a negation of *Shia Fiqh* because it was a product of the institutionalized Islam and its false consciousness justifying the unjust social order. *Velayat-e Faqih's* insertion in the constitution as the central principle of the political system indicated the Islamic character of the system. Two years after the popular approval of *Velayat-e Faqih* in the constitution, the Iranian parliament introduced a package of Islamic laws. Undoubtedly, the Islamic law proposal would have created a hot debate in the public space if part of the opposition did not appeal to violence, and the war with Iraq was not going on at that time. Ayatollah Gholzadeh Ghafuri, a prominent member of the first parliament, wrote and published one of the most important critiques of the Islamic laws proposal. Ghafuri offered a detailed evaluation of the law proposal. He argued that instead of defending the rights of the citizens and their security and well-being, the Islamic penal codes seemed to revive forms of revenge, exercised in primitive societies.¹¹⁴ Ghafuri argued

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 58–59.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 59.

¹¹⁴ Ali Gholzadeh Ghafuri, *Naqdi bar layehel-ye qesas* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Chapakhsh, 1980), p. 5.

that social and economic justice are preconditions for the execution of Islamic laws. Before the establishment of an ideal Islamic society, one cannot define criminal acts according to the Islamic laws. Otherwise, Islamic laws can become a device in the hands of the powerful to suppress anyone who stands against them. He maintained that the dependence of the judiciary system on the executive power could have damaging impacts on the social and political rights of the people. For instance, the executive power could exploit Islamic laws to suppress any criticism as a conspiracy against national security. Golzadeh Ghafuri criticized the Islamic laws proposal because it did not distinguish the private from the public and for criminalizing religiously sinful behaviors.¹¹⁵ Voices such as Golzadeh Ghafuri could not make an impact on the minds of the intellectuals and political activists in the opposition. They were preoccupied with Lenin's axiom that state power was the central question of every revolution and that seizing state power was the final solution to all problems. Golzadeh Ghafuri was a cleric, but he was one of the most democratic voices of his time. He tried to interpret Islam according to the democratic principles and through his acquaintance with modern schools of law. Such interpretations are precisely the point of departure for Shabestari, who aims to demonstrate that such interpretations are the result of external knowledge in the mind of religious interpreters. Shabestari intends to show that *Fiqh* is not a total system of thought, but the sum of particular perspectives of different religious interpretative authorities who have contributed to this body of knowledge. For Shabestari, neither traditionalist nor modernist interpretative strategies can break away from the preconceptions and pre-understandings dominating their historical condition of emergence. Therefore, neither side can claim that it represents the true Islam. For Shabestari, although the Qoran does not determine the structure of the state and methods of government, it establishes the fundamental values involved in governing.

There are different types of government including a government based on *Shura* or *Bei'at* in the Qoran. For instance, both David's and Solomon's governments are mentioned with approval in the Qoran. So, the question is, how does the Qoran approve two different political regimes, which are not based on *Shura*? The most important issue from the Qoran's view is not elected leadership or appointed leadership, or *Shura* or whatever, but Justice.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 29–30.

¹¹⁶ Shabestari, *Hermenotik, kitab va sonnat*, p. 60.

In this way, the Qoran does not say anything about the structure of the government or who should take the political power, but what the government delivers. Regardless of their forms of organization, a political system capable of delivering justice is compatible with the general values articulated in the Qoran. Thus, from a Qoranic perspective it is up to the members of every particular society to choose the form of government they desire. For Shabestari, the invariable factor or the base of the government's legitimacy is the value of justice. We should bear in mind, however, that it is not the *Fatwa* of a *Faqih* that defines what justice is. Only generally accepted notions of justice at a particular time and in a particular society decide whether the *Fatwa* of a *Faqih* is just or not. The *Faqih* alone cannot determine what justice is. All the people who express their views on the subject should decide it.¹¹⁷ Because of the transformation of human knowledge, and the change of social reality, the questions raised in every historical time are different from another historical time. It is the duty of the *Faqih* to be curious enough to deal with the new situation and the new questions.¹¹⁸

GOD AS LEGISLATOR OR THE SOURCE OF VALUES

Shabestari's critical approach toward the *totalization* of *Fiqh* has generated theoretical reflections on the nature of God's commands and his legislative power. Shabestari distinguishes between two types of Muslim thinkers. Those who believe that God is the supreme legislator and understand Islamic laws as the expression of the absolute Truth see nothing in religion but the communication of God's laws to man.¹¹⁹ Other religious thinkers do not see God as the maker of eternal laws, but as the source of eternal values and moral norms. In the view of the latter intellectuals, the truth of religion is a mystical experience. God is the one who gives meaning to human life and human values. There will be no changes in God's values because they are part of his essence, but humans and believers discover these values.¹²⁰ The difference is not merely between two distinctive theologies, but also between two different anthropological understandings. The view that perceives God as the source of values conceives man as a concrete

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 65.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

historical reality.¹²¹ Contrary to this view, the *Faqih*s, who claim God is the supreme legislator, claim as well that general values and principles are products of God's laws.¹²² Shabestari argues that post-revolutionary Iran provided an opportunity for religious thinkers to engage in practical and theoretical problems.¹²³

Evaluation of divine values and commands should not be the exclusive privilege of the few. Many people say that *Ejtehad* is free in Islam. However, they do not pay attention to the philosophical and epistemological foundation of this issue. *Ejtehad* cannot be exclusive because it is a type of human knowledge and the result of positions and persuasions. Such knowledge (knowledge of the *Fiqh*) cannot be conceived as a divine gift in the monopoly of a particular class ... Since *Ejtehad* is open for all, every *Fatwa* is nothing but a point of view of a religious expert. Although *Fatwa* has a meaning for the followers of a particular *Faqih*, it is not a sacred command and should be subject to criticism.¹²⁴

Shabestari tries to encourage religious scholars to reflect on the modern political and moral philosophy, in particular, to enrich *Fiqh*. According to Shabestari, the improvement of these new branches of knowledge depends on a critical approach toward Islamic theology and Islamic *Fiqh*, which should not be confused with a critique of Islam. According to Shabestari, Islam cannot be reduced to Islamic theology or *Fiqh*, because Islam is a religion consisted of mysticism, theology, Islamic philosophy, and *Fiqh*. Criticism of all these elements should not be understood as a critique of the religion of Islam, which is a message from God purely and directly delivered by the Prophet.¹²⁵ It is obvious that the approach inaugurated by Shabestari could result in a radical critique of religion. However, such a critical approach would not harm the Islam that Shabestari promotes. For Shabestari, Islam means the experience of the individual human being in his or her encounter with God. He argues that the precise nature of the real Islam is not a theoretical problem but a matter of existential experience.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 86.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 92.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 183.

EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE

Shabestari claims that the essence of religion is faith (*Iman*), and he makes a distinction between the religion consisted of theology, mysticism and *Fiqh*, and religious experience:

Monotheistic religions begin with the emergence of faith (*Iman*). In this stage, the faithful does not express his faith as principles of faith, but as an excited lover who moves within a spiritual stream that dominates his or her entire existence. It is the same with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam ... However, it does not mean that this faith is primarily detached from knowledge. Thus, the faithful acquires knowledge through both reason and his existential experience.¹²⁶

As mentioned earlier, Shabestari makes a distinction between two ways of being Muslim. He refers to Shariati's and Motahhari's different concepts of faith (*Iman*) as the expression of two modes of being Muslim. Whereas for Motahhari philosophical knowledge is the essence of faith, for Shariati, faith is an existential involvement and experience. These two conceptions of faith result in different interpretations of religious knowledge.¹²⁷ The process of definition of religious faith operates on two levels, the internal and the external. At the internal level ambiguities concerning the main principles of faith are explained and clarified for believers. At the external level, the effort is focused on illustrating what differentiates Muslims from non-Muslims, and making clear what cannot be accepted as part of the Islamic belief system.¹²⁸ In this way, the distinction between internal and external clarifications and a difference between major and minor principles of religion (*Osul* and *Foru-e Din*) come into view. Consequently, some religious aspects are presented as the culmination or the pillars of the religion.¹²⁹ Shabestari's attempt to historicize religion and its principles indicates that the principles presented as the main pillars of the religion, or the main principles of Islam, are results of intellectual interventions and historical contingencies. This historical understanding of theology is apparent in Shabestari's distinction between pre-modern knowledge and modern knowledge. Whereas, the pre-modern knowledge was a result of

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 166–167.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 184.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 185.

the analysis of the external world, the modern knowledge is a reflection on the process of knowledge to discover where its limits lie.¹³⁰ According to Shabestari, humans no longer have a fixed image in the modern world, and they are not searching for an Archimedean point to explain the world in its totality. The problem is no longer a search for the absolute truth as the road to salvation, but spiritual salvation in this world.¹³¹ Shabestari claims that criticism of religion has enriched religion as an existential experience of God in the modern world. He refers to the modern critiques of Christianity as contributions to the development of modern Christian theology, of which he is an enthusiastic reader.

What Feuerbach and Marx have said in their criticism of religion has been useful for the faithful in understanding what faith is and in defining faith in a more meticulous way. Moreover, their critiques have shown us that religious beliefs can be used to mask class interests in a particular society. Further, they also referred to man's psychology, which created the picture of God. These critiques have been of great assistance to the faithful in distinguishing between faith (*Iman*) and what is not faith (*Gheir-e Iman*), and monotheism (*Touhid*) from polytheism (*Sherk*).¹³²

Shabestari argues that Feuerbach has shown that theology is nothing but anthropology in reverse, and God's attributes are nothing more than the attributes of idealized humans. In the same way, he praises Marx for his contribution in showing that religion could operate as an ideology in a class-based society. Shabestari argues further that since the intention of the external criticism of religion is to get rid of religion entirely, it exposes the weakness of religious discourse and creates an opportunity for religious people to revisit their religion.¹³³ Shabestari appreciates a dialog between religious believers and their nonreligious critics because the latter present external criticism to religion. For Shabestari, external critique of religion enables religious people to rediscover the content of their faith. It reminds religious people that the content of their faith has never been constant but in continuous transformation. Shabestari compares the relation between God and humans to a conversation between two persons. He argues that in the text of the monotheistic religions, God presents himself as a person

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 189.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., p. 202.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 196.

calling upon another person. He invites the reader of divine texts into a conversation. While the recognition of humans as persons indicates their freedom to act independently, their relation to God limits their freedom of action and independence. However, humans are imperfect persons only in their encounter with God, who is the perfect person.¹³⁴ Human inability to grasp God intellectually indicates, on the one hand, the absoluteness of God and, on the other hand, the limitations of human knowledge. For Shabestari, human understanding of the absoluteness of God and his own limits would result in the recognition of the equality of all members of humankind, believers as well as unbelievers, in front of God. Shabestari claims that humans' reliance on the religious knowledge made them forget that the origin of faith is individuals' experience of the absoluteness of God. Following this forgetfulness, religion, originally understood as faith, is reduced to an institution that has stopped thinking of God as the absolute.

When religion is institutionalized, man is negated. Why? Because the institutionalized religion denies God's "absoluteness." As a result of the institutionalized religion, the church and mosque have monopolized God. They use the philosophy of religion, theology, law, tradition and customs to serve the religious authorities, and protect the interests of particular social groups... The institutionalized religion denies man's encounter with the absoluteness of God. As a consequence of this denial, God's presence is experienced as anti-freedom.¹³⁵

Shabestari argues that the concept of God as absolute is against the idea of God in an institutionalized religion. When religion becomes an institution, it is transformed into a storehouse of religious knowledge limited within the church, mosque, theology, laws, rituals and a hierarchy of religious officials. All these have contributed to conceiving God, not as an absolute God, but a limited one, a thing with particular characteristics. In so doing, humans negate their own experience, and by negating their experience, they negate their own freedom.¹³⁶ What is important for Shabestari is that in institutionalized religion, humans are not only deprived of their liberty as persons, but they are also deprived of the experiencing God. Shabestari rejects the claim that the central pillar of the

¹³⁴ Shabestari, *Iman va azadi*, Tehran: Tarh-e Nou, 1997, p. 28.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Islamic faith is the tradition. For Shabestari, the conception of the continuity of tradition in its religious, historical, and linguistic meanings is a typical Western construct.¹³⁷ He argues that the Western conception of the tradition is based on the anthropological understanding of humanity in Western Christianity. This understanding considers the human capability of communicating and transmitting the tradition to the following generations as the only condition of possibility for human cognitive development. In the shadow of this tradition, humans become historical entities. Thus, there is no history without that tradition. In this way, humanity is dependent on the continuity of tradition. When the legitimacy of tradition and the knowledge it has produced is lost, the tradition and identity are in crisis.¹³⁸ According to Shabestari, the Western idea of religious and historical tradition has preserved the belief that God appeared as Jesus to man. He made his judgments and rescued him from extinction at a particular time in the history of humankind. Therefore, the Western tradition becomes meaningful in the light of this very event. "Being a Christian means to understand the gradual continuity of this tradition in every age; the understanding takes place within this tradition. In this way, faith and Christian theology depended entirely on the religious, historical and linguistic tradition."¹³⁹ It seems at first glance that Shabestari follows Karl Lowith's argument in *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte*, where modern philosophies of history are interpreted as the secularization of the salvation history. In fact, he refers to an active academic circle led by Henri Corbin in Iran in the 1970s. Corbin understood modernity as the continuation of Christian tradition, in Lowith's terms. According to Shabestari, modernity emerged from within Christian tradition, but it became the cause of the historic crisis of the Christian tradition. Because of this crisis, the religious and anthropological aspects of the tradition are in danger of extinction.

In this way, Western Christians perceived the encounter between tradition and modernity as an encounter between religiousness and an anti-religious position. In so doing, the encounter between tradition and modernity becomes the most important spiritual problem of the West and has generated new philosophical schools.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 101.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

Shabestari argues that in contrast to Christianity, the Islamic faith and belief are not based on an understanding of the continuity of religious, historical, and linguistic tradition. Being a Muslim in any age does not depend on nourishment from tradition. For Shabestari, the meaning of being a Muslim is established through a vital and changing relationship with God in every epoch. The essential in this relationship is not a continuous religious and historical tradition, but experience and personal understanding of the Islamic revelation. Shabestari claims, “neither the history of salvation nor the church as the transmitter of that salvation, appeared in Islam. According to the Islamic view, God has never appeared in any historical event.”¹⁴¹ Thus, in contrast to the continuity of tradition in Christianity, Islam is based on discontinuity. Because of this discontinuity, a Muslim does not need to live and preserve the religious, historical tradition. In this way, modernity is not the antithesis of the tradition in Islamic societies, and the encounter between tradition and modernity does not make sense for Muslims.

I do not perceive the Islamic movements during the past 150 years as religious movements. They are political movements rather than Islamic revivalism. The founders of such movements have been preoccupied with particular [political and social] problems such as backwardness and colonialism in the Muslim countries.¹⁴²

He claims that the modern religious movements are, rather, political attempts to create social and political justice, as well as a reaction to colonialism and imperialism. For Shabestari, the leaders of the modern Islamic political movements have been social and political reformists.¹⁴³ For Shabestari, whereas religion is concerned with humans and God in a vertical relationship, politics is about the horizontal relationship between human and human. While the relation between humans and God is a spiritual relationship and is concerned with the individual’s inner dimension, the relation between human and human is an external relation, an intersubjective relation. Humans have a vertical relationship with God, because they cannot govern that relationship, but predestined to it. On the contrary, humans can establish and rule their relationships with

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 123.

other humans. Shabestari argues that what is at stake in the relationship between God and human is awakening and reminding, but human relationships with each other involve rational decisions and legislations.¹⁴⁴ Does Shabestari base his religious pluralism on epistemological uncertainty? Does he intend to establish a pluralist society on religious pluralism? He argues that the epistemological uncertainty is a presupposition for religious pluralism and is a condition for religious experience as an existential experience. Shabestari asserts that religious pluralism cannot guarantee democracy, but the other way round. Democratic or pluralist societies create the condition within which the faithful can surpass worldly obstacles and move toward a real experience of the absolute and divinity. Intentionally or unintentionally, Shabestari's religious pluralism is likely to be a debate on political pluralism because religion and politics have been intertwined in the post-revolutionary Iran. However, the primary goal of Shabestari as a theologian is to develop regular religious practice toward an existential religious experience. Such an effort could only be possible if all religious people around the world had the same right to practice their own belief.¹⁴⁵ However, the unresolved question is whether pluralism in epistemology leads to tolerance and moderation in practice. The early pluralists, the Sophists, who propagated epistemological uncertainty, sentenced Socrates, the guardian of epistemological certainty, to death.¹⁴⁶

POLITICS OF HISTORICIZED KNOWLEDGE

As a former member of the Iranian parliament in the Islamic Republic, Shabestari cannot deny that he knows the consequences of his ideas on the political discourse. For Shabestari, democratic government is the government of neither majority nor minority, but a government that preserves the interests of the members of society as a whole. He argues that freedom and justice for all citizens as the main principles of the democratic government abolish all privileges based on a single belief system. For Shabestari, democracy is the less cruel way of governing the affairs of the citizens than all other forms of government. As a result, metaphysical questions are irrelevant regarding political power, and the nature of God has nothing

¹⁴⁴ Mojtabeh Shabestari, *Naqdi bar qaraat-e rasmi az din*, pp. 314–315.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 389–390.

to do with the type of government.¹⁴⁷ In this way, Shabestari dissociates religion from the state. “What seems to be of the most significance among Shabestari’s political views is that he considers the state and political institutions as ‘civil,’ as opposed to religious, in nature.”¹⁴⁸ In response to the religious establishment, which perceives democracy as a danger against the word of God and the Islamic laws, he asks what would happen if the people voted against the word of God? Shabestari’s response is that, if Iranians do not want to follow the word of God and are willing to vote against his word, then Iranians are not Muslims. If Iranians decide not to be Muslims anymore, nobody can force them to change their view.¹⁴⁹ Shabestari claims further that the Iranian constitution is a particular interpretation of Islam among many; therefore, there is always a time to interpret Islam, and nobody should prevent new interpretations.¹⁵⁰ According to Shabestari, Islamic laws and its codes of punishment, supposed to be originated from Islamic laws (*Fiqh*), maintain the superiority of religious leaders over the people. Furthermore, Islamic laws, which are the products of particular sociocultural and political conditions, sustain the superiority of the Muslims over non-Muslims and the superiority of men over women.¹⁵¹

ARTISTIC TOTALISM AND PERSPECTIVISM

The relation between modern arts and revolutionary Islam was one of the preoccupations of Ali Shariati, who, more than any Islamic thinker, tried to reconcile these two seemingly different concepts. Shariati outlined the theoretical foundations of an Islamic modern art in the late 1960s. After the takeover of political power, the revolutionary Islamists encountered a major dilemma concerning the view of traditionalist religious authorities who in the past opposed TV and cinema as un-Islamic. However, Ayatollah Khomeini supported Iranian cinema and TV on the condition that they did not violate Islamic values. It was reported that he allowed filmmaking after being impressed by seeing *The Cow*, a film of Daryush Mehrjuyi, a famous Iranian director. The film industry in Iran was a moderate industry before

¹⁴⁷ Massoud Razavi, *Motafakeran-e moaser va andisheh-ye siyasi-ye Eslam* (Tehran: Farzan-e Ruz, 2000), pp. 139–141.

¹⁴⁸ Vahdat, “Post-Revolutionary Discourse”, Part I, pp. 53–54.

¹⁴⁹ Razavi, *Motafakeran-e moaser*, p. 145.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 148–149.

the revolution. It produced more than fifty movies annually. However, after the revolution some of the filmmakers either left the country or were banned from directing or playing in films. Despite the restrictions, many Iranian film directors who made quality films remained in the country. The propagators of the Islamic ideology as the state ideology claimed that it had answers to every intellectual, social, and political question. The field of the film industry was also the place where the Islamists had nothing to offer. Nevertheless, this did not deter a group of Islamists to use this medium to spread the Islamic revolutionary ideology. It was within such a climate that the journey of Mohsen Makhmalbaf, a young revolutionary who believed in Islam as a total ideology but had no artistic experience, started. Similar to many young Islamists, Makhmalbaf was interested in disseminating the victorious Islamic ideology after the revolution. In his search to find a medium to convey the message of the revolutionary Islam, he came across the cinema, which he had hated intensely before the revolution. However, 2 years after the revolution, Iranian cinema was still in the hands of the secular filmmakers, who were not interested in the Islamic revolution and the ideology of the Islamic state. The young Islamists, dissatisfied with the entire state of secular Iranian culture and without professional experience, came together to realize their dreams of Islamic art as the expression of Truth. They founded *Islamic Art and Thought Foundation (Houzeh-ye Andisheh va Honar Eslami)* in 1980 to communicate the Truth to the people. One of the leading ideologues of *Houzeh* was a 23-year-old man named Mohsen-e Makhmalbaf. In 1980, Makhmalbaf had one thing in mind—to create “pure Islamic art.”¹⁵² Within 10 years, he became an internationally recognized film director. Twenty years later his daughter Samira Makhmalbaf, who was born in 1979, became one of the most celebrated and admired young filmmakers in the world.

Mohsen Ostad Ali Makhmalbaf was born in 1957 into a religious family in southern Tehran. He experienced the uprising of 1963 as a child. Under the influence of traditional religious and anti-Shariati clerics, he decided to assassinate Ali Shariati at the age of 15. The Mullah of the Mosque in the neighborhood presented Ali Shariati as an anti-Islamic intellectual and unbeliever who deserved to be killed. However, when Makhmalbaf listened to Shariati’s lectures for the first time, he realized that he was mistaken about the man. Under the influence of Shariati’s ideas, he

¹⁵² Gholam Heydari, *Naqd-e film’ha-ye Makhmalbaf* (Tehran: Negah, 1997), p. 25.

organized a guerrilla group at the age of 15 in 1972.¹⁵³ Makhmalbaf's first revolutionary action was performed in 1974 when he attacked a police officer, which resulted in his arrest, and he was incarcerated until 1978. Makhmalbaf's experience in prison shaped his view of Iranian Marxists and the Mojahedin. "If you dared challenge, someone, questioning their ideology, they'd make you a SAVAK informer ... – and then you'd be 'boycotted.' Imagine living in a cell with thirty other people, and then suddenly all thirty of them are boycotting you."¹⁵⁴ The experience Makhmalbaf described could be his own or that of other religious individuals whom the Marxists had perceived as reactionaries. However, what Makhmalbaf pointed at here was not a conflict between religious and nonreligious prisoners, but the domination of totalistic worldviews on the minds of the Iranian political activists who could not tolerate any otherness. For the leftist revolutionaries of the 1970s, what Makhmalbaf had experienced in prison was not an important issue. They put the cause of revolution above every abstract morality. Because of that, neither the humiliation nor the boycotting of a fellow prisoner who thought otherwise would raise any sorrow. Thus, the killing of their revolutionary colleagues in the organization of the Mojahedin did not create any sense of guilt among the members. Makhmalbaf's experience was the result of his incarceration with the Marxists and the Mojahedin, who remained faithful to the early ideology of the Mojahedin. That is why Makhmalbaf claimed that

Well, when I was in prison, the religious faction split in two, and I was associated with the second faction, the one that was less organised and more independent, and closely identified with popular resistance. So, when I was released, I was worried that the oppression I had experienced from the Mojahedin in prison would be unleashed on the entire populace should they come to power. You might not believe it, but even with the worst conditions that I have observed under the rule of the clerics, I would still prefer their rule a thousand times to that of the Mojahedin. They are Stalinists!¹⁵⁵

After the victory of the revolution, Makhmalbaf's worked with his like-minded friends in the *Sazman-e Mojahedin Enqelab-e Eslami* to stand

¹⁵³ Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up Iranian Cinema: Past, Present and Future* (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 167–68.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁵⁵ Dabashi, *Close Up Iranian Cinema*, p. 178.

against the Mojahedin and the Marxists.¹⁵⁶ Soon, Makhmalbaf realized that this organization, which was supposed to stand against totalitarian ideologies, was producing totalitarian ideology and practices of its own. According to Makhmalbaf, in the early 1980s, the *Mojahedin Enqelab-e Eslami* was the dominant political force in the Islamic Republic.¹⁵⁷ Makhmalbaf's experience in prison was a limited experience with a totalitarian approach of a group of dissidents toward a defenseless dissident. However, his post-revolutionary experience, which involved his participation in the state power, made a greater impact on his intellectual development. In this new experience, he was not the target of the exercise of power, but part of the dominant power.

TOTALITARIAN MESSAGES

Makhmalbaf's reorientation from politics to artistic activity was the result of a decision to defend the Islamic revolution against its enemies who tried to undermine the liberating truth of Islam. Thus, when he started working on his artistic project he was sure of one thing: the revolution was the culmination of that liberating truth. For Makhmalbaf, art was only an instrument, a technique to achieve higher values of that liberating truth. From 1982 to 1983 he made three films: *Nasuh's Repentance* (*Toubeh-ye Nasuh*) in 1982, *Two Sightless Eyes* (*Dou Chashm-e Bisu*), and *Seeking Refuge* (*Este'azeh*) in 1983. After making these three films he claimed:

From a tactical standpoint, cinema is an art form we are searching to know. We are looking for its weak and strong aspects. We are searching for its capability of mediating ideological messages. Unfortunately, we have no model for Islamic art today, particularly in the field of cinema, which is a relatively young art form. Thus, for us cinema becomes a field for research about the characteristics of Islamic arts. For the time being, we are making models in all art forms, including cinema. However, what we are making are not Islamic models of art, but we are reflecting on these models again and again from a critical standpoint to discover the main characteristics of Islamic art.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁵⁸ Heydari, *Naqd-e film'ha-ye Makhmalbaf*, pp. 24–25.

The project Makhmalbaf presented here is ambitious and courageous at the same time. It formulates a new perspective and a new approach, and it reveals elements of his later intellectual transformation. His initial comment on Islamic arts shows that he had the courage to know and the will to experiment in uncharted territories. Thus, he started a process of self-education and a learning process through experience. Makhmalbaf knew well what he wanted to reject ideologically, but he could not imagine what he was going to achieve. He not only rejected the entire history of Iranian modern art but also claimed that the artists who had been part of that history must be put on what he called a cultural trial. He criticized secular intellectuals and filmmakers and claimed that they had corrupted Iranian art in general and Iranian cinema in particular. He wanted to present Islamic values in his screenplays and short stories. He introduced a theory of Islamic art. In the *Introduction to Islamic Art (Moqadameh'i bar Honar-e Eslami)*, Makhmalbaf claimed:

Art, in general, is the representation of particular parts or the whole of truth. In this regard, Islamic art is the presentation of the content of Islamic philosophy as an interconnected relationship between form and content. Thus, the content of Islamic philosophy is expressed in the form of Islamic art. Nevertheless, the form would preserve all its own characteristics.¹⁵⁹

Makhmalbaf believed that there were truths out there to be discovered and delivered to the masses. He used cinema to convey Islamic truth to the masses who could not read and understand complicated philosophical and theological texts. Accordingly, Makhmalbaf would not examine the truth of any particular claims in his films, but just deliver the message of Islamic truths. One of Makhmalbaf's first works was a screenplay in 1980, adapted into a movie in 1982, with the name of *Justification (Toujib)*. The film is a harsh criticism of leftist intellectuals and political activists, in general, and Marxists in particular.¹⁶⁰ In this film, Makhmalbaf challenged the secular leftist intellectual discourse and introduced Islamic cinema as an alternative art. Whereas theoretical flaws and totalitarian politics of Marxist organizations are clearly articulated in the film, his presentation of revolutionary Muslims as free and autonomous individuals is not convincing. Makhmalbaf's second attempt was also a continuation of *Toujib*,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

a play with the name *Walls within Walls* (*Hesar dar Hesar*), shown several times on national TV in 1982. The play is another attack on the secular intellectuals. The play established him as a revolutionary Islamist artist.¹⁶¹ The fact that this play had a greater effect than his work in *Toujib* showed him the way to make films based on his own writings. His project was still to nullify or reduce the danger of other modes of thought than the Islamic one and to transform the nature of art in Iranian society into pure Islamic art. However, the question was how to create such art. The Islamists or religious intellectuals had not attempted to understand the nature of modern art, including visual arts, before the Islamic revolution. Shariati and a few others, such as Mir Hossein Mousavi, were the exceptions to the rule. According to Shariati, art, philosophy, and religion have the same origin. They had once been an intellectual unit, but had become alienated from each other throughout history, and they will be reunited into a new totality in the future. It is in this impoverished artistic context that Makhmalbaf claimed that what he intended to show in his films is a type of *Foto Roman*, to visualize and portray what he has written or said. Makhmalbaf believed at this time that the viewers of Iranian films could be stimulated more by a lecture than by painting. In *Nasuh Repentance* and *Two Sightless Eyes*, the decent people expose what is evil in other people and make them aware of their moral weaknesses. Thus, the message of the filmmakers comes in words rather than images. Evil acts can be avoided if religious and morally responsible persons lecture the evildoers on the evil nature of their actions repeatedly. In these early films, the pictures assist the words to mediate a message of Islamic and revolutionary morality, as Makhmalbaf understood it. For instance, in *Seeking Refuge* (1983) he reflects on timeless truths and shows an abstract picture of humanity, without a history. Five persons in different situations encounter the devil. The devil defeats four people, who had no control over their desires, but is defeated by the last one who has total control over his desires and shows spiritual strength.¹⁶² The central theme in his third film, *Two Sightless Eyes* (1983), is politics. A Marxist teacher in a remote village disseminates socialist ideas and propagates socialist revolution. The teacher murders one of his students who denounces Marxism and socialism. In a parallel story, whereas a shopkeeper symbolizes exploitation and evil, two religious persons represent the revolutionary struggle against exploitation and evil. In his fourth film,

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 94–95.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 36.

The Boycott (1985), Makhmalbaf also tries to show the ideological and the moral weakness of the Marxists in pre-revolutionary Iran. A member of a Marxist organization is imprisoned. In prison, he experiences an ideological and spiritual crisis, and consequently, he distances himself from other Marxists. While facing execution, he is afraid of dying meaninglessly. What saves him spiritually is the memory of a Muslim couple he met before his incarceration. In *The Boycott*, Makhmalbaf is continuing his representation of the dualism of the material world and divine life, as well as the liberating power of repentance. Makhmalbaf's work could be analyzed on two levels: the intentional and the unintentional. In addition to the aims he was well aware of, Makhmalbaf sets forth some elements unintentionally. In 1986, in the *Monthly Review of Film* (Mahnameh-ye Film), Ahmad Talebinejad, a film critic, describes this aspect of Makhmalbaf's films. *The Boycott* depicts helplessness and incarceration of the individual within totalitarian political organizations. The question Talebinejad asks in a very meticulous way is whether Makhmalbaf believes that all political organizations, regardless of their ideology, alienate their individual members.¹⁶³ In fact, Talebinejad questions Makhmalbaf's self-confidence in his attack on the weaker part, which at that time was Marxist ideology and organizations. Maybe such critiques moved Makhmalbaf a little further in reflecting on his ideological standpoint from which he judged his ideological adversaries. After all, Makhmalbaf wanted to experiment and discover new territories within modern art. With *The Boycott*, a chapter of Makhmalbaf's artistic journey was closed.

However, this is what I felt, based on these early experiences. So these works were either moralistic, like Nassuh's Repentance, which essentially tells people how to live or political like Boycott. If you see Boycott, you'll realize that one can distil the entire film into a brief critique of fascism. These works are also influenced by my religious beliefs then, and they are clearly the work of a person without a background in film, as they are full of cinematic errors.¹⁶⁴

In evaluating his first four films, Makhmalbaf claims that these works are reflections on his own experiences before the revolution. He sees the fascist/totalitarian tendencies within the ideologies of the Iranian Marxist organizations and the Mojahedin, and he tries to expose these totalitarian

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 246.

¹⁶⁴ Dabashi, *Close up Iranian Cinema*, p. 184.

tendencies. According to Makhmalbaf, these political groups believed that they, and only they, had access to the truth. However, many Iranian critics of Makhmalbaf's in the early 1980s described him as *Mohmalbaf*, meaning the narrator of nonsense.¹⁶⁵

TOTALISM IN CRISIS

A year after *The Boycott*, Makhmalbaf started a new experiment. Makhmalbaf tried, in his early films, to evaluate Marxism, philosophically and politically, and propagate Islamic truth. In his new films beginning with *The Peddler* (*Dastforoush*, 1986), he presented a type of social critique. *The Peddler* consists of three episodes. The first episode is a social realist film close to Italian *neo-realism*, based on a short story by the Italian play-writer *Alberto Moravia*. The second episode is a *surrealist* film. The third episode is a combination of social realism and surrealism. The film is a study of the defenseless and helpless condition of humans, in general, beyond their cultural conditions, religious beliefs, and ideological orientations. Makhmalbaf reflects, in this work, on individuals entrapped in psychologically insecure, socially uncertain, historically indeterminate situations. The film does not show Makhmalbaf's monopoly over Truth, as had been the case previously. It does not offer ready-made answers, and it ends with uncertainty.¹⁶⁶ Perhaps the doubts in the film somehow mirror Makhmalbaf's own political and intellectual hesitations at that time. This new experiment indicated Makhmalbaf's new approach. This new experiment was the beginning of Makhmalbaf's artistic transformation, from his confident belief in the totality of Islamic Truth into his *artistic perspectivism*, which led him to interpret reality from different perspectives. His artistic experiments combined with his experience of the post-revolutionary political situation led Makhmalbaf to reassess his ideological orientation. Politically he began to understand that his visions were unachievable for two reasons: humanity has no fixed nature, and the questions of good and evil have always been understood from particular perspectives. He realized that humans were operating within their sociocultural and historical limits from which they cannot escape. He also discovered his personal limits and those of the intellectual discourse within which he was operating.

¹⁶⁵ Golmakani, *Kiyan*, Vol. 8, No. 45 (Feb-Mar 1999): 188.

¹⁶⁶ Heydari, *Naqd-e film'ha-ye Makhmalbaf*, p. 266.

Makhmalbaf's intellectual transformation, which started with *The Peddler*, continued in a *perspectivist* direction in his later films. Certainly, Makhmalbaf is not the only Islamist filmmaker to learn from his artistic experience. Many other Islamist filmmakers, such as Ahmad Reza Darvish, Rasoul Molaqolipur, Saifollah Dad, Ebrahim Hatamikia, Majid Majidi, Behrouz Afkhami, Aboulfazl Jalili, have followed Makhmalbaf's example. However, none of these filmmakers became as hostile as Makhmalbaf toward secular filmmakers. All of these Islamist filmmakers expressed their affirmation of the ideology of the revolution through their films. In the 1990s, all these filmmakers gave up their earlier ideological positioning. Majid Majidi, an actor in Makhmalbaf's first films, has become an internationally known film director. In the 1980s, these filmmakers were not as ambitious as Makhmalbaf. Ahmad Reza Darvish claimed: "For me, cinema is a medium that I can work through to promote the revolution. I make a propaganda production, and I have no ambition of creating an analytically complicated work of art."¹⁶⁷ The significant difference between Makhmalbaf and all other Islamist filmmakers in the early 1980s was that they neither had high ambitions to create a new Islamic art nor were they as courageous as Makhmalbaf in seeking new challenges. A significant switch in Makhmalbaf's social and political perspective took place in *The Peddler*. He replaced, in this film, the Marxists with the capitalists. As a dedicated follower of Shariati and in accordance with the Islamist leftists' political stance, he found a more significant ideological and political contender in the capitalists.¹⁶⁸ *The Peddler*, shown at several film festivals and admired by critics, made Makhmalbaf a phenomenon within the Islamist discourse. After *The Peddler*, Makhmalbaf left the *Islamic Foundation of Art and Thought*, which was moving toward conservative postures. He made his two subsequent films, *The Marriage of the Blessed* and *The Cyclist*, with the support of the charity organization the *Mostazafan Foundation*, controlled by the Islamist leftists. These two films were an expression of a new ideological struggle between those who remained true to the revolutionary principles and fought for equality, and those corrupted by power. What *The Marriage of the Blessed* and *The Cyclist* have in common is that they both express the growing dissatisfaction of a section of former revolutionaries with the unfulfilled promises of the revolution. These two films represent the reaction of a generation that is recognizing that its vision

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 193–194.

of a new society based on equality, freedom, and spirituality cannot be realized. Makhmalbaf had already shown in *Peddler* in 1986 that the symbols of justice and spirituality had become a place for business and material interests.¹⁶⁹ He showed how effortlessly the newly dominant social forces pursued their economic interests in religious garb. The disillusioned revolutionary hero in *The Marriage of the Blessed*, sees the contradictions between the promises of the revolution and the practice of a new dominant class. Realizing his inability to make any changes in the post-revolutionary relations of domination, he returns to the war front to face death to save his own soul. In *The Marriage of the Blessed*, Makhmalbaf visualized what Farhad Khosro-Khavar called the ideology of martyrdom that is based on despair and the denial of this world.¹⁷⁰ Makhmalbaf's artistic development was not finished with *The Marriage of the Blessed* since his brilliance lay in the fact that he did not stop searching for new forms of interpretation. If he had continued his social criticism, like any other revolutionary who stands on his ideological firmness, he would not have been an intellectual phenomenon within the Iranian intellectual discourse. In that case, he would have continued to hold a particular discourse as truth and reject others as false. Makhmalbaf's journey from his early films to *The Marriage of the Blessed* expresses the transformation of the revolutionary Islamist who believed he possessed the Truth into a disillusioned artist who called into question every revolutionary ideal.

ARTISTIC PERSPECTIVISM

Makhmalbaf's later work is, in fact, a break with his second period of artistic production, which began with *The Peddler* and finished with *The Cyclist* and *the Marriage of the Blessed*. Instead of reflecting on social reality, he reflected on the limits of the forms of presentation of that reality. The most important point for Makhmalbaf in his later work was the role of the medium of cinema and its ability to create different visual perspectives on social reality. It began with his fascination with the *Wings of Desire* (1987), a film made by the German filmmaker Wim Wenders. Wenders's film was a story of two angels who came to earth to live with humans for a short time. One of the angels fell in love with a woman, remained on earth, and gave up eternal life in heaven for the sake of worldly love. The impact of

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁷⁰ Khosrokhavar, *Critique*, No. 16 (Spring 2000): 6.

this film was so decisive that Makhmalbaf pointed at its magnitude several times. "After I had seen the movie, I went to the hotel and cried the whole night. I was wondering if it was possible for cinema to introduce such a presentation of love, compassion, and faith."¹⁷¹ It is perhaps the impact of this film that made him say in an interview, upon his return to Iran, that he intended to reread Shariati's entire works one more time. In the same interview, he claimed that at the center of his new preoccupation with Shariati stood the concept of "the return to the self."¹⁷² The outcome of this return to the self performed by Makhmalbaf contradicts the entire literature on Shariati and his conception of the *return to the self*. Eight years later in 1995, when he had become an internationally known filmmaker, he was still fascinated by that film.

In Wenders' film ... angels have become tired of eternal life and seek love; they are ready to give up their eternal life for the sake of love and worldly life. Whereas we believe the idea that man was expelled from heaven and eternal life because of his sinfulness; this film shows that it was man who chose love before eternal life.¹⁷³

After 2 years of the *return to the self*, Makhmalbaf produced two other films. *A Time for Love (Noubat-e Asheqi)* and *the Nights of Zayandeh'rud (Shab'ha-ye Zayandeh'rud)* are produced in 1990, in which he challenged the moral norms imposed by the Islamic Republic on the entire society. Beyond this surface history, Makhmalbaf himself interpreted these two films, along with *Once Upon a Time Cinema* and *The Actor* in 1991, as expressions of *perspectivism*.¹⁷⁴ I would like to add two other films by Makhmalbaf, namely *Salam Cinema* and *The Time of Innocence*, to this list. According to Makhmalbaf, in his first films the Truth is represented by religion, and in the second period of his filmmaking, the Truth is represented by social justice. However, in the third period, in his last films, there is no center of truth. "The third period of my films is very much defined by analysis of the condition which governs our lives, represented through multiple perspectives."¹⁷⁵ For Makhmalbaf, the meaning that we attribute to reality does not originate from the real phenomenon, but

¹⁷¹ Golmakani, *Kiyan*, Vol. 8, No. 45 (Feb-Mar 1998): 192.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹⁷⁴ Dabashi, *Close up Iranian Cinema*, p. 188.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

from our own views and perceptions. He claims that humans can never grasp reality altogether, and one's perception of reality depends on one's perspective. Thus, as soon as people change their perspective of reality, they encounter a new aspect of that reality and a new perception. The second observation, which is the result of the second perspective, can be as real as the previous perception, which means that new perceptions join new perspectives ad infinitum. For Makhmalbaf, the representation of a particular perspective on the reality of a sociocultural condition as the absolute truth by an individual leads him or her to particular ethical persuasions and political choices. When this perspective loses its validity, the person attached to it feels that his or her entire world, with its ethical and political properties, is collapsing.¹⁷⁶ He claims further that different perspectives appear because people experience their historical, cultural, and personal lives in various ways. Thus, many given truths are the result of particular perspectives originated from historically, socially, and culturally situated reality. Thus, any representation of reality is only one perspective among many existing and possible perspectives.¹⁷⁷ The Islamist conservatives accused Makhmalbaf of propagating individualism and relativism in his films to undermine the Islamist ideology and the Islamic Republic. One critic accused him of claiming that every individual can become his or her own *Emam*.¹⁷⁸ "Relativism in knowledge leads to relativism in morality ... Who can decide, in this value relativism, whether social responsibilities are necessary or not?"¹⁷⁹ In fact, the Islamist conservatives used relativism to harass any expression of the emerging intellectual discourse in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The conservatives could not ignore the antitotalitarian elements of Makhmalbaf's works, which could damage loyalty of the people to the political system and the new leader. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who lacked the charismatic status of Ayatollah Khomeini, was supposed to lead the Islamic *Ommat* or nation toward the ideal Islamic society. The problem was that he had neither the support of the people in the way Khomeini had nor the support of the Islamist leftists. The more urgent problem was that the new leadership was imposing its invented Islamic values on the people, while ignoring their political rights. The new

¹⁷⁶ Zaven Qukasian, *Majmueh-ye maqalat dar naqd va moarefi-ye asar-e Abbas Kiarostami* (Tehran: Nashr-e Didar, 1997), p. 269.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

¹⁷⁸ Heydari, *Naqd-e film'ha-ye Makhmalbaf*, p. 376.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

leadership was at the same time alienating many former Islamist intellectuals and political activists. It was in this political climate that Makhmalbaf reminded his fellow revolutionaries that their unfulfilled promise of radical sociopolitical changes indicated the illusory character of revolutionary ideas. Makhmalbaf tried to demonstrate that the revolutionary attempts of his generation had achieved nothing but another exploitative and repressive political system. In *The Nights of Zayandeh'rud*, Makhmalbaf showed people's different reactions to similar events in three different periods: in the pre-revolutionary, at the time of the revolution, and after the revolution. He showed the difference between people witnessing a tragic accident in pre-revolutionary Iran and their selflessness during the revolution and the war, and then their egocentric behavior after the revolution and the war. People were the same, but different situations changed them completely. By showing in *A Time for Love* the possibility of different perceptions from dissimilar perspectives of the same event, Makhmalbaf declared his *perspectivism*. However, what provoked the conservatives within the Iranian political establishment was the issue of sexuality from a liberal perspective, which they claimed Makhmalbaf tried to explore in this film. He was accused of sexual liberalism and moral relativism, of adopting the nihilism of Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilisation*, which portrays sexual repression as a form of social repression.¹⁸⁰ The combination of Makhmalbaf's impact and Soroush's ideas became a serious threat to the self-confidence of the political establishment. For instance, Makhmalbaf was accused of propagating *Popperian morality*.¹⁸¹ We can ask, what kind of morality did Karl Popper advocate? The argument had simple premises and a straightforward conclusion. Soroush was interested in the philosophy of science, and he admired Popper's philosophy of science and his advocacy of liberalism. Thus, Popper and by association Soroush could be blamed for every intellectual challenge to the conservatives authority in Iran. An attack on Popper meant an attack on Soroush. Thus, Soroush's alleged philosophical relativism and political liberalism, combined with Makhmalbaf's alleged artistic relativism, epitomized a real danger to the ideology of the Islamic Republic. The cultural impact of *The Nights of Zayandeh'rud* and *A Time for Love* was so decisive that it could be compared to the intellectual impact of Soroush's *Qabz va Bast*. In questioning the social norms imposed on the Iranian society by the Islamic Republic,

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 382.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 383.

Makhmalbaf inaugurated the most lauded intellectual declarations of the 1990s in Iran. One of the more important causes of Khatami's resignation as cultural minister, in the early 1990s, was the conservatives' pressure after the screening of *The Nights of Zayandeh'rud* and *A Time for Love*.¹⁸² These two films were among the main elements of the intellectual discourse understood by Ayatollah Khamenei as *Cultural invasion* (*Tahajom-e Farhangi*) in 1991. A conservative-oriented film critic claimed that *The Nights of Zayandeh'rud* illustrated despair and disappointment with the revolution and justice. According to the critic, Makhmalbaf had glorified the sexually sublime as a solution to despair and disenchantment and as a source of emancipation. The critic claimed further that by showing how the wounds of a devotee (*Basiji*) caused by the war were cured through sexual appeal, Makhmalbaf violated all the revolutionary values. The same sexual sublimation gave the disappointed woman in the film new hopes of accepting and enjoying life as it is, instead of sacrificing herself.¹⁸³ The critics, as the guardians of the official ideology of the Islamic Republic, were very hostile toward Makhmalbaf. However, Farhad Golzar as one of Makhmalbaf's staunch conservative critic discovered more than any other Iranian secular film critics the richness of the ideas communicated in these two Makhmalbaf films.

What made Makhmalbaf's approach original was that worldly love became the films' subject matter. The value of Makhmalbaf's work lies in his discussion of the relation between love and social norms, between the reality of love and marriage certificate. Makhmalbaf asks: "Is our love to our women worldly in the beginning and does it then become sacred after it has been legally confirmed?"¹⁸⁴ The relativity and historicity of social and moral norms become the central issue in the film. These films challenged the state ideology in Iran according to which morality is God's word. God wants man and women to practice the morals he delivered to the prophet and the infallible *Emams*. Whereas the religious and political establishment rejected Makhmalbaf, the secular intellectuals praised him as one of their own, although Makhmalbaf did not show any signs of enjoying the secular intellectuals' appreciation. It could be said that he was afraid of open involvement with secular intellectuals. However, he distanced

¹⁸² Mohammad Rasul Jahromi & Amir Reza Porhelm, *Khatami'ha* (Tehran: Dadar, 2001), p. 335.

¹⁸³ Heydari, *Naqd-e film'ha-ye Makhmalbaf*, p. 384.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

himself from the secular intellectuals in many occasions.¹⁸⁵ Many commentators on the Iranian intellectual discourse become confused in claiming that post-Islamist thinkers' and intellectuals' new positions resemble the Iranian secular discourse. Makhmalbaf may have found his own earlier unforgiving judgments of others, including secular filmmakers, as baseless and superficial if not morally wrong. The judge in *A Time for Love* claims, "Judgment is suited for those who investigate the consequence of a crime, not its causes. When I heard the causes of the action of every accused I have judged so far, I conclude that if I were in the place of the defendant I could do the same."¹⁸⁶ More than anyone, Makhmalbaf was thinking of his judgment of the people he had blamed in the early 1980s. In so doing, Makhmalbaf had studied himself more critically than had anyone else within the Iranian intellectual discourse. Makhmalbaf's search for new perspectives continued in different directions later. In *Once Upon a Time Cinema*, Makhmalbaf paid tribute to the history of Iranian cinema, and he appreciated all those who had contributed to its development. It is an acknowledgment of the fact that his work is part of that cinema, with its all limits and possibilities, and he realized that his early project of modern Islamic art was nothing but an illusion. Makhmalbaf showed the limits of criticism, because criticism cannot completely negate what it criticizes. The critic's relevance is, in fact, conditioned by the object of criticism. The social and cultural structures and the intellectual discourses, which become the object of criticism, indicate at the same time the contingency of the critic as a subject. Moreover, in *Bread and Flower (Nun va Goldun)* in 1995, Makhmalbaf reviewed and reconstructed his revolutionary action against the police officer he had attacked in 1974. In fact, the real police officer challenged the 17-year-old Makhmalbaf's emancipatory claims. The police officer told Makhmalbaf that his attempted assassination took place on the same day he was going to see the girl he loved and intended to marry, but Makhmalbaf's attack turned his life into total misery. The police officer questioned Makhmalbaf's story of the event and insisted on his version of the story as the correct version. What is implied in the police officer's charge against Makhmalbaf is a critique of all *totalist* ideologies, including the Islamist ideology, which claim to emancipate humanity. Makhmalbaf wanted to share with the spectators the idea that there is a multiplicity of perspectives to see reality. He hoped that his

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 97

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 395.

perspectivism would lead to the recognition of differences, and tolerance between people, beyond cultural differences, ideological discrepancies, and social positions.¹⁸⁷ “When, as a child I started going to the Mosque, I wanted to save humanity. After growing a little further, I wanted to save my country; now, I think, I make films in order to save myself.”¹⁸⁸ In the course of his artistic experience, Makhmalbaf saw that his previous actions in the name of truth and revolution were a result of his commitment to the *totalist* Islamist ideology. Thus, the Islamist revolutionary who once divided human beings into good and evil recognized that perception of reality, as the battleground of these two forces, is a result of a particular perception from a determined perspective. While the first perception was a product of *totalist* ideological persuasions, the second perception is a result of intellectual *perspectivism*.

¹⁸⁷ Dabashi, *Close up, Iranian Cinema*, p. 189.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 211–212.

Post-Islamism and Democracy

Since the early twentieth century, many Iranian intellectuals have claimed that the major obstacle preventing democracy from taking hold in the country is the lack of a political theory that is characteristically Iranian. Currently, there is an enormous body of knowledge on the lack of Iranian political theories. It includes discourses on the lack of a theory of why and how of the 1979 Revolution, on the shortage of a theory of state and the absence of a theory of democracy. Shariati's Islamist ideology was a response to the lack of a theory of revolution. The 1979 Islamic revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic created a new space of political experience and a new domain of theoretical reflections on the state, democracy, and politics. The post-revolutionary debates on the meaning of the *Velayat-e Faqih* and its validity began with Ayatollah Montazeri's theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* after the revolution. In the 1980s, Montazeri used the *Fiqh*'s terminology to construct a political theory based on the idea of popular sovereignty declared by the 1979 constitution. Montazeri's political theory was more democratic than the actual practice of the Islamic Republic at that time.¹ I do not intend to evaluate Montazeri's political theory, but I focus on Mohsen Kadivar's historical reflection on the theory and practice of Velayat-e Faqih. Kadivar was one of the most enthusiastic students of Ayatollah Montazeri, whose reflection on the concept of Velayat-e Faqih would not have been possible

¹Hossein Ali Montazeri, *Mabani-ye fiqhi-ye hokumat-e Eslami, Tarjomeh va Tqirir Mahmud Salavati* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Sarayi, 2000), p. 117.

without the emerging *perspectivist* discourse in the early 1990s. We can recognize traces of the intellectual *perspectivism* in Kadivar's conception of the historical contingency of Velayat-e Faqih. Makhmalbaf artistic expression dealing with the limits of human intellectual ability and experience within particular social, historical, psychological, and cultural conditions did not go unnoticed by the younger generation of Islamists such as Kadivar. Makhmalbaf told them that their collective submission to the authority of Ayatollah Khomeini deprived them of an authentic experience of politics. Makhmalbaf taught them that the real enemy was not their political opponents, but the way they approached politics. They learned from Makhmalbaf that they should search for a deeper and more creative understanding of their personal experiences. Islamic leftists such as Kadivar, who supported Khomeini unconditionally, realized after a decade that their submission to the leader was at the expense of their individual liberty and intellectual creativity. Kadivar's intellectual preoccupation in the 1990s can be described as a search for an alternative political theory that suits Islam as a political ideology. As an Islamist political thinker and a reader of modern political theories, he tried to establish a dialog between traditional Islamic political ideas and modern political theories. He argued that such a dialog would be a fruitful interpretative strategy if the interpreters of the traditional *Fiqh* and Islamic scholars discover the limits of their own knowledge. The difference between Kadivar and Shabestari is not that former emphasizes the conceptualization of faith and freedom through a hermeneutic approach while the latter focuses on harmonizing reason (*aql*) and revelation through "classical and familiar Islamic categories," as some analysts claim.² It is true that Shabestari is preoccupied with the question of faith and Kadivar with the revelation in the modern world. However, their differences lie in the fact that the former is preoccupied with the theology and the latter with political theory. Whereas Shabestari tries to find out whether Islamic faith is compatible with religious pluralism, Kadivar is preoccupied with the question of whether Islamic *Fiqh* is compatible with political pluralism. The questions worth discussing are, what is the nature of this political pluralism, and how is it related to religious pluralism and philosophical and artistic *perspectivism*?

Mohsen Kadivar was born in 1959 in Fasa, not very far from Shiraz, the capital of the southern province of Fars. In 1977, he entered the University

²Farzin Vahdat, *Post-revolutionary Discourse of Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari and Mohsen Kadivar Part II: Mohsen Kadivar*, Critique, No. 17 (Fall 2000): 138.

of Shiraz to study electronic engineering. After the Iranian revolution, he began to study *Fiqh* and Islamic theology in the seminary of Shiraz. In 1982, he went to Qom and continued his studies under the supervision of Ayatollah Montazeri. Kadivar became known to the public when he was sentenced to 18 months in prison in 1999 for alleged propaganda against the Islamic Republic. According to Kadivar, *Velayat-e Faqih* is a political theory based on the Platonic question of who should govern the state. There was a consensus among Shia scholars that only infallible Imams had the right to rule, but no *Shia* scholar reflected on the issue of political power in the absence of the infallible *Imam*.³ The question of an Islamic state was an irrelevant question for almost all *Shia* scholars until a century ago. According to the traditional belief of *Shia*, the members of the *Shia* community, as true followers of the infallible Imams, experience the same oppression as their *Emams*, until the return of the *Imam Mahdi*. Such an interpretation of *Shia* could not allow the formation of a new political theory. Kadivar distinguishes four distinctive periods in the *Shia Fiqh*. In the first phase, from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, the *Fiqh*'s concern was individual Muslims' private affairs, expressed in the teaching of *Sheykh Mufid*. In the second phase, between the seventeenth and the early twentieth centuries, *Shia* became the official religion of Iran. The third period began with the constitutional revolution and ended with the theorization of *Velayat-e Faqih*. The fourth stage is the theorization and implementation of the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*. Kadivar points to the two approaches toward the constitutional revolution by religious leaders as an indication of diversity within *Shia Fiqh*. Ayatollah Naini and Sheykh Fazlollah Nouri stood on two opposite sides during the constitutional revolution, and both argued from the standpoint of traditional *Shia Fiqh*, without any innovation. Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* was an innovation in the *Shia Fiqh*. According to Kadivar, Khomeini's novelty consists of four components. First, Islam is only meaningful if it manages to establish an Islamic state. Second, political struggles led Islamic scholars to oppose tyrannical regimes, thereby creating the condition of possibility of an Islamic state. Third, an Islamic state is a state led by the *Faqih*, whose power, according to *Fiqh* or *Sharia*, is no less than the power of the prophet and the infallible Imams. Finally, an Islamic state and its commands take priority over other Islamic commands. Thus, the establish-

³ Mohsen Kadivar, *Nazariyeh'ha-ye doulat dar fiqh-e shia* (Tehran: Nashr-e Nou, 1997), p. 10.

ment and preservation of the Islamic state is the most important religious duty of all Muslims.⁴ In a series of lectures from 1984 to 1989, Ayatollah Montazeri put forward his theory of *Velayat-e Entekhabi-ye Moqayyadeh-ye Faqih*. Parts of those lectures were published in five volumes under the title *Drasat fi-velayat ol-faqih va Fiqh al-Doulat ol-Islamiyah*. Reflecting on Montazeri's theory Kadivar shows the internal inconsistencies within the *Shia Fiqh* and the persistent controversy around the concept of *Velayat*.⁵ According to Kadivar, until Ayatollah Khomeini's innovations there were neither positive nor negative responses to the concept of *Velayat-e Faqih* within the *Shia* tradition. The concept of *Velayat* signifies the authority of a small group of individuals in their relations to others. Their authority is explained either by virtue of the mystical (*Erfani*) relationship to God or due to their inherited line of descent from the Prophet (*Velayat* based on *Emamat*). Accordingly, the delegation of some of these virtues to scholars of religious law (*Faqih*) can be understood as *Velayat-e Faqih*. As a result, *Velayat-e Faqih* is an invention. It is a result of a theoretical construct, a new type of conceptualization.

FAQIH AND AUTHORITY

Kadivar argues that the concept of *Velayat* (Guardianship) is meaningful only in relation to the concept of *Mahjuriyat* within *Shia Fiqh*. *Mahjuriyat* points to a mental disability of an individual, making it impossible for him or her to run his or her affairs.⁶ The term *Mahjur* or mentally challenged corresponds to the term *aliéné*. *Aliéné* indicated, according to Michel Foucault, insane individuals who in legal cases were not treated equally with sane individuals in the pre-modern Europe.⁷ Kadivar argues that if we extend the relevance of *Velayat* and *Mahjuriyat* in the social and political sphere, inequality between citizens becomes the rule. This view would conceive of citizens as incapable of managing their own affairs and preserving their interests. Thus, *Velayat* and *Mahjuriyat* are two complementary concepts. Kadivar argues, however, that *Mahjuriyat* indicates only exceptional cases in the *Shia Fiqh*.

⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

⁶ Mohsen Kadivar, *Hokumat-e Velayi* (Tehran: Ney, 1998), p. 47.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Maladie Mentale et Personnalité* (Paris: PUF, 1954), p. 10.

In *Fiqh*, the rule is the absence of *Velayat*. *Fiqh* is based on the principle that no one has sovereignty over another, and everyone is in charge of his own affairs, and nobody has the right to decide the destiny of others. Every individual is in charge of his own affairs within the frame of religion and reason... The fact of the matter is that in order to deny the individual of any one of these rights and give him or her to the custody of another person, valid religious proofs are needed.⁸

Based on the absence of *Mahjuriyat* in the *Shia Fiqh*, Kadivar concludes that *Shia Fiqh* considers all humans as autonomous individuals capable of governing their own destinies and managing their own affairs. Thus, one cannot claim an individual is *Mahjur* without proving his or her claim. *Mahjuriyat* has to be proved by rational argument and convincing evidence.⁹ Kadivar's argument is based on the *Qoran*, the *Hadith* of the Prophet, the *Hadith* of *Shia*, and the history of *rational inquiry* in the *Fiqh* of *Shia*. To Kadivar, one cannot prove the validity of *Velayat-e Faqih* regarding the *Qoran* or *Sonnat*, or through persuasive arguments.¹⁰ After rejecting the idea of *Velayat* as a principle in Islam, Kadivar tries to show the incompatibility of *Velayat-e Faqih* and the concept of *republicanism*. Kadivar argues that citizens are considered *Rashid* (intellectually competent) in a republic and have equal rights in the public space, but the state based on *Velayat-e Faqih* treats them as *Mahjur*. By treating its citizens like *Mahjur* the state keeps political leadership as the exclusive rights of the *Faqih*,¹¹ while obeying the commands of the government becomes the duty of the citizens.¹²

VELAYAT-E FAQIH AND DEMOCRACY

The oscillation between the theory and practice of *Velayat-e Faqih* and republicanism has created ideological contradictions within the Islamic political system since its establishment in 1979. In the 1980s, whereas the Islamist leftists defended the absolute power of Khomeini, the conservatives opposed the unquestionable role of *Faqih* in the daily politics of the state. After Khomeini's death, the conservatives changed their position

⁸ Kadivar, *Hokumat-e Velayi*, p. 56.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹² Kadivar, *Nazariyeh'ha-ye doulat*, p. 48.

and favored the absolute power of *Faqih* to undermine the democratic elements of the state defended by former Islamist leftists. To Kadivar, this ideological contradiction within the Islamic system indicates the incompatibility of the concepts of *Velayat-e Faqih* and republicanism. Whereas, people are treated as equal citizens in the public space of a republic; they are unequal with their guardians in the state based on the *absolute guardianship of Faqih*. Whereas, in a republican system, people with equal rights elect their government, in the state based on the absolute guardianship of *Faqih*, God appoints the head of the state. While, in a republic, leadership is temporary and accountable to the people, in the *Hokumat-e Velayi* (government led by a *faqih*) it is not held responsible to the people. Unlike a republic in which law limits the head of the state, he is above the law in a *Hokumat-e Velayi*. In a *Hokumat-e Velayi*, the legitimacy of laws depends on the head of the state.¹³ Despite his objections, Kadivar does not claim that the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* is categorically in contradiction to democracy. For Kadivar, *Velayat-e Faqih* is a novel political theory with its own merits, weaknesses, and contradictions, and similar to every political theory, it should be interpreted and reinterpreted. Kadivar registers two distinctive lines of thinking within the contemporary political thought of *Shia*. The first line of thinking is the *divine sovereignty (Velayat-e Elahi)* based on *immediate divine legitimacy (Masbruiyat-e Belavaseteh-ye Elahi)*. The second line of argument is the *mediated divine sovereignty (Velayat-e Bavaseteh-ye Elahi)* based on *divine-popular legitimacy*. According to Kadivar, the theory of *immediate divine legitimacy* is elaborated by Ayatollah Khomeini and defended by Ayatollah Abdullah Javad-Amoli.¹⁴ Ayatollah Montazeri advocated the theory of *mediated divine sovereignty* based on *divine-popular legitimacy (Masbruiyat-e Belavaseteh-ye Elahi-Mardomi)*. According to Montazeri;

God permits the people sovereignty over their social affairs, and no one has the right to deny them this “divine right.” People elect their leaders within the framework of the constitution that is compatible with religion. The leaders of the community would serve the public under a contract of representation [*vekalat*]... The supervision of *Faqih*s would make sure that secular laws are not in contradiction with Islamic laws.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁴ Abdollah Javadi Amoli, *Piramun-e vaby va rahbari* (Tehran, 1989).

¹⁵ Kadivar, *Nazariyeh’ha-ye doulat*, p. 49.

For Montazeri, God is the primary source of the state legitimacy, but this legitimacy remains imperfect without democratic popular elections. According to Kadivar, divine popular legitimacy, which prioritizes electoral procedure over authoritarian methods, is one of the main principles of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁶ In Montazeri's view, *Velayat-e Faqih* does not justify the rulership of the *Faqih*, but rather his position as an "ideologue of the state."¹⁷ The problem with this *Faqih-ideologue* is that, in order to become an ideologue, one has to be accepted by the people as an ideological authority. If the *Faqih* is only an ideologue, why should people elect him for a political office that has no real power? Montazeri also claims that the elected *Vali-ye Faqih* should oversee the general direction of policies and their proper implementation, which means that the position of *Vali-ye Faqih* is more than an ideologist of the Islamic state.¹⁸ Montazeri's conception of the *electoral and conditional guardianship* (*Velayat-e Entekhabi-ye Moqayyadeh-ye Faqih*) fluctuates between an ideologist and an elected governor. In such a government, the elected *Faqih* as governor is accountable to the elected *Assembly of Experts* (*Khobregan*) and the people. The *Assembly of Experts* have the right to appoint, question, indict (*Estizah*), or remove the elected *Faqih* from office.¹⁹ Furthermore, Montazeri limits the authority of the elected *Faqih* to the term of his office, makes him accountable to the body of experts elected by the people, and demands his binding commitment to the constitution. Another religious scholar who put forward a new democratic political theory termed as *Vekalat-e Malekan-e shakhsi-ye Mosha* is Ayatollah Mehdi Haeriy Yazdi. After an analysis of the grand Ayatollah Khomeini's statements on the question of *Velayat*, he asserts that only the Prophet and the infallible *Imams* are worthy of the *Velayat* position. As a result, *Faqih*s have no right to intervene in public matters or social and political administration. Haeri Yazdi's theory of government, based on *Malekiyat-e Mosha* and *Vekalat* (representative), is more democratic than Ayatollah Montazeri's theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*. Yazdi argues that the root of the word *Hokumat* (government) does not come from sovereignty or command but from wisdom (*Hekmat*) and *practical reason* (*Aql-e Amali*). For Haeri Yazdi, the government is not a metaphysical phenomenon, but

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁷ Vahdat, "Post-Revolutionary Discourse", Part II, p. 151.

¹⁸ Kadivar: *Nazariyeh'ha-ye doulat*, pp. 154–156.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 156.

rather an empirical event and a result of the collective attempts of members of society to govern their public affairs. According to Haeri Yazdi, every political entity is the collective property of all its citizens, who have equal rights to decide who should govern their society. The election of the governor would take place through a contract for a particular mission, and the citizens would have the right to nullify the contract whenever they chose.

The nature of the state is nothing but *Vekalat* (attorneyship) which is a contract for a definite period. The *Movakel* or the clients can discharge the *Vakil* (attorney) and appoint or elect another one whenever they want... Thus, the *Vakil* or the representative who is under the supervision of the *Movakels* could deal only with issues defined in the contract. The whole effort of the *Vakil* should be focused on defending the interests of his *Movakels* and protecting them from [possible] damages. The state is nothing but a representation. If the state attempts the smallest amount of independence, it can no longer be the embodiment of the people.²⁰

At the center of Yazdi's political theory stands the idea of *Malekiyat-e Mosha*, which refers to joint ownership of land with simultaneous individual rights, without separation of shares. This conception of property rights constitutes a theoretical foundation of intersubjectivity in a sovereign territory.²¹ Yazdi argues that contrary to philosophy and *Fiqh*, which are concerned with the unchangeable, politics is the realm of the changeable.²² As a result, "government is nothing but representation and delegation."²³ Yazdi claims that politics has nothing to do with the analysis of the nature of the Prophethood and the *Emamat*. Politics is about justice and the art of leadership.²⁴ Trough historicization of the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*, Kadivar demonstrates its historical contingency and artificial nature and challenges its privileged position as a divine form of government in the post-revolutionary Iran. The disconnection of the *Velayat-e Faqih*, from its sacred locus, has shaken the conservative political and religious establishment, which placed its concept beyond critical scrutiny. Kadivar argues, further, that the Islamic Republic was established

²⁰ Kadivar, *Nazariyeh'ha-ye doulat*, p. 182.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 184.

²³ Ibid., p. 182.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 184–185.

with the people's consent because they believed that this republic would protect their political rights.²⁵ Kadivar argues that Khomeini approved of an Islamic Republic as the alternative political system to replace monarchy a few months before the overthrow of the Shah, in 1978. However, in September 1979, the Assembly of Experts inserted the *Velayat-e Faqih* in the constitution. "Until its approval in the Assembly of Experts, *Velayat-e Faqih* was neither one of the goals of the Islamic revolution nor one of the underpinnings of the Islamic Republic. *Velayat-e Faqih* was set forth clearly by Ayatollah Khomeini [at that particular time]." ²⁶ According to Kadivar, it was Shariati's *Ommat va Emamat* that prepared the Islamist revolutionaries intellectually for the acceptance of the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*. Referring to Shariati's distinction between *Politics* and *Siyasat*, discussed previously, Kadivar claims that the underpinnings of Shariati's political theory are similar to those of the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*.²⁷ Shariati depicts an idealized picture of a modern *Emam*, who plays three different roles. First, he plays the role of the ideologue and theoretician of the coming revolution. The second role he plays is the leadership of the revolution. In his third role, the *Emam* becomes the leader of the revolutionary state aiming to shape new total men who express their humanity in their effort to build a total society.²⁸ Kadivar claims that Khomeini possessed many of the characteristics that Shariati had depicted as necessary for the forthcoming *Emam* or leader: "The great responsibility of the *Emam* is the building of a revolutionary society. The people who recognize this mission should be responsible to the *Emam*. Nevertheless, what is unclear in Shariati's conception of the revolutionary state is what would be the responsibility of the leader vis-à-vis the rights of the citizens?"²⁹ Kadivar claims further that Shariati's theory of *Ommat va Emamat* prepared the young revolutionaries to accept Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader of the revolution.³⁰ He criticizes Shariati for his failure to foresee the possibility of the transformation of the ideological leader of the revolution into an authoritarian dictator governing a totalitarian regime.³¹ The identification of Shariati's ideas with totalitarianism is a critique of the Islamist

²⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

²⁶ Kadivar, *Hokumat-e Velayi*, p. 189.

²⁷ Kadivar, *Daghdagheb'ha-ye hokumat-e dini* (Tehran: Ney, 2000), p. 239.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 240.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 241.

³¹ Ibid., p. 242.

leftists, for whom Shariati's Islamist ideology has been the culmination of revolutionary truth. Thus, for Kadivar Shariati's Islamist ideology and political theory represent a *totalist* ideology and totalitarian politics.

THE DEMOCRATIC KERNEL OF THE ISLAMIST DISCOURSE

With the rise to power of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the *Vali-ye Faqih*, the Islamist leftists, who were excluded from power, took refuge in study circles. They started to rethink the nature of the Iranian revolution, the Islamist ideology, and the Islamic Republic they had created.

I think that period (of Marginalization) was the greatest blessing for the Left... We redefined our strategy, perceptions and goals. Having been eliminated from all executive positions of power, we had the time to read and reflect. Of course, not all the Left made use of this opportunity; it was mainly the younger forces that underwent this transformation... The group that originally supported Khatami and helped formulate his campaign platform.³²

Saeed Hajjarian has been one of the most distinguished voices among the Islamist leftists who problematizes the Islamist ideology, the structure of the Islamic Republic, and the foundation of its legitimacy. A participant in the occupation of the US Embassy and a member of the *Ministry of Information and Security*, he also founded the Iranian *National Security Council*. In 1989, Hajjarian left the *Ministry of Information and Security* and became actively involved in the Presidential Office's *Centre for Strategic Studies*. Hajjarian wrote extensively for the weekly *Asr-e Ma*, published by the *Mojahedin Engalab-e Eslami* and the periodical *Kiyan*, in the early 1990s. He discussed the position of the Iranian constitution within the political structure of the Islamic state and tried to define the relationship between the words of the constitution and the deeds of the Islamic Republic. Similar to other Islamist leftists, Hajjarian was concerned about the new leader's lack of popularity and its undesirable effects on the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. He viewed the constitution as a social contract, which should become the final judge in the grave political conflicts within the system.³³ As early as 1980, the Freedom Movement and

³² Alireza Alavitabar and Kaveh Ehsani, "God Hasn't Died in this Society Yet": A Conversation with Alireza Alavitabar, *Middle East Report*, No. 212 (Fall 1999): 30.

³³ Saeed Hajjarian, *Jomburiyat, afsunzedayi az qodrat* (Tehran: Tarh-e Nou, 2000), p. 21.

Bazargan warned that the *Velayat-e Faqih* article would undermine the spirit of the constitution as a social contract. At first glance, the concentration of the Islamist leftists on the constitution as a point of reference seems to be a reaction to their exclusion from political power by the new *Vali-ye Faqih* and his conservative entourage. Regardless of Hajjarian's intentions, his question touched many within the Islamic Republic who were concerned about the degree of the Republic's popular legitimacy after Khomeini. While insisting on its historicity, Hajjarian saw the constitution as the only legal source of political power. He argued that since the constitution was subject to many changes in 1989, it cannot remain forever unchanged, and it can be subject to new revisions.³⁴ Hajjarian maintains that Khomeini believed in democratic procedures because he insisted that the Iranian constitution needed the approval of the nation. To Hajjarian, the constitution is a changeable document and a product of social and historical contingencies. Thus, both the constitution and the conditions that created its appearance can be subjects of criticism.³⁵ Accordingly the legitimacy of the state is dependent upon the consent and participation of the citizens, who may organize themselves in various political parties representing their political interests. Hajjarian argued that the legitimacy of the laws depended on the popular legitimacy of the parliament representing the will and concerns of the citizens, which can be verified through free and fair elections. He defends the equal rights of all Iranian citizens to elect and to be elected. Referring to Haeri Yazdi's theory of democracy as I discussed previously, Hajjarian claims:

The geographical entity called Iran is the Mosh'a property of all the inhabitants of the country. This means all the citizens of the country have the same share in its politics. Therefore, if the parliament or the government does not represent the will of the majority, it loses its legitimacy. If it did so, the laws and the rules of such a parliament and government would be illegitimate. Consequently, the members of such a parliament and government are viewed as unlawful.³⁶

It is not by accident that Hajjarian's point of reference coincides with Kadivar's affirmation of Haeri Yazdi's ideas. According to Hajjarian, since the legitimacy of the political institutions is due to the freedom of all citi-

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 22–23.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

zens to participate in the political process, exclusion of particular segments of society is illegal. In this way, the legitimacy of political power depends on its *republicanism* and *constitutionalism*. While republicanism expresses equal political rights of all citizens, constitutionalism reveals their coming together through a social contract. Following the Weberian model, Hajjarian argues that the main challenge the Islamic Republic faces is legitimacy crisis. He claims that the Islamic Republic had once in the past three sources of legitimacy, such as traditional, charismatic, and legal-democratic legitimacy. Ayatollah Khomeini was a traditional leader before the revolution. He became the charismatic leader of the revolution. Finally with the Iranian constitution, he became the legal source of legitimacy of the state. He preserved all three sources of legitimacy as long as he lived, and thus his unique position gave legitimacy to the constitution in the eyes of the majority of Iranian revolutionaries. The concentration of all sources of legitimacy in Khomeini prevented the constitution from becoming the legal foundation of state authority, as the expression of a social contract in the post-revolutionary Iran.³⁷ Hajarian claims that as long as Ayatollah Khomeini lived, the Islamic Republic was a legitimate state since Khomeini—as the head of the Islamic Republic—had popular support during his lifetime. Nevertheless, since Khomeini’s death these three sources of legitimacy have been in crisis. Hajarian points to three responses to the question of the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic in post-Khomeini Iran. According to the first response, because the *Assembly of Experts* has the right to appoint a leader, it is the source of the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. This view does not regard the popular vote as the source of the authority of the assembly but believes in the divine rights of the *Faqih*s (senior clerics) as the vicars of the infallible Imams.³⁸ According to the second response, the charismatic nature of the leader is the source of legitimacy of the political system. It argues, further, that the power of *Vali-ye Faqih* is beyond the *Assembly of Experts* because the Assembly does not choose a leader. It discovers the leader as an objective truth. As a result, he is not accountable to the people but to God.³⁹ The third view, which Hajjarian defends, argues in favor of the legal-democratic source of legitimacy within the Islamic Republic. According to this view, the leader represents the will of the nation and the result of a popular vote. The Assembly of Experts, which is an elected body through popular vote,

³⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

elects the leader. Accordingly, the current leader who is the product of the constitution and elections cannot ignore the constitution, because he needs the citizens' approval to remain in power. Since the source of legitimacy of the leader is the constitution and the popular vote, the *Assembly of Experts* should not be restricted to the clerics, but open to all sections of Iranian society.⁴⁰ One may criticize Hajjarian for saying that the Islamic character of the state would be preserved because the majority of the electorates are Muslims. One may criticize him for theorizing the Iranian state as *Theo-democracy*, or the government of God and the people.⁴¹ However, these critiques cannot deny the consistency of his democratic arguments. Hajjarian calls into question the authority of the *Guardian Council of Constitution* to qualify election candidates and questions the legality of its decisions, which deny political rights of the citizens as proclaimed by the constitution. He claims that according to Article 59 of the Iranian constitution, the leader has no authority to appoint the members of the Guardian Council. "Iranian people have the rights to vote on the important economic, social, and political problems in a referendum. These same people are qualified to elect the leader through their elected *Assembly of Experts*. Consequently, they and only they have the right to decide... the domain of political competition."⁴² Hajjarian's stance seems very close to the ideas of Kadivar. However, whereas Kadivar focuses on the historicity of *Velayat-e Faqih*, Hajjarian's concern is the contradiction between the promises of the constitution and the practices of the state institutions. Hajjarian tries to show that the paradox of Iranian politics is not merely an inconsistency between the constitution and its interpretations, but rather its denial as the point of reference in political disputes. For instance, the *Assembly of Experts* is an elected body and has the power to oust the leader. However, the dominant voice in the same *Assembly* claims that it does not choose a leader, but discovers him. He claims that there is no contradiction between the authority of leader elected by the popularly elected *Assembly of Experts*, and freely elected parliament and the city councils because they all are expressions of popular sovereignty.⁴³ Hajjarian was not alone in the formation of a post-Islamist democratic political discourse: other Islamist leftist intellectuals joined him in the process of ideological and political transformation in the 1990s.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 54–55.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 54.

⁴² Ibid., p. 81.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 81–82.

THE END OF UTOPIAN DEMOCRACY

Whereas Kadivar calls into question the totalitarian tendencies within the system, Hajjarian searches for democratic potentials of the constitution to guarantee free and fair elections as the only sources of legitimacy and stability of the state. The primary concern of Alavitarbar, a former member of the revolutionary guard and a close friend and colleague of Saeed Hajjarian in the *Centre for Strategic Studies*, is the meaning of Islamist ideology. Alavitarbar described, in 1992, the period from 1979 to 1986 as the climax of the Islamist ideology in Iran. The Islamist ideology began to decline in the late 1980s.⁴⁴ What is the significance of the year 1986? Between 1986 and 1989, when Khomeini was dying, the *Mojahedin Enqelab-e Eslami* and the clergy were divided into leftist and conservatives factions, and Soroush and Makhmalbaf had become ideologically controversial. These events indicate a turning point within the revolutionary Islamist discourse. It expressed Iranian Islamists' awareness of their own experience. Alavitarbar's description of the climax and decline of the Islamist ideology is, in fact, the summation of the intellectual and political experience of his generation after 1979. Ten years of experience of revolutionary practices with unfulfilled promises and intangible political results weakened Alavitarbar's ideological certainty. Alavitarbar questioned the conception of Islam as a political ideology and claimed that religion was "the inner experience of man in his encounter with the sacred," regardless of his or her social position and cultural background. However, at the empirical level, Islam had become an ideological religion, in which almost all religious concepts were redescribed as political concepts.⁴⁵ Furthermore, like many other former Islamist leftists in the early 1990s, Alavitarbar investigated the relationship between the Islamist ideology and the nature of the Islamic Republic and its totalitarian tendencies. Alavitarbar differentiated between four distinctive characteristics of totalitarianism. First, a totalitarian ideology simplifies a complicated reality through the selection of some aspects of reality within a unified whole. Second, it rearranges perceptions of reality into a logical system, within which the multiple aspects of reality are reduced to one simplified aspect of reality. Third, the totalitarian ideology provides a persuasive force toward political action.⁴⁶ Fourth, every totalitarian ideology

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 161.

that seizes political power produces a totalitarian political system. In defining a totalitarian regime, Alavitarbar refers exclusively to the Islamic Republic of the 1990s. “Every totalitarian regime is based on First, a charismatic leader ... Second, a decline of the rule of law; Third ... the distinction between public and private spaces disappears, and the state controls all aspects of people’s lives; Fourth it bases its legitimacy on unorganized masses.”⁴⁷ According to Alavitarbar, in a society governed by a totalitarian regime people are unable to respond to injustice, because the people are forced to ethical passivity and moral irresponsibility. The totalitarian regime broadcasts its totalitarian ideology to present its victims as a source of all the misery that exists in the society.⁴⁸ It is not too difficult to draw similarities between Alavitarbar’s description of a totalitarian regime and its ideology and the ideology of the Islamic Republic. Alavitarbar not only describes the Islamic Republic as a totalitarian regime but also its ideology as a totalitarian ideology because it produces submissiveness and moral irresponsibility. In his essay on ideology and totalitarianism, published in 1994, Alavitarbar claims that adherents of totalitarian ideologies claim that their ideologies represent timeless truths about reality. They claim that after controlling and eliminating all social and cultural elements corrupting citizens, they build a total society and elevate ordinary people to total humans.⁴⁹ Alavitarbar asserts that contrary to totalitarian ideologies, none-totalitarian ideologies neither seek total explanation of reality nor politicize all aspects of life, because they distinguish between the public and private matters.⁵⁰ For Alavitarbar, democracy is the common name of these none-totalitarian ideologies and political practices.

Democracy has become a universal value in these days. The reason behind the popularity of democracy is not its promise of a utopian society or philosophically strong arguments to justify it. It is the decision of the majority of the people throughout the world who have experienced undemocratic governments ... [that] democracy is the least evil form of government man has ever experienced.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 162.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 163–164.

⁵⁰ Hajjarian, *Jomburiyat, afsunzedayi az qodrat*, p. 165.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 123.

Alavitabar argues that in contrast to totalitarianism, which seeks a utopian society in the future, democracy is the government of the citizens with equal rights in the present. For Alavitabar, whereas totalitarianism is based on mere theory, democracy is based on the social experience and political practice. He advocates the establishment of a *Religious Democratic Government*, because similar to every democratic government it protects the freedom and equality of all citizens. For Alavitabar, a *Democratic Religious State* is not an Islamic government based on the Islamization of government, but a participatory democracy consisted of a free association of all citizens in civil society. If the civil society is Islamic, the state becomes Islamic. If the civil society is not Islamic, then the Islamic state is irrelevant because the majority of the people rejects it.⁵² The view Alavitabar represents suggests that

The Islamic state would have an organic relationship with the religious civil society. The civil society in its turn represents the beliefs, ideological orientations and religious attitude of the masses. Because of the necessity of this organic relation between the state and civil society, in a society that is not Islamic, the Islamic government is out of the question. An Islamic state cannot be imposed on a secular society since the state should represent the will of the citizens.⁵³

Despite his religious tone, Alavitabar's arguments, like the arguments put forward by the rest of the post-Islamists, are rationally consistent and politically democratic. Alavitabar demands fulfillment of the unfulfilled democratic promises of the existing constitution. He claims that an Islamic state that does not live up to the people's expectations will eventually fail.⁵⁴

IN SEARCH OF A COMMON GROUND

Thanks to his investigation of the serial murders of political activists and intellectuals in 1999, Akbar Ganji became the most distinguished Iranian journalist. Unlike Alavitabar, Hajarjian, and Kadivar, Ganji had never been a passionate Islamist leftist. He was a member of the revolutionary guard in the early 1980s. During the 1980s, Ganji was influenced by Soroush's antihistoricism, through which he could criticize both the opponents and

⁵² Ibid., p. 131.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

the enthusiastic defenders of the Islamic Republic. From this antihistoricist stance, Ganji criticized what he called fascist tendencies among the advocates of *Velayat-e Faqih*, who in the name of this principle used every antidemocratic means against their critics and propagated anti-Western views.⁵⁵ Ganji engaged in this ideological battle while he was on the staff of Mohammad Khatami, who was the cultural minister at the time. In the 1990s, Ganji argued that totalitarian interpretations of the doctrine of the *Velayat-e Faqih* reject any intellectual and political dissent within the system. He argued that in contrast to this ideological tendency, the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih* was democratic by nature, because it represented the popular will.⁵⁶ In addition to his critique of the totalitarian political practices within the Islamic state, Ganji tried to discover the causes of the secular and Islamist schism within Iranian intellectual and political discourses. He searched for a common ground on which these two intellectual and political rivals could enter into democratic intellectual and political contestations. Ganji argued that the main reason for the absence of such common ground was the Iranian intellectuals' blind adherence to modern political ideologies. He claimed that the Iranian intellectuals could not realize that these ideologies were the products of Western historical experiences. Without examination of the intellectual underpinnings of Western ideologies and the Iranian experience of modernity, Iranian intellectuals used these ideologies in a bid to understand the challenges confronted the Iranian society, culture, and politics. What they achieved was an oversimplification of these ideologies unable to understand and change the Iranian context.

The evaluation of our intellectuals and the negation of our tradition have taken place through these ideologies. The history of intellectual life in our society is the history of the distance from tradition toward the imitation of Western ideologies. In contrast, ignorant of the depth and the bases of modernity the traditionalist opponents refuse to understand modernity's philosophical and political foundations. Due to this condition of intellectual life, is it reasonable to expect the formation of modern Islamic political philosophies?⁵⁷

Ganji distinguishes two responses to modernity and democracy in Iran, both of which are total in their acceptance or rejection of these historical

⁵⁵ Akbar Ganji, *Talaqi-ye fashisti az din va hokumat* (Tehran: Tarh-e Nou, 2000), p. 166.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

phenomena. He argues that the total rejection or passive acceptance of these phenomena will not overcome the intellectual and political predicaments of the Iranian society. He proposes a critical focus on the historical significance of the rejection and acceptance of these historical phenomena. He argues that the Iranian intellectuals should conceptualize different aspects of these approaches and their effects toward a common democratic space. For Ganji, in a democratically shared space, political contestations and debates are pursued through rational arguments and democratic means. This public space is, as he argues, the only communal space in which they can share their experience and exchange their meanings. Thus, the possibility of exchange between different meanings of the common experience of all Iranians, secular and religious alike, would be the foundation of the new common ground that Ganji is seeking. Ganji, Alavitarbar, Hajjarian, and Kadivar have contributed to the creation of a post-Islamist political discourse supplementing the ideas of Soroush and Shabestari and the artistic performance of Makhmalbaf. This new critical and reformist political discourse created an intellectual and political condition in which the victory of Mohammad Khatami in the presidential election in 1997 became a reality.

POST-ISLAMIST POLITICS

When Khatami reluctantly agreed to stand as a presidential candidate, he could not imagine he was going to be elected by more than twenty million Iranians a few months later. The Islamist leftists now turned post-Islamist, or reformist supported Khatami's candidacy. Before his candidacy, Khatami was one of the many Islamists who were rethinking the Iranian revolution. His rise as a political leader for the democratization of Iranian politics was due to the support that he had received from the exponents of the post-Islamist discourse. To increase his intellectual credibility during his campaign for the presidency, Khatami was invited to write an introduction to Al-e Ahmad's 1970s book, *Westoxication*. The gesture was meant to express his common ground with Iranian intellectuals as a whole, both Islamists and seculars. In the summer of 1979, Khatami was among the eager supporters of the principle of Velayat-e Faqih.⁵⁸ Khatami became the head of Keyhan newspaper in 1980 and 2 years later became the Minister of Culture in Mir Hossein Mousavi's government. After 10 years

⁵⁸ Jahromi & Porhelm, *Khatami'ha*, p. 115.

as a minister, the conservatives forced him to resign. After his resignation, he became the director of the National Library. The titles of the books he published before his election are *Bim-e Mouj*, *Az Donya-ye Shar ta Shahr-e Donia*, and *Ayin va Andیشه dar Dam-e Khodkamegi*. Long before standing as a candidate for the presidency, Khatami defended freedom of expression as a constitutional right.⁵⁹ We can detect in his book *Bim-e Mouj* (*Fear of the Wave*), published in 1993, an increasing tension between Shariati's ideological stance and post-Islamist *perspectivism*. Khatami argues that the religion of Islam as an objective entity is not affected by historical and sociopolitical circumstances. However, depending on different cultural, social, and historical contexts, its interpretations are in continuous change.⁶⁰ Khatami maintains that the Islamic Republic cannot protect religion by denying people, their freedom of speech, and ignoring their democratic rights. In 1991, then-minister of culture, Khatami, claimed that "Freedom of thought, the most precious for human beings, is the fundamental principle of Western civilization. It will be a disaster if we in our encounter with the West deny freedom. Neither Islam nor reason allows us to resist freedom."⁶¹ In fact, at the time Khatami wrote these lines, the conservatives were criticizing his liberal cultural policy, and the new leader Khamenei was raising his voice against Western *cultural invasion*. In the name of resistance against the Western cultural onslaught, conservative forces led by Khamenei started a campaign against the post-Islamist and secular intellectuals and Khatami in particular. Khatami's defense of freedom of speech provided the condition in which artists such as Makmalbaf could work freely and encouraged the post-Islamist intellectuals to make their voices louder. Khatami was forced to resign because he defended intellectual freedom. In his book, *From the World of the City to the City of the World* (*Az Doniaye Shar ta Shahr-e Donia*), Khatami draws the conclusion that the political structure of the Islamic Republic is a result of historical contingencies. Khatami argues that the Islamic state has no legitimacy beyond people's consent and that state power should be accountable to the people, who are the origin of the political power. Freedom of expression and freedom of political organization,

⁵⁹ Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini, Reinventing Khomeini: the Struggle for Reform in Iran* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 198.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 198–199.

⁶¹ Mohammad Reza Hanafi, *Ta sobhdam, ravanshenasi-ye nofuz-e ejtemaei-ye Khatami Rais Jombur-e Iran* (Tehran: Ruznameh-ye Salam, 2000), p. 234.

which provide peaceful solutions to political disputes, are according to Khatami the preconditions for the accountability of state power in the Islamic Republic. Reflecting on Locke's argument, Khatami asserts that since the foundation of the state is nothing but the consent of its citizens, "the state is neither absolute nor eternal. It is rather dependent on its ability to defend citizen's freedom, security, and property."⁶² According to Khatami, these principles of the state are realized if they are combined with *Tasamoh* and *Tasahol*, meaning tolerance toward different beliefs and persuasions. It is not by accident that these two concepts of *Tasahol* and *Tasamoh* were frequently used in the reformists' discourse during Khatami's presidency. "*Tasamoh* and *Tasahol* are the best means through which agreement concerning the welfare, happiness and security of the citizens who follow different beliefs and are affiliated to different modes of thought, are reached. The rights of man should be protected regardless of his beliefs."⁶³ Despite his praise for the democratic aspects of the liberal political theory, Khatami criticized liberal theory's individualism. Khatami's interest in modern political theories is not a theoretical preoccupation, but the concern of a political activist. As the cultural minister, he was witnessing the emergence of the *perspectivist post-Islamist* intellectual and political discourse, and he protected the freedom of expression of the leading intellectuals who advocated this new discourse. Since the early 1990s on, Khatami contributed intellectually and politically to the post-Islamist discourse understood at that time as the expression of popular demands for political freedom and equality. While the *Islamist totalist* politics searched for a utopian society and total human in the future, *post-Islamist perspectivist* politics focused on the present and real grievances of the citizens. That is why *post-Islamist perspectivist* politics encouraged civil society to organize itself through nongovernmental organizations to increase the political rights of citizens since they assumed that citizens' rights were co-extensive with their power. The *post-Islamist perspectivist* believed that democracy was a result of the empowerment of civil society vis-à-vis the state. Consequently, it reduced the political significance of citizens to their electoral functions, as mere voters whom they would summon in election times. The post-Islamists recognized that politics was a struggle between the state and the citizens. While the citizens fought for enlargement of the

⁶² Mohammad Khatami, *Az donia-ye shahr ta shahr-e donia: Seyri dar andisheh-ye siyasi-ye gharb* (Tehran: Ney, 1997), p. 240.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

public space, the state tried to restrict its domain. The post-Islamists realized that in an enlarged public space, democracy means that citizens have equal political rights to decide who should govern and who should be governed. Nevertheless, they limited public space to the critical exchange of meanings and opinions on politics at the discursive level to prepare citizens for national and local elections. While defending theoretical dissensus they discarded street demonstrations as populist politics of passion that opposed rational arguments. It was not until the candidacy of Mir Hossein Mousavi in the 2009 presidential election that the post-Islamists realized that street demonstrations were also ways to verify rational arguments implied in the Iranian constitution. According to the argument, Iranian citizens have equal rights. By appealing to the constitutional claims that all citizens have the same political rights to govern and to be governed, Iranian citizens reconfigured the Iranian public space and argued that politics was the rights of anyone and everyone. The *Green Movement* that erupted after the 2009 presidential election was the expression of this new configuration of the public space. The post-Islamist intellectuals no longer searched the Qoran, the Hadith, and traditions to rediscover ideas that suit democracy, since they believed democracy was a modern response to the modern social and political experiences. Thus, according to the post-Islamists, the compatibility between Muslim societies and modern democracy is not a theoretical question, which leads to providing Qoranic concepts to translate democracy, but rather a practical question. Thus, citizens experiencing a lack of political rights defend their rights through the contrasts between the promises made by the constitution and the practices of state institutions violating those promises. The post-Islamist discourse discovered that the *Islamist totalist* ideology is a reduction of complicated processes of understanding of reality into a few elements. The result of this discovery is that the new discourse criticizes totalitarian political practices generated by the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic and its ideology have been described as totalitarian by post-Islamists, yet the same totalitarian system and ideology gave birth to the most significant intellectual discourse in modern Iranian history. The particularity of Iranian Islamism as a *totalist* ideology is that it managed to create an *illusio* or space of experience⁶⁴. It started with Shariati, developed with the Islamic Republic, and finally culminated in the new discourse of philosophical-artistic

⁶⁴Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 76–77.

perspectivism and post-Islamist political pluralism. Therefore, we see a continuity of the Islamist discourse from Shariati to the new post-Islamist discourse. The post-Islamist discourse has all the characteristics of a secular discourse. Iranian secular intellectuals have underestimated this truth. Abbas Kiarostami was the first Iranian secular intellectual who appreciated the genius of this discourse in its earlier phase through his recognition of Makhmalbaf's contribution to Iranian modern cinema in his film *Close Up* in 1990.

Post-Islamism Versus Neoconservatism

From 1997 to 2001, the advocates of reform and democracy in Iran gained four significant electoral victories. Khatami's election as Iran's president in 1997 and his reelection in 2001, the reformists' absolute majority in the 1999 local elections, and the 2000 parliamentary elections manifested these electoral victories. However, the unelected institutions such as the *Judiciary*, the *Revolutionary Guard*, and the *Guardian Council of the Constitution* resisted democratic political reforms. The Guardian Council obstructed the law proposals to protect freedom of expression and assembly and free and fair elections. In December 1998, agents of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence killed several prominent political dissidents and intellectuals.¹ Khatami forced the Ministry publicly to declare its guilt and the head of the Ministry to resign.² However, the pressure on the prodemocracy and reform-oriented forces did not diminish. In the summer of 1999, the paramilitary organization *Basij* brutally suppressed student protests. Saeed Hajarain whose ideas I discussed previously became the target of an assassination attempt in 2000, which paralyzed him for life. Tens of pro-reform newspapers were banned and many journalists and intellectuals incarcerated. The *Guardian Council* disqualified more than two thousand prodemocracy parliament candidates throughout Iran including more than one

¹Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2000), pp. 156–158.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 259–260 and p. 220.

hundred members of the 2000–2004 parliament.³ These incidents generated fierce public debates regarding the capacity of the reform-oriented government to fulfill its democratic promises. The disputes on the aptitude of the reform-oriented government divided the post-Islamist intellectuals and political activists into two camps. One group argued that the principles of the movement for reform and democracy corresponded to the principles of the 1979 Revolution and the Islamic Republic. Another group argued that the totalitarian nature of the revolution and the Islamic Republic were the main obstacles to democracy. The rise of the reform movement in Iran coincided with the rise of the American *neoconservatives* who aimed at retaining the US global leadership. In the same year that Khatami became Iran's president, the American *neoconservatives* stated their policy in a *Statement of Principles* supported by academics and politicians who gathered around the Project for the *New American Century* in 1997. Francis Fukuyama, the theorist of the end of history and Donald Rumsfeld, US secretary of defense in 2001–2005, were among the signatories of the *Statement of Principles*. The *Statement of Principles* declared the commitment of its signatories to shape the twenty-first century favorable to American values and interests. The signatories of the statement believed that it was “important to shape circumstances before crises emerge.” They argued that the US was able to retain its global leadership if it strengthened its ties to democratic allies and challenged regimes that were hostile to the American interests and values. The *neoconservative Statement of Principles* was released only 2 weeks after Khatami's election as Iran's president in 1997. After Khatami reelection in 2001, the neoconservatives were running the US government. The 9/11 terrorist attacks created the opportunity for the American neoconservatives to argue that it was inevitable rather than important “to shape circumstances before crises emerge.” The neoconservatives saw the Middle East as an area in crises. They argued that the lack of good governments and democracy in the region has created frustrated youth who invest all their energy and skills to take revenge on the West. The Middle Eastern youth hates the West because they cannot take part in the affluence and freedom of Western people and because the West supports their corrupt and oppressive governments. The convergence of the 9/11 terrorist attack with the neoconservative strategy in the Middle East increased the demand for the experts who espoused the neoconservative theoretical presuppositions on

³ Ali Ansari, *Modern Iran* (London: Pearson-Longman, 2007), pp. 324–328.

the region and were willing to realize their political goals. The neoconservative experts have been arguing ever since that democratization in the region would serve regional interests of the USA and its allies. A segment of Iranian post-Islamist intellectuals and political activists who had become critical of Khatami government's handling of the question of democratization in Iran found the neoconservative democracy project in the Middle East convincing. For instance, *The Office for Consolidating Unity* as the largest student organization welcomed the American-British occupation of Iraq.⁴ This new stance of *The Office for Consolidating Unity* was one of the early expressions of the political split among the post-Islamist intellectuals and political activists. Despite all its weaknesses in implementing and safeguarding democratic practices in Iran, Khatami's government defended the citizens whose rights were violated by the state institutions controlled by the conservative forces. Khatami's critics claim that Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad's presidency indicated that the Islamic Republic and the prodemocracy reformists loyal to the Republic lack the capacity to respond to the democratic demands of the people. The central cause of the failure of the reform movement is, according to some of the vocal critics, the inconsistency of the reform movement's theory and practices with the principles of liberal democracy.⁵ This critical assessment of the reform movement in Iran is also shared by some of the most ardent advocates of the post-Islamist *perspectivist* discourse such as Soroush and Ganji. They point to the self-imposed limitations of Khatami's government. This critique of the reform movement is partly a logical outcome of the post-Islamist *perspectivist* discourse and partly a result of the demand put forward by a *new ideological order* that generated the neoconservative discourse. Some Iranian post-Islamist intellectuals, who are unfamiliar with the nature of *the new ideological order* and its relation to *the neoconservative discourse*, fall in traps of its seemingly democratic language. They only react when *the new ideological order* uses *Islamophobic* terminologies in the Western public space. The post-Islamists oscillated between the old concepts of participatory and liberal democracy in the 1990s. Some post-Islamist intellectuals became attracted to the oversimplified conception of democracy propagated by Western neoconservatives since the late 1990s.

⁴ *Bayaniyeh-ye tablili anjoman'ha-ye eslami-e daneshjuyan-e 24 daneshgah keshvar*, Kohrdad 82/May–June 2003.

⁵ Mehrdad Mashayekhi, *Gofteman-e sekular va demokratik cheguneh shekl gereft*, <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=33494>.

They did not realize that democracy could not be reduced to one of its outcomes, namely human rights.

Intellectual and political activists such as Hajarian, Alavitabar, Kadivar, and many others who belonged to the post-Islamist left were concerned with recognition of the equal political rights of all citizens by the state. They understood the right to govern as the equal right of every citizen. The liberal post-Islamists, represented by intellectuals and activists such as Soroush and Ganji, focused instead on freedom of expression and the question of human rights. The demands of the liberal post-Islamists correspond to the conception of democracy, expressed in the *neoconservative design for democracy* in the Middle East. Under the influence of the neo-conservative approach to democracy, many post-Islamists have forgotten that they contributed to the expansion of the public space in Iran. It is fashionable now for some of the Iranian post-Islamist intellectuals to deny the significance of the Islamist ideology in the formation of the post-revolutionary democratic discourse. They accept uncritically a narrative of the Iranian revolution, which is, according to Hayden White, a result of “*political domestication* of historical facts.”⁶ White argues that the imputation of particular meanings that introduce particular orders to history politically domesticate historical facts. The imputed meaning in the case of the history of the Iranian revolution is totalitarianism. The fight against totalitarianism has been *raison d'être* of *the new ideological order*. According to *the new ideological order*, the Islamist ideology underpinning the Iranian revolution is the new totalitarian ideology after communism. This narrative of the Iranian revolution understates the importance of the Islamist *totalist* ideology and the post-Islamist *perspectivist* discourse in the formation of the current movement for democracy in Iran. Akbar Ganji's new interpretation of Shariati's Islamist ideology is a case in point. Ganji spent 5 years in prison for criticizing Iran's leader. After his release from prison, he left Iran for the USA where he offered a radical critique of Shariati's Islamist ideology. Ganji published his new critique of Shariati on the website of Radio Zamaneh, sponsored by the government of the Netherlands to promote democracy in Iran, in July 2007. Referring to Bazargan, he claims that Shariati alone provided the intellectual, cultural, and practical condition of the revolution.⁷ According to Ganji, Shariati's revolutionary

⁶ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 74–75.

⁷ Akbar Ganji, *Otopiya-ye Leninisti-ye Shariati*, Zamaaneh.com, July 11 2007.

discourse was utopian, egalitarian, antidemocratic, and anti-Western. It was a search for a collective return to the self and cultural identity.⁸ For Ganji, a critique of Shariati's Islamist ideology is a self-critique since the Islamist ideology was the ideological universe in which he and his generation made sense of their experience and constructed their political identity.⁹ Ganji argues that Shariati's emphasize of the central role of the revolutionary leader led the Iranian revolution into a wrong direction. Ganji is well aware that Shariati's ideological universe reflected the global revolutionary discourse of the 1960s and 1970s, which was utopian, anti-Imperialist (anti-Western), and antidemocratic.¹⁰ To Ganji, Shariati's arguments, on the responsibility of the revolutionary leaders to generate a new type of human beings and a new type of society, in *Ommat va Emamat* are anti-democratic and antihuman rights.¹¹ Ganji claims that Lenin's theory of Imperialism (*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism 1916*) inspired Shariati's anti-imperialism. He points to Heidegger's theory of civilizational decadence (*What is Metaphysics 1935*) as a source of inspiration for Shariati's anti-Western stance. Whereas, Heidegger blamed both American capitalism and the Soviet communism as the causes of European decadence, Shariati accused the West in its entirety. Shariati blamed the West for modern slavery, colonization, exploitation, and moral decay of the oppressed of the world, including Muslims and Iranians. Heidegger's response to the problem of capitalist and communist materialism was a creative reinterpretation of Western philosophical and intellectual traditions. Similarly, Shariati sought to transform Islam into a militant ideology to challenge the Westernization and modernity in the Muslim countries.¹² Ganji argues that Shariati's ideology rationalized the totalitarian nature of the Islamic Republic.¹³ According to Ganji, despite his opposition to the clergy, Shariati admired Khomeini and Khamenei's political stance.¹⁴ Ganji claims that while Shariati disregarded human rights in his theories, Khamenei violates human rights in his actions. "In the same way as Shariati and Marxists, Khamenei gives priority to the economy (bread, housing,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

and employment) rather than political and human rights of the citizens.”¹⁵ Ganji argues that the conservative forces in Iran used Shariati’s Islamist ideology during the 1979 revolution and establishment of Islamic Republic. They used as well the post-Islamist intellectuals’ concept of Islamic democracy (*Mardomsalari-ye Dini*) to consolidate their grip on power. While relying heavily on Shariati’s terminology on social justice, the conservatives led by Khamenei hijacked the concept of Islamic democracy. According to Ganji the conservative forces have distorted the real meaning of every democratic concept, which have been constructed by progressive Muslims. As a result, Ganji argues, the secularization of politics is the only way toward democracy in Iran because secularism is immune to the conceptual abuse of the clergy.¹⁶ Ganji asserts that Shariati failed to recognize the value of democracy because he failed to respect the lifestyles of the other, the lifestyles of the Western individual, and the experience of Western societies.¹⁷ “Shariati thought of the Western other with contempt and as unworthy of respect... since he saw nothing but exploitation, immorality, sexual pleasure and electoral fraud in the West of the 1960s and 1970s.”¹⁸ Ganji claims that the Muslim fundamentalists’ representation of the West to their Muslim audience resembles Shariati’s anti-Western and antimodernist stance. Despite Ganji’s effort to present Shariati as an anti-Western Islamist par excellence, we find much evidence in his quotations of Shariati that contradict his claims. Ganji quotes Shariati as claiming “through a painful struggle modern woman threw hijab and harem away to realize her freedom and true humanity, but she became a victim of the capitalist system. The market does business with her sexuality and reduces all her qualities to her bodily organs.”¹⁹ Ganji misrepresents this quotation because Shariati’s argument in this particular quote is similar to his contemporary European Marxists. Leftist feminists would have presented the same argument if they were dealing with the question of woman’s emancipation in the Middle East. Shariati’s Islamist ideology created the space of the post-revolutionary political reconstruction and contestation. It became as well the object of the intellectual transformation of hundreds of thousands of students and young revolutionaries who were

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Naqd-e Akbar Ganji bar Shariati -6*

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

the subjects of this political construction and contestation. The emergence of the Islamist ideology and its transformation into the post-Islamist *perspectivism* was the expression of the intellectual and political journey of Muslim intellectuals. In fact, Muslim and secular intellectuals have shared the same intellectual presuppositions and political expectations in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran. However, Muslim intellectuals succeeded to lead a revolution. They built a political system. They have criticized its undemocratic practices and its totalitarian tendencies. They have been trying to make democratic changes within the system and have been successful to a certain extent. However, the most crucial achievement of Muslim intellectuals has not been their contribution to the institutionalization of democracy in Iran. It was their contribution to the elimination of the dichotomy between Muslim and secular intellectuals regarding the question of democracy and political rights of the Iranian citizens. I have demonstrated how Western Marxist *totalism* and Iranian Islamism converged in the 1960s and 1970s and how Western post-Marxism and post-Islamist *perspectivism* coincided in 1990s. However, neither the Islamist nor the post-Islamist discourse was passive replications of the Western discourses. The leading exponents of these two discourses have, rather, absorbed, internalized, and adjusted the Western *totalist* and post-Marxist intellectual discourses through their own intellectual reflections on Iranian politics. In so doing, they formed the ideological basis of four important political events in Iran: the Islamic revolution, the reform movement, the Green Movement, and finally, the election of Rouhani as Iran's president. In the same way that the Islamist ideology rationalized the 1979 revolution, the post-Islamist *perspectivist* intellectual discourse have legitimized the political struggles for democratic changes in Iran since the 1990s. By mastering the vocabulary used by secular intellectuals, Muslim intellectuals declared their intellectual and political equality with the nonreligious or secular Iranians who had dominated the pre-revolutionary intellectual and political discourse in the public space. They fashioned the Islamist ideology, led the Islamic revolution, and established the Islamic Republic. The post-revolutionary political order they created contradicted their envisioned political order, which was based on the equality of everyone to govern and to be governed. The incongruity between the existing political order and the envisioned political order led the Muslim intellectuals to revise their ideological framework and take a critical stance toward the existing order. Post-Islamist *perspectivism* was the outcome of the incongruity between the existing political order and the ideological persuasion

of Iranian Islamists. Shariati's discourse encouraged in many ways the revolutionary Islamists to unfold their intellectual creativity and question the established truths within the Islamic Republic. The Islamist *totalist* discourse created an Islamist linguistic community in the Gramscian sense, which functioned as the space of political contestation and intellectual transformation within the Islamic Republic.

Shariati's Islamist ideology put forward a particular conception of history and envisioned what he called the true democracy populated by total human beings. Shariati's Islamist ideology was the Iranian response to the universalist intellectual and political discourse of the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to this discourse every human being has the intellectual and ethical capacity to become a universal subject of knowledge, ethics, and politics. Shariati equipped with this universalist discourse challenged the Iranian Marxist discourse and synthesized Islam and Humanist Marxism in an Islamist ideology as a prelude to an intellectual revolution to bring forth future political and social revolutions. In so doing, he reconfigured the Iranian intellectual space and established the intellectual equality of both Muslims and seculars. Shariati understood *the return to the self* as starting points for an alternative intellectual discourse to transcend the intellectual infertility of the Iranian intellectual discourse of his time toward a new public space. Shariati succeeded in demonstrating that Muslim intellectuals could increase their share in progressive politics if they exhibited publicly the knowledge they have inferred from their own experience. "Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of the spaces and the possibilities of time."²⁰ Shariati reconfigured the space of intellectual discourse in the Iran and changed the intellectual arrangement in favor of Muslim intellectuals. Instead of the official religious language, Shariati took the existing religious terminology that expressed the religious feeling of the masses as his point of departure. He conceptualized and incorporated the popular religious terminology in the Islamist ideology to bridge the gap between the feeling of the masses and the knowledge of the intellectuals. The Islamist ideology aimed at removing the gap between knowing and feeling and between intellectuals and the masses toward collective understanding. In fact, the Islamist ideology was a response to the failure of the Iranian intellectuals, who did not consider the experiences of the ordinary people as autonomous and

²⁰ Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 91.

meaningful experiences. The Islamist ideology saw the experience of the ordinary people as a source of valid knowledge upon which a new envision of politics could be built. Shariati adopted the Marxist concept of alienation because he believed the concept had a religious underpinning. He assumed that human beings had an unchangeable essence, but they become alienated through their economic, cultural, and political existence. Shariati took the alienated Muslim as the reality of the alienated person to be transformed into a de-alienated and total human or *Ensan-e Kamel*. For Shariati, this state of harmony of the de-alienated human was a precondition of his or her return to God. For Shariati, true democracy would be attained only with the withering away of the state in the classless society. He argued, in *Ommat va Emamat*, that Western liberal democracies deceived their people to search for pleasure and material prosperity instead of perfection and spirituality. Shariati believed in the revolutionary vanguards as enlightened educator capable of leading the shapeless masses toward perfection. He argued that instead of *Mojtahed* Muslim masses need a *Mojahed*, a charismatic leader, an ideologue, and an Islamist Lenin. The way the masses understood Khomeini during the revolution did not correspond to the picture of a *Mojtahed*, a religious scholar, but a *Mojahed*, a warrior of the just cause, as Shariati had depicted. They saw an *Emam* who could lead his people toward perfection. The people had an obligation to follow the leader, for the simple reason that the revolutionary leader acquired the responsibility to lead his people toward the promised society and the new humanity. Shariati's Islamist ideology reached its climax in the adoption of the *Velayat-e Faqih* doctrine into the post-revolutionary constitution. For the Islamist revolutionaries, the theory of *Ommat va Emamat* anticipated Khomeini's leadership during the revolution. However, the Islamic Republic seemed less totalitarian and more liberal politically than the ideal state Shariati had proposed. Despite the tendencies within the Islamic Republic toward a totalitarian and closed political system, public political and ideological contestations have been an important feature of the Islamic system. That is why, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the very concept of *Velayat-e Faqih* was challenged by the same Islamist revolutionaries who, more than a decade before, supported the concept. Nevertheless, the challenge did not result in promoting another revolution to create an ideal society again governed by the true democracy. This time, the former Islamist revolutionaries had a well-informed vision of democracy and took a reform-oriented approach toward the existing political institutions. As a result, the former Islamist

revolutionaries who understood politics as the realization of truth and dreamed of creating a perfected society realized that politics is not about truth, but about citizens' equal political rights. For this reason, the Islamist leftists interpreted the constitution of the Islamic state as the basis of democratic demands. In fact, the most dedicated adherents of Shariati's Islamist ideology or the Islamist leftists tried to re-define, re-describe, and re-interpret the content of the constitution to reconfigure post-Khomeini politics in Iran. The change of outlook of the Islamist leftists was inspired partly by the post-Islamist *perspectivist* intellectual discourse and partly by their own political experience. The Islamist leftists criticized totalitarian ideologies in general, and the Islamist *totalist* ideology, in particular, rejected the idea of the total man and utopian society and demanded concrete democratic changes instead. Unlike Shariati, the post-Islamist *perspectivist* intellectuals did not hold the idea that Islam represents the absolute historical truths. They examined the historicity and limits of human experience and knowledge, in general, and Islamist knowledge in particular. The post-Islamist *perspectivists* showed directly or indirectly the historicity and contingency of religious knowledge, including *Fiqh*. They declared the theory of Velayat-e Faqih a historical construct that emerged in a particular historical time and in a particular political state of affairs. Soroush went even further and claimed that Islam's truth-claim could not have a privileged position vis-à-vis other religions' truth-claims. The post-Islamist *perspectivists* such as Soroush argued that there is no objective truth, but the truth for the subjects who operate within a particular system of thought or discourse. Soroush called into question the dogma that *Shia* represents the absolute truth, and he claimed that the truth-claim of a particular religion is irrelevant to that of other religions. Persuaded by the idea that religious experience and knowledge are contingent events, the post-Islamist *perspectivists* claimed that there has never been a fixed Muslim identity. They claimed that there have always been fluid, ephemeral, and invented Muslims identities. As the logical consequence of their *perspectivism*, the post-Islamist intellectuals argued that there is nothing religious in the relation between the citizens and the state. In their view religious experience takes place only in the relation between individual human beings and God. According to this religious *perspectivism*, in order to be a Muslim, one does not need to be a member of an Islamic community, because the relation between human and God is a personal relationship. Shabestari concluded that the absence of an Islamic community as a precondition for being Muslim is a refutation of the claim that politics is the

essence of Islam. If the relation between human and God is an inner relationship, politics, which indicates a relationship between humans, is an external and intersubjective relationship. Whereas the relation between human and God is a vertical relationship, predestined by God, the relation between human and human is a horizontal relationship, decided by political struggles and historical circumstances. The political consequence of the distinction between these two types of relationships is that it is not up to religious authorities to decide what form of government a Muslim society should have. The post-Islamist intellectuals argued that Islam is more preoccupied with justice than with political power. They encouraged religious leaders to set forth high moral standards to democratize politics and make it more human, rather than seizing state power. They discarded the use of absolute terms concerning politics and argued that democracy is an empirically verified less cruel form of government compared to any other form of government. The post-Islamist *perspectivist* discourse was, in fact, a description and re-description of the dominant intellectual and political discourse in Iran. Makhmalbaf argued that as soon as an individual artist changes his or her perspective of reality, he or she realizes that a new aspect of the situated historical, social, and cultural reality emerges. Makhmalbaf's *perspectivism* generated a clear-cut antitotalitarian intellectual position, which called into question Shariati's Islamist ideology and revolutionary state. However, Makhmalbaf reminded Iranian intellectuals, secular as well as religious, that they were part of the same social, political, and cultural experience. He demonstrated in his films that the intellectuals reproduce to a certain extent the limits and possibilities of this same experience. Makhmalbaf realized, through his artistic experience, that a total critique of the existing cultural, social, and political condition is impossible because the critic is conditioned by what he or she criticizes. The ethics of Makhmalbaf's *perspectivism* indicate that anyone who tries to liberate the world in its totality does nothing but corrupt and destroy it in the end.

THE PERSPECTIVISM OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

The intellectual *perspectivism* and political post-Islamism of the 1990s gave birth to a new generation of journalists, academics, and political activists who defended democracy as the right of every citizen to govern. In their capacity as university teachers, students, journalists, and local intellectuals throughout Iran, this new generation internalized the post-Islamists' dictum that democracy is not a theoretical question, but a practical one. In

the heydays of the reform movement, this new generation of post-Islamists enacted as intermediated intellectuals who declared the Iranian constitution a national contract and the point of reference in major political conflicts. As post-Islamists, they assumed the political and intellectual equality of all citizens and defended the rights of different intellectual and political orientations in the public space. This post-Islamist discourse has gradually overcome the cleavage between the Islamist and secular discourse toward a more democratic discourse. Overstating what the post-Islamism could not do to democratize the structure of the state in Iran resulted in minimizing its impact on the formation of the public space capable of hosting popular democratic movements. Critics claim that post-Islamists such as Khatami never used the massive popular support they had to pressure conservative forces to submit to the will of the people. By use of popular support, the critics mean mass demonstrations. What the critics disregard is that the post-Islamists were aware that they neither could guarantee the safety of the participants in the street demonstrations nor their peacefulness or fidelity to the reform movement. The post-Islamists would never change the political structure but to enlarge the public space to host public debates on the democratic rights of Iranian citizens. Despite their failure to force the state to recognize freedom of assembly, the post-Islamists enlarged the Iranian public space on the national and local level to include a variety of democratic discourses. They encouraged debates on democracy but discouraged concrete and collective political actions. As Khatami began his second term in office in 2001, the post-Islamists were divided into a majority confining themselves to public debates and a minority of radical or rather neoconservatives propagating radical political activities and civil disobedience.²¹ The post-Islamist *perspectivist* discourse has democratized the Iranian public space since the 1990s. At the same time, it has depoliticized this same public space by refusing to engage the conservative constituencies in the public debates. Both the conservative and post-Islamist constituencies included large sections of the working class and middle class. The claim that prodemocracy post-Islamist discourse represented the political visions of the Iranian middle class simplifies the role of different social groups in the struggle for democracy in Iran.²²

²¹ Akbar Ganji, *Manifest-e Jomhurihahi*, & Abdolkarim Soroush, *Nameh'i beh Khatami*, http://www.dr.soroush.com/Persian/By_DrSoroush/F-CMB-13820417-1.htm

²² Ali Gheisari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 125.

This political failure may explain the breakup of the reform-oriented forces and Mahmud Ahmadinezhad coming to power. The re-emergence of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Iran's prime minister in the 1980s, on the political scene in the 2009 presidential election added political passion as a new element to the Iranian public space. Through his election campaign, Mousavi activated the potentials of Iranian people who were interested in democratic politics but had no access to any political stage. This part of the people had no presence in the post-Islamist *perspectivist* discourse. By rejecting the conservative-reformist dichotomy, Mousavi called upon the people as the subjects of change in Iran. He described himself as a reform-oriented candidate who remained true to the principles of the Islamic revolution.

Mousavi not only dissolved the conservative-reformist dichotomy but also translated the post-Islamist elimination of the schism between Muslim and secular discursive approaches to democracy into political actions.²³ In so doing, he changed the attitudes of the Iranian people toward politics and reconfigured the Iranian political scene during the 2009 presidential election. The *Green Movement* became the expression of this new attitude toward politics a few days before the election took place on June 12, 2009. The Green Movement overcame the political relaxation, which dominated the Iranian political scene during Ahmadinezhad's presidency. Mousavi engaged those who opposed the Islamic system entirely, as well as conservative-oriented intellectuals, politicians, and journalists, in his political campaigning for democratic changes.²⁴ The political passion instigated by the Green Movement was confirmed in exceptional street demonstrations in Tehran and other major cities a few days before the election. The demonstrations refreshed the memory of Iranian citizens of the revolutionary solidarity and of the collective political actions, which fused the knowledge of the intellectuals and the feeling of the masses.²⁵ The political passion was, in fact, what Mousavi expected and had asked for since the first

²³ Hemayat-e Qate-e Khatami az Mousavi, Paygah-e Khabari-ye Aftab, 02.02.1388/22.04.2009, <http://aftabnews.ir/vdch6xn6.23nqidft2.html>

²⁴ Mohamad Nourizad, a well-known conservative journalist, Emad Afrough, a conservative academic and a former member of parliament, Majid Majidi, a well-known and internationally recognized and politically conservative film-maker, and Saeed Aboutaleb, a conservative film-maker and former member of the parliament, are among many former conservatives who changed their political position in the reconfigured political stage in Iran with the reemergence of Mousavi in the 2009 presidential election.

²⁵ Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation Between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 158.

day of his candidacy. Unlike Khatami, who reduced democracy to ballot boxes, Mousavi asked for people's active participation to invigorate the revolutionary spirit of the past, according to which the equality of every political agent or citizen was presupposed. The Green Movement created an unprecedented moment of political solidarity since the revolution that engaged hundreds of thousands of people, regardless of age, gender, education, and social position, in democratic politics.

The Iran of the past few days has experienced this solidarity through Mousavi's "green wave" or rather "green movement." Now, the question is, can Mousavi's "green movement" develop after the election to fulfill its various promises, or become yet another memory in the collective consciousness of a nation whose political spirituality is understood by its artists such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf but misunderstood and hated by its philosophers such as Abdolkarim Soroush.²⁶

The Green Movement realized its full potential when the official results of the election were released. For the first time, since the revolution, a popular political movement with clear political demands challenged the Islamic system and dragged it into its deepest political crisis. Tens of protesters were killed, hundreds of ordinary people and post-Islamist political activists were imprisoned, and newspapers and Internet websites and several political parties were banned. While the conservatives supporting Ahmadinezhad and the supreme leader denied the existence of any crisis in Iran, the leaders of the Green Movement were talking about a grave political crisis in the Islamic Republic. What is the meaning, the depth, the extent, and the main causes of the political crisis? The Green Movement seemed to have delegitimized Ahmadinezhad's presidency, not only among millions of Iranians but also among a great number of his former allies. The post-election demonstrations in Tehran led the political elites to advise Iran's supreme leader to negotiate with the opposition forces to no avail.²⁷ Ayatollah Khamenei's repeated visits

²⁶Yadullah Shahibzadeh, The election sparks popular enthusiasm <http://gulfunet.wordpress.com>, June, 11, 2009. It seems strange to see that Soroush, the main post-Islamist perspectivist who engaged a generation of Iranian intellectuals and political activists in the democratic discourse of the 1990s misunderstood Mousavi's position on democracy and attacked him only a few days before the election, since he assumed that he represented the conservative forces in Iran, while Makhmalbaf, a post-Islamist perspectivist artist, supported Mousavi a hundred percent.

²⁷Mohsen Rezayi's open letter to Iran's supreme leader. <http://tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=79461>, 01, January 2010.

to the holy city of Qom did not convince senior religious leaders to back his and Ahmadinezhad's repressive policy against the opposition forces. In fact, the acknowledgment of the political crisis in Iran became the Ahmadinezhad government's and the leader's red line. Even senior conservative religious leaders, such as Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, pointed out that the system was in a dreadful crisis and encouraged opposing political forces to make compromises so that they can save the system.²⁸ Veteran politicians, such as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, tried to persuade the leader to acknowledge the political crisis and recognize the legitimate demands of the movement. He called upon the leader and the Ahmadinezhad government to respect the constitutional rights of all citizens to enjoy the freedom of speech and assembly and free elections.²⁹ Rafsanjani argued that people not only have the right to choose between different political alternatives within the system but also have the right to oust the entire system. Rafsanjani's argument indicated the extent of influence of the democratic discourse generated by the Green Movement in Iran.³⁰ The eruption of the Green Movement came as a surprise to many analysts of Iran, and this is why they failed to give a convincing account of the genealogy of the movement.³¹ Simplification of the political and intellectual origins of this democratic movement lies behind this incomprehension. The analysts who play down the democratic kernel of both the Islamist ideology and post-Islamist *perspectivist* discourse have misunderstood the Green Movement. We can detect the misunderstanding in the contradictory remarks they have made about the nature of the movement, on its historical origins and its leaders. The perplexity of these analysts is a result of a misreading of the form of the movement's main argument and its democratic content. The movement's democratic argument is based on the promises of the Iranian constitution declaring equal political rights for all Iranian citizens—freedom of speech and assembly, and other democratic rights. Through demonstrations in the streets and through their defiance as political prisoners, people exercised their political subjectivity and demanded their constitutional political rights and in so doing declared their equality with those who rule. We fail to understand the consistency between the form of

²⁸ Etemad-e Meli Newspaper, *Rahkar-e Ayatollah Aloszma Makerem Shirazi: Aahsti-ye meli baray-e hale ekhtelafat* 06.04.1388/27.06.2009.

²⁹ Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's Friday prayer after the 2009 presidential election.

³⁰ During Khatami presidency in 1997–2005, Rafsanjani did not use such democratic arguments.

³¹ Abas Milani, *The Mousavi Mission: Iran finds its Nelson Mandela*, New Republic, February 17, 2010.

the movement's arguments and the pattern of its actions unless the sequence of events since the Iranian revolution is fully understood. We cannot expect the analysts of Iranian politics whose conception of democracy is limited by the neoconservative design for democracy in the Middle East to understand the core of the movement's argument and its forms of expression. Bernard-Henri Lévy, a well-known French neoconservative intellectual, supported the Green Movement because he saw the movement as the true revolution against the 1979 revolution that he conceived as a fallacious revolution.

Whatever happens, this extraordinary event--which is a miracle, as a popular uprising always is, and which was endowed under this circumstance with the blind mimetism and un-self-consciousness that is peculiar to the Angel of History when it thinks it is going forward, but is actually looking backward--will seem to have reproduced topsy-turvy the very scene in the same streets, surrounding the same barracks and the same shops, that was described thirty years ago by Michel Foucault, who never imagined that the real revolution was still to come, and that it would be the exact opposite of what he described.³²

Lévy claims that Foucault defended the 1979 revolution in Iran because he mistook it for a real revolution, because a real revolution does not result in a totalitarian state, but the Iranian revolution did. After his appreciation and passion for the Green Movement, Lévy supported the Arab uprising to the extent that he encouraged the French government to interfere in Libya militarily to overthrow the Muammar el-Qaddafi Regime. What the people of Libya got after the el-Qaddafi regime was not a democratic state as Lévy promised but the destruction of the state institutions and lawlessness in their country.³³ According to *The New York Times*,

It was Mr. Lévy, by his own still undisputed account, who brought top members of the Libyan opposition — the Interim Transitional National Council — from Benghazi to Paris to meet President Nicolas Sarkozy on March 10, who suggested the unprecedented French recognition of the council as the legitimate government of Libya and who warned Mr. Sarkozy

³² Bernard-Henri Lévy, "The Swan Song of the Islamic Republic," *Huffington Post*, July 23, 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernardhenri-lévy/the-swan-song-of-the-islama_b_219323.html

³³ Steven Erlanger, "By His Own Reckoning, One Man Made Libya a French Cause," *New York Times*, 1 April 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/02/world/africa/02levy.html?_r=0

that unless he acted, “there will be a massacre in Benghazi, a bloodbath, and the blood of the people of Benghazi will stain the flag of France.”³⁴

It seems strange conceptually that Lévy distinguishes between true and false revolutions. In the late 1970s, he described revolution and politics in general as expressions of totalitarianism. Lévy’s new passion for revolutionary changes in the Middle East’s politics gives us enough reasons to review his previous stance toward politics and revolution. Lévy belongs to a circle of radical leftist revolutionary intellectuals and activists from the late 1960s and early 1970s in France. Some members of this intellectual and activist circle started to oppose revolutionary politics and totalitarianism in the early 1970s. This group of French intellectuals has celebrated, since the late 1970s, the liberal state for its protection of human rights nationally and internationally. The group is associated in France with *Nouveaux Philosophes*. We can find similar ideological transformation in the public space of every Western society in the same period. This ideological transformation has received wider audience among scholars and intellectuals in Western societies since the collapse of socialist countries in the early 1990s. Since the early 1990s, this ideological transformation has made an enormous impact on the study of the modern Middle East, in general, and on the study of the Iranian revolution in particular. A majority of Western scholars and intellectuals affected by this ideological transformation became antitotalitarian and propagators of Western liberal democracy. Specialists and journalists preoccupied with the Middle East began to feel responsible for the people of this region who suffered from poverty and human rights abuse under their repressive autocratic regimes. Moreover, they “discovered” that the intellectuals in this region are *Third-Worldist*, antimodernist, and anti-Westerners who reject liberal democracy. There is also a small minority of intellectuals who know the West, but their shallow knowledge of Western modernity has led them toward superficial modernism/Westernism or totalitarian ideologies. These scholars and journalists concluded that the people of the Middle East including their intellectuals need cultural and political re-education. In the case of the Iranian revolution, some books of social and political pathology and repentance are introduced as the historiography of the Iranian revolution. As the facts of the Iranian revolution have been politically domesticated, they

³⁴ Ibid.

preclude new interpretations. The domestication of the facts of the Iranian revolution has taken place within an intellectual climate, which recognizes the idea of the end of politics and history. This domestication of historical facts has convinced many students of Iran that there is something called a sanitized approach (*Barkhord-e Behdashti*) toward Iranian history and politics, as well as toward modernity and the West. The sanitized approach to modernity is supposed to create the precondition for a healthy social and political development that may result in what could be seen as a good government that respects the human rights of its citizens. However, the social and political pathology of the Iranian society have precluded understanding of the dynamics of the intellectual and political journey of Muslim intellectuals and activists. I have tried to explain this intellectual and political journey in three phases of the Islamist *totalism*, post-Islamist *perspectivism*, and *democratism*. This politico-intellectual history includes the ideological or intellectual foundations of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the reform movement of the 1990s and early 2000s, and the Green Movement.

The new ideological order behind the historical writings on the Iranian revolution can be traced back to an ideological shift that Michel Foucault observed among the French left-wing intellectuals vis-à-vis the Iranian revolution.³⁵ Foucault criticized the French intellectuals for their indifference toward the Iranian revolution while he could not grasp the nature of the ideological shift that prevented the French intellectuals from showing an interest in the revolution. The statement made by Lévy in *La Barbarie à Visage Humain* published 2 years before the Iranian revolution is symptomatic of the emerging ideological order. "If I were an encyclopedist, I would dream of writing in a dictionary for the year 2000; Socialism, noun, cultural genre, born in Paris in 1848, death in Paris in 1968."³⁶ For Lévy, Socialist, or rather Marxist, politics was not the expression of a collective desire and action for equality and freedom, but a desire for obedience, slavery, and totalitarianism. This notion of politics called into question the Marxist philosophy of history and its claim of withering away of the state as a precondition for human emancipation. Foucault has been ridiculed for his misunderstanding of political Islam and his glorification of Islamist fundamentalism as an emancipatory movement. In fact, what

³⁵ Iran: *la révolution au nom de Dieu*, Claire Brière, Pierre Blamchet, Didier Eribon, *Suivi D'un Entretien avec Michel Foucault* (Paris: Éditions Du Seuil, 1979), pp. 227–228.

³⁶ Bernard-Henri Lévy, *La Barbarie à Visage Humain* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1977), p. 11.

Foucault saw in the Iranian revolution was the possibilities it unleashed for future democratic struggles. Both the reform movement and the Green Movement have proven the validity of Foucault's reflection on the Iranian revolution. The misfortune of the Iranian revolution was that it occurred at a time when the entire theoretical efforts were dedicated to the new social movements that appeared in Europe in the 1970s. These social movements, which were particularistic by nature, substituted the old universalist revolutionary movements. In calling into question theories of revolution and withering away of the state, the new social movements advocated social reforms and defended the legitimacy of the liberal state. Thus, instead of demanding the abolition of the state as a precondition for human emancipation, these social movements protested against their own exclusion from the state power. They demanded reforms that could make the state inclusive toward excluded social groups. The new social movements, their demands, and their achievements had gradually been presented as verification of the idea that liberal state was the end of history and politics. The result of the exchange between the existing political order, the social movements, and the ideological shift was historical narratives that make the past meaningful only to the new social groups in power.³⁷ The historiography of the new social movements since the late 1970s and early 1980s became meaningful in the light of Foucault's new conception of power as an essentially positive phenomenon that is impossible to exclude from human relations.³⁸ In fact, the positive conception of power became a significant factor in a critique of the historiography of universal human emancipation theorized by radical ideologies. The positive aspect of power in a liberal state combined with a critique of totalitarian ideologies, such as Marxism, became the theoretical framework for the political domestication of historical facts in the 1970s and 1980s. This political domestication of historical facts promoted two interrelated types of historiographies: a historiography of the self-regulation of Western liberal states in their encounter with democratic social movements and historiography of totalitarianism.³⁹ With the discrediting of Marxist ideology in the 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the social-

³⁷ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, p. 128.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, in *The Foucault Reader* P. Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1988), p. 298.

³⁹ Jean François Revel, *The Totalitarian Temptation* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977).

ist bloc in the 1990s, history came to its end.⁴⁰ In fact, the New Philosophers who argued for the demise of radical politics or totalitarian politics announced the end of history in 1977. They declared that since revolutionary politics has only one replacement for the liberal state namely the totalitarian state, politics in its entirety must be substituted for a new politics, or rather an ethics of human rights. Thus, because of its superiority over the totalitarian state, the liberal state was understood not only as the end of politics but also as the end of history. The French intellectuals, who accepted the end of politics and history in the late 1970s, did not show any interest in the Iranian revolution, because they were immersed in their resistance against the totalitarian enemies of the liberal state. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, political Islam or Islamism and the Islamic Republic of Iran became the new expression of the totalitarian ideology and the state. While the declared ideological stance of a considerable number of historiographies of the Iranian revolution is antitotalitarian or antiauthoritarian, their implied ideological agenda is neoconservative. The first obvious consequence of the neoconservative ideological order in the late 1980s was a public debate on whether Europeans open others to reason or open themselves to the reason of others.⁴¹ Alain Finkielkraut, a member of the New Philosophers circle, argued that instead of opening themselves to the reason of others, Europeans and Americans should open others to reason. Finkielkraut reminds the contemporary Europeans that their grandparents used to open others to reason during the time of colonialism. This neoconservative ideological order created the theoretical framework through which some historians of the Iranian revolution have interpreted the ideological underpinning of the revolution and its political outcomes.⁴² These historians are not looking into the past for answers to questions such as why things are in the way they are in post-revolutionary Iran. They rather start with questions such as why things, conditions, ideas, institutions, and practices are not the way they are in the liberal states in the West. We ask, why did Iranians not succeed in coming to terms with modernity, or why did the modern subject not emerge in Iran, or to what extent have Iranian

⁴⁰ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991).

⁴¹ Alain Finkielkraut, *La Défaite de la Pensée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

⁴² Shaygan's *Le Regard Mutilé*, published in 1989, explains the Iranian revolution through the lens of this ideological order.

religious intellectuals become modern? However, these questions are not historical but ideological. An account of the past is supposed to help us to understand the present sociopolitical and cultural situation. The current historiography of the Iranian revolution and modern Iran is rather preoccupied with the causes of the absence of an already realized utopia, that is, the existing social and political order in the West. The explicit or implicit presence of this already realized utopia in the historiography of the Iranian revolution prevents this historiography from imagining a different future for both the West and non-Western societies. The result is an *omniscient historiography* that is convinced of the West's present condition as the expression of post-historical time or the eternal present. This post-historical time allows the omniscient historiography to become a *social pathology* that discovers what is wrong with Iranian politics and culture. It explains the trajectory of the Iranian experience and its intellectual and political expressions concerning its acceptance or rejection of the present of the West. It tries to reveal the points of convergence or divergence between Iranian's past and present experiences with an existing utopia, that is, the status of the West. This omniscient historiography of the Iranian revolution has politically domesticated the facts of this event in terms of what can be and what cannot be said about this event. As White remind us, "One can never move with any politically effective confidence from an apprehension of 'the way things actually are or have been' to the kind of moral insistence that they 'should be otherwise' without passing through a feeling of repugnance for and negative judgment of the condition that is to be superseded."⁴³ I do not claim that the knowledge produced by the omniscient historiography of the Iranian revolution and political Islam is implausible or incoherent. In fact, it has provided coherent and plausible accounts of this event. However, the historical accounts that correspond to this historiography are barely epistemologically inventive or ethically nonconformist. This historiography does not interpret the way Iranians lived, worked, thought, loved, fought, and died in the pre- and post-revolutionary eras. Instead, it tries to find out why Iranians could not live, work, think, love, fight, and die in the way the inhabitants of modern Europe did. This historiography does not investigate the intended and unintended consequence of the intellectual underpinning of the Iranian revolution in the post-revolutionary periods. This omniscient historiography is trying to find the revolution's totalitarian tendencies, its

⁴³ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 128.

animosity with civil liberties, and its anti-Western nature. By imposing an anti-Western meaning on the Iranian revolution no matter what, this historiography has inverted the democratic objectives of the event and reinvented it as a collective search for identity and the exercise of collective cruelty. It reconstructed the intellectual underpinning of the Iranian revolution through contrasts between *modernism-traditionalism*, *secular-religious*, *Westernism-anti-Westernism*, *universalism-nativism*, and *genuine Modernism-reactionary Modernism*. These oppositions are in fact products of the domestication of the facts of this event by the omniscient historiography. The impact of the *neoconservative ideological order* on some agents of the post-Islamist discourse such as Ganji who moved to Western countries is easy to detect. After years of looking into Iranian politics through the neoconservative lenses, Akbar Ganji realized that his advocacy for democracy and human rights has become incorporated in the neoconservative propaganda machine against democratic forces in Iran. As a response, he began to take a critical stance on the neoconservative conception of democracy. His numerous articles since mid-2011 against the neoconservative approach to Iran have been indicative of his attempts to distinguish his view of democracy in Iran from the neoconservative one. Ganji's critique of Shariati in 2007 was the continuation of a neoconservative critique of the Iranian revolution and its ideological foundations. This type of critique of Shariati and the Iranian revolution began in the 1990s in academia. After 9/11 terrorist attack, the Persian media financed by Western governments for promoting "democracy" in Iran have popularized the critique of Shariati's political Islam.

Thus far, I have tried to demonstrate that historiographies of Iranian Islamism that correspond to the new ideological order ignore democratic kernels of Iranian Islamism and post-Islamism. The emphasis of the new ideological order on the question of human rights as the basis of democracy has worked as a guideline for the neoconservative interpretations of the Iranian revolution. The disregard for democracy as a political process is a consequence of the neoconservative interpretation of the Iranian revolution. We can discover the seeds of democracy in thought and practice in the journey of Islamist *totalism* into post-Islamist *perspectivism* since this journey has enlarged the Iranian public space. This public space played a decisive role in the election of Rouhani as Iran's president in 2013. Rouhani's *charter of the rights of citizens* indicates the efforts that are taking place to

expand the Iranian public space.⁴⁴ The Iranian public space is largely the legacy of the transformation from Islamism to post-Islamism. The most important consequence of the expanding public space that has emerged in Iran since 1997 is the suspension of all intellectual authorities and the declaration of the intellectual equality of every member of this public space. The growth of local publications, newspapers, and magazines throughout Iran is one of the results of this new intellectual equality.⁴⁵ Even though the post-Islamist reformists failed to transform Iran into a formal democratic state, they enlarged the Iranian public space, which recognizes the intellectual equality of everyone and anyone. This intellectual equality was supplemented by local elections initiated by Khatami in 1999 to extend the political power of all Iranian citizens. The post-Islamists did not realize fully that political rights of citizens were coextensive with their power. It is worth stating that despite all the damage that Ahmadinezhad inflicted on the cause of democracy in Iran, his ascendancy to power was a democratic event. In the absence of the local elections, he had no chance of being elected as Iran's president. Because of the local election in Tehran, Ahmadinezhad, an unknown politician, became the mayor of the city, and from there he became visible and audible in the public space.

Put in its proper context, the enlarged public space from 1997 to 2005 was the declaration of the intellectual and political equality of all citizens. This public space threatened the *aristocratic* and *epistemic* privileges that conservative elite in Iran assumed for themselves. Thus, the conservatives, who controlled the judiciary system and security forces, limited freedom of expression and assembly. The conservatives in power saw these expressions of freedom as verification of the intellectual and political equality of the Iranian people and, as a result, a threat to their privileged position. Putting the issue of human rights as the most important criteria for judging the success or failure of the reform movement had a terrible consequence. It reduced the agents of democracy to depoliticized victims of an invincible dictatorial regime who were pleading to be saved by Western liberators. Liberals such as Ganji and Soroush argued that Khatami's democratic reforms should be judged vis-à-vis his human rights record and demanded his resignation since he could not protect the

⁴⁴ Sharq Daily, 18.03.1392. (8.06. 2013)

⁴⁵ For a comprehensive discussion of the subject see Yadullah Shahibzadeh, *The Iranian Political Language, From the Late Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Chapters 3–6.

human rights of his supporters.⁴⁶ Contrary to this stance, the post-Islamist left argued that people's political power or democracy was the only guarantee for the protection of human rights. In fact, the real problem facing the democratization strategy led by Khatami was the intellectuals and political activists who considered the question of human rights as the most important issue of Iranian politics. The majority of the Iranian people who did not see a political significance in this problem became relaxed politically and allowed Ahmadinezhad to seize political power. Mousavi re-emerged from his 20 years of silence in Iranian politics to challenge the reign of Ahmadinezhad, who had made political activity in Iran a dangerous affair. Mousavi, who injected a new political passion among his supporters, contributed to the reconfiguration of the political stage to include new forms of political subjectivity, which synthesized the revolutionary views with post-Islamism. This new political subjectivity recognized religious, secular, leftist, liberal and even conservative individuals as political subjects in the struggle for democracy.⁴⁷ Unlike the advocates of the Islamist ideology, the activists of the Green Movement said no to revolution. They discovered that the struggle for democracy in Iran should not limit itself to the public arguments as the reform-oriented forces preferred to do. That is why the Green Movement became synonymous with street demonstrations. Street demonstrations are legal forms of popular protest according to the Iranian constitution. While legal according to the Iranian constitution, the right to demonstrations had never been recognized in practice by the state institutions. Whereas, the leaders of the Green Movement endorsed street protests, tactics that were used during the 1979 revolution, they did not demand revolutionary changes in the system. The aim of the Green Movement was nothing more than recognition of equal political rights of all citizens by the state. Thus, the Green Movement became the point of convergence between the concrete democratic demands of the people and the promises of the Islamic Republic's constitution. For representatives of the Green Movement, even the doctrine of the *Velayat-e Faqih* was an embodiment of the *general will*. However, when Ayatollah Khamenei, opposed the general will of the

⁴⁶ Akbar Ganji's *Republican Manifesto* is a famous text written in Tehran's Evin Prison in 2003 and published on the internet in the same year (<http://redinblack.netfirms.com/manifest/>).

⁴⁷ "Interview with Habibollah Peyman," *RadioZamaneh*, http://www.radiozamaneh.com/analysis/2009/07/post_1055.html.

people in the 2009 presidential election, he damaged the legitimacy he had enjoyed within the political system. Because of his past as the prime minister in the 1980s, Mousavi was met with skepticism when he declared his candidacy in the presidential election. Very soon, however, he enjoyed the support of Iranian democrats consisting of the post-Islamist and secular left. Mousavi managed to secure the support of a great number of politicians and public figures within the conservative faction as well. Thus, the Green Movement became a meeting point between the post-Islamists activists and moderate conservative forces. For Mousavi, the Green Movement aimed to restore the *Vali-ye Faqih* as the general will. Mousavi was an Islamist leftist loyal to Khomeini and the prime minister of the Islamic Republic for 8 years in 1980. The fact that he became the leader of a genuine democratic movement in 2009 raised the question: was the Islamic Republic ruled by Mousavi and his colleagues in the 1980s a democratic government? There is no rounded answer to this question because the Islamic Republic was dragged into a brutal conflict with the armed opposition and 8 years wars with Iraq since the early 1980s. It is empirically proven that any state in such a situation suspends the democratic rights of its citizens. The fundamental principle of a democratic government is the right of every citizen to govern, as well as the right of every citizen to political and ideological contestation. Clearly, the Islamic Republic since its consolidation has not recognized the full political rights of a great part of its citizens. Nevertheless, there was an official argument to justify this policy in the 1980s. According to this argument, the opposition forces accepted neither the Iranian constitution as the legal framework of political activity nor the monopoly of the government over the means of violence. In the first 2 years after the revolution, the reciprocal misrecognition of the Islamic Republic and its opposition created a picture of Iran as a country on the brink of civil war. A consequence of this political conflict was Saddam Hussein's dream of an easy victory in his war against Iran in 1980. This reciprocal misrecognition has never been adequately addressed and is at the heart of the great misunderstandings concerning the real nature of the Green Movement. Mousavi established a relationship between the revolution, the reform movement, and the Green Movement. He integrated the promises of the revolution and the reform movement in his election promises in 2009. The fact that the leaders of the reform movement and the Green Movement are former Islamist leftists indicates the continuous journey of Iranian Islamist from Shariati to the advocates of the Green Movement. It tells about the very people who

started as Islamists searching for total humans in a society without contradictions and have discovered through their experience that a perfected just society without contradictions is a figment of their imaginations. The former Islamists have realized that democracy may not get rid of all forms of injustice, but it could reduce the current injustices because it recognizes the equality and political rights of every citizen. The current intellectual and political awareness is the result of concrete intellectual and political experiences of Muslim agents who have been the protagonists of Islamism and post-Islamism. That is why the leaders of the Green Movement reminded the Iranian people of the unfulfilled promises of the revolution. Responding to the nature of the promises of the revolution, the leaders of the Green Movement raised the significance of the rights of citizens in Chap. 7 of the Iranian constitution. The Iranian constitution protects freedom of expression, of assembly, of social and political associations, and of street demonstration. The leaders of the Green Movement argued that the demonstrators on the streets did nothing but exercising their constitutional rights.⁴⁸ The leaders and participants of the Green Movement established a relation between the words of the constitution and their own actions. They established a forceful public argument through establishing the relation between the democratic content of the promises made by the constitution and the popular demand for the fulfillment of those promises. The demonstrators and the leaders of the Green Movement justified their actions concerning the Iranian constitution. They considered the constitution as a legal document authored by a popularly elected constitutional parliament, for which the overwhelming majority of Iranians voted for in a referendum in 1979. Some took the constitution seriously and considered it as a legal document to be implemented, others did not. The history of the post-revolutionary democratic struggle in Iran is the history of those who took the constitution seriously. That is why prior to the 2013 presidential election Khatami and Mousavi were the only political figures who generated an extraordinary passion for political debates and actions in the post-revolutionary era. In fact, they symbolized two political movements worthy of the name in the post-revolutionary Iran because they just took the Iranian constitution seriously. Like his prodemocracy and reform-oriented predecessors, Rouhani made promises in his 2013 presidential campaign that were consistent with the constitution.

⁴⁸ Mir Hossein Mousavi, *Bayaniyeh-ye shomareh-ye 11*, <http://www.kalame.com/1388/06/17/klm-312/>.

Rouhani was a pragmatist conservative politician in the 1980s and 1990s. In January 1991, he opposed the Islamist leftists who argued that Iran should actively oppose any attack against Iraq by the USA and its allies and insisted on Iran's neutrality in the war.⁴⁹ As the director of *the Centre for Strategic Studies*, in the early 1990s, Rouhani told the former leftist Islamists researchers, who were beginning to take a prodemocracy postures, "If you think we will fall for your pretty words on democracy, you are wrong. We know you are seeking to topple the regime, but we will not let you because we will not make the same mistake that the Shah made."⁵⁰ Unlike Khatami, who tried, in the 1990s, to raise public debates regarding democratic changes, Rouhani was defending the stability of the political system.⁵¹ Rouhani's files indicate that he was more preoccupied with the state sovereignty rather than popular sovereignty. In the 2013 presidential election, Rouhani presented a political program that described the state and popular sovereignty as indivisible aspects of the Iranian political system.⁵² As a member of Iran's nuclear negotiation team in the early 2000s, Rouhani defended Iran's rights to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. He viewed the Western powers' refusal of this particular right of Iran as a violation of Iran's state sovereign. He realized in the course of the negotiations that the right to uranium enrichment would be a reality if Iran were powerful enough to make its right a reality. Rouhani realized that a democratically elected government that respects the Iranian people's democratic rights would be more successful internally and externally than a government that governs with an iron fist. During Ahmadinezhad's presidency, Rouhani used *the Center for Strategic Studies* to explore the relationship between democracy and state sovereignty.⁵³ That is why the Iranian voters took his promises of de-securitizing Iranian politics and respect for political and civil rights of the citizens seriously. He evoked Chap. 3 of the Iranian constitution that declares state and popular sovereignty as indivisible components of the Iranian political system. According to Iran's constitution Article 9th, no authority has the right to infringe state sovereignty in the name of freedom or limit freedom of the citizens

⁴⁹ Revayat-e Montajeb'nia az mojadeleh-ye Rouhani ba tondrou'ha-ye majles-e sevvom, Mohttp://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/30/bodyView/5166/, 10.06.1396./01.09.2009.

⁵⁰ Ali Mirsepasi, *Democracy in Modern Iran, Islam, Culture and Political Change* (New York: University Press, New York, 2010), p. 140.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Shargh Daily, 19.Khordad.1392/9 June 2013.

⁵³ Shargh Daily, 16.Khordad.1392/6 June 2013.

in the name of the state sovereignty. He turned reform-oriented when he experienced Ahmadinezhad's ultraconservative politics and its devastating impacts on the Iranian economy and damaged Iran's international standing. In Rouhani's view, the continuation of Ahmadinezhad's policy could jeopardize not only the continuity of the Islamic Republic as a political system but also the Iranian state and its sovereignty. As a result, Rouhani put forward a prodemocracy and reform-oriented political platform and insisted on the constitutional and democratic rights of the Iranian people in his presidential campaign. During his campaign, Rouhani's political platform received the support of moderate conservatives and the support of prodemocracy forces, some of whom were in prison at the time. The supporters of Rouhani displayed the third wave of prodemocracy and reform-oriented popular movements after the reform and the Green Movements. Rouhani called his political program a platform for *prudence and moderation*. Rouhani's popular support led Iran's supreme leader to guarantee the fairness of the election by assuring the Iranian people that the government would respect their vote as *Haq al-Nas*. According to the religious creeds and scholarship, God may forgive human beings for their violation of the rights he has upon them, but he will never forgive their violation of the rights of their fellow human beings.⁵⁴

DEMOCRATISM VERSUS NEOCONSERVATISM

Political Islam or Islamist ideology has been instrumental in making a large number of religiously oriented Iranians visible and audible in the public space. However, the political system it brought about excluded a segment of the people whose ideological orientation challenged the system. Within the same political system, there emerged intellectual and political movements, which have advocated political equality of all Iranian citizens. The reform movement was about the rationality of the political equality of all Iranian citizens. While affirming this reformist argument, the Green Movement was about the extent to which people were prepared to defend these rights through concrete political actions. In fact, the 2013 presidential election put the claims of the reform movement and the efforts of the advocates of the Green Movement to the test. Equipped with the persuasive power of the reform movement and the operative authority of the Green

⁵⁴See a thorough definition of the term in Mohsen Kadivar's *Haq al-Nas: Islam and Human Rights*, Entesharat-e Kavir, Tehran 2008.

Movement, Rouhani's supporters worked out the electoral mobilization that made his victory in the election a reality. With Khatami's takeover in 1997 and popularization of the post-Islamist discourse throughout Iran, *democratism* and *neoconservatism* became the two most significant intellectual and political stances in Iran. We can recognize these two intellectual trends through their approach toward *the new ideological order*. Whereas the democratic intellectual goes beyond the Islamist-secular dichotomy to defend the political rights of everyone and anyone in the Iranian society, the neoconservative position represents political Islam as a totalitarian threat. In the name of human rights and freedom of expression, this new ideological order has reduced democracy to *a mode of being* or *ethos*. The publication of the controversial cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad in Autumn 2005 by a Danish newspaper unleashed a public debate in Europe on the compatibility of Muslim modes of being and freedom of speech. The public debate ended with the conclusion that democracy is an ethos, a mode of being, contradicting the Muslim mode of being. In fact, according to the editorial of the Danish newspaper, the publication of the cartoons aimed to test the extent to which the Muslim mode of being tolerated freedom of speech. However, it had taken for granted that Muslims were going to react violently to the cartoons. *The Manifesto of Twelve: Facing Islamism as the New Totalitarianism* was released few months after the publication of the cartoons. It was a declaration of support for the publication of the cartoons and condemnation of the Muslim intolerance supposed to have been generated from Islamism or political Islam. The *Manifesto* branded Islamism as a reactionary ideology, which, similar to Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, "kills equality, freedom and secularism wherever it is present." The *Manifesto* called for a global resistance against Islamism, both through military means and in the ideological field.⁵⁵ However, ideological resistance overcame neither Fascism nor Nazism. Let us, for a moment, trust the claims of the *Manifesto* concerning the global ideological struggle to defend "the universality of freedom of expression," secularism, universal reason, and individual freedom. These are the ideals of the Enlightenment that every genuine democrat appreciates. The *Manifesto* encourages a global ideological struggle against Islamism. The *Manifesto* implies that it is the expression of an established ideology and intellectual movement that seeks to impose its ideological dominance

⁵⁵ "Full text: Writers' statement on cartoons," *BBC*, March 1 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4764730.stm>.

in the global society. In their defense of the Enlightenment's ideals, the signatories of the manifesto identify Islamism as an enemy within the people. The identification of Islamism as the enemy within the people is reminiscent of Nazi Germany's classification of the Jews. It also reminds us of Fascist Italy's categorization of the communists, Leninism identification of the bourgeoisie, and Stalin's identification of his communist opponents. In fact, the conception of enemies within the people became the *raison d'être* of totalitarian political movements in the twentieth century. In the 1920s, against the preoccupation of the European intellectuals with enemies within the people, Julian Benda conceptualized the intellectual in a new way. For him, the intellectual was one whose theoretical activity was directed toward disinterested reason, Enlightenment, individual liberty, and common humanity against the politics of race, nation, and class.⁵⁶ The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben distinguishes between two concepts of movement. According to Agamben, Karl Schmitt, the Nazi theoretician, describes movement as an autonomous and dynamic political force that mediates between the static political institutions or the state and the un-political element or the people. For Schmitt, movement draws its politics from its ability to identify the enemy within the people, and this allows the political element to exercise its control over the unpolitical element.⁵⁷ The Nazi movement drew its politics from its capacity to identify the Jews as the enemy within the people, who were considered as unpolitical by nature. Thus, at the core of any totalitarian political movement lays an unpolitical body of humankind that needs governing. In this regard, an anti-Islamist Manifesto that identifies Islamism as an enemy, and by extension every Muslim as a potential Islamist, and therefore also an enemy, ends up more as a Nazi-like movement than Islamism. In contrast to the Schmittian conception of movement, an alternative movement is void of an enemy within the people, and it does not consider people as an unpolitical element that needs to be politicized and controlled. The movement in this sense is unable to politicize and control the people because it is an imperfect act without an end and because it considers people as a political factor.

⁵⁶ Julien Benda, *La Trahison des Clercs* (Paris: Editions Bernard Gasset, 1927).

⁵⁷ Giorgio Agamben, "Defining Moment," *PostCapital: Archive 1989–2001*, transcribed and translated by Arianna Bove, February 25, 2009, <http://www.postcapital.org/2009/02/25/defining-movement-georgio-agamben/>

The history of the Iranian intellectuals from the late nineteenth century onward indicates that they considered themselves as the agents of rationality and ethics, seeking universal truth and individual freedom. The role of the Iranian intellectuals in significant political events, such as the constitutional revolution, the Iranian revolution, and the prodemocracy movement of recent years, is undeniable. All these intellectual movements have been connected in one way or another to intellectual and political movements taking place in the West. From the early 1900s to the 1970s, Iranian intellectuals were engaged in democratic nationalist and radical socialist movements. These movements aimed to politicize the people against the enemy, but the enemy they identified was not within the people, but above the people. The enemies were either external enemies, such as colonial and imperialist powers, or internal enemies, such as different monarchs. However, Iranian intellectuals had little success in generating long-lasting and effective political movements. Al-e Ahmad and Shariati claimed that Iranian intellectuals had failed to live up to their cognitive and ethical promises. Shariati presented his Islamist ideology as an attempt to overcome this failure. Shariati tried to show that his Islamist ideology was better equipped to understand the mechanism of domination and the condition of possibility of human emancipation than any other political ideology, especially Marxism. Shariati entered the intellectual discourse while Marxism had a dominant role in Iranian intellectual life. Iranian intellectuals conceived of themselves as participants in a universal struggle for human emancipation. Grasping the Iranian revolution and the Iranian Islamist ideology requires understanding the self-image of the Iranian intellectuals and their perception of their agency in the universal struggle for freedom and equality. The domination of the new ideological order in Europe resulted in the disappearance of the idea of the universal struggle in the political and ideological field. With the evaporation of the universal ideological and political struggle to abolish the liberal state, the Iranian secular intellectuals who identified themselves with this universal struggle since the early twentieth century lost their ideological appeal. For Western intellectuals the time of the struggle had ended long ago, in the late 1970s. The end of the universal struggle professed the end of the universal intellectual. What remained were local intellectuals fighting for particular causes. The new intellectual motto resulted in the mutual recognition of the state and the intellectual. After all, they had been working together in the same ideological state apparatus. Moreover, in this context of mutual recognition of the state and the intellectuals, a new but

distorted universalism emerged. This *new universalism* has two distinctive characteristics. First, it insists on the values of universal reason and individual liberty, and second, it takes a revisionist approach toward colonialism. As one of the earliest representatives of this new universalism, Alain Finkielkraut reminds European intellectuals of their responsibility toward the universal and democratic values of the Enlightenment against what he calls *particularism*. He detects this particularism in the modes of being of Muslims and Africans in France.⁵⁸ Finkielkraut calls upon European and non-European intellectuals to recognize the positive sides of colonialism since it built modern states in the colonized regions and spread the ideals of universal reason and individual liberty.⁵⁹ In 2005, the French parliament passed a law that required high-school teachers to teach the positive values of colonialism to their students. Ironically, French President Jacques Chirac repealed the law, which reflected the new universalism of the former leftist intellectuals. Finkielkraut's argument on universalism and particularism is indicative of the Hegelian opposition between the Greek universalism and the Jewish particularism. André Glucksmann, a former Maoist and one of the early advocates of the French new philosophers in the 1970s, criticized this Hegelian dichotomy.⁶⁰ Over recent years, Islamism caused by the Muslim modes of being has become at the center of Glucksmann's preoccupation with Islamism.⁶¹ According to Glucksmann, for Hegel, Greek universalism and Jewish particularism represented two different modes of being. While the former dedicated itself to universal concepts in theory and practice, such as state building, the latter was antiuniversal and antistate in its essence. Hegel claimed that the German nation would not be able to build its own state unless it killed the Jews in itself. Hegel was reasonable enough to presuppose that his contemporary Jews had the capacity to emancipate themselves from their Jewish mode of being and participate in German state building and revive the Greek mode of being and state. Glucksmann argues that the obsession with the Jewish mode of being among the German thinkers resulted in

⁵⁸ Alain Finkielkraut, *La Défaite De La Pensée* (Paris: Galimard, 1987), pp. 13–61 and 109–131.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 66–76.

⁶⁰ André Glucksmann, *Les Maîtres Penseurs* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1977), pp. 95–123.

⁶¹ L'antieroe Wellington, "Andre Glucksmann: An interview in Le Figaro about his new book 'West Against West,'" *The Andre Glucksmann File*, August 26, 2007, <http://andreglucksmannfile.blogspot.com/2007/08/andre-glucksmann-interview-in-le-figaro.html>.

the extermination of the Jews by the Nazi regime without any resistance.⁶² However, Glucksmann ignores the important point that Hanna Arendt made concerning the obsession with the Jewish mode of being in Germany. According to Arendt, the Nazis learned from the *essentialization* of the colonized people through an abstraction of their modes of being and the administrated mass killings in the colonies. Thus, they essentialized the Jews to justify their mass killing all over Europe.⁶³ It seems that the European obsession in the nineteenth century with Jewish particularism and its inability to build its own nation or participate in the state building of other nations is transformed into an obsession with Islamic particularism. Islamic particularism is supposed to explain the inability of the Muslims to build their own democratic states or respect democratic values in the Western democracies. Now that the contradictory nature of the Muslim mode of being with democracy is constituted in a considerable number of academic studies, we cannot complain so much about the media. However, we should try to raise questions that require meticulous study of the phenomena called Islamism. Whether, in the media or academia, essentializations of Muslim identity abstracted from Muslim mode of being will not enlighten anyone. It has, of course, produced fortune seekers who are claiming that they have emancipated themselves from their mode of being. *Muslimness*, with certain psychological attributes and reactions, has been constructed in the same way that the concept of *Jewishness* had been constructed from the early 1800s to the emergence of German Nazism. One of the inevitable consequences of the obsession with Muslimness is the theoretical presuppositions that the knowledge produced out of Muslim experiences is a banal repetition of already existing knowledge produced in the West. According to this argument, Muslims do not consider different aspects of their Muslimness in the process of their knowledge production inferred from their experience. The unwillingness to recognize the experience of other people and the knowledge they produce as their epistemological reflection on their own experience results in untrue interpretations and sometime in interpretations that fall into the category of a lie. Hayden White argues, "The theoretical point to be taken, however, is that an interpretation falls into the category of a lie when it denies the reality of the events of which it treats, and into

⁶² Glucksmann, *Les Maitres Penseurs*, p. 100.

⁶³ Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 65–68.

the category of an untruth when it draws false conclusions from reflection on events whose reality remains attestable on the level of ‘positive’ historical inquiry.”⁶⁴ We should keep White’s maxim in mind; otherwise, we may not be able to discern the cognitive and ethical significance of the democratic and neoconservative positions. These two intellectual positions represent two types of understanding of Iran’s past and present. For a while, post-Islamist intellectuals and political activists such as Soroush and Ganji took pleasure in the significance of the concept of Muslimness in the new ideological order. It helped them to be heard and seen in the Western public space. Following *the new ideological order*, these *post-Islamist intellectuals* recognized democracy, as a mode of being, which does not fit the Muslim mode of being. They argued, whereas *duty* is the structuring principle of the Muslim mode of being, *right* is the foundation of the democratic mode of being. So how do Soroush and Ganji explain their own intellectual and political journey? They were Muslim believers whose mode of being was considered by the proponents of the new ideological order as undemocratic. As Muslim intellectuals and political activists, they defended the equal political rights of all Iranian citizens and contributed to the emergence of one of the most democratic public spaces in the Middle East. The neoconservative intellectual position that is preoccupied with Muslimness rejects the cognitive and ethical competence of Iranian Muslim intellectuals. It claims that the Muslimness of the Muslim intellectuals prevent them to act as authentic subjects who seek disinterested reason, universal truth, and individual liberty. During the heyday of the reform movement from 1997 to 2005, Iranian neoconservative intellectuals contested the term *religious intellectual* used by *post-Islamist intellectuals* as a contradiction in terms. They argued that the intellectual vocation presupposed a belief in independent and the universal reason that cannot be reconciled to the faith. The *post-Islamist intellectuals* have been blamed for their misunderstanding of the nature of modern rationality and the history of modernity.⁶⁵ *Iranian neoconservative intellectuals* seem to be unaware of the fact that “general notions do not resolve anything; they simply serve to pose a problem.”⁶⁶ According to the neoconservative intellectual position, the post-Islamist intellectuals’ interpretations

⁶⁴ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 133.

⁶⁵ Mohammad Reza Nikfar, Tafsir va tajrobeh-ye setam, http://www.nilgoon.org/archive/mohammadrezanikfar/pages/Nikfar_Interpretation_and_Oppression.html

⁶⁶ Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, p. 57.

of their religious texts will not result in freedom of expression and tolerance since freedom of expression and tolerance are the preconditions of creative interpretation.⁶⁷ In fact, the neoconservative narrative of the post-Islamist discourse is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the post-Islamist *perspectivist* discourse. The post-Islamist discourse was not about creative interpretation of religious texts, but about their historicity and contingency. They tried to demonstrate that interpretation of texts and events depends on interactions between epistemological capability, ethical capacity, and esthetic sensibility of the interpreter within his or her particular historical condition. They concluded that texts and events have been and will be the subject of endless interpretations by infinite interpreters from unending perspectives. The neoconservatives claim that the *post-Islamist intellectuals* will become modern autonomous subjects provided they internalize the Enlightenment's ideals of pure insight and disinterested reason toward the text of Qoran. They claim that the post-Islamist intellectuals can overcome their Muslim mode of being if they treat the Qoran as an ordinary text. A former philosophy professor of the University of Tehran theorized the Iranian Muslim mode of being as an expression of *denial of rational thinking* (*Emtena-e Tafakor*) throughout Iranian history. He coined the concept *Din-Khoyi* (religious outlook) as the chief property of this denial of rational thought.⁶⁸ The main argument of this rather intellectual historian is that Iranians have internalized religious faith in such a way that it has structured their attitude and mode of thinking with a belief in the existence of an absolute truth.⁶⁹ As a result, Iranians have lost their ability to question and to think rationally. The main argument of this theory is not new. It is trapped in the Hegelian essentialisation of Jewish particularism and Greek universalism. According to this argument, Iranian society and by extension every Muslim society cannot embrace universally valid rational thinking unless they are emancipated from their Muslim mode of being.⁷⁰

These days, numerous Muslim intellectuals, who had not been seen and heard very much in the *post-Islamist perspectivist discourse*, defend the democratic intellectual position. Mostafa Malekian is one of the former

⁶⁷ Mohammad Reza Nikfar, Tafsir va tajrobeh-ye setam, http://www.nilgoon.org/archive/mohammadrezanikfar/pages/Nikfar_Interpretation_and_Oppression.html.

⁶⁸ Aramesh Dustdar, *Derakhshesh'ha-ye tireh* (Paris: Entesharat-e Khavaran, 1999), and *Emtena-e tafakor dar farhang-e dini* (Paris: Entesharat-e Khavaran, 2004).

⁶⁹ Dustdar, *Emtena-e Tafakor*, pp. 113–114.

⁷⁰ Dustdar, *Derakhshesh'ha-ye tireh*, pp. 68–69.

Islamist intellectuals who advocates this democratic intellectual position.⁷¹ He calls his intellectual position a synthesis of spirituality and rationality. He does not privilege a particular religion as a source of spirituality. For Malekian, all religions have a kernel of hope that can be developed into the foundation of a universal ethics.⁷² While Malekian explores the ethical capacity of intellectuals, in general, Soroush infers the logical consequence of the post-Islamist *perspectivist* position and tests its cognitive or epistemological capabilities. Soroush argues, for instance, that the *Shia* belief in the divine missions of the *Twelve Imams* is inconsistent with the Muslim belief in *Khatamiat*. He argues that while with the Prophet Mohammad the chain of prophethood was ended, Shia continued the chain of prophethood through *Emmamat*. Furthermore, Soroush argues in *The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience* that since prophetic experience is comparable to the poetic experience, the Qoran cannot be the exact words of God. He claims that Qoran was not revealed to the prophet's mind but to his heart, which he expressed through his own words. Soroush implies that Mohammad is the author of the Qoran, and like every other author, he has to deal with the historical limitations of language. In so doing, Soroush presents the Qoran as a text with its own historical character, which can be interpreted within its historical context. Apparently, Soroush reflects the demand put forward by *the new ideological order* and its Iranian advocates. Soroush seems satisfied by the role *the neoconservative ideological order* ascribed to him. Thus, Soroush came to the conclusion that a secular approach to the Qoran is the prerequisite for the Muslim intellectuals to operate as modern subjects and genuine intellectuals. In my view, the neoconservative intellectuals' complete trust in the Enlightenment as a negation of faith has pushed Soroush to a more radical approach toward the Qoran.⁷³ First, Soroush tries to disconnect *the post-Islamist intellectual* project from the community it belongs to show the absolute autonomy of this intellectual project and its disinterested reason. Second, his attempt to contextualize the Qoran as a mundane text is an attempt to demonstrate that Muslim intellectuals are capable of questioning religious faith in the way *the neoconservative ideological order* has defined it. However,

⁷¹ Mostafa Malekian, *Dar jostoju-ye Aqlaniyat va Manaviyat: Moruri doubareh bar tarh-e nazariyeh-ye aqlaniyat va manaviyat*, Mehrnameh, Shomareh-ye 3, Khordad 1389/ May–June 2010. <http://www.mehrnameh.ir/article/639/>

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Abdulkarim Soroush, *Expansion of Prophetic Experience, Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion* (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2009).

the neoconservative intellectuals and Soroush ignore the fact that faith is about connectedness in a shared public space from which modern subjectivity cannot cut itself. It seems that Soroush's attempt is the attempt of a Muslim intellectual who would like to distance himself from the ethical, political, and religious community to which he belongs. Soroush wants to emancipate himself from the Muslim mode of being and become an absolutely self-determining subject. He has forgotten that a self-determining subject seeking universal freedom with no connection to a particular community knows only negative actions, destruction, and death. Malekian, who understands the quandary of the self-determining subject, has tried to initiate an intellectual project to express the dialectic between connectedness and disconnectedness, a synthesis of spirituality and rationality.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Mostafa Malekian, *Dar jostoju-ye aqlaniyat va manaviyat*, Mahnameh-ye Mehrnameh, Shomereh-ye 3, Khordad 1389/May–June 2010.

Conclusion

Bernard Lewis claimed in 2001 that the choice for the Muslim countries in the Middle East is between the secular Turkey and the fundamentalist Iran.¹ Several years later, Olivier Roy claimed, “The choice is indeed between Erdogan and Taliban.”² Whereas the choice was, according to Lewis, between secularism and Islamism, for Roy the choice was between two expressions of Islamism, the Turkish and the fundamentalist Islamism. Roy argues that in the absence of a secular democratic alternative, Erdogan’s moderate Islam, is the best choice the Middle East has. It is worth noticing that the Erdogan model’s “fundamental” democratic achievements were “in exchange for considering Turkey’s membership” in the European Union.³ Analysts who relate the “Turkish model” to the democratization of Portugal, Greece, Spain, and South Africa assume a European path for democracy that is different from the American way. Whereas the former is accomplished through constructive political means, the latter tried to bring democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq through destructive military campaigns.⁴ Erdogan’s military camping against the Kurds in 2015 supported by the European governments has reverted one of his most

¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 1.

² Olivier Roy, *The Politics of Chaos in The Middle East* (London, Hurst Publisher, 2007), p. 59.

³ Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 199.

⁴ Ibid.

significant “democratic achievements” regarding the inclusion of the Kurds into the Turkish political process. Erdogan war against the Kurds has demonstrated one of many ugly sides of the European path for democracy in the Middle East. Erdogan Islamism is attractive to the European governments and scholars because it represents a domesticated Islamism in a state that has been domesticated since its emergence, in the early 1920s. Roy’s view on Turkish Islamism as the only choice that the Middle East has reflects his affiliation to *the neoconservative project for democracy* in the Middle East. It became the motto of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which dreamed of becoming as domesticated as Erdogan’s Islamism but experienced a nightmarish political disaster. The problem with Iran is that neither its Islamism nor its post-Islamism or democratism has ever tended to be domesticated.

On July 14, 2015, Iran and five permanent members of Security Council and Germany reached an agreement on Iran’s nuclear program. Khatami’s government tried hard to achieve such an agreement but failed for the simple reason that the USA was not ready to recognize Iran’s right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. Numerous academic and journalistic analyses sympathetic to Iran’s position on the issue argued that nuclear energy had to do with Iranians’ national pride and their nationalistic sentiment. Nevertheless, they said little about the way Iranians related this issue to Iran’s state sovereignty. Both the conservative and prodemocracy reform-oriented forces in Iran have defended Iran’s position on the issue. Many Iranians believed that the USA and its allies would not accept a nuclear deal with Iran unless Iran becomes a vassal state similar to other states in the region.⁵ The Iranian conservatives in the government claimed that the USA and its Western allies were seeking Iran’s capitulation.⁶ Many analysts of Iran’s modern history and politics ignore the significance of Iran’s state sovereignty as the prerequisite of a shared political community. They minimize the relation between Iran’s sovereign but dynamic public space with the recent movements for democracy. The confidence in the sovereignty of the post-revolutionary state in Iran has led to the emergence of many religiously conservative but politically progressive politician and activists who join the movement for democracy.⁷ Ali Motahari, a prominent member of the Iranian parliament with conservative social and

⁵ Ali Ansari, *Modern Iran* (London: Pearson-Longman, 2007), pp. 234–236.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

⁷ One of the most prominent conservatives turned reformist is Mohammad Nourizad, a journalist-filmmaker who had been a fierce critic of the Reform movement while Khatami was in power. Nourizad is now a staunch critic of Iran’s leader and the Revolutionary Guard.

cultural outlooks, supports freedom of political expression and assembly and free and fair elections.⁸ Political prisoners in Iran supported Rouhani's political platform and wrote to the US president about the damaging impacts of the economic sanctions for the democratic struggle. This act signifies the significance of the state sovereignty for the advocates of democracy in Iran.⁹ Unlike some Iranian neoconservative intellectuals in the diaspora, the agents of the democratic struggle in Iran are reluctant to involve Western powers in the internal political disputes. They believe that popular sovereignty and state sovereignty are indivisible. The comparison between the contents of two letters, the one by Iranian neoconservative intellectuals in the diaspora and the other by the secular and post-Islamist advocates of democracy in Iran, is worth mentioning here. Whereas, the former is addressing the US Congress,¹⁰ the other is speaking with American people.¹¹ The content of the letters demonstrates the gap between two types of Iranian intellectuals. The former assumes Western governments as the guardians of democracy and human rights and is eager to legitimize their interference in the Iranian affairs. The latter believes in the capacity of the Iranian people in their struggle for democracy. The authors of the second letter know that they and the Iranian people are members of a shared political community. Thus, they have to engage conservative forces in Iran into a democratic dialog instead of asking Western powers to take a role in the democratic struggle in Iran.

I have tried, in this book, to challenge some *established facts* regarding the intellectual underpinnings of the 1979 Iranian revolution and the post-revolutionary prodemocracy movement. I have tried to call into question the way *the science of the Iranian political culture* constituted these facts. I did not take intellectual and political *lacks, immaturities, and deficiencies* ascribed to the Iranian political culture as my points of departure to discuss the Iranian intellectuals' approach toward democracy. These intellectual and political *lacks, immaturities, and deficiencies* are debated in studies that intend to explain why Iran lags behind Western

To date Nourizad has written thirty-three open letters to Iran's leader in which he asks him to resign from his position and dissolve the office of *velayat-e faqih*.

⁸ Shargh Daily, 9 Day 1392/30 December 2013

⁹ "Iran political prisoners urge US to end sanctions," *BBC*, August 9, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23629295>

¹⁰ Letter to the Congress of the United States, <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/08/letter-74-iranians-iran-deal/>

¹¹ Open letter to the people of the United State of America, <https://bostonreview.net/editors-picks-world-us/open-letter-people-united-states-america>, September 2, 2015.

democracies. These instances can be used as well to explain why Iran is not a part of the global process of democratization guided by Western governments. I have tried to identify those characters of the Iranian democratic struggle, which are disregarded by the academic narratives preoccupied with the nature of the Iranian political culture. According to these narratives, Iranians have been entrapped in their undemocratic political culture because they lack the intellectual capacity that enables them to become self-educated subjects. These narratives have disregarded the fact that Iranians have already been exercising their intellectual capacity to understand their political situation. These narratives disdain the knowledge at work in the historicization of knowledge. They play down the significance of the public polemics through which Iranian Islamists and post-Islamist have demonstrated their capability of knowing how to see, of understanding the meaning of what they have seen, and of transforming their understanding and knowledge into political activity. Through historicization of the current religious and political knowledge, they have challenged the ideological underpinning of the state. They contrasted the words of the constitution regarding democratic rights of the people with practices of the state institutions that violate those rights. The Islamists and post-Islamists have demonstrated that subjectivity means understanding and reconfiguring every situation from within, intellectually, esthetically, and politically. Iranians, regardless of their social position, are involved in the struggle for democracy. This democratic involvement indicates that there is no necessary relation between one's social position and the way he or she is feeling, seeing, thinking, and speaking. The 1979 Revolution emancipated millions of Iranian people as members of an Islamist community. It enabled them to discover their capacity as narrators of their society's political history and interpreters of its general will. In their intellectual and political journey, Iranian Islamists and post-Islamists refuted the claim that ideologization of religion is one of many maladies of the Iranian political culture. The neoconservative posture, which assumes that Muslim intellectuals have misunderstood modern European philosophical concepts, replicates Hobbes's argument regarding the incapacity of ordinary citizens to distinguish between good and evil. To Hobbes, the common people's use of this majestic prerogative causes sedition and rebellion in the state.¹² Since the Iranian revolution, Iranian Islamists have been blamed for their

¹²Thomas Hobbes; *On the Citizen* edited and translated by Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 131.

excessive use of words, the meaning of which they did not master. The Islamist ideology was full of words and concepts Islamists borrowed from Western discourses through which they called into question “the relations between the order of discourse and the order of bodies.”¹³ According to the order of discourse and the order of bodies in the Middle East, region’s monarchs and autocrats monopolized the right to govern, if they served the interests of Western governments. According to the same order, the people of the region do not have the right to govern. By calling into question the order of discourse and the order of bodies, Iranian Muslim intellectuals rejected the belief that peoples’ feeling, thinking, and speaking corresponds to their social position. They transgressed social boundaries between those who think and those who act. In so doing, they reconfigured the Iranian public space politically and esthetically toward individual and collective emancipation. We should bear in mind three important factors regarding the relation between the movement for democracy and state sovereignty in Iran. First, the continuity of the struggle for democracy in Iran since the constitutional revolution has resulted in a degree of state sovereignty that is rarely enjoyed by any other state in the Middle East. Second, unlike many places in the region the advocates of democracy are the natural winner of fair elections in Iran because they represent the most powerful political force in Iran. Third, unlike the political scenes of the most countries in the region, the Iranian politics is a space of contestation between a significant prodemocracy majority and a small conservative force that defends its privileges in the state. In many countries in the region, the division is between the pro-Western autocratic regimes and the advocates of an Islamic state based on Sharia.

The intellectual history of Iranian Islamism demonstrates that Western governments and politicians, scholars, and human rights organizations cannot be the political educators and the guardians of democracy in Iran. Some years ago, it might have seemed a noble lie to claim that democratization in the region was in the Western government’s long-term interests. However, after the military intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya and the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, the noble lie has become an ignoble lie. The societies that were supposed to be educated and emancipated politically are entrapped either in civil wars or are on the brink of civil wars. There are still people who are tempted to ask, “What went wrong with the project of the political education in the Middle East?”

¹³ Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, p. 61.

The answer that I believe crosses the mind of every serious student of the Middle East would be that democracy in the region has never been suitable for the interests of Western governments. The history of politics in modern Iran demonstrates the validity of this answer. Not all pundits of political education who theorize the myth of the convergence of democracy and Western interests in the region defended the 2013 military coup against Egypt's first democratically elected president. Some described it as a "democratic coup" that would invigorate the democratic process in the region. Others condemned the coup because it neither served Western interests nor democracy. The response of Western governments to the military coup in Egypt discarded the idea that there was a natural convergence between Western interests and democracy in the region. It indicated that any such convergence was nothing but the figment of the imagination of some scholars. It was predictable, even before the failure of military intervention in the region and the Arab uprisings, that outside interventions would derail the region's political dynamism. Every society must be given the chance of creating its own political agents that challenge those who govern their society. Iranian politics has long suffered from outside interventions. After the outbreak of the Green Movement, the USA and its European allies imposed economic sanctions against Iran. The sanctions were supposed to curb Iran's nuclear program. However, the timing of the sanctions raises the question whether the sanctions were intended to exploit the political conflict within the Iranian political system to the benefit of the USA and its European allies in the region. The USA and its European allies used the sanctions to pressure the conservatives in power while at the same time were trying to influence the reform-oriented forces that struggled for the democratization of the system. This type of external intervention could have poisoned the Iranian public space in such a way that opposing political forces would regard each other as enemies in war. What the USA and its European allies did not take into account was the dedication of the prodemocracy forces into Iran's state sovereignty. Iranian prodemocracy forces distanced themselves from the USA and European powers and calmed down the political tension caused by the Green Movement and used the political opportunity created by the 2013 presidential election. They imposed the democratic will of the people on the system through electoral means and ballot boxes. Prodemocracy forces in Iran were able to transform the 2013 presidential election into a democratic opportunity because they remained truthful to the inherent vitality of the Iranian struggle for democracy based on state and popular

sovereignty. I have tried to liberate the history of this politico-intellectual transformation from the prison of endless debates on the stage of Iranian modernity and political culture. I took *totalism* and *perspectivism* as my point of departure to reveal the intellectual and political capacities of Islamism and post-Islamism as instances of political self-education of the Iranian people since the 1960s. In my view, the emergence of the post-Islamist discourse in the 1990s changed the nature of Iranian public space forever. The development of the post-Islamist discourse would not have happened without the Islamist discourse as its prelude. The Islamist discourse or ideology made the newcomers in the public space capable of thinking and talking about their own emancipation as an instance of human emancipation in general. However, the post-Islamists discovered a different conception of democracy as a struggle for equal political rights of all citizens. As Islamists, Muslim intellectuals and political activists considered secular leftists and pro-Mosaddeq nationalists as their intellectual and political adversaries. The Islamists either defended or turned a blind eye to the harsh treatment that secular intellectuals received from the revolutionary government in the 1980s. The Islamists' disregard for the political rights of the secular left and pro-Mosaddeq forces should not prevent us from grasping the fruits of the Islamist journey and its transformation into post-Islamism. This journey is in fact representative of Iranian intellectuals, in general, because through their transformation from Islamism to post-Islamism, Muslim intellectuals succeeded in overcoming the fallacy of religious (Islamist)-secular dichotomy. In doing so, they enlarged the public space to include Iranian democrats regardless of their religious orientation or ideological persuasion. As advocates of the post-Islamist discourse, Muslim intellectuals have never been in opposition to the Iranian secular prodemocracy forces. Countless footages of the active participation of dedicated Muslims and seculars in the Green Movement indicate that the post-Islamist expansion of the public space included everyone who contributed to the struggle for democracy and equal political rights of citizens. The Green Movement became a democratic movement of citizens who tried to force the Islamic Republic to recognize the political equality of the governed and those who govern. The role of former Islamists such as Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karoubi, and many others in the movement pointed to the significance of Muslim intellectuals for the expansion and strengthening of the democratic public space in Iran. In the new enlarged public space, the value of ideas and actions are not decided in connection with whether the subjects are secular or religious but

concerning their democratic significance and effect. In fact, the seeds of this enlarged and democratic public space can be found in Shariati's incorporation of the contents of the Iranian leftist secular discourse in his Islamist ideology. Shariati's Islamist ideology surpassed the limits of the secular left at theoretical and practical levels. Regarding theory, Shariati gave the Iranian secular leftist discourse, based on deterministic and official Marxism of communist parties, a humanist turn in which the role of the conscious subject was strengthened. Practically, Shariati's Islamist ideology fascinated hundreds of thousands of Iranian youth and prepared them for revolutionary actions. These theoretical and practical advantages became a fertile ground in which the Islamist ideology imposed its intellectual and political dominance in the public space in the years of revolutionary turmoil from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. The incorporation of the main principles of the secular left in the Islamist ideology resulted in the renaming of pro-Mosaddeq nationalists such as *the Freedom Movement* as "liberals." The "liberals" became known as the enemies of the promised true democracy and Iran's sovereignty. After making the secular left's anti-liberal crusade their own, the Islamists included the secular left in the category of liberal during the 1980s. The categorization of secular left as pro-Western liberals took place with the mediation of Al-e Ahmad's and Shariati's conceptualizations of two types of intellectual; the one is serving and the other exposing Imperialist ideology. The Islamists criticized Iranian secular intellectuals for failing the 1979 revolution and the Iranian people in their emancipatory war with the local (Iraq) and global enemies (the West). They blamed secular Iranian intellectuals for using Western categories to understand Iranian people and for their failure to see the people as they were: ordinary, Muslim, and pious. In fact, before the emergence of the post-Islamist discourse the term secular had never been used, either by secular left or by pro-Mosaddeq nationalists or their Islamist opponents. The Islamist-secular binary opposition became a Western academic preoccupation for scholars such as Bernard Lewis in the 1990s while the post-Islamist discourse was becoming a real intellectual and political force in Iran. This academic and political concern with secular-Islamist binary gave the conservative forces in Iran the opportunity to label post-Islamism as an expression of secularism. The historiography of the Iranian revolution, based on the secular-Islamist dichotomy, undermines the factual history of the event. Neither the Turkish model favored by Bernard Lewis nor the "Arab Spring" even in its heydays could invalidate the democratic lessons of the Iranian experience through Islamism and post-Islamism. We should bear in mind that the liberal-revolutionary dichotomy

was a result of the joint effort of the secular and Islamist left in the post-revolutionary Iran. The conservatives in Iran reconstructed this dichotomy as Islamist (religious)-secular dichotomy when they ascended to power after Khomeini's death in 1989. The post-Islamist discourse did not debate Islamic or secular identities in the Iranian society; it focused rather on the democratic rights of Iranian citizens promised by the Iranian constitution. In fact, the conservatives' Islamist-secular binary was the perversion of the liberal-revolutionary binary to curtail the post-Islamist discourse on democracy. The achievement of every democratic process in every society is expressed in the society's expansion of the public space. The Green Movement aimed to expand the public space in Iran, but it lost its momentum after a year and a half. It seemed, until a few days before the 2013 presidential election, that those in power in Iran had succeeded in quelling the movement. There were no signs of street demonstrations, and the activists of the movement were in prison or excluded from the political scene. However, the 2013 presidential election created the opportunity that the advocates of the Green Movement had been waiting for. Thus, instead of street demonstrations, the advocates of the Green Movement mobilized millions of electorates behind Rouhani, who promised to realize the democratic demands of the Green Movement. In the meantime, Iran's leader, Khamenei, made a promise to the Iranian people that their votes would decide the fate of the presidential election. He kept his promise. It was surely the impact of the mass demonstration after the disputed presidential election in 2009 that prompted Iran's leader to promise the voters that the government would respect their votes. The new interpretation of the electoral rights of the people by Iran's leader as inviolable rights of the people reinforces the argument put forward by post-Islamists and prodemocracy constitutionalists in Iran. It contradicts the conservatives in power who have argued that, first, the constitution cannot weaken the position of the leader as the final arbiter in political conflicts within the system. Second, the same constitution has authorized the Guardian Council as the constitution's sole interpretative authority.

The guarantee for the democratic process in Iran is hundreds of thousands of ordinary Iranians who have cultivated a variety of public discourses throughout Iran. They, unlike Iranian neoconservative intellectuals, have remained true to the reform-oriented forces led by Khatami. The Iranian neoconservative intellectuals think of the Western mode of being and democracy as the embodiment of the Enlightenment's ideals of disinterested reason and universal truth. They believe that the absence of these elements in Iran is a result of the Iranian people's Muslim mode of being.

Thus, they endorse the neoconservative conception of democracy based on a regime of understating of politics that presupposes inequality of epistemological capability, ethical capacity, and esthetic sensibility between the West and the Muslim world. The most significant consequence of this presupposition is that as long as Muslims do not overcome their epistemological incapability, ethical incapacity, and esthetic insensitivity, they are unable to exercise their political agency. The democracy based on this regime of understanding of politics divides people into politically qualified and politically disqualified. As a result, the politically qualified would lead the politically disqualified people. The logical consequence of this line of argument is that Muslims are politically incompetent because of their Muslim mode of being. They cannot attain political competence through political Islam or any other political ideology or practice because they reflect their Muslim mode of being. There is only one solution; they must be depoliticized. Thus, the depoliticization of Muslims is according to the advocates of *the new ideological order*, a pre-condition for their democracy. However, the advocates of *the new ideological order* who propagate depoliticized democracy encourage a campaign against political Islam at the same time. This campaign implies a political movement that defines Islamists, as the natural products of the Muslim mode of being, as enemies within the people. This ideological position assumes that a democratic political movement in a Muslim society or Europe draws its politics from its capacity to identify the Islamists and Muslims as the enemy within the people. This ideological position is meant to control the people who are unpolitical by nature. That is why the advocates of the new ideological order who believe in *the end of history* and politics argue that depoliticization of Muslim citizens would result in the democratization of the Middle East. Interestingly, Ahmadinezhad, Iran's former president, and his conservative entourage also tried to keep the political power through depoliticization of Iranian people through the uncovering of the enemies within the Iranian people.

Althusser has demonstrated that ideology constitutes concrete individuals as autonomous subjects. The *neoconservative ideological order* establishes many local intellectuals and activists as "subjects" of democracy in the region on condition that they identify an enemy within the people. The Iranian new conservatives have identified the Muslim mode of being as a criterion to identify the enemy within the people. Thus, when a post-Islamist examines a *historical phenomenology of violence*,¹⁴ an

¹⁴ Hashem Aghajari, *Padidar'shenasi-ye tarikhi-ye khoshbunat*, in Ali Mohammad Nejati, *Gofteman-e kbordad* (Tehran: Nashr-e Atiyeh, 2000), pp. 304–317.

Iranian neoconservative advocate of democracy writes a decade later a *theology of torture* to demonstrate that every Muslim is a potential terrorist or torturer.¹⁵ In contrast to this neoconservative view, the advocates of democracy in Iran have no desire to generate a political movement that aims to identify the enemy within the unpolitical people. They understand politics as an imperfect act without an end. Contrary to the dominant view of the post-revolutionary Iranian politics, political Islam managed to establish a constitutional government that promised political equality of every citizen. As previously demonstrated, the perception that Iran is a constitutional government has become the starting point for a democratic struggle in Iran. When Ayatollah Khomeini died in 1989, he left behind two of the most important requirements for democracy, a constitution that guaranteed all citizens equal political rights and practice of political contestation within the political system. The history of political Islam or Islamism and post-Islamism in the post-revolutionary Iran is, in fact, the history of political contestations within a political system based on the constitution and its democratic promises. The political contestations within the system have convinced the people to enter into political actions. Either as the activists of the reform movement or as the activists of the Green Movement or as the advocates of Rouhani's election in 2013, the Iranian people try to realize the promises of their constitution. Since the eruption of the Green Movement until the 2013 presidential election, the democratic intellectuals and the advocates of the neoconservative ideological order have presented radically different views of Iran's past and present. For the former, Iran was a vital and dynamic society in continuous self-assertion, self-evaluation, and self-criticism capable of contributing to human endeavor for freedom and equality. The latter have considered Iran as a static society, brutal, unjust, intellectually stagnant, imprisoned in its Muslim mode of being, and in desperate need of emancipation from itself. The results of the 2013 presidential election demonstrated that the reform and Green Movement were only instances of complex and open-ended democratic processes in Iran. In this process, the people put their democratic demands in the public space through public arguments, street demonstrations, and electoral mobilizations. The intellectuals and political activists who support the complex democratic process in Iran have understood that to invent new ways of doing politics, they should take into consideration the properties of time and possibilities of space.

¹⁵ Mohammad Reza Nikfar, *Elahiyat-e khoshbunat*, http://www.nilgoon.org/archive/mohammadrezanikfar/articles/Nikfar_Theology_of_Torture.html

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