# Islamic Perspective

## Journal of the Islamic Studies and Humanities

Volume 27, Spring 2022

The Institute for Critical Social Theory



INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

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# The Russian Restrainer of the Apocalypse:

## *The Katechon in St. Paul, Carl Schmitt, and Alexander Dugin*

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## Abstract

In his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, St. Paul spoke of a "restrainer" of the Antichrist, one who holds back the coming of the apocalypse. This "restrainer," or "Katechon," was later secularized and brought into the 20th century political realm by the Nazi jurist, Carl Schmitt, who saw empires as "restrainers" of chaos and disorder. In 2022, with the invasion of Ukraine by Putin's Russia, the concept of the Katechon came to the fore again. This time by the Russian philosopher, Alexander Dugin, who merged St. Paul's anonymous restraining force with Schmitt's political force, claiming that the Russian Federation, and its war on its neighboring ex-Soviet state, Ukraine, was the task of the Katechon – the emerging Russian Empire – holding back the advance of the Antichrist: The West, especially America. In this essay, the author explores the development of the concept of the Katechon through St. Paul, Carl Schmitt, and Alexander Dugin, demonstrating the eschatological and apocalyptic legitimation it attempts to bestow on Putin's dream of a new Holy Russian Empire.

 **Key Words:** Katechon, Antichrist, Eschatology, Political Theology, Geopolitics, Vladimir Putin

## Introduction

"We Russians don't need Ukraine. Christ needs it. And that is why we are there." This curious statement was written by the Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin regarding Putin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Published on the Neo-Eurasianist website, Katecon.com, and entitled "Apocalyptic Realism," Dugin expounds on his political theology, couching the conflict as an eschatological collision between good and evil, Christ and Satan (Dugin, 2022). Dugin writes, "the main battle from now on unfolds between… the Russia Idea, the [K]atechon, the Orthodox Civilization, and the world of the Western Antichrist, coming at us" (Ibid.)[1] From the perspective of Dugin, the struggle for Ukraine is not simply a struggle for an independent country to maintain its sovereignty, nor a proxy war between NATO and the Russian Federation, but rather a struggle for the future of the entire world: the very salvation of the world is at stake. By locating this struggle within an eschatological framework, Dugin imbues spiritual and existential necessity into Russia's war on Ukraine. It could not be avoided.

In order to lend this religious and eschatological legitimacy to Putin's "special military operation" in Ukraine, Alexander Dugin turns to a concept originally found in the New Testament, specifically in St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: the "Katechon," i.e., "that which restrains."[2] In this essay, I will trace the life of this eschatological concept from its origins in St. Paul's letter through its "determinate negation" (*Aufhaben*) and secularization by the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt, to its theo-political usage by Alexander Dugin. I will argue that as a theo-political concept, it gives those who invoke it expansive justification to engage in a "total war" (*Totalen Krieg*) against a civilian population, all in the name of rescuing the world's population from an eschatological catastrophe. In this sense, the invocation of St. Paul's Katechon is an ideological cover for particular war crimes in the name of universal benevolence. Through the politicization of the theological notion of the Katechon, it is transformed from an eschatological hope to an ideology of conquest in the name of a palingenetic ultra-nationalist project: the construction of a new "Holy Russian Empire."

## St. Paul's Restrainer of the Anti-Christ

The concept of the Katechon originally appears in two forms in St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Church of Thessalonica, chapter 2, verses 2-12, wherein St. Paul writes,

*2 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us— whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness (anomia) is revealed, the man doomed to destruction (apoleia). ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.*

*⁵ Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is holding him back (τὸ κατέχον - "that which restrains"), so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness (anomia) is already at work; but the one who now holds it back (ὁ κατέχων - "the one who restrains") will continue to do so until he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one (anomos) will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, ¹⁰ and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie ¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:2-12).³*

Being a polysemantic hapax legomena, the concept of the Katechon is multifaceted as well as unique to St. Paul's letter, having never appeared prior to St. Paul's usage of the term. In the context of first century Greece, wherein the early Christian communities were expecting the apocalypse and thus the imminent return of Christ, the function of Paul's Katechon is to diminish the eschatological expectations in the overly zealous Thessalonian Church, who were expecting the imminent return of Christ in their lifetimes. Paul explains in his letter that *something* (τὸ κατέχον) or *someone* (ὁ κατέχων) referred to as the "restrainer," holds back the forces of evil who bring about the lawlessness and disorder associated with the apocalypse. As such, the Christian community must not act as if the "Day of the Lord" (ἡμέρα κυρίου) were imminent, as the Antichrist, or the

"Sons of Perdition" (ὁ υἱός τῆς ἀπωλείας), must be revealed prior to Christ's return (Gospel of St. John 7:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:3). However, the revealing of the identity of the Antichrist is conditioned on the overcoming of what St. Paul called the "restrainer," the "Katechon," who holds back the Antichrist and its lawlessness and disorder. The period of the *eschaton* ("the final days"), wherein the believers wait for the *parousia* (coming/presence) of Christ, must be endured with patience, even though that world is saturated by evil, suffering, mendacity, and persecution. Nevertheless, due to God's abundance of mercy and compassion for humanity, the Katechon is instituted, who will serve as the agent of order and stability despite the anomic and unjust condition brought by the forces of evil. As such, the eschaton is determined by a struggle between the forces of evil, disorder, confusion, and dysgenic decline and the forces of good, order, law, and stability. When the Katechon is "taken out of the way," and there no longer is anything to restrain the Antichrist, the worldly of evil envelop the world, a condition that will reign until destroyed by the second coming of Christ.

There are three pertinent issues that must be understood when examining St. Paul's concept of the Katechon: first, St. Paul's notion of the Katechon is eschatologically ambiguous, due to its "restraining" the forces of disorder and chaos, it restrains the eschatological conditions that would bring about the triumph of the Antichrist and therefore the second coming of Christ in response to that triumph. Because of this parousia (Παρουσία) delay, the Katechon inadvertently prolongs the existential suffering that is inherent within the human condition. Without the second coming of Christ, humanity must continue to suffer its beleaguered fate in this world, including the ravages of aging, sickness, childbirth, and death. In this way, the Katechon is both the agent of stability, a necessary entity for human flourishing, but also the means by which humanity's miserable existence is extended in perpetuity. As long as the Katechon performs its function and restrains evil in the world, humanity will not witness the second coming of Christ nor Christ's ultimate triumph over evil, as personified by the Antichrist.

Secondly, Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians is ambiguous as to the identity of the Katechon. Both variations of the term "restrainer" in Paul's letter to the Thessalonian Church fail to positively identify who the force restraining the Anti-Christ is. It is possible that St. Paul understood the Katechon to be the Roman Empire and Roman Emperors, as he implores the Christian community in Rome to "subject themselves to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1). This view was shared by Tertullian, John Chrysostom, and St.

Augustine, who understood the first of the two variations of the Katechon (τὸ κατέχον - "*that* which restrains") as the Roman Empire, and the second mention of the Katechon (ὁ κατέχων - "*the one* who restrains") as the Roman Emperor. For example, Tertullian, often referred to as the "father of Latin Christianity, wrote the following in his *Apology*,

> *There is also another need, a greater one, for our praying for the Emperors, as for the whole estate of the empire and the interest of Rome. We know that the great force which threatens the whole world, the end of the age itself with its menace of hideous suffering, is delayed by the respite which the Roman Empire means for us. We do not wish to experience all that; and when we pray for its postponement are helping forward the continuance of Rome (Tertullian 1977: 154-155).*

As for the Eastern Orthodox Church, it has been suggested that the Katechon is a Grand Monarch or an Orthodox Emperor, while others believe that the Katechon refers to a palingenetic Holy Roman Empire.[4] Additionally, it has been suggested that the Katechon is none other than the Holy Spirit, the Archangel Michael, the name of God, or the Institution of the Church itself (Meierhenrich and Simons 2019: 47; Engleman 1995). Nevertheless, the inherent ambiguity of St. Paul's usage of the term "Katechon" allows the biblical concept to be utilized by all those who wish to claim divine prerogatives and/or to assign such divine prerogatives to a given institution. To claim that an individual or institution is that which holds back the forces of evil, disorder, and lawlessness, and thus restrains the apocalypse, is to give that individual or institution a level of existential power beyond the mere political. Once adorned by the power of the divinely instituted Katechon, the individual or institution becomes a necessity for the continual existence of humanity and society. It is that which guarantees that the world doesn't succumb to the Antichrist – the personification of all things evil and destructive. Thus, the fate of the Katechon is likewise the fate of humanity.

Third, the same ambiguous identity for the Katechon can also be found regarding who the "lawless one" is. From the perspective of higher criticism, we attempt to see the world of St. Paul by way of what I call the "tri-text": first, the *context* that St. Paul would have been writing, i.e., what's is going on around him – the growing number of Christian communities within the Roman Empire and their theological diversity; second, the *subtext* of his writing, i.e., what is consistent within his actions – the attempt to unify the early Christian communities along the

lines of his interpretation of Christ's meaning and purpose; and third, and most important in this analysis, the *pretext* of his writing, i.e., what has preceded him and therefore has determined (or influenced) his thoughts on the contemporary moment: Jewish experiences with the Roman authorities. With this broader picture of the world and worldview from which St. Paul is operating, we can see that he seems to have modeled his agent of destabilization on individuals who brought theological, political, and social chaos to the Jewish people in the recent past. This could include the Seleucid tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes (c. 215-164 BCE), who scandalously installed a pagan idol (perhaps Zeus of even Ba'al) in the Temple of Jerusalem – the holiest of holies – and performed a blasphemous sacrifice of a pig to the idol. Some Jews and Christians believe that the prophet Daniel condemned Antiochus IV Epiphanes' desecration of the Temple in  his "prophecy" (Daniel 11:29-35), thus giving this event significance beyond mere history.[5] We can also consider the Julio-Claudian Roman Emperor, Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, better known as "Caligula" (AD 12-41), as an archetype of lawlessness for the Jews. He too threatened lawlessness by way of defiling the Temple, this time by installing an "graven image" of himself posing as Zeus, sometime between AD 39-40. However, Caligula was assassinated in AD 41 before his sacrilegious act materialized.[6] Nevertheless, this imperial attempt to disturb the divinely instituted order within the Jewish world of which St. Paul lived marks Caligula as a potential agent of lawlessness, chaos, and destruction. Whatever is the case, these two historical figures give us a picture as to what kind of lawlessness, chaos, and evil St. Paul would have been familiar with, and who he could have modeled his "Antichrist" on. Such historical memories of anomic figures in Jewish history appear to have migrated into the Christian tradition with St. Paul's conversion to Christianity, and later Christians amalgamated the image of the "lawless one" with the Gospel of John's notion of the "Antichrist" as well as with the image of the "beast" of St. John of Patmos' Book of Revelation. Combined, it produced the familiar image of the Antichrist that spreads evil in the world, which was only "restrained" by the work of the Katechon. Just like the Katechon, the precise identity of the Antichrist remains up for debate. However, in each epoch of Christian history, someone or something has been identified as being the Antichrist or the agent of the Antichrist due to their perceived wickedness. This is true even in the 21st century, wherein the Nazi jurist, Carl Schmitt, positively identified the Antichrist as well as the Katechonic force that opposed it.

## Carl Schmitt's Political Secularization of the Katechon

The notion of the Katechon in Schmitt's thought is subterranean, although it surfaces often as a means to legitimate his expansive concept of political sovereignty. It first appears in his work in the mid-1940s, during his enthusiastic support of Nazism, and later reappears in the post-War years between 1950-1957, wherein he looks back at the war years and offers what can only be called an "apology" for his juridic work in service to the Third Reich, and by extension, World War II and the Holocaust (Balakrishnan 2000). He mentions the Katechon for the last time in 1970, when his book, *Political Theology II,* was published (Meierhenich and Simons 2019: 47). Despite the defeat of German fascism, Schmitt's influence has not ceased to be a potent factor in contemporary political philosophy. Rather, today, especially among Russian intellectuals, Schmitt's geopolitical thought, as well as his political theology, is being rediscovered, adapted, and appropriated into the Neo-Eurasianism that saturates Putin's Kremlin. Most profoundly, Schmitt has profoundly influenced the aforementioned Alexander Dugin, whose own version of Neo-Eurasianism and his "Fourth Political Theory" (as he calls his version of Russian Neo-Fascism), is partially rooted in Schmitt's geopolitics and political theology. Ironically, the theoretical work that built much of the juridical scaffolding of Nazi ideology and the Nazi state – responsible for the death of 27 million Soviets – is itself given refuge in contemporary Russia, wherein it has found a heartfelt welcome among intellectuals and their counterparts in the Russian military hierarchy and state (Clover 2016: 178, 180, 239, 283).

Best known as a "political theologian," Carl Schmitt "determinately negated" (*Aufhaben*) Christian concepts, wherein theological notions migrated from the depth of the religious mythos into secular semantics, thus losing their religious veneer while maintaining the underlying logic of the religious concept. "Political Theology," being a sub-discipline of Political Philosophy, attempts to understand how certain religious notions, concepts, and theories can be secularized and formed into the basis of secular political theory and praxis, or in the case of Carl Schmitt, how such theological concepts form his juridical theory.

For Schmitt, St. Paul's notion of the Katechon was a concept saturated with political potential, as it was essential for the growth, maintenance, and perpetual meaningfulness of the Christian tradition itself. Testifying to the importance of the Katechon in his political theology, he wrote to his friend Hans Blumenberg on October 22, 1974, that "for more than 40 years I have collected materials on the problem of the κατέχων or κατέχον (2 Thess. 2, 6); and during these years I have

looked for a human ear that would listen to this question and understand it. For me, it is the most-important question (*Kernfrage*) of my political theology" (Blumenberg and Schmitt 2007: 120).[7] Schmitt first invoked the concept of the Katechon in his April 19th, 1942, article, published by the journal *Das Reich,* wherein he identifies the United States as a "delayer of world history" (*Verzögerer der Weltgeschichte*) (Schmitt 1942). However, for Schmitt, it was the United States under President Franklin D. Roosevelt who dislodged the "paralyzed" or "spellbound" (*wie festgebannt*) British Empire from their Katechonic imperial state, thus transforming the U.S., although reluctantly, into a "restrainer" as opposed to an "accelerator" (*Beschleuniger*) of history (Ibid.).[8] Later that year, Schmitt invokes the Katechon in his famous essay *Land and Sea,* which will later have a profound effect on Alexander Dugin's own geopolitical thought (Schmitt 1997). In this essay, Schmitt argues that the Byzantine Empire served as a Katechon – a "rampart" – against the growing assertiveness of Islam. Likewise, the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (AD 1552-1612) served "not as an active hero, but rather a brake, a delaying factor," wherein he stunted a divided Europe's historical drive towards the Thirty-Years War by decades (Ibid.: 8, 43). Schmitt, writing in agreement with Nietzsche, even identifies Georg W.F. Hegel as being a philosophical instantiation of a Katechonic force – restraining Europe's march toward theomachist atheism by his theologically saturated philosophy of history. Schmitt writes, "Nietzsche furiously identified Hegel and the sixth sense of the Germans, i.e., the historical sense, as the great deferrer on the way to expressed atheism" (Schmitt 1950: 929-930). Hegel's World Spirit (*Weltgeist*), working its way towards the realm of absolute freedom, in a sense was a reiteration of God's presence and activity in the world, even in catastrophe. Thus, even in the highly-abstract philosophical language of Hegel, a Katechonic force is identifiable, as Hegel's theo-philosophical language restrains Western Christendom from collapsing into its own civilizational nihilism via the modern pillars of atheism: instrumental reason, natural science, and positivism.

Unlike the Christian theologians before him, who understood an individual, institute, or even the Holy Spirit to be the divinely appointed delayer of the apocalypse, Schmitt accelerates the process – already started by John Calvin's own depersonalized interpretation of the Katechon – to divorce the concept from a divinely appointment position in the singular, to a "metahistorical" force in the plural, one that structures the dialectic of history within each epoch.[9] In Schmitt's *Glossarium,* dated December 17, 1947, he states the following:

*I believe in the Katechon: it is for me the sole possibility as a Christian to understand history and its meaning. We must name the Katechon for every epoch for the last 1948 years. The position [of the Katechon] has never been vacant, if it had, we would not be present anymore… There are temporary, transient, splinter-like fragmentary bearers of this task (Schmitt 1991: 63).*

From this passage, we see Schmitt's divorce of the Katechon from St. Paul's rendering as a singular divinely-appointed force, to a generalized force that emerges routinely from the dynamics of history itself in order to hold back the forces of chaos. When Schmitt states that "we must name the Katechon for every epoch," he assumes that the Katechon is not singular, and thus must be identified within each epoch, for the Katechonic force is born of the historical particularities of each epoch, and therefore is also a history-bound force. As such, that which "restrains" the forces of evil, instability, and chaos, could not simply be a singular individual, institution, or even the Holy Spirit, somehow traversing throughout time, but rather a historical force that corresponds to the historical dialectic of the epoch, even if only in a "splinter-like fragment." Thus, St. Paul's singular "restrainer" existing in perpetuity gives way to Schmitt's reformulation: the Katechon is an historical force that emerges out of the particularities of each historical epoch in response to each threat to order, stability, and goodness. As such, Schmitt can identify the *Katechons* (plural) by examining the world-historical forces that held evil – or what he thinks was evil – in abeyance.

In his book *The Nomos of the Earth,* Schmitt, much like Tertullian, John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine, identifies the Katechon in early Christian history as being the Roman Empire, but Schmitt includes – and emphasizes – the later Christianized Roman Empire, especially as it was substantiated in its *imperium* (empire) – which it inherited from the pagan Roman Empire, and its *sacerdotium* (priesthood), in its uniquely Christian form (Schmitt 2006: 59). He writes,

*This Christian empire was not eternal. It always had its own end and that of the present eon in view. Nevertheless, it was capable of being a historical power. The decisive historical concept of this continuity was that of the restrainer: Katechon. "Empire" in this sense meant the historical power to restrain the appearance of the Antichrist and the end of the present eon; it was a power that withholds (qui tenet), as the Apostle Paul said in his letter to the Thessalonians… The*

> *empire of the Christian Middle Ages lasted only as long as the idea of*
> *the Katechon was alive (Ibid.: 59-60).*

Schmitt here admits that that which is at one time a Katechonic force can lose such status when it no longer believes in itself as a Katechonic force. He makes a point to distinguish between empires that maintain their Katechonic charge and those that do not; the latter devolve into Caesarism (monarchal absolutism) (Ibid.: 62-66). When such empires forecloses on their Katechonic task, they can no longer "restrain" the Antichrist, and evil pervades the world. Indeed, they may become part or even a source of that evil. As such, the weakening or absence of the Katechon is dysgenic for the world. The more its power to restrain the Antichrist fades away, the more anomie grows, and the more anomie grows, the more the world reflects the chaos and lawlessness of the Antichrist.

From a dialectical perspective, the collapse of the Katechonic force creates the conditions wherein a new Katechonic force is called for, and is ultimately brought into existence in order to restrain the anomie that has become normative. This new Katechonic force will last, according to Schmitt's logic, as long as it understands itself as being the Katechon, and fulfils that law-giving and order-maintaining function. Additionally, while such a Katechonic force substantiates itself within a still-religious context, wherein religion remains determinate in social ethics and morality, such a Katechon will appear religious in nature. However, in the modern period, wherein ethics and morality have generally migrated from the religious tradition into secular articulations, the Katechon(s) may take a secular rendering, for even the secular Katechon can hold back the emergence of that Antichrist in the world, as it can be a force of stability, order, and traditional morality. However, within a globalized world that is increasingly secularized, cosmopolitan, and culturally liberal, the return to the concept of the Katechon is most likely to be expressed via religious language, especially through a seemingly "religious empire" that is attempting to stem the tide of post-modernity, which is often identified as the source of today's "evil" in the world.[10]

Remembering that Carl Schmitt lent his juridical and theological talents to the Third Reich, which from a historical perspective appears to be a genuine source of disorder, chaos, and outright evil, we must ask why Schmitt is interested in secularizing the St. Paul's theological concept of the Katechon. What did the identification of the Katechon in Schmitt's time do for Schmitt and the political order he supported: the Third Reich?

Considering the various instances wherein Schmitt invokes the Katechon, we can first see that Schmitt utilizes it to explain the dialectics of history – the ebb and flow between the forces of good and order against the forces of evil and disorder. This structuring of history between the forces of the Antichrist that bring forth the *eschaton* (ἔσχατον) and the Katechon that restrains that anomic force, delivers a world historical and apocalyptic importance to that which is identified as the Katechon. As such, St. Paul's notion of the Katechon, now translated into a metahistorical entity materializing within each epoch of history, as Schmitt saw it, becomes a way of legitimizing Schmitt's concept of sovereignty and the totalitarian state. For Schmitt, the sovereign is the one who determines the "state of exception" (*Ausnahmezustand*), wherein the will of the ruler is no longer bound to constitutional norms, legal restraints, and other socially recognized restrictions, but rather can act in such a way that would violate all norms in the name of "suppressing" (*niederhalt*) the chaos and evil that threatens the order of the status quo. In such a totalitarian state, the authoritarian leader is the new giver of *nomos* (law), which always corresponds to their unbridled will. As such, the totalitarian state and its leaders are identified as Katechonic forces that restrains the Antichrist, allowing no revolutionary (or counter-revolutionary) movement to disturb the given order. Since peace and stability are needed for human flourishing, all of humanity becomes dependent on the success of the Katechon to hold back the chaos of the Antichrist. Without the authoritarian state, the forces of chaos would reign and humanity would come to its demise. Whether the world's population knows it or not, that which is designated as the Katechon makes their lives possible, as it is the Katechon that delivers the possibility of ataraxia (ἀταραξία). In the end, the Katechon in Schmitt's analysis is a means of bestowing divine legitimacy and world-historical importance to the totalitarian state ruled by the authoritarian ruler, making their expansive rule the basis of the world's ability to thrive. It is the eschatological politics of the present in the cause of maintaining the already established.

It is clear that Schmitt developed this line of thinking in the 1940s as a way of justifying the establishment of the totalitarian fascist state – the Katechon – that wrestled state and social control from the liberal chaos of Weimar democracy, as well as barricading Germany from the growing communist threat emanating from the Soviet Union. The dual forces that threatened world order for Schmitt were culture-destroying American-style laissez-faire democratic capitalism and the egalitarian perversion of the Aristocratic Law of Nature that animated Soviet communism. Much like the early Christian writers who interpreted the Katechonic

forces as being "that which restrains" (τὸ κατέχον) as the Roman Empire, and "who which restrains" (ὁ κατέχων) as being the Roman Emperors, Schmitt saw the Third Reich as "that which restrains" and Adolf Hitler as "who which restrains." Nazism, in Schmitt's view, was the ideology of the "restrainer" – a conservative ideology that held back the forces of dysgenic modernity, cultural degeneracy, and racial equality. It was a way of not only winning the *kulturkampf* in Germany, but a means of reversing the dialect of history, wherein those aspects of German national identity that were waning or had already been determinately negated by cultural modernity could be reinstated, augmented, and turned into an ideology of "authenticity" (*Eigentlichkeit*): a hermetically sealed notion of what it meant to be a German, which was responsible for making the "non-identical" into life-not-worthy-of-life (Adorno 2003; Heidegger 1962). In the end, an expansive German *imperium* (Third Reich), born from the chaos of the Weimar Republic, pushed itself westward in the name of *lebensraum* (living space) as a means of establishing itself as the dominant power in a Western world, standing alone against the power of the ever-metastasizing modern form of anarchy determined by nihilism and accompanied by a triumphant theomachism. Having inherited this soteriological charge from the empires before it, the Third Reich was for Schmitt the new Katechonic empire, and it understood itself as such, much like the Christian Empires of old (Schmitt 2006: 59-66).

## Alexander Dugin: Putin's Russia as the New Katechon

The Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin has been called many things: "Putin's brain," "Putin's Rasputin," "Putin's special representative," "the Putin Whisperer," "the most dangerous philosopher alive," and even the "St. Cyril and Methodius of Fascism" (Clover 2016: 174). He is by all means the most influential philosopher in the Neo-Eurasianist movement, having developed this political philosophy nearly by himself. However, Alexander Dugin's "Fourth Political Theory," or Neo-Eurasianism, has older roots, much of which can be found in fascist Germany, fascist Italy, the neo-fascist New Right (*Nouvelle Droite*) in post-WWII France, and the original anti-Soviet Eurasianist movement in Russia (Dugin 2012). From Germany, the writings of Martin Heidegger, Ernst Junger, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Edgar Julius Jung, Oswald Spengler, Othmar Spann, Ernst Niekisch, Karl Haushofer, and Carl Schmitt have all been highly influential on Dugin (Clover 2016: 178). From Fascist Italy, the works of Julius Evola are especially important, and from post-World War II France, the work of the far-right identitarian thinker,

Alain de Benoist, cannot be underestimated. The "traditionalist" strain of Dugin's thought is especially grounded in the anti-modernist work of the French mystic Sufi Rene Guenon, while the form of ultra-conservative Orthodox Christianity he follows is decidedly the "Old Believers" sect, who rejects the 17th century reforms of the official Orthodox Church (De Simone 2018). As for the Eurasianist basis upon which Dugin's philosophy stands, he appropriated the works of Nikolai Yakovlevish Danilevsky, especially his book *Russia and Europe,* wherein it is argued that Russia is not Europe, but rather its own civilization, i.e., Eurasia. This Eurasianist strain of thought is also grounded in  the founding generation of anti-European, anti-Bolshevik, and monarchist thinkers, namely the Russian exiled Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy and his co-Eurasinists: Petr Savitsky, Petr Suvchinsky, and Georges Florovsky (Danilevskii 2013; Arnold and Stachelski 2020).[11] The latter group of monarchist intellectuals formulated much of their work in response to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, as well as against the growing influence of European culture within Russia. The Soviet ethnologist and Neo-Eurasianist, Lev Gumilev, and his concept of "passionarity" (пассионарность), an obscure word akin to "civilizational force," has played a major role in Dugin's ethnological thought (Bassin 2016; Dugin 2018; Dugin 2019). The Russian philosopher, Ivan Alexandrovich Ilyin, exiled from the Soviet Union due to his fascist philosophy, has also been a decisive influence on Dugin. However, Ilyin's influence on Vladimir Putin may be even more pronounced, so much so that Putin repatriated Ilyin's writings back from the United States in 2006 and frequently quotes him (or his main ideas) in his speeches (MSU Today 2006).

According to Charles Clover, the author of *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (2016), which chronicles the development of the "Fourth Political Theory" and its influence in Putin's Kremlin, it was *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right) author Alain de Benoist who first introduced the enigmatic Russian to the fascist thinkers that would ultimately define his political philosophy and geopolitics (Clover 2016: 180). Within Russia's post-Soviet chaos, such fascist thinkers were an intellectual goldmine to Dugin, offering him theological, cultural, and geopolitical analyses that had been suppressed in the Soviet Union. While communism stressed egalitarianism and internationalism, these thinkers proposed the opposite: nationalism, anti-modernism, anti-mondialism, and a critique of the West and its dysgenic future trajectory. Although de Benoist rejected the idea that he introduced Dugin to the work of Karl Haushofer, the "father of Nazi geopolitics," he readily admits he introduced Dugin to the works of Carl Schmitt during one of his visits to Paris in the 1990s (Ibid.).[12] This encounter between the

anti-1968 reactionary intellectual, Alain de Benoist, and the eccentric Russian theorist who would soon have the ear of the Russian military and the Kremlin, was decisive for the 21st century, as it married Slavophilic thought with European conservativism, along with its ideological defender: fascism. From that point on, Dugin would develop out of these many disparate influences his neo-fascist "Fourth Political Philosophy," which animates the thinking of the Eurasianist Kremlin today.[13]

While Carl Schmitt's influence on Dugin appears throughout the latter's work in numerous ways, including the binary struggle between "Sea Power" (*Thalassocracy*) (The West) versus the Land based power (*Tellurocracy*) (Russia/Eurasia), as well as his "friend/enemy distinction" as the "essence of politics," it is his appropriation of the concept of the Katechon that we're focusing in on here (Schmitt 1996: 35; Schmitt 1997). As we'll see, the concept of the Katechon has become an integral part of Dugin's ideology justifying Russia's claim to being a resurgent superpower, determined to break the neo-liberal hegemony of the West, especially the United States, bringing about a "multipolar world."

In none of Dugin's major books does he deliver an extensive meditation on the meaning of the Katechon. Rather, it is mentioned sporadically throughout a number of his books, social media postings, articles, etc. Nevertheless, it can be surmised from those passages that Dugin has, in some ways, returned the notion of the Katechon back to St. Paul's religious sphere, and thus away from Schmitt's secularization. However, Dugin's rendering of the concept is not entirely identical with the anonymous "restraining" force that St. Paul proposed to the Thessalonian Church. Rather, Dugin restores the religious nature of the concept but combines it with Carl Schmitt's notion that a worldly – yet religious – institution can serve the function of the Katechon. For instance, in the aforementioned article by Dugin published on the website Katehon.com, Dugin discusses Russia's "special military operation," i.e., its 2022 "war of aggression" on Ukraine, by placing the conflict within the spiritual binary of the Russian Katechon versus the West as Antichrist. He writes,

> *Either this area of the world will come under the omophorion of Christ and His Immaculate Mother, or it will remain under the dominion of Satan, who will immensely strengthen his dominion over what is, in fact, the cradle of our Russian statehood, Church and culture, our people. The fight for Donbass, for Odessa, for Kiev, and even for Lviv is part of the great eschatological battle. Reality*

*precedes dreams – including imperial eschatological dreams. The era of materialism, economics, rational analysis, experts, technocrats, managers is over. Ideas are returning to our world (Dugin 2022).*

He then reminds his listener of the eschatological role Russia playing, from his perspective in his fight:

*And the main battle from now on unfolds between them [ideas vs. "the era of materialism…"]. Between the Russia Idea, the Catechon [sp], the Orthodox Civilization, and the world of the Western Antichrist, coming at us. It is not us Russians who need Ukraine. It is Christ who needs it. And that is why we are there. And that is why we are not leaving it (Ibid.).*

Dugin's move here is to give the Russian "special military operation" a soteriological meaning and mission. The "blitzkrieg" that began on February 24, 2022, which transformed into a "totalen krieg" – a total war against the entire people of Ukraine – is meant to bring the wayward Ukrainian people, who have been spellbound by the Satanic West, back into the fold of God's chosen empire: Putin's Eurasianist Russia. In this sense, Moscow's war is an attempt to fulfill its eschatological role on earth, bestowed upon it by the privilege of being the "Third Rome." In Dugin's book, *Putin vs. Putin: Vladimir Putin viewed from the Right,* Dugin explains that Moscow "always played a significant eschatological role in Orthodox Russia," because it is the inheritor of Roman religious authority (after the fall of Constantinople to the Muslim Turks in 1453) (Dugin 2014: 11).[14] As such, the "meaning of the Tsardom was that of a state which recognizes the truth of the Orthodox church in its entirety," including the idea that Orthodox Moscow is "a barrier in the way of the son of perdition, the Antichrist, the Katechon, 'the one who withholds.'" (Ibid., 11-12). If this designation of Russia as the new Katechon is applied to the current war on Ukraine, Russia is transformed from the aggressor to Ukraine's eschatological savior. The logic is as followed: if Ukraine were to follow the Western/EU/NATO model, with free-market capitalism, democracy, fair elections, political accountability, the guarantee of human and civil rights, including the freedom of speech, expression, and political association, etc., it would inevitably lead to the "dominion of Satan" in heartland of the Russ. Kyiv, the first capitol of the Russ, would no longer be distinguishable from London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome, or any other European capitol, wherein secular liberalism, globalism, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, individualism, theomachist atheism, and every other form of cultural "degeneracy" reign supreme, including LGBTQ rights, which

for Dugin is especially offensive. For this to happen, it would be as if the sacred city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, central to the faith of all Muslims, was lost to the forces of Western hedonism. Such is unthinkable from Dugin's perspective, and thus the Katechon must act. As to "save" Ukraine from itself, the 21st century's Katechon, Putin's Russia, must "restrain" Ukraine by force from the seduction of the West. If it will not save itself from the Antichrist, its "brother" people will rescue it and return it back to the fold of Christ. As Dugin wrote, "We Russians don't need Ukraine. Christ needs Ukraine. And that is why we're there."

One should bear in mind that Alexander Dugin blames the post-Soviet Russian state of being a "carbon copy of the secular-European model," which nurtured its own ontology independent of the Russia people, whom he believes have been "chosen by Divine Providence for a special mission" (Ibid., 61-62). In order to rectify this historical mistake, the state must engage in an "anagogic" process, wherein it elevates itself to "serve the people and the Church instead of forcing them to serve the state" (Ibid., 63). In order to attain this, Dugin seeks to "eradicate the state and replace it with the Holy Empire, a *basileus* [king], a comprehensive Katechonic Tsardom, where the divine rays directly fuse with the great God-bearing people" (Ibid.). This removal of the secular-European "carbon copy" state for an authoritarian Orthodox-aligned (or Orthodox-serving) state, commanded by a Tsarist sovereign, who has the power to determine the "state of exception," has increasingly becoming the reality of Vladimir Putin's rule over Russia, as power becomes more centralized within the office of the President, as substantive opposition has been neutralized, whether that opposition comes in the form of rival politicians, independent media, or adversaries within the state. In a *60 Minutes Overtime* interview with Leslie Stahl, filmed in 2017 but aired in 2022, Dugin reminded Stahl that Putin is in an "absolute position of absolutist power" because Russia is a "monarchist society from below" (2022). Thus, from Dugin's perspective, it is not Putin who imposes "monarchism or authoritarian rule" upon the Russian people, but rather he says, "we demand from him to be much more authoritarian than he is. He, a little bit disappoints us, because it takes too long" (Ibid.). With this in mind, it can be argued that the more Putin consolidates power into a neo-Tsarist state, tearing down the vestiges of post-Soviet democracy, the more he embodies the soteriological role of Russia as the world's present Katechon. To democratize and/or westernize is the shirk what Dugin thinks is Russia's eschatological responsibility. To deliver the people "chosen by Divine Providence for a special mission" over to the liberalism, is to abandon the Orthodox world's responsibility to "restrain" Antichrist – their "special mission." Thus, to not become

a neo-Tsar, to not create an authoritarian state, to not reintegrate the post-Soviet Union states back into an Eurasian empire, would be a capitulation to the Antichrist. Thus, in order for Putin to fulfill his role to the Orthodox Church, and thus to God, he must gather to himself as much power as possible so that he may be the Katechon that the "monarchist society from below" demands of him. That which horrifies the West, i.e., Putin's increasing authoritarianism, disregard for international law and international standards, his unprovoked war against Ukraine, his assassination of political opponents, his silencing of the free press, etc., is that which must be done if his Katechonic position is to be realized. Thus, the more the West pushes back against Russia, the more it impedes Russia's plans for Ukraine and its other post-Soviet neighbors, the more it creates a self-reenforcing narrative: the West is the Antichrist, attempting to undermine and defeat God's Katechonic force. Following that logic, the more Russian soldiers are killed in Ukraine, the more Putin can attest to the ferocity of the Antichrist and the growing need for his Katechonic force to do whatever it needs to in order to defeat the forces of evil that are threatening Russia and its wayward former Soviet Republics.

## Conclusion

Dugin's reintegration of Schmitt's formerly secularized Katechon back into a religious sphere imbues the "restrainer" with God-like authority, thus elevating the force that "restrains" the Antichrist into a cosmic confrontation that takes place within history between the forces of good and evil. It is no longer a matter of an ambiguous force working to delay the apocalypse, as it was with St. Paul; it is no longer a matter of a historical empire working to maintain stability and order in a chaotic world, as it was with Schmitt's secularization of the Katechon; it is now a combination of both: Russia is the historical empire, and Vladimir Putin is the historical emperor, who are active within the earthly-bound cosmic struggle between the forces of good that restrain the forces of evil.

Russia, being identified as the new Katechon by Alexander Dugin, has handed a convenient and powerful political theology to Putin. In his role as the new Tsar, acting as the head-of-state of the Katechon, Putin assumes the ultimate authority to determine the "state of exception," not only within the borders of his own country, but also within the post-Cold War world order. Utilizing Schmitt's logic wedded to Dugin's eschatological framing, Putin has seized the authority to suspend authority, to violate international laws, and forcibly reintegrate former Soviet Republics – former pieces of the Russian Empire – back into the Russia Federation, precisely

because he is the divinely legitimated sovereign that determines the limits of his earthly power. No constitution, nor domestic law, no international law, can challenge the authority of this divinely-appointed sovereign. Earthly restrictions on the actions of states matters not at all; what matters is that the eschatological confrontation between Katechonic Russia and the Antichrist West be won by the former, for the whole world has become dependent on the Katechon's success. As such, Russian forces in Ukraine, who are credibly accused of mass atrocities, including systematic rape of Ukrainian women and girls (and in some cases boys), as well as mass executions of civilians, bear total authority to inflict whatever kind of harm deemed necessary to win Ukraine for Christ, for God is on the side of the Katechonic sovereign, and so is Patriarch Kirill's Orthodox Church, God's "Third Rome." And thus, just like the Crusaders, the invading Russian forces can claim divine prerogatives: "Deus Vult" – "God wills it."

What Alexander Dugin has created is an ideology that not only legitimates but also sanctifies all forms of depravity in the name of St. Paul's "restrainer." While the Apostle's restrainer holds back the forces of chaos, destruction, and disorder, Dugin's Katechon unleashes the forces of chaos, destruction, and disorder, in the name of defeating "the enemy," the Antichrist, whom he designates as being the West, most prominently the United States of America. His claims to seek a "multipolar" world, wherein other global spheres of influence can determine their own historical trajectory, free from the hegemony of the West, is an altruistic façade, meant to imbue virtue into Russia's acts of aggression against its neighbors and those who oppose its ambitions. In reality, what Dugin dreams of is a reconstructed "Holy Russian Empire," a palingenetic "second chance" inheritor of Christianity, nestled within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union. This empire, like those before it, can claim the prerogatives of God, just as Schmitt's sovereign claimed the prerogatives of God. Whereas the "demilitarization" and "denazification" of Ukraine are the stated "war goals" of Putin's invasion, supposedly to end Ukraine's "Russophobic" threat, the real goals are much earthlier: power. Vladimir Putin would like to have Russia once again at the forefront of history, a world-historical force, as opposed to being a regional nuisance to the neo-liberal world order. If such an aspiration can be married to divine justification, all the better. If that means that the enemy has to be identified, so that the friend/enemy dialectic can galvanize the Russian people to his imperial cause, then it must be done. If the enemy must be tarred by the false accusation that they are "Nazis," all the better, as it invokes the 27 million Soviets murdered by German fascists; a historical trauma still felt today throughout the former Soviet

Union, including Ukraine. If that supposed enemy is said to pose an existential threat, because it is cosmically charged with the task of destroying all that is good, then all the better. The Katechon nation of Russia will seize the moral, spiritual, and civilizational high ground and fight for all that is good in the world, while the enemy, the West, that which "restrains" Russia's imperial vision, will be deemed the ultimate evil.

# Note

1. For the purposes of consistency, I will utilize the generally accepted Latinization of the Greek word ὁ κατέχων, spelling it as "Katechon," as opposed to "Catechon" or "Katehon."
2. The Russian President, Vladimir Putin introduced the phrase "special military operation" in his February 24, 2022, speech, wherein he claimed he would launch an invasion of Ukraine in order to "demilitarize" and "denazify" Ukraine. Putin would later go on to sign a law that could impose a 15-year prison sentence for those referring to the conflict as a "war" or an "invasion," and not a "special military operation."
3. New International Version of the Bible. The Greek and Latinized Greek terms were included by the author, as well as the italicization.
4. One should bear in mind that traditional Orthodox teachings see Moscow as the "Third Rome," the inheritor of Roman/Christian authority after the fall of the Roman Empire and later the Byzantine Empire. As such, an Orthodox Emperor as the Katechon is the logical extension of the claim that the Roman Empire was the original Katechon, having then passed that mantle on to its successors in Constantinople and then Moscow.
5. Daniel 11:29-35 reads as such: "At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant. His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed

time." Being that the prophet Daniel lived approximately 350 years before Antiochus IV Epiphanes' desecration of the Temple in Jerusalem, scholars assume Daniel's "prophecy" was used to interpret Antiochus IV Epiphanes' actions as opposed to have foretold them.

6.  The Roman/Jewish historian Flavius Josephus tells us that Caligula changed his mind, and therefore recalled his intension to erect a statue of himself in the Temple (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:290-309). It remains unclear whether or not Josephus was correct.

7.  My translation.

8.  The U.S. as a Katechon was not an entirely good thing in Schmitt mind, especially since it opposed the world-historical project of the Third Reich, which Schmitt thought was itself a Katechonic force.

9.  John Calvin believed that the Katechon was not an individual, institution, or the Holy Spirit, but rather thought that it was the process of evangelization. In other words, the eschaton would not come until the whole of the world had hear the Gospel of Christ. Only then would the apocalypse come to fruition. This interpretation detaches the concrete particularity of the Katechon, as it seems to have been formulated in St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, to Christian praxis.

10. We will return to this point later.

11. For an early critique of Danilevsky and Eurasianist thought, see Robert E. MacMaster, *Danilevsky: A Russia Totalitarian Philosopher.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967. In an act that supports the claim that Ivan Ilyin is Putin's "favorite fascist," in 2006, after Ilyin's work and corpse were repatriated to Russia, Putin publicly placed flowers on Ilyin's grave with Patriarch Kirill consecrating the grave. "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited the cemetery of the Donskoy Monastery." N.D. http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/4226/print/ See Andrew Stuttaford, "The (Re)birth of Ivan Ilyin." April 19, 2014. https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/rebirth-ivan-ilyin-andrew-stuttaford/

12. Also see Holger H. Herwig, *The Demon of Geopolitics: How Karl Haushofer "Educated" Hitler and Hess.* Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

13. Dugin claims that his "Fourth Political Theory" is not liberalism, communism, or fascism, but a new hybrid of these theories, thus creating a *fourth* great political theory. As is often the case with Dugin's eclectic theories, he mistakes a philosophical genus and a philosophical species. While his Fourth Political Theory is a separate species from Italy's Fascism and Hitler's National Socialism, it is clearly within the same genus as these two political philosophies. As such, the Fourth Political Theory is merely a Russian form of Fascism, cobbled together out of earlier forms of fascism with a smattering of Russian enculturation. Dugin's book, "The Fourth Political Theory" is the greatest testament to

the idea that fascism lives on well beyond its defeat on the battlefield in World War II, and that it can even infest those countries that were decidedly against it in prior times.

14. The famous saying by the Russian Orthodox monk Hegumen Filofei of Pskov in 1510, was "Two Romes have fallen. The third stands. There will be no fourth." This underlies the logic of the supposed Third Rome's historical responsibility to fight the forces of the Antichrist. There will be no fourth Rome if the Third falls to the Antichrist. Thus, it is either support the Third Rome or face the apocalypse.

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# Iran after Ayatollah Khamenei

## *Possible Scenarios*

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## Abstract

Iran *After Ayatollah Khamenei* could be conceived in a variety of different ways but this problem needs to be understood in relation to a wider background and that is the patterns of political culture in Iran as a long-standing civilizational unit. In other words, I do not take on with this question in terms of the demise of a leader and the emergence of another leader. On the contrary, the very nub of this problematique should be interwoven into the textures of Iranian political culture as far as *succession* is concerned. Iranians are not as a nation very open to changes and transformations and for them to hold on the *status quo* is a *way of life* and that is what makes them to endure ad infinitum in the course of history. This is to emphasize that when we articulate the question of Iran *after Ayatollah Khamenei,* we should bear in mind that this query should be conceptualized in terms of historical sense of conservation of Iranian identity rather than a passing political question vis-à-vis a political leader.

**Keywords:** Political Culture, Succession, Status Quo, Way of Life, Ayatullah Khamenei

## Introduction

Iran *After Ayatollah Khamenei* could be conceived in various different ways but this question needs to be understood in relation to a wider context and that is the patterns of political culture in Iran as a long-standing civilizational unit. In other words, I do not engage with this question in terms of the demise of a leader and the emergence of another leader. On the contrary, the very nub of this question should be interwoven into the textures of Iranian political culture as far as *succession* is concerned. Iranians are not as a nation very open to changes and transformations and for them to hold on the *status quo* is a *way of life* and that is what makes them to survive continuously in the course of history. This is to argue that when we speak of Iran *after Ayatollah Khamenei,* we should bear in mind that this question should be conceptualized in terms of historical sense of conservation of Iranian identity rather than a passing political question vis-à-vis a political leader. To put it more clearly; when we speak of possible future scenarios this should not be understood in trivial journalistic fashions but rather, we should contextualize the question within the broader frame of historical realities of Iranian society. One of the lessons we may learn from doing so is that Iranians may be unhappy about their state functionaries but they wisely distinguish between Iran as a longstanding social reality and Iran as a political state. By doing so, they have internalized the hard lessons of history that those who do not distinguish between these two realities do not last very long. But ironically the distinction between these two poles and by assuming a gap between the state and society, itself, is a very untenable position in the context of later-modernity of present hyper-globalizing world order. In other words, in a sense the inbuilt historical indifference of Iranians towards their state has created a paradoxical state of affairs when we think of Iran *after Ayatollah Khamenei* and the possible scenarios which may arise in the near future. One reason for this could be the *image of state* in Iran which is rarely an impersonal image. On the contrary, the hegemonic image of state is always personified in the body of the king and now after the collapse of royal tradition in the body of the *jurist* who wears the *mantle of the prophet*. In the Shiite tradition, it seems this mantle should be solely worn by a *Seyyed* who carries the noble lineage of *House of the Prophet*. This is to argue that one of the controversial questions in Shiite politics could be the *rites of succession* and in this fashion the passing of Ayatollah Khamenei would put the nation before a grand scale trauma. However, it would be a grave mistake to think of this traumatic period as the end of the state as this traumatic panic could have a paradoxical effect upon the runners of the state as it did once after the demise of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1988. In European royal tradition there is a phrase which

captures this dilemma in an eloquent fashion, i.e. "The King Is Dead, Long Live the King"! This is to emphasize simultaneously the previous monarch's death and assure the public of continuity by saluting the new monarch. This tradition is not only confined to the European political culture but it is traceable in Iran too. To put it differently, when we speak of the state of leadership and its transformations, we should bear in mind that these changes and transformations are embedded within the context of a political culture which cherished vigilantly the *continuity of the office* above and beyond anyone else. This is to argue that when we reflect upon Iran after Ayatollah Khamenei and the possible future scenarios which may occur afterwards then this should not divert our attentions from understanding the wider political culture which allows Ayatollah Khamenei operate within it. In other words, it is a grave mistake to misread the signs of the Iranian political culture by reconfiguring all the complex signs in reference to an individual. This is to argue, we need to distance from reducing complex historical phenomena into psychology of an individual person and I do believe that most analyses on the future of Iran in terms of leadership tend to commit this mistake. But we try in this study to have a different approach on the possible future scenarios and prospective scenarists in Iran.

The question which has been chosen for this research is related to the state of affairs after the era of Ayatollah Khamenei in Iran. In order to understand the state of affairs in Iran and draw her possible future scenarios we need to have a rounded understanding of the current political forces which exist in the Iranian society. But to speak of these forces without taking into consideration the historical realities which have shaped the contours of contemporary society of Iran, it is almost impossible to forecast such a possible scenario of the future without having that historical view in mind. In other words, when we think of possible developments of Iran, it is incumbent upon us to reflect on various factors and issues which have made the three decades rule of Ayatollah Khamenei possible and also its continuation a politically feasible project. However, it is important to avoid reductionist explanations which are all too often repeated in the context of political analyses which misread political questions in an ancient society such as Iran. In this chapter, I shall focus on Iran after Ayatollah Khamenei in terms of the question of *succession*. In other words, the important question before the Iranian establishment is how to manage the passing of power in a legitimate fashion. But this is not a new question in history of Iran both in strictly Islamic tradition of Iran and Royal tradition in the pre-Islamic context of Iran. This is to argue that the question of succession has always been one of the most controversial issues in Iran and by the

rise of Islam this question has not become easier to manage but got even more complex. Homa Katouzian (2004) talks about the problem of *legitimate succession* as one of the daunting questions which needs to be reflected upon in the context of Iranian history as far as the societal development of Iran is considered. In other words, when we ask about *Iran after Ayatollah Khamenei* we are not talking solely about an individual person or the demise of a leader and the rise of a new leader but we are actually inquiring upon a political tradition which seems to be unpredictable in terms of *succession*.

The historical records of Islamic Republic of Iran give us a model itself to think about the possible scenarios after Ayatollah Khamenei. I categorize the model in three different forms:

## Charismatic Leadership

Ayatollah Khomeini represents a leadership by charisma in the history of Islamic Republic of Iran and nobody has ever been able to compete with him as far as leadership by charisma is concerned. In other words, the question of legitimacy which has been one of the contested questions in the context of Iranian politics was absolved by the emergence of a charismatic leader during the first decade of the Republic since 1979. This is to argue that the revolutionary climate created a state of affairs that the division between state and people was filled by *charisma*. But as many classical sociologists such as Weber has rightly argued the charismatic qualities cannot be conferred to the next leader and this, itself, may create some deep-rooted problems as far as legitimate succession is considered. In the case of Islamic Republic of Iran, we have had this controversy as well but the 'revolutionary generation' seems to hold still some kind of charismatic aura for certain social strata after the demise of Ayatollah Khomeini. This is to argue that we can witness some form of constructions whereby certain qualities associated with 'revolutionary generation' were fused into the office of leadership and this itself paved the way for the emergence of a post-Charismatic leadership who lacked charisma but has the group charisma (associated with the revolutionary generation).

## Bureaucratization of Charisma

In the second phase we are faced with the office of leadership as a bureaucratic post which is upheld to safeguard the sanctity of charisma by the assistance of a bureaucratic apparatus. Here we can see that the charisma has been conferred upon

the office and the holder of the office due to revolutionary seems to hold a bureaucratic form of charisma. This bureaucratic charisma is different than leadership by charisma but it is still a kind of charisma which should be conceptualized as leadership by *charismatic office*. Now the question which is related to my research here is what will happen when the time of leadership by charismatic office is over? Should we expect some kind of collapse of the system as such? Or should we witness a kind of political transition from the Islamic Republic into a Republic with *secular tendencies*? Is it a military junta the next step after Ayatollah Khamenei? Or some even think of the re-turn of Pahlavi Royal Family as an option? Which scenarios are possible and feasible? Here I think there is a sense that the system cannot regenerate vital forces of leadership which could make a general consensus possible among various fractions of the Iranian political elite. But how factual is this assumption? Is the system unable to regenerate itself and craft a new national consensus? Most critics outside Iran compare the political terrain *after Ayatollah Khamenei* to the last decade of the Soviet Union and based on this analogy foresee a collapse of the Republic after the demise of current leadership of Iran. But I disagree with this view due to my understanding of the distinction between the ideology of communism in the Soviet Union of Russia and the episteme of jurisprudence in Iran. In other words, the analogy is wrong as the ideology of communism did not arise from within the various historical traditions of different societies of the Soviet Union while the Shiite jurisprudence seems to have deeper connections to Iranian subconscious. Having said this, I do not think that after Ayatollah Khamenei the contours of this office stay intact. (Ashraf, 1990) This is to argue that we are going to witness a third phase of leadership which is not either by charisma (as in the first decade of IRI) or by bureaucratization of charisma (as during the reign of Ayatollah Khamenei) but it is best conceptualized as *Charismatization* of *bureaucracy*. What kind of charisma is this possible future form of leadership?

## Charismatization of Bureaucracy

Charismatization of bureaucracy is not a novel phenomenon in the history of Muslim societies as we can find antecedents to this event as early as the beginning of Khalifat form of governance. At the early stage of Khalifat the office got its prominence and sanctity from the very person of Khalif but later on we started to see a huge transformation where the office itself was sanctified and endowed sacral credibility upon the person who wore the mantle of khalif. In other words, gradually

we are entering a stage in the Islamic Republic where the office itself is sanctified and elevated to a sacral position and its sacrality seems to be interwoven with traditional symbols such as "Prophetic Nobility" (سيادة). By "Prophetic Nobility" I refer to the lineage which is associated to the House of Prophet and among Shiites this plays a very significant role in the constitution of religious affairs and it seems this *nobility* is associated with the office of leadership as the first and the second leaders of Islamic Republic have been a "Seyyed". Of course, one could see resemblances between this Shiite definition of holiness and the notions of "Divine Aura" (فره ايزدى) or "Shadow of God" (ظل السلطان) but after the establishment of Islamic Republic in 1980 –not in 1979- there was a tendency to suppress any kind of relationship between the idea and office of "Rule of Jurist" and its predecessors such as King or Sultan and Khalif but by gradual advancement of the idea and steady institutionalization of the office we cannot but see deep historical continuities rather than discontinuities. In other words, what could be foreseen in the near future is not a collapse of the *office* but formal transformation rather than substantial change. This is to argue that *after Ayatollah Khamenei* I do not foresee an abolishment of the *office of the jurist* but a sanctification of the office as such regardless of its future functionaries. But the question is what kind of consequences would such a change have upon the fabric of the state? In other words, what would be the arrangements of political forces in the third phase of the Republic? In order to answer this question, we need to distance from apocalyptic discoursed concocted by yellow journalism which paints colorful scenarios about Iran's future after Ayatollah Khamenei as though the whole system is reliant on one single person. This is to argue we need to delve into group alliances which have occurred now or/and may occur *after Ayatollah Khamenei*. To put it differently, I do not interpret the research question of this project solely in terms of the person of Ayatollah Khamenei but I regard this problematique in terms of four major intellectual/political/ideological currents in Iranian political landscape.

## Four Major Intellectual/Political Currents in Morrow's Iran

I would like to categorize the major currents in morrow's Iran as following:

1.    Militant Islamism

2.    Militant Nationalism

3.    Civil Islamism

4.    Civil Nationalism

These are the four major trends which somehow imbue various parties and discourses in Iranian society at large. For some, Iran is the focal idea but for others Islamism is the towering point of departure but the way these two major ideas are conceptualized is of great significance. In other words, the question is how these two major ideas and ideologies consider the relation between state and society; in the nationalist discourse the society should be at the disposal of the nationalist state policies without any regard to diversities or human right issues and democracy and in the Islamist discourse it is the society which should be at the service of Islamist state policies without any regard for society and its diversities. This is to argue that both of these ideologies in their respective militant forms are deeply harmful for Iranian society as such but during these past 40 years something else also has happened in Iran which one should not disregard and that is the growth of the 'social' as a decisive element in the constitution of self, society and politics. That is why we can talk about two other positions along with militant Nationalism and militant Islamism, i.e., civil Nationalism and civil Islamism.

However, conventionally the Iranian political forces are categorized broadly in terms of reformists versus conservatists but this classification have become outdated after the 2009 uprising which led to divisions between followers of both reformists and conservatists. In other words, Mahmud Ahmadinejad had the power to bring deep-seated changes to the camps of both reformists and conservatists by crafting new alliances which gave birth to new political formations such as old conservatism versus new conservatism and mild reformism versus extreme reformism and even overlapping between the new conservatism and some spectrums of reformism which felt disappointed by the alliance of old conservatism and mild reformism in the person of Hassan Rouhani. But I think these categories and alliances are gradually becoming obsolete due to new transformations and changes which are not solely in the context of ruling families and parties and governing elites but within Iranian society. All these forms of political platforms such as old/new conservatism and mild/extreme reformism (and even various visible and invisible overlapping alliances of these four different political inclinations) are parts and parcels of an overarching ideology of Islamism. Islamism as a revolutionary ideology was able to suppress all its competitors and hold power over Iranian society since 1979. However, this change of ideology did not happen in a vacuum but it occurred in the context of nationalism and socialism/communism and aspects of technocratic liberalism of the Pahlavi dynasty. Once Islamism as a state ideology took the upper hand over society, the functionaries of the jurisprudential state claimed that they are aiming to implement the verdicts of the divine in the soil of society and on the body

of the nation. This was actually an extreme version of Islamism which did not have any regard for civil dimensions of society and as a matter of fact it regarded society as a tool for the advancement of Islamism both as an instrument and as an ideal. In other words, by suppressing the national identity of Iranian society and instead focusing on the internationalism of Islamist ideology the state drove the society to the verge of complete national alienation but this did not last long. Of course, here we can mention both internal (failures of revolutionary promises and institutionalized corruption) and external dynamics (the Iran-Iraq war and the subsequent trends of *Iranophobic* policies of neighboring Persian Gulf countries) which led to re-emergence of nationalism as a very strong discourse in Iran by the advance of the third decade after the victory of Iranian Revolution in 1979. But this reemerged nationalism of 21st century due to its suppressed characters carries militant features within itself.

Now let me reread the main principle of this project. i.e., *After Ayatollah Khamenei* in the context which I have depicted. If we agree that the future politics of Iran is not going to be decided along the conventional lines of reformism versus conservatism then the question is how are we going to conceptualize the future trends and along which lines? As I mentioned earlier, I do see the future trends in the complex matrix of militant Islamism versus civil Islamism and militant Nationalism versus civil Nationalism. But it would be a mistake to see the future possible scenarios *after Ayatollah Khamenei* in a simplistic four distinguished lines of progress which will never cross each other. On the contrary, hypothetically we may forecast different possible scenarios in whichever case all outcomes may not be desirable nationally, regionally and even globally. The first position which has seized state power is the Militant Islamism; the second position which seems to brew in certain corners of the society is the Militant Nationalism; the third position which has grown out of the battles of various political skirmishes within the revolutionary forces of the state after four incessant decades is the Civil Islamism; and the last position which is part of the Iranian longstanding civilization is Civil Nationalism which its roots go back as far as Iran as a diverse and multilingual as well as multi-religious reality and in tune with cosmopolitan culture of modern era. So far, we have experienced partially the dominance of militant Islamism which in recent times turned into fundamentalist Shiite ideology and if it will take the upper hand in the region then we shall witness a new large-scale war. This war may be between two destructive forms of fundamentalisms of Militant Shiism versus Militant Wahhabism. In my view, the four decades of Islamism in Iran seems to have curbed the mobilizing potentials of this ideology for a remapping of politics in

this direction. In other words, the 'other' in this context is Wahhabism and the end-result is a kind of semi-cosmological war for the renunciation of all evils. The second scenario could be that of Militant Nationalism which seems to grow among segments of society and parts of marginal political groups in Iran. This, however, seems to be diametrically at odds with the official line of Islamic Republic's ideology and as long as Ayatollah Khamenei is alive, I do not see any real future for this position in the hierarchy of power. Having said this, I should allude to few aspects of this ideology which seems to have influenced certain second rank politicians in Iran who believe that the age of Islamism is over in Iran and the era of Nationalism has just begun in a post-Khamenei context. How do these second rank politicians justify their paradigm-shift from militant Islamism to Nationalism (or even militant nationalism)? The main argument of proponents of this second current is that due to the failures of the state, the Iranian society has shifted from Islam (and any isms associated with it) into a new ideational force, i.e., Iran. This is to argue that Iranian nationalism in the age of globalization and post-globalizing realities seems to experience resurgence but militant elements of these nationalistic sentiments could pose dangers both nationally and regionally. One may ask in what ways this resurgence could pose fatal dangers in the region. I think this is a valid question and few have reflected upon the consequences of political paradigm-shift from militant Islamism into militant nationalism. If we agree that the 'other' in the context of militant Islamism was the west and after the Iraq-Iran war gradually was extended to Saudi Arabia (and its allies) then the 'other' in the context of militant nationalism could be shifted from the denominational index (such as Sunnism or Wahhabism) to a kind of archaic racial notion of 'Arab' vis-à-vis 'Persian Aryan Race'. In other words, nationalism divorced from religious dimensions could be very dangerous ideology in the region and as long as Ayatollah Khamenei is alive, I do not see any real chance for this ideological position in Iran. However, there are two other important positions which have social endorsements and those are of Civil Islamism and Civil Nationalism. However, we do not see strong rapprochements between the proponents of these two trends in Iran but socially speaking we can discern tangible tendencies within the Iranian society where certain positive elements of religion are cherished while cultural elements of Iranian identity are welcomed as well but how to forge alliance between these two at a political level is a matter which needs to be seen. In other words, civil tendencies of these two positions are visible in social terms but how to translate these social terms into political agenda remains contested and unclear.

## Conclusion

I have tried to inquire about the overall question in regard to Iran *After Ayatollah Khamenei* in this chapter but here in the final section I would like to round up my discussions and put forward my final assessments about the proposed problematique. In other words, I think the very construction of this problematique itself is a very problematical form of conceptualization as it seems there are elements of tacit orientalism in its very textures. Let me explain my points in some details. Within anthropological studies there are two very key concepts of *emic* and *etic* and they respectively refer to two kinds of fieldworks: **emic**, from within the social group (from the standpoint of the subject) and **etic**, from outside (from the angle of the observer). In other words, in this very form of conceptualizing the problematique it seems the complexity of Iranian society is reduced into the very person of her leader (i.e., Ayatollah Khamenei) and the importance of this question is assessed in relation to western political establishment. It may be of interest to note that this form of analyzing and conceptualizing the so-called oriental societies, in general, and Iran, in particular, are not without precedents as we can mention historical cases such as the ones proposed by Carter administration vis-à-vis the Shah of Iran before the Iranian Revolution of 1979. In relation to the Shah, all the complexities of the Iranian societies were reduced to one single person and his health took the front seat and all the assessments came to be weighed in terms of Shah's physical conditions. In this present case it seems the same pattern is discernible as though the whole complexities of contemporary Iranian political life is reducible into the life of Ayatollah Khamenei and the future of Iran as a nation (as a culture and as an ancient civilization) is conceivable in terms of his future health. For instance, there are studies which suggest that it was possible to determine the outcome of the 1979 revolution if the Carter administration would have known about the Shah's illness and based on this analogy some scholars/analysts suggest that it is imperative to know about the possible scenarios before Iran due to the health of Ayatollah Khamenei. The discourses which follow this analogy seems to be based on an assumption that the health of Iran's supreme leader plays an oversized role in the country's political trajectory, a fact that should not be overlooked by current western policymakers. They further argue that as commander in chief of the country's armed forces and vicar of the Shiite Messiah, Ayatollah Khamenei is the ultimate arbiter over Iran's factionalized political system. In other words, the argument by proponents of this etic perspective is that the incapacity of Ayatollah Khamenei's rule would escalate government infighting, unbridle the Revolutionary Guard and degrade the capacity of the system to

cohesively counter to internal uproars. Then based on this viewpoint, they advice western policymakers' readiness to respond to such an eventuality which could, in particular, turn a new leaf in the U.S.A-Iran relationship for decades to come- and for that, the U.S.A. needs to be prepared with as much intelligence as achievable. But as we mentioned earlier, the complexities of Iranian society and the political culture of Iran have deeply changed in comparison to last century when Iran was ruled by Shah in the Cold War context of international geopolitics. It seems analyses of this kind are unable to take into consideration the transformed subjectivity of a non-western society and still insisting on a model of analysis where the west is a subject and the orient is an object. To put it differently, we need to understand Iran as a dynamic society where the *political* is not her total reality as such but part of a larger historical entity, i.e., society. As long as we do not heed to this issue in our analysis then whatever possible scenarios which we construct or forecast it would be nothing but *science fiction scenarios* that are rampant in think-tank research institutes run by hawkish politicians in US or elsewhere. On the other hand, what I can foresee is that the next coming decade shall be still the era of Ayatollah Khamenei and the scenarios which have been constructed upon the paradigm of *After Ayatollah Khamenei* will soon be outdated and those who have invested upon these kinds of scenarios shall be disappointed for another ten years or so. But the problem which Iran is facing under Ayatollah Khamenei is the tension between the *res religio* and *res politico*, on the one hand, and the uncontrollable tensions between the religio-political dimensions and the rising and combatant form of the *social*, on the other hand. In other words, one of the plausible future scenarios is that during the reign of Ayatollah Khamenei we shall witness a referendum on key questions and a sea-change of the current constitution in favor of democratic institutions and a rapprochement at regional and global level. My optimism is based on the inherent potentials of civic Islamism which even could be traced in early intellectual life of Ayatollah Khamenei who has been in favor of progressive reading of traditional canonical texts. As I have mentioned elsewhere (Miri, 2014), Islamism is consisted of five different currents (Jurisprudential Islamism, Socialistic Islamism, Democratic Islamism, Liberal Islamism and Salafi Islamism) and Ayatollah Khamenei is able to steer between the three forms of Islamism, i.e., a combination of the Jurisprudential and Socialist and Democratic positions. Last but not least, it would be a grave mistake to think of the Iranian society at large in terms of pre-revolutionary era as Iranians have gone through gigantic mental and cultural transformations which have been inconceivable 40 years ago. This is to argue that

any possible scenario should take this sociological dimension into consideration as without this note all policy recommendations would be ailing.[1]

## Note

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# Similarities and Differences between Shariati's Thoughts and Fundamentalism

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## Abstract

This article seeks to respond to following questions: Was Shariati, who had awakened the dormant religion, aware that what awakened religion looked like? Did he ever pathologize this dormant religion that was to be awakened? These questions are suggestive of the need for a serious rethinking of Shariati on the one hand, and on the other hand, they reflect the rage and fury of the younger generation in the post- "Islamic Revolution" context in Iran.

**Keywords:** Ali Shariati, Revolution, Rebellion, Social System, Social Theory.

## Introduction

This paper seeks to respond to following questions: Was Shariati, who had awakened the dormant religion, aware that what awakened religion looked like? Did he ever pathologize this dormant religion that was to be awakened? These questions are suggestive of the need for a serious rethinking of Shariati on the one hand, and on the other hand, they reflect the rage and fury of the younger generation in the post- "Islamic Revolution" context in Iran. Before beginning the discussion, the questions merit a pause for reflection. Who is the questioner? What is the questioner's intention by posing the above-mentioned questions? Why have the questions been formulated with such words?

It is not difficult to understand that the questioner belongs to the generation and an era unhappy with the status quo of Iran. The questioner is protesting and believed that there is a yawning gap between what was promised to him or her in pre- revolution period of Iran and what was achieved in the post- revolution time. And he is crushed under this gap, a distance of what is and what should have been. Shariati was one of the most influential figures who portrayed very favorable circumstances for the society based on his revolutionary idealism. Now, this generation or those who share a similar fate with this generation, are in the pursuit of a fundamental critique of Shariati as the teacher of Iranians' revolution. What prompted raising these questions is not merely the desire to seek knowledge but rather raising these questions is a sort of activism and protest against the status quo of Iran and against one of the main contributors of a process that led to such situations. I have no particular objection to this issue and to this sort of questioning since it is typical that asking every question is also in itself a kind of action. It is interesting to note that whoever wants to respond to such questions usually responds based on a sort of activism and according to his take on the status quo, his history and tradition, his expectations, hopes and a future portrayed for himself, the society and the world. Anchored within such discourse, the fundamental question is: Is it ever possible to let go of our activism, fury, protest and anxiety over the status quo and think about the question itself? The question that comes to mind is "what is the real content of the question regarding *Shariati's understanding of dormant and awakened religion*?".

This question seemingly informs us either implicitly or explicitly: to begin with, Shariati should have not awakened the dormant religion, i.e., an individual religion that had been in seclusion, and dragged it into the realm of social life. Secondly, Shariati was like a sleepwalker who walked in his sleep unconsciously and was not

aware of the consequences of his movements at all; thus, he could not predict the outcomes and consequences of his movement. And finally, he should have pathologized the awakened religion, which is a metaphor for religion dragged into the social life.

Now let's think about every single assumption in this question. The first assumption is it was Shariati who had brought the individual religion into social life. This assumption, however, seems incorrect. Because our history as Iranians and the history of the vast majority of Muslim societies show that religious culture has always been one of the main and basic components of our political and social life; especially since the religion of Islam and Shi'ism are intrinsically political. To put it in another way, Shariati himself was influenced by our historical tradition, and political and social conditions in a broader spectrum. This status quo was not formed by Shariati and could not be eliminated by him because otherwise, this awakened religion would have returned to dormancy with his death and decades after his passing.

The second assumption of the question constitutes the sentiment that Shariati was in no way aware of the consequences of his movement; hence, he could not prognosticate the ramifications and upshots of his own movement. This sentiment is absolutely accurate but the question that is important to raise is: who was aware of all the consequences of his thoughts, actions, and movements in our society during the time Shariati lived?  Put it simply, is it ever possible to be aware of all the results, necessities and consequences of one's thought, action and social movement? Obviously, this is not possible. Owing to the inherent finiteness of human beings, and the infinite potentials that lie in the meaning of a text, a doctrine, an idea, or in the results and consequences of a socio-political movement, no one can be aware of all the ramifications of his thoughts or actions.  However, it is fair to argue that thinkers as opposed to ordinary people, political authorities, political activists, non-thinkers and preachers, are relatively more aware of the results and necessities of thoughts and movements. This should not be considered an absolute fact. In fact, the awareness stems from one's special approach to teachings and thoughts, the relative freedom from the will to act, his lack of theological and ideological tendencies, his reluctance towards pragmatism and politicization, his studies of other historical traditions, and use of human experience in a broader specter of human life. According to these premises, it must be admitted that Shariati and many other religious, political, social and ideological leaders, and philosophers did not prognosticate where the movements in the society will lead to; it is however unfair not to mention that Shariati was, in comparison to many thinkers, more aware of the

results and ramifications. Due to this awareness, many of Shariati's predictions about the failure of movements and revolutions, the futility of revolutions without the intellectual and philosophical support, how opponents and oppressors would change in many revolutions and show themselves as the heirs and custodian of revolutions, and how movements would rapidly merge into power after gaining power came true. A great number of people reading his works feel that he had a relatively profound understanding of the social and historical phenomena, and feel that he prognosticated some of the current issues a few decades back. This should not be considered as absolute since Shariati could not have been aware of all the results and ramifications of his thoughts and actions because of the inherent finiteness of human beings.

I totally agree with the third assumption of the question, which Shariati should have pathologized the awakened religion. Shariati, indeed, has works replete with pathologies of the culture of degenerated religion. His *Alawi Shi'ism, Safavid Shi'ism* and *Father, Mother, We Are Accused* are dealing with the pathology of the culture of the degenerated or dormant religion. This particular pathology is, however, very different from the one that is todays expected. Shariati criticized the culture of the degenerated religion from the perspective of why religion in this culture has become the cause of stupefying, stillness, lethargy, and immobility. Instead, he sought to accentuated the elements of rebellion, protesting, mobilization and liberation in religion. Just like all our religious, political, social, and ideological leaders, Shariati always thought of religion at the movement stage; and never thought of religion at the stage of institutionalizing a political and social system, its concomitant dangers and its pathologies. This criticism should not be limited to Shariati but rather it includes every thinker even our philosophers. Neither Shariati as a social theorist nor our philosophers seriously and fundamentally posed the question of the intrinsic possibility of establishing a religious state and community in the modern age. Up to now, the fundamental question of 'how is it essentially possible to establish a religious society and state for a secular human being in modern period?' has not been seriously reflected upon. Let me remind that the critique of a discourse occurs only after the departure of the person from the discourse. Simply put, it is an irrational and impossible expectation that we would ask the person within the discourse to critique the discourse. If it had not been because of the post-revolutionary experience, we would be unable to critique the discourse of the past and the pre-revolutionary context. This also holds true for the current context as we are captivated by the particular discourse of our time and it is difficult to critique the current discourse; but certainly, those in the future will

easily critique our discourse. The change of discourse and time, indeed, allows us to critique Shariati and the figures like him.

## What are the Similarities and Differences between Shariati and Fundamentalists in referring to Tradition?

The prerequisite to responding to this question is having a detailed discussion. This question probably implicitly wants to tell us that there is not much difference between Shariati and fundamentalists—constituting different movements and diverse tendencies and ideas— in terms of referring to tradition. Thus, irrespective of the motives and origin of this question, the question of similarities and differences between Shariati and the fundamentalists is a significant question that merits a pause for reflection and attention. To respond to this question, the following points need to be addressed:

1.      Apparently, both Shariati and the fundamentalists call for a return to tradition, and a return to self and indigenous culture. However, there are noticeable differences between Shariati's understanding and fundamentalists' grasp of the concept of tradition, the meaning of self, the pivotal point in tradition, the need to revive the tradition, the link between the tradition and the present world, and how tradition should be revived in the contemporary world. Therefore, concepts such as tradition, self, indigenous culture, religion, Islam, and Shi'ism in Shariati's thoughts and the fundamentalists' perception are only equivocal and bear commonalities and similarities on the surface.

2.      fundamentalists understand tradition as jurisprudence and a complete set of individual, political, social and economic instructions. But what fundamentalists call tradition is a historical matter for Shariati; and the spirit of tradition for him is nothing except a spiritual interpretation of the world and confronting with all the phenomena on the base of the spiritual wisdom.

3.      Tradition for fundamentalists is a theological system, a collection of dogmatic and institutionalized historical beliefs and ideas that forbids any doubt as doubts and critical approaches are tantamount to heresy. Thus, the fundamentalists' rationality and thought are, indeed, theological rationality and thought within the framework of the same dogmatic and institutionalized historical beliefs noted earlier. One can trace theological beliefs in Shariati's thoughts too but in the periphery and not in the main context of his thoughts. His thoughts are, therefore, not theological but rather question the theological rationality and pave the way for critical thinking and transition from theological approach. This is evident in his

efforts to prove theological principles and assumptions with the help of modern sociological and anthropological concepts, and in his use of modern tools such as sociological concepts to describe the theological teachings and notions such as describing *Imamate* (religious readership) on the basis of committed democracy or describing the principle of *Intezar* (the expectation of promised savior) according to sociological and political concepts.

Borrowing from Henri Bergson's literature, it is worth noting that the fundamentalists' religion is a dogmatic and closed religion based on an enclosed worldview and disopenness to Being, the world and history; and Shariati's religion is an open religion based on open worldview and openness to Being, the world and history. Shariati helps us take crucial steps towards the destruction of theoretical and dogmatic theological systems, and transition from theology to reach a phenomenological encounter with the world and emergence of a new form of spiritual thought.

4.      If not all but Many fundamentalists consider religion and tradition as a source for an ideology and discourse for political power, and not as a horizon for thinking within the ontological, epistemological, and basic anthropological framework in order to attain a new understanding of the world and human being in the present age on the base of a meditative thinking. I am not overlooking the fact that Shariati also speaks of the perception of Islam and religion as 'ideology' but the term 'ideology' in his thinking means neither a thought as a guide for action nor a discourse and justification for gaining political power and legitimizing it; rather he used 'ideology' to refer to 'wisdom' and 'human, social and historical self-awareness'. Unlike the fundamentalists, his take on religion is not ideological and it is by no means right to accuse Shariati of turning tradition into ideology.

5.      The fundamentalists defend the totality of our historical tradition and think of it as unified. This applies *mutatis mutandis* to the modernists and all fascinated of modern rationality and the values of the Enlightenment, who reject the historical tradition in its entirety. However, Shariati does not consider our historical tradition as unified but rather he believes that there is a yawning gap and duality in the historical tradition. He suggests that our historical tradition is an interweaving of both sublime human values and life-giving elements, and vulgar values and destructive forces; he attempts to separate these values and elements from each other. Expressions such as 'prophetic Islam and Umayyad Islam,' 'Islam of truth and Islam of history,' 'apparent Islam and inner Islam' and 'Alawi Shi'ism and Safavid Shi'ism' in Shariati's works are indicative of this yawning gap and duality

that has been located within the historical tradition. Contrary to the Enlightenment intellectuals and their followers who rejected tradition in its entirety, thinkers such as Kierkegaard spoke of the imprisonment of Christ in the papal prison and the distinction between the 'story of Christ' and the 'story of the Pope'. Akin to this group of recent thinkers, Shariati also spoke of the idea of the war of religion against religion, and castigated the official custodians of historical tradition through a radical criticism, even more radical than the criticism of anti-tradition intellectuals.

6.      While fundamentalism has no clue of the perils and calamities of theological systems or closed and dogmatic ideologies, Shariati is fully self-conscious of the calamities of dogmatism and limitations of theological and ideological systems. That is why Shariati, unlike the fundamentalists, tried to confront and battle these calamities by proposing the ideas of denying religious authority, denying professionalism and elitism in the field of religious faith, and calling for constant *ijtihad*[1] and permanent revolution depending on rationality, the element of time, and legitimizing the new science.

7.      One-sided dependence on some apparent similarities between Shariati's thoughts and those of the fundamentalists such as their commonalities of the concept of revolution, indigenization, Islamism, Shi'ism or the criticism of the West, the struggle against Westernization, and the challenge to modern rationality is not well-grounded without taking into account the real meanings and notions of these concepts, and their interpretations. It is interesting to note that a truth-seeking researcher goes beyond the general interpretations and reads between the lines in any system of thoughts. Equating the spirit and content of Shariati's thoughts with those of fundamentalists, and ignoring the differences and divergences between them would conceal important truths, and intellectual and spiritual capital; this leads us to unscientific, irrational and unfair conclusions. I think there are yet other fundamental differences that would help us distinguish Shariati's thoughts from those of the fundamentalists.

8.      Unlike the fundamentalists who deemed the historical tradition as a culture, an object of study, a source for an ideology or a theological system, i.e. a combination of institutionalized historical beliefs and some theoretical beliefs, preposition, and indigenous, local, geographical, racial and class, Shariati presents an existential—not existentialist— understanding of the spirit and truth of the historical tradition; this is how he challenges and questions the fundamentalists' theological thinking. Contrary to the fundamentalists' *Sharia*-centered views,

Shariati considers mysticism and the direct relationship between human beings and God to be the essence and the soul of the historical tradition of Islam. Instead of drawing a theological and heavenly portrayal, Shariati juxtaposes religion with mysticism, art, poetry, literature, science, technology and even mythology, and myths and legends as different aspects of human existence or ways of being and conceives each of them as a realm from various realms of human existence; and links religion with the truth of human existence. Having done this, he took a step in the right direction to destruct theology without imposing the "form" of modern reason on the "matter" of historical tradition.

Through his historical confrontation and historical interpretations of religions, the distinctions between the historical and existential aspects, and the segregation between the historical and trans-historical aspects of religion, Shariati introduces the de-secretion of history into our theological culture; this raises the anger of the supporters of theological ideas. Contrary to the fundamentalists' views, Shariati's historical and phenomenological view of Islamic tradition is not a secular and nihilistic approach, but it rather paves the way for the emergence and manifestation of trans-historical truth beyond all the rigid historical beliefs of theological systems.

9.      Shariati recognizes living in the modern world and understands its inevitability but seeks to give identity back to the de-identified Iranian society based on its native culture and tradition. Fundamentalism, however, has never recognized the modern world and living in it, and considers modernity as a kind of deviation and an adventitious issue in human life. Despite its political and ideological claims and bragging, for fundamentalism it is very hard to confront the modern world. From the ontological and epistemological perspectives, fundamentalism passively finds refuge in tradition and the quasi-historical and mythical world within the tradition. Shariati, however, invites us to face modern rationality with a more open and active mind.

10.     Unlike the radical fundamentalists, Shariati is not entrapped in the one-sided theological and ideological encounter with the new rationality. The radical fundamentalists developed opposing, one-sided, theological and ideological positions towards modern reason. They are blind to the undeniable and significant achievements of modern reason, and their encounter with history is narrow-sighted. However, Shariati is open to the achievements of the West. He does not hesitate to learn from Marx, Freud, Georges Gurvitch, Feuerbach or Sartre. Thus, Shariati, unlike fundamentalists, is not captivated by a kind of inverted Orientalism—

political and ideological understanding of the orient and fabricating an imaginary West and East— and therefore, he would not be captivated by the logic of the West itself. He does not surrender to the theological and ideological dualism of the East-West, Islam-infidelity, or divine history-evil history. Unlike the fundamentalists, Shariati does not seek to advocate that tradition is superior to modernity. He takes important steps to establish a dialogue between tradition and the modern world.

11.     In contrast to the fundamentalists and those who detected a conflict between the new science and the spirit of historical tradition seeking to Islamize the new science and humanities or establish a new epistemological system as opposed to new science, Shariati does not perceive religious awareness and new sciences at the same level, and finds them as two different realms of human existence. Therefore, contrary to the fundamentalists, Shariati does not detect any conflict between the achievements of new sciences and religion, and believes in their unity. He speaks of a religious feeling beyond science and distinguishes between two types of religion; one is the sub-scientific religion, i.e., a set of historical propositions and beliefs that would not be confirmed by science and the achievements of modern sciences; it confuses the believers of this religion and causes a conflict between the new sciences and faith in these beliefs. The other is the trans-science religion—a spiritual interpretation of the world and a faith in the existence of an intelligence and consciousness in the world system—which is the basis of scientific research, and there is a longitudinal relationship between this religious feeling and scientific research, hence, no challenges and conflicts.

While the religion of the fundamentalists is an enclosed, ethnic and cultural religion, Shariati's religion is open to the whole world and all history and historical traditions, cultures and civilizations. Shariati's God is closer to the concept of 'Being' in Heidegger's thought and his ontological God, which appears throughout the universe and history, than to the ancient *ontic* God in theological systems which only exists in a specific culture, history, geographical points, and manifested itself only in particular moments of history for a certain group and people. Unlike the spirituality of the fundamentalists, Shariati's spirituality is more compatible with the principle of the denial of meta-narrations, the collapse of social hierarchies, and the enfeebling of traditional institutions of political, social, and religious powers in the postmodern world.

12.     If we agree with Hegel that modernity is nothing but emancipation of the subject, emancipation that appeared in the three events of the Protestant Movement

(emancipation of the subject from religious authority), the French Revolution (emancipation of the subject from the political power), and Enlightenment (emancipation of the subject from rational authority), then it is safe to contend that Shariati has been one of the exponents of modern rationality and a coordinator of Iranian society with the modern rationality through his rejection of the *marji'i dini* [2] of the official custodian of religion—which is one of the key challenges of his thoughts with the fundamentalists— and his opposing of the political power (monarchy), and his rejection of *marji'i aqli*[3] (opposing imitation).

13.    Had it not been for the efforts of Shariati and like-minded figures, our challenges with the modern world would have been far worse and more destructive than what we are facing today. Shariati was against the modernization policies of the Pahlavi, and unlike Marxists and secularists, he believed that modernization in traditional and quasi-traditional societies such as Iran will not occur through its confrontation with tradition but rather it occurs through the path of tradition itself. This project in its entirety is still an existing, fundamental and thought-provoking issue for intellectuals and political power of Iranian society as well as Islamic world.

14.    Let us pause here a bit and imagine an Iranian society without the efforts of figures such as Ali Shariati, Mehdi Bazargan, Mohammad Nakhashb, Abdolkarimi Soroush and others. In this hypothetical situation, how would fundamentalism appear in Iran? Doesn't it ever cross Shariati's opponents' minds that what makes the Iranian society as 'Iran' and what differentiates Iran from the decadent and backward societies such as Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the particular fundamentalism of those societies like Talibanism or Bin Ladenism? Undoubtedly, a part of the answer of the question lies in the efforts of thinkers like Shariati.

15.    If Iran and its culture are not to be further eroded in the process of globalization, and if it is not to become an abandoned land in a corner of the world, and if we are to have a dialogue and conversation with the global community and western cultures—not mere political confrontation and ideological and political bragging, and considering the West as the enemy—we will have to depend on Shariati's phenomenological thinking for the intellectual leadership of Iranian society as his phenomenological thinking seeks to establish a dialogue between our traditional culture and world, and the modern world and rationality.

I mean by the term 'Iran' neither a geographical land or a specific race such as Aryan, nor the jurisprudential and theological system of Shi'ism or the political and

ideological system such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. I mean rather a historical tradition within which the three great historical traditions of Indo-Iranians (mysticism, Fahlavis or Khosravani's wisdom), the Hebrew-Jewish text-based and revelation-based tradition (theology, jurisprudence and Interpretation of holy text), and the Greek tradition of metaphysical rationality (philosophical tradition) are integrated so much so that none of these components can be removed. Unfortunately, however, there has not been yet a great philosopher who could offer a proper ontological and epistemological system through the combination of these elements in modern era.

Iran, according to Henri Corbin, is symbolically a land between India (East**)** and Greece (West). Humanity and future thought require such a middle nation and middle thought that has neither been vanquished in the heart of the new metaphysical rationality, nor immersed in the Eastern and Indian spirituality or the orthodoxy of the Hebrew tradition like 'the Seven Sleepers a.k.a Companion of the Cave' that do not understand that the coin of theological thoughts of Decianus era has long been outdated. Shariati's thought, in comparison with those of the fundamentalists and modernists, is more compatible with such a historical and cultural situation in Iran.

16.       And last but not least, Shariati is neither a hero nor an anti-hero. He is alone a discourse from which and through critiquing it, one can learn a great deal. However, it should be pointed out that any critique of a text hinges on understanding and establishing a dialogue with it.

# Note

1. ijtihad, (Arabic: "effort") in Islamic law, the independent or original interpretation of problems not precisely covered by the Qurʾan, Hadith (traditions concerning the Prophet Muhammad's life and utterances), and ijmaʿ (scholarly consensus).
2. Religious authority
3. Rational authority

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# Michel Foucault's Concept of 'Critique' and the Iranian Experience

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## Abstract

This paper offers an interpretation and discussion of the later Foucault's multifaceted concept of 'critique'. It argues that critique for Foucault is composed of three main elements: the 'spirit' (though not all of the substance) of Kant's understanding of the Enlightenment; the practice of parrhesia that emerged in Ancient Greece and became central to Christian subjectivity; and the transfigurative aesthetic experience of modernity that was most richly depicted by Baudelaire. In the second section, there is a discussion of Foucault's view of an event that continues to perplex Western observers, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, juxtaposed with a Marxist understanding of the upheaval. Rejecting both historical materialist and liberal historiography, Foucault offers a unique perspective on the Iranian Revolution, deeming it to be a practical manifestation of critique in an 'irreducibly' religious context and based on a reformation of the self situated within a wider 'political spirituality'. However, the trajectory of politics in Iran since 1979 bears resemblance to those of other, resolutely secular post-revolutionary societies, and thus raises the questions of whether Foucault ignores the universal in privileging the particular and in refusing synthesis between the West and the Orient, adopts an Orientalist epistemology.

**Key Words:** Critique, Foucault; Enlightenment; Parrhesia; Marxism; Political Islam; Iranian Revolution

## The critical attitude

Concentrating on a short journalistic essay written by Kant in 1784 in response to a question posed by a Prussian newspaper, Foucault argues that with this article commences a new critical attitude that is characteristic of modernity (Foucault 2007:42).   What is particularly distinctive and without precedent about Kant's essay, for Foucault, is its self-consciously critical reflection on the present moment:

> *[I]t is the first time that a philosopher has connected in this way, closely and from the inside, the significance of his work with respect to knowledge, a reflection on history and a particular analysis of the specific moment at which he is writing and because of which he is writing (Ibid., 104).*

That is, Kant's Enlightenment essay differs from past and more familiar philosophical writing in that it relates to topical events and situates itself in relation to those events.   Understood in this way, the piece appropriately belongs in a newspaper rather than within an academic tome.   In Foucault's analysis, modernity is not properly understood as a particular historical period or indeed a doctrine, but rather as a distinctive critical ethos that has made its appearance in a variety of forms at several stages of history (Ibid., 105).[1] Foucault declares of this concept of philosophical critique:

> *The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986:112).*

He attempts to reconstruct 'enlightenment' as a process rather than an endpoint. To accomplish this, it is necessary for Foucault to 'liberate' critique from the Kantian approach that he believes made all ideas and policies subject to the procedures and ultimate tribunal of Reason (Rajchman 2007: 23).   Eschewing the humanist view of Enlightenment politics as promulgating the ideals of 'liberty, equality and fraternity', which become a yardstick of the governmental arrangements of any given society, Foucault prefers to see a spirit of criticism that manifests itself as an ongoing enthusiasm for progressive measures, an "ever-renewed will to transformation" (Osbourne 1999: 50).   Humanist interpretations of

the Enlightenment are, by contrast, fundamentally nebulous in content for Foucault, for they have been subject to a multiplicity of political appropriations historically, thus "the humanist thematic is in itself too supple, too diverse, too inconsistent to serve as an axis for reflection" (Foucault 2007: 111). If humanism is nebulous, it is also theoretically doctrinaire for Foucault because its maxims are invariably interpreted in a de-historicised and immobile manner, but it is events that determine ideas rather than vice versa (Osbourne 1999: 50-51). Foucault's emphasis on the variegated and continuing spirit of the critical attitude would appear to strike a chord with predominant themes in postmodern thought, where difference and dynamism find their champions. But Osbourne is quick to caution against such a reading since Foucault is "more serious" than the supposedly trivial politics of postmodern thought. Rather, Foucault wants to ensure that we citizens are:

> *open to both political events and games of government in terms of their singularity rather than their inevitability – in the one case, in order to understand them properly and, in the other, as a constant reminder that government itself is an art that is never given once and for all but is subject to the forces of creative invention, accident, change and transformation (Ibid.).*

That is, Foucault's critical attitude comprises both an analytical and normative component, with the latter supervening on the former: we are to interpret in order to appreciate the contingency of governing arrangements and political orthodoxies the better to transform them. Whilst this reading is accurate, Osbourne appears to ignore the fact that postmodern treatments can, indeed, be serious engagements with politics, and that this can provide the basis for a critique of the present. Perhaps the best example of such a thinker is Rorty, who privileges an aesthetic re-creation of the self against an outdated and impoverished Enlightenment rationality. Literary art serves the political function for Rorty of safeguarding liberal values and educating citizens to avoid cruel and humiliating practices that harm others (Thacker 1993:18).[2]

Foucault has an ambivalent attitude towards the question of where his work on critique is to be situated in relation to the Enlightenment project. On the one hand, he calls into question the "simplistic" and vapid debate in 20th century continental thought between Enlightenment's liberal heirs and its detractors (such as Adorno and Horkheimer) as unedifying "blackmail" (Foucault 2007:110). And, the supposed diametrical opposition between reason and unreason on which that debate is based – and debased – is "senseless" for Foucault because reason cannot be

adequately understood in its historical and political dimensions without its opposite (Foucault 1982:210-211).    On the other hand, Foucault declares that "we still depend in large part" on the Enlightenment (Foucault in Hoy 1986:22) and are "historically determined, to a certain extent", by that event (Foucault 2007:110).  As Hoy argues, this places Foucault within the Enlightenment tradition, but since "rational autonomy is itself an empty ideal" Foucault's task becomes that of continuing the "vigour of the Enlightenment" through "permanent critique" (Hoy 1986:23).    But Habermas notices a paradox in Foucault's attitude to the Enlightenment that undercuts and threatens the unity of his project: Foucault believes that the spirit of critique should help to transform for the better undesirable governing arrangements and, yet, he also eschews a normative perspective on account of his rejection of all transcendental positions (Habermas cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986:112).    Moreover, Habermas points out, Foucault's earlier rejection of the epistemological pretensions of modern philosophy and science (the 'will-to-knowledge' supposedly independent of power-structures) jars with his placement of his project within that same Enlightenment tradition.  Habermas asks: "How can Foucault's self-understanding as a thinker in the tradition of the Enlightenment be compatible with his unmistakable criticism of this very form of knowledge of modernity?" (Habermas in Hoy 1986:106) Against Habermas, Foucault would want to counter that objection of this sort are premised on a mistaken understanding of the nature of critique that owes its origins to an equivocation, or 'slippage', at the heart of Kantian philosophy: Kant simultaneously advocated man's subjection to the ultimate transcendental tribunal of Reason and, less prominently and rather contradictorily, the critical ethos that Foucault favours (in Owen 1999:32).  Habermas is heir of the former approach, within which the critical ethos is subordinate to and circumscribed by the rational procedures of philosophy and science and the wider political 'project' (Ibid.).    Foucault, by contrast, is engaged in the attempt to return 'enlightenment' to its essential spirit, and this involves taking "the inverse path to this movement of tipping over, to this slippage, to this way of displacing the question of *Aufklarung* onto critique" (Foucault in Ibid.)  But whether Foucault (like Rorty) can consistently refuse a normative position whilst approving certain governing arrangements over others remains a vexed question.  Moreover, Foucault may have misconstrued Habermas's reading of Kant, which amounts to a recognition that reason is limited in its applicability (particularly if its procedures claim to deliver transcendent truths about the world) whilst simultaneously affirming a transcendental role for reason as

providing the methods to reject as intellectually unviable myths and authoritarian politics (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986:110).  To Habermas's mind, modernity

> *consists in preserving the primacy of reason articulated most recently and fully in Kant's enlightenment critique while facing up to the loss of the metaphysical ground of our substantive beliefs.  Maturity is the discovery of the quasi-transcendental basis of community as all we have and all we need, for philosophy, and human dignity (Ibid.).*

Foucault too sees in the critique the contours of a benchmark for political legitimacy – one that limits the power that may legitimately be extended over the citizenry: "the art of not being governed quite so much" (Foucault 2007:45).  This aspect of the critique has called forth the orthodoxy of "universal and indefeasible rights to which every government, whatever it may be, whether a monarch, a magistrate, and educator or a *pater familias*, will have to submit" (Ibid.: 46).  However, for Foucault, as we observed above, there are no innate and inalienable 'rights' that humans qua humans possess; he shares Bentham's view that such a discourse is "nonsense upon stilts" (Bentham 2002: 317).  Thus, the desire for there to be limits to state authority can only ever be *a posteriori*, as it were, and comparative:

> *I do not think that the will not to be governed at all is something that one could consider an originary aspiration.  I think that, in fact, the will not to be governed is always the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price (Foucault 2007:75).*

Osbourne argues that whilst Foucault explicitly rejects the notion of natural rights throughout his career, he nonetheless in his latter works outlines the bases of resistance to government wherein Foucault is committed to the governed enjoying certain 'rights' and the governors subject to certain 'duties' (Osbourne 1999:53).  The rights of the governed issue not from their 'nature' but rather are a consequence of the very fact of their being objects of a regulatory regime.  Osbourne says of Foucault's position:

> *Given that we are all subject to government, and that it is the duty of governments to work for the well-being of their citizens, then we have the right to contest the evils that are done supposedly in the name of government (Ibid.).*

And, of course, this carries with it the implication of *concerted* struggle on the part of the governed to defend their 'rights'.  Foucault envisions that such solidarity be global and multicultural, an ongoing and changing commitment, and in an

apparent denial of a Marxist notion of class consciousness, the solidarity ought to be 'constructivist' – that is engaged in the creation of solidarity utilising whatever tools are available in any given society or culture rather than the "organic expressions of an already-given moral solidarity of the oppressed" (Ibid.: 54) that are founded upon one's subjection to an abstract theoretical identity.  As Foucault says:

There exists an international citizenship with rights and duties and which can engage with any abuse of power, whatever its author, whatever its victims.  After all, we are all governed, and by the light of this, in solidarity (Foucault in Ibid.)[3]

Foucault regards Baudelaire to be a pre-eminent cultural figure of lasting significance beyond literature since he is representative of the quintessential attitude of the modern age, namely a transfigurative aesthetic experience, where the perceptions of modern citizens change markedly:

> *Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the one who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself.  This modernity does not "liberate man in his own being"; it compels him to face the task of producing himself [...] This transfiguring play of freedom with reality, this ascetic elaboration of the self – Baudelaire does not imagine that these have any place in society itself, or in the body politic.  These can only be produced in another, a different place, which Baudelaire calls art (Foucault 2007: 109).*

On Foucault's account, Baudelaire sees individual autonomy within modernity in the self-fashioning of one's body and existence into a work of art.  The corporeal counterpoint to Kant's high-minded insistence on public reason and confinement within rational limits, Baudelaire's 'heroic' modern subject moulds his passions and body towards the transgression of these limits, and hence comprises a critical stance towards the present, and thus societal and political norms.

To the objections that a critical approach can scarcely be said to have come into being with Kant or Baudelaire in the modern period, when intellectuals, dissidents and others have engaged in criticism stretching far back into history, and that critique has no positive value since it is merely a tool of a higher value, Foucault answers that a proper analysis of the distinctiveness of modern critique must issue from an understanding of the subjectivity that gave rise to it. For Foucault, this requires a genealogical investigation into the distant past:

> *Even if the Enlightenment has been a very important phase in our history, and in the development of political technology, I think we*

*have to refer to much more remote processes if we want to understand how we have been trapped in our own history (Foucault 1979: 226).*

Foucault rejects as untenable another feature of Kant's philosophy: the pre-given Kantian self.  In its stead, Foucault continues in the anti-transcendental tradition of Nietzsche, who rejected the notion of a fixed human essence.[4] Human subjectivity is constructed by and through historical practices, Foucault believes: "the subject is not a substance.  It is a form, and this form is not mostly nor ever identical to itself" (Foucault in Han (2006:3).  In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault demonstrates how even the concept of the human body, often believed to be a fundamental component of personal identity, is actually subject to pliability by means of various official practices (Foucault 1977).   In Foucault's nominalist historiography, everything has been constructed and genealogical study is a tool to uncover this often concealed past:

> *[T]his critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think (Foucault in Owen 1999).*

Indeed, genealogy is for Foucault critique *par excellence* since it demonstrates through destabilising orthodoxies that that which we take to be settled and static is flexible and reversible (Owen 1999:36).

On Foucault's view, modern subjectivity and its critical attitude emanate from a distinctively Christian heritage of pastoral practice.  Sharply diverging from the conventional liberal historiographical account of modernity that postulates a radical dichotomy between traditional religious culture and the advent of the age of reason, Foucault's genealogical analysis into subjectivity reveals for him the insight that the effects of originally religious practices and attitudes continue to inform the social structures and governmentality of 'secular' modernity.[5]   Foucault argues that Christianity uniquely developed the idea that every individual was to be governed by a priest in order to realise his or her salvation within a "detailed relationship of obedience" (Foucault (2007:43)).   Such a subordinate relationship was the context within which the believer would be expected to publicly disclose his or her sins to the priest, to testify against themselves, and this information had to be 'true' as far as the believer could tell (Ibid.:171).   This led to Christianity emerging as a

discourse preoccupied with the truth which enjoins upon believers an obligation of truth, wherein they must disclose their selves (Ibid.:171). Foucault explains:

> *Christianity is not only a salvation religion, it's a confessional religion [...] Each person has the duty to know who he is, that is, to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognise temptations, to locate desires, and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community and hence to bear public or private witness against oneself (Foucault in Carrette 2000: 27).*

As suggested towards the end of the above quote, Foucault distinguishes between two distinctive varieties of confession and disclosure: one public, the other to be practised away from the community and in isolation with the priest. With respect to the private variety of confession, which Foucault terms *exagoreusis,* this evolves in the modern era into the disciplinary practices that seek to control individuals; the schoolteacher and the psychiatrist are modern proxies of the clergyman (Afary and Anderson 2005:52). The former kind Foucault terms *exomologesis*; it normally occurs in the presence of others and often involves self-punishment and the maceration of the body as a penance (Foucault 2007:187). But, whether the performance of the penance is to be communal or private, silent or loquacious, the ultimate purpose is very similar, if not synonymous: to disclose the truth about oneself through the paradoxical renunciation of the self. As Foucault says:

> *[T]he revelation of the truth about oneself cannot be dissociated from the obligation to renounce oneself. We have to sacrifice the self in order to discover the truth about ourselves, and we have to discover the truth about ourselves in order to sacrifice ourself. Truth and sacrifice, the truth about ourselves and the sacrifice of ourselves, are deeply and closely connected (Ibid.).*

That is, Christian pastoral practices fashion a self and a wider 'truth' by renouncing the self. Foucault connects the public confession of sin to a wider practice of the fearless proclamation of a message, which he terms, following Euripides, as *parrhesia.* The origins of the practice of parrhesia lie in Fifth Century BC Greece. The practitioner of parrhesia is unabashed in communicating that which he believes in:

> *The one who uses parrhesia [...] is someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind*

*completely to other people through his discourse.  In parrhesia, the*
*speaker is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he*
*has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what*
*the speaker thinks (Foucault 1983).*

Though it arose in Athens, parrhesia was incorporated by Christianity into its confessional practices.  Foucault, however, distinguishes some of the elements of Hellenic parrhesia from its Ecclesiastical version.  The renunciation of the self and the world was the ultimate Christian purpose, whereas parrhesia was seen by the Greeks as vehicle for "self-possession and self-sovereignty" in the context of their ethics of the care of the self (Ibid.).  However, a necessary feature of parrhesia that continued into the Christian era was the element of risk-taking involved: parrhesia always concerns telling the truth to a higher authority than oneself (Ibid.).  For the early Christian apostles, struggling to spread the gospel against ruthless Roman opposition, parrhesia became the bold announcement and proselytising of the New Testament (McSweeney 2005:128).  For Foucault, it is this political function of parrhesia that amounts to its distinctive critique factor:

*Parrhesia is a form of criticism, either towards another or towards*
*oneself, but always in a situation where the speaker or confessor is in*
*a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor.    The*
*parrhesiastes is always less powerful than the one with whom he or*
*she speaks (Foucault 1983: 4).*

One may observe here a resemblance between Foucault's parrhesia and the notion of 'performative utterances' developed by the analytical philosopher John Austin.  Austin argues that sentences expressed orally or in the written form which are performative utterances do not describe something and are, thus, not to be assessed in terms of their truth value.    Rather, performative utterances are themselves the very performances to which they supposedly merely refer (Austin 1962:6).  Han elaborates further on the epistemological framework that underpins Foucault's parrhesia, and that is profoundly different from that of the modern era (Han 2005:11).    For the parrhesiastes, truth is to be understood not as the adequation of a proposition with reality, as it is in the Correspondence Theory of Truth, but rather as a function of his or her ethos in society.  Foucault says of the parrhesiastes:

*What guarantees that I am saying the truth to you is that I am*
*effectively as subject of my behaviour, absolutely, integrally and*

*wholly identical to the subject of speech that I am, when I say what I say to you (Foucault in Ibid.:11 ).*

That is, for Foucault there is an identity of the confessor's belief and the truth that is established by his or her integrity.  To the inevitable question of whether we can be sure that a particular confessor is accurately communicating his or her sins (he or she could be mistaken or misleading us, for example) Foucault answers that it is the parrhesiastes's courage which validates their testimony (Foucault 1983).  To the objection that this is inadequate or irrelevant to the truth-value of a statement, Foucault will answer that modern epistemology and modern modes of subjectivity raise for us problems that were absent in pre-Cartesian societies (Han 2005:14).  In order to both return to an older conception of truth and challenge oppressive governing arrangements; Foucault advocates an ethical transformation of the self:

*An ethics of the self [...] is an urgent, fundamental, politically indispensable task [...] it is true after all that there is no more primary and ultimate point of resistance to political power than in the relationship with the self (Foucault in Ibid.:17).*

And, elsewhere, in a rebuttal of Marxist theories of resistance which focus on liberation through overthrowing the state, Foucault expands upon this point:

*[T]he political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and the type of individualisation which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries (Foucault, 1982: 216).*

To an objection that Foucault's wide-ranging and expansive conception of power (where power relations must exist perpetually) amounts to little more than conservative preservation of the *status quo*, Foucault would make the following points:

*[T]o say that there cannot be a society without power relations is not to say either that those which are established are necessary, or, in any case, that power constitutes a fatality at the heart of societies, such that it cannot be undermined.  Instead, I would say that the analysis, elaboration, and bringing into question of power relations and the "agonism" between power relations and the intransitivity of*

*freedom is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence (Ibid.:223).*

That government of many and various kinds will always exist is not an argument, in Foucault's mind, for the maintenance of any particular appearance of it. This is to be achieved through 'technologies of the self' – practices by virtue of which one can fashion one's own subjectivity. As we saw above, Foucault deems there to be the possibility of solidarity between the governed for change. One particular manifestation of resistance in the modern world to oppressive power structures which Foucault rather presciently identified, and which is connected to his account of Christian pastoral practices, was that of religious identity politics, and it is to that that we now turn our attention.

## Recognising Critique in action: Foucault in Iran

Carrette argues that Foucault sought to identify in his own time a "mysticism of revolt" within which a new conception of spiritual subjectivity in a religious framework could be fashioned (Carrette in McSweeney 2005:133). Consistent with his view of the Enlightenment, Foucault saw theology in terms of practice rather than scripture or doctrine (Ibid.). Having previously witnessed at first hand both the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland to the Communist government, which would later influence the Solidarnosc organisation, and the nascent Liberation Theology movement in Latin America (Bernauer 2006), Foucault made several visits to Iran in 1978 and 1979, which was then in the grip of social disquiet and popular agitation against the oppressive regime of the Shah. The turmoil would culminate in a popular revolution. Foucault wrote many journalistic articles for French and Italian newspapers during his visits, in a manner and spirit that recalls Kant's essay in a German newspaper on the contemporaneous event of the Enlightenment. As Osbourne puts it:

> *Reading Foucault's contributions to philosophical journalism, one gets the impression, precisely, of somebody trying to think through the circumstances of the present moment by moment and with the aid of whatever resources – philosophical, sociological, historical, economic – lay to hand (Osbourne 1999:55).*

That is, Foucault refused to submit what he was witnessing in Iran to ready-made philosophical theories that, for him, simply could not adequately account for the dynamics of that which was occurring. Despite his self-confessed lack of

knowledge of Iranian history and culture, Foucault nevertheless attempted to enact the spirit of critique in his despatches from Tehran:

> *I cannot write the history of the future, and I am also rather clumsy at foreseeing the past.  However, I would like to try to grasp what is happening right now, because these days nothing is finished, and the dice are still being rolled.  It is perhaps this that is the work of a journalist, but it is true that I am nothing but a neophyte (Foucault in McCall 2008).*

What was distinctive about the Iranian Revolution, and which perplexed many European observers of both a liberal and a Marxist persuasion, was the fact that many of the revolutionary leaders were deeply religious Shi'ite Muslims and many of the popular slogans were couched in the language of Islamic theology.  Shi'ism was not the means by which fundamental class interests were mediated, as a Marxist analysis might have it, rather, for Foucault, the revolt was irreducibly religious, bringing to the Iranians "the promise and guarantee of finding something that would radically change their subjectivity" (Foucault in Carrette 2000:137). Though the European struggle for modernity has been anti-clerical in nature, Foucault believed that the Iranian Revolution was a radical rejection of secular modernity, represented by the Shah's policies (McCall 2008:8).  It, thus, failed to fit the theoretical models of liberal social progress and Marxist revolution developed in the European history of ideas[6]. Iran manifested for Foucault a phenomenon long forgotten in the West, that of a 'political spirituality':

> *How can one analyse the connection between ways of distinguishing true and false and ways of governing oneself and others?  The search for a new foundation for each of these practices, in itself and relative to the other, the will to discover a different way of governing oneself though a different way of dividing up true and false – this is what I would call 'political spirituality' (Foucault in Carrette 2000:137).*

The singular political spirituality of Iran's revolution was unexpected for Western observers because they had, like Habermas or Kant, failed to recognise that critique is an ethos rather than a doctrine to which we must submit events to scrutiny.  The apparently doctrinaire machinery of Marxism comes in for particular criticism from Foucault, as he finds himself concurring with religious Iranians who saw Marxism as a Western ideology unable to account for events that were unfolding:

*Do you know the phrase which is most mocked by Iranians nowadays? The phrase which seems to them the most ridiculous, the most senseless, the most Western?  'Religion is the opium of the people.'  Up to the present dynasty, the mullahs preached in their mosques with a rifle by their side (Foucault in Almond 2004).*

Marx's famous dictum is, thus, revealed to be inadequate to explain the irreducibly religious nature of the revolt, with religious consciousness inculcating a political militancy, rather than as the intellectual father of modern socialism had it with his belief that confessional faith has a purely soporific effect.  Foucault's view is that religion can both fashion a particular form of obedience to authority that was demonstrated in Christian pastoral practices and continued into the disciplinary forms of governmentality of secular Western societies, as well as providing a means to criticise and reject existing governing arrangements (McCall 2008: 4).  The latter Foucault believed he had witnessed in Iran, with the frank and fearless speech of the oppositionalists against the Pahlavi regime.  Foucault observed in Shi'ite public ceremonies during the month of Muharram in Iran fundamental similarities with earlier Christian confessional practices, where believers disclose their 'truth' in the presence of others.  As Afary and Anderson write:

*In Muharram, self-adulation, self-mutilation, and the "baring of the flesh and the body" are not individual, lonely acts of repentance. Rather, they take place as part of a collective, dramatic public festival [...] The individual is therefore involved in an act of public confession (Afary and Anderson 2005:53).*

Foucault's understanding of events in Iran is at odds with a Marxist analysis. Firstly, Marxists may want to take issue with Foucault's claim that the revolution amounted to a rejection of modernity, since the Shah's autocratic rule was something that bears greater resemblance to despotic feudal European polities, rather than conceptions of society developed during the Enlightenment.  Foucault's belief that Marx's theories had demonstrated their epistemological and explanatory limitations on Iranian soil faces the objection that Foucault ignores classical Marxist accounts of religion.  A longer quotation of the sentences preceding the popular slogan that Foucault quotes from Marx's Introduction to his *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* reveals that Marx did not ascribe to religion a merely soporific effect:

*Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of*

> *the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of*
> *soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people (Marx 1844).*

That is, Marx explicitly recognises a role for religion in opposing political and economic oppression, even if he did not consider religious politics to be an adequately progressive force.   The Marxist writer Harman has provided an historical materialist account of the Iranian Revolution in which he denies Foucault's claim that it was 'irreducibly' Shi'ite in orientation; rather, organised religion was only tangentially associated with it.   Arguing that the victory of Islamism in that revolution was not "inevitable", and referring to the particular and highly contingent dynamics at play, Harman states that the experience of Iran in 1979:

> *merely confirms that, in the absence of independent working-class*
> *leadership, revolutionary upheaval can give way to more than one*
> *form of the restabilisation of bourgeois rule under a repressive,*
> *authoritarian, one party state (Harman 1994).*

And, the key to making sense of how the revolution became 'theocratic' lies not in some religious or Islamic 'spirit' but rather in material forces that also shape Western societies.   Thus, "the vacuum created by the failure of the socialist organisations to give leadership to an inexperienced but very combative working class" (Ibid.) led to an orientation and outcome that was not secular and not socialist. Therefore, perhaps Foucault was too eager to jettison 'Western' theoretical models to explain contemporary political events when some of those theories are best placed to understand these events.   The new subjectivity of a 'political spirituality' that Foucault apparently saw in the Iranian people did not lead to the establishment of a regime that was emancipatory in all respects.   Rather, the way in which a tyrannical state apparatus became instituted in Iran in the 1980s demonstrates that the country followed a political trajectory similar to that of other post-revolutionary societies in the world that also became authoritarian.   But these other post-revolutionary societies were secular in orientation (and in many cases avowedly anti-religious) – suggesting that an analysis that identifies a supposedly distinctive 'political spirituality' is unable to account for the palpable similarities between what occurred in Iran and in other societies.   Such correspondences can be seen as having been occluded through Foucault's adoption of a rather Orientalist framework in his treatment of Iran, with Iran functioning as the site of resurrection of Europe's lost past, paralleling Said's view that such knowledge delineates a clear ontological and epistemological antithesis between the West and Oriental Other,

with the former dominant over the latter and without the possibility of synthesis (Said 1978).

The executions and abuses that followed the establishment of the revolutionary government drew Foucault's ire; he wrote protesting the excesses in an open letter to the new Iranian Prime Minister Bazarganto in April 1979 (Bernauer 2006: 782). Though his pleas fell on deaf ears, Foucault was never to regret his support for the upheaval in Iran, later commenting:

> *The spirituality of those who were going to their deaths [during the Revolution] has no similarity whatsoever with the bloody government of a fundamentalist clergy (in Afary and Anderson 2005: 265).*

## Concluding Remarks

Foucault has emerged as a thinker who takes seriously the critical vigour of the Enlightenment and locates his own project of critique within that intellectual history.   Rejecting secular liberal historiography, he identifies the role of confessional discourses in the formation of subjectivity in the modern era – both in terms of their 'liberatory' critical dimensions and their oppressive and disciplinary governmentality.   Foucault's analysis of the Iranian Revolution proposes that classical Western political thought derived from the Enlightenment cannot properly account for modern attempts to fashion a new subjectivity in opposition to predominant and tyrannical discourses and practices.   Crucially, for Foucault, a 'critical' revolt against any given order must be based on a transformation of human subjectivity and, thus, the self.

## Note

1.   On this point, Foucault is concurring with Nietzsche that the singular rationality of the Enlightenment does not represent a qualitatively novel phenomenon: rather, this spirit has come to the fore during other periods of Western history, most notably, for Nietzsche, with the rise of Socratism in ancient Athens .

2.    See Rorty 1989. Whether Rorty (or likeminded postmodernists) can reconcile the normative demand to citizens to refrain from cruelty with the radical rejection of moral truth is another matter .

3.    Whyte argues that Foucault at this stage became increasing sympathetic to the emerging climate of human rights discourse and practice through NGOs, including Medecins Sans Frontières and Amnesty International, which had gained prominence contemporaneously with the decline of the revolutionary idea in French intellectual life and society (Whyte 2012: 217). Problematically, such human rights discourse was located within neoliberal rationality, which was just beginning to become the dominant economic model in most Western states (as Foucault himself presciently predicted), as well as ultimately providing the overriding ideological justification for subsequent military interventions in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Ibid., 221).

4.    See Nietzsche, e.g., Beyond Good and Evil 2010:227

5.    We can observe here that Foucault is indebted to an important theme in later Nietzsche, who regarded modern attitudes and ideologies to be the often unconscious residue of a 'Christian-moral' interpretation of the world.

6.    Here Foucault echoes the views of the pre-eminent ideologue of the Iranian Revolution, Ali Shariati, who rejected the idea that organised religion was inherently opposed to social progress. Shariati accuses Marx of equating the Messiah with the Pope, and in the process airbrushing generations of martyrs who opposed Roman imperialism and feudal rule: "Could Marx actually not know that independent Christian thinkers, in struggling against the church and the clergy have made greater sacrifices, to greater effect, than materialists and Marxists?" (Shariati 1980: 38).

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# Curriculum for Revolution:

## *Ali Shariati's Practical Plan and the Radical Politics of Knowledge*

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## Abstract

In the final years of his professional life, Shariati lectured at the Tehran progressive Islamic centre Hosseiniyeh Ershad, where he gave some of his most powerful and influential addresses. Behind the public impact was serious thinking about new constructions of knowledge required for a break from Iran's neo-colonial dependence, for a revolutionary change in culture and society. Shariati crystallized this thinking in a document that has fortunately survived, and is one of the most striking texts of postcolonial thought. It is a curriculum for research and teaching to be carried out by a greatly expanded Hosseiniyeh Ershad. This paper examines Shariati's agenda, its conception of a knowledge workforce, its socially-radical Islamic perspective, and its significance for Southern conceptions of knowledge. He offered a radical alternative to the Eurocentric economy of knowledge; not a model of hybridity.

**Keywords:** Ali Shariati, Hosseiniyeh Ershad, Southern Theory, epistemic hybridity, Eurocentric economy of knowledge

## Truth Validity of Concepts: Some Notes on 'Allameh Tabatabai and Nelson Goodman

### Introduction: Shariati on the cultural crisis of Muslim society

Ali Shariati placed himself in an anti-colonial tradition, speaking of a global revolutionary movement and citing Fanon (whom he had met), Cesaire and Kenyatta (Shariati 1986a: 51-2).[1]  He was an anti-colonial thinker, but one with a distinctive set of concerns and practices.  The structure of his thought, and the coherence of his remarkable project for making and disseminating knowledge, poses difficulties for any interpretation of his work as hybrid or creole.  But it also opens radical possibilities for an anti-colonial agenda in knowledge, and for new understandings of intellectual workers in postcolonial conditions.

Shariati saw contemporary Iran, and the Muslim world generally, as a society in a state of combined stagnation and crisis.  Though he recognized internal causes of decline, a major concern was the onslaught of the colonizing powers of western Europe and the United States, and its effects within Muslim society.  From the centuries when the Muslims held the upper hand, or were in rough balance with the Europeans, the scales had now tipped drastically.  The West held overwhelming military and economic power, and was able to use that power to profit, to extract resources, and to hold down resistance.

Iran had not been directly colonized, and was only occupied by European armies on one occasion (during World War II, by the British and the Soviets).  But the country had been the scene of economic exploitation, political subservience and inter-imperial rivalry for a hundred years.  Like his older contemporary Al-e Ahmad, whose famous cultural critique *Gharbzadegi* ["Westoxication"] is mentioned in his texts, Shariati was particularly concerned with the cultural conditions that allowed economic and political subordination.

A focus of this argument and a distinctive feature of Shariati's sociology was a theory of intellectuals.  He pictured the modernizing intelligentsia of Iran, in universities, media or literature, as utterly dependent on Western training, ideas and approaches:

> *In such an atmosphere everyone breathes the air of the West,*
> *everyone consumes only those intellectual, moral and artistic*
> *products imported from the West, and everyone sits defenseless*
> *against the onslaught of the alien culture. (55)*

There was another intelligentsia in Iran, which should have provided a defence against this onslaught, but failed to do so.  This was the mainstream body of religious scholars, the *ulama*, who in Shariati's view – here echoing the critique by Islamic modernizers from al-Afghani onward - had become stuck in a backward-looking, formulaic version of Islam.  Paraphrasing a vivid remark of the Imam Ali, Shariati observed that in Shi'ite orthodoxy, "Religion has become like a garment which is worn inside out" (136) – ugly, dull and lifeless, incapable of inspiring resistance.

This profound split in culture, which Shariati noted was a general feature of colonialism, was very much in the interest of the colonizers.  Indeed, it was actively promoted by them.  Contesting domination therefore required re-uniting and re-vivifying the culture that colonial power had broken apart.

On what basis?  Shariati was completely clear about this.  Though the project required the most sophisticated modern, scientific knowledge, the basis must be a re-invigorated Islam:

> *Thus, a profound scientific movement in our time... is urgently needed.  The objective of such a movement would be to present the real truth and the original face of Islam; to raise the level of understanding and religious awareness in the society; and to familiarize the educated stratum and the young generation with that Islam from which cultural colonizers have made tremendous efforts to alienate them... (112)*

In such passages Shariati's intellectual project appears, as Ghamari-Tabrizi (2004) described it, as a kind of liberation theology.

This has common ground with other anti-colonial and post-colonial knowledge projects.  It shares with the liberation theology of Latin America (Gutierrez 1974) a concern with the damage to human lives and real religion done by imperialism and local comprador capitalism.  It shares with the 'decolonial' school a critique of the dark side of European modernity (Mignolo 1995), which Shariati saw in the ruthlessness of imperialism and the creation of new social hierarchies.  It shares with indigenous knowledge projects (Odora Hoppers 2002, Tuhiwai Smith 2012) a concern to find, in pre-colonial traditions, a radically separate basis for the critique of colonial culture and the building of modern alternatives.

Yet Shariati was emphatically not proposing a local indigenous-knowledge project.  Nor did he emphasise the alterity of pre-colonial culture in criticising Eurocentrism, as decolonial thinkers usually do.  Rather, Shariati's anti-colonialism

has some analogy with the way Vinay Lal (2002) presents the strategies of Mahatma Gandhi: it is an alternative universalism. But the matter goes beyond that. Shi'ite Islam, to Shariati, is not a local culture, and it is not one alternative among others. It is the revelation and the command of God.

As Shariati says again and again, the voice of God is hardly to be heard in the fossilized official religion of the mosques. In his view of the history of the faith, there had been a struggle between true revolutionary Islam and various corruptions imposed by privilege, from the time of the Prophet's immediate successors onward. The line of descent from Ali, the first Imam, was defined in opposition to the imperial power grasped by the Ummayad clan as they took control of the Caliphate. A later disaster was the installation of Shi'ism as a state religion by the Safavid dynasty in Iran, when even the radical Islam of the Imams became institutionalized.

Shariati was not alone in this view. Similar ideas were developed by the group who eventually launched the Islamic guerrilla campaign against the Pahlavi state, the Mojahedin (Abrahamian 1989). Shariati was a particularly eloquent voice among those who believed that a profound, transformative renewal of Islam was needed. Some of his most dramatic writing tried to characterize this renewal:

> ...how can we bring out that life-giving, creative, revolutionary, enlightening, power-generating, wisdom-bestowing and civilization-making spirit which used to give its followers honor and independence, life and knowledge, faith and motion, spirituality and wealth, mysticism and the sword, hate and love, revenge and forgiveness, struggle and peace, fanaticism and tolerance, freedom and leadership, realism and idealism, pride and modesty, servitude and revolt, humanity and awareness? (110)

This was not just a rhetorical question. Shariati had a substantive answer. He argued that what prevented renewal, and made Islamic culture anachronistic, was "the death of the spirit of independent reasoning" – *ijtihad*. This is the crux of Shariati's argument about knowledge. It was independent reasoning or interpretation that created the tremendous wealth of classical Islamic culture. Independent reasoning engaged in the "constant extraction of new truths of Islam parallel with the evolution of human thought and science" (110-111) - this is what is now needed for the renewal of Islamic culture and the reform of Muslim societies.

In this argument Shariati was far removed from most of Sunni tradition and also from many modern Islamic revival movements. The "door of *ijtihad*", which orthodox jurisprudence considered closed or almost closed, had to be thrown open.

Freedom of thought and expression, open debate and innovation, were of the essence.  Shariati not only grounded this view in Shi'ite tradition, he quoted the Prophet himself: "The difference [of opinion] among the ulama of my community is a blessing" (113).

That was the principle.  But how could this be turned into practice?

## The means of change

Shariati's sociology, as I have noted, distinguished two main groups of Iranian intellectuals: the modernizing professionals associated with universities and the development agenda of the state; and the *ulama*, the religious scholars, associated with the mosques and the traditional religious schools.  Each was the bearer of important knowledge: on the one hand modern science and technology, on the other the knowledge contained in Islam. (The latter is rendered by the translators "Islamology", not meaning external knowledge *about* Islam so much as knowledge *within* Islam, especially knowledge of God, the Prophet, and the Qur'an.)

However, in Shariati's view both groups had become hopelessly compromised in the conditions of a semi-colonial Iranian society.  The professional intellectuals had effectively sold out to the West, while the *ulama* had retreated to a ritualized substitute for real religion.  Shariati developed a fierce critique of both groups, and this is an important reason he became politically isolated.  He was convinced that neither group had the capacity to speak on behalf of society as a whole.

But hope was not lost, because there was another possibility, another type of thinker.  This was not an organized group, and not distinguished by formal qualifications, as Shariati observed in the important 1971 lecture at the Technical University of Tehran, "Where Shall We Begin?" He had in mind bold and imaginative thinkers who maintained a connection with their culture and with the masses, and did have a capacity to articulate profound social needs.  These were not necessarily Muslim: Shariati gave the example of Mohandas Gandhi.

For this type of intellectual Shariati used the Farsi term *rushanfekr*, rather awkwardly translated in English as "enlightened thinker".[2]  The *rushanfekran* are above all practitioners of radical, independent reasoning.  Towards the end of "Where Shall We Begin?", Shariati defined the political-cultural task of establishing autonomy vis-à-vis the West:

> *We can resist only by creating an independent intellectual movement,*
> *by providing the needed intellectual and ideological resources, by*

> *enhancing and improving critical ability, the level of understanding*
> *and accuracy of diagnosis, and by strengthening the power of*
> *ideological resistance among our youth and among our intellectuals.*
> *(1986a: 63)*

In the Practical Plan, Shariati imagines this strategy being implemented by an independent Islamic research and teaching centre, in fact by Hosseiniyeh Ershad itself. The centre is treated almost as a collective *rushanfekr*.

Hosseiniyeh Ershad in Tehran was a recently established centre for discussion of a modernized Shi'ite Islam. It provided a lecture hall in which Shariati became a popular speaker, and a library. It was not a large institution, but it provided a model for a growing movement of lay intellectuals and students with a religious orientation. Other centres of the same kind multiplied in Tehran and other parts of the country.

However popular with students, Hosseiniyeh Ershad lacked the institutional authority and support from a wider public that the mainstream mosques and religious schools could rely on. When the armed struggle against the Pahlavi regime began in the early 1970s, the Ershad was very vulnerable. The regime labelled it a recruiting ground for terrorists, and closed it down without difficulty in 1972. Shariati was arrested not long afterwards, also without repercussions for the regime.

In the Practical Plan, Shariati imagined Hosseiniyeh Ershad as a large research and teaching institute, with at least 4000 graduate students, on the way to becoming a national "Free Islamic University" (151) – indeed a world centre. He described it as having four units or divisions: the first for research, the second for teaching, the third for public outreach, and servicing those three, a fourth for logistics.

Research institutes already existed in Iran, including Shariati's own field of sociology. Zohreh Bayatrizi (2013) has told the story of the Institute of Social Studies and Research, founded in 1958 at the University of Tehran. This Institute became the main vehicle for developing Iranian sociology up to the change of regime, undertaking empirical studies of social issues. By 1977 it had 300 full-time or part-time researchers and had published 263 books. Its intellectual frameworks and methods, however, were largely imported from France and the United States, and much of its funding came from contract research for the government.

Research institutes and Islamic universities existed in other parts of the Muslim world. An outstanding research centre was CERES (Centre d'etudes et de recherches economiques et sociales) founded in Tunisia in 1962. The staff of

CERES became involved in broad discussions of decolonization and postcolonial culture as well as detailed research on local social patterns and development strategy (Ben Salem 2009). The idea of an Islamic university, or general advanced teaching centre, is ancient. As Farid Alatas (2006) observes of al-Azhar in Cairo, its foundation pre-dated any European university and even provided a model to Europe. Al-Azhar survived to become the pre-eminent world centre of Sunni scholarship. In the complicated de-colonization of Egypt, it was integrated into the public university system by the Nasr regime, and has since grown on a massive scale, though in some tension with the Egyptian state (Bano 2018, Zeghal 2007). Shariati thus had some relevant models, though his thinking was distinctive in a number of ways, especially in proposing a close alliance of advanced science, powerful religion and popular education.

## The plan

The text called "A Practical Plan for Husayniah Irshad", which accompanies the lecture "What Is To Be Done?" in Shariati's *Collected Works*, is fifty-six pages long in English translation.  It is quite a detailed piece of planning, but it is also difficult to follow.  The text has every appearance of being an uncompleted draft, perhaps a composite from different sources hastily put together.  It is uneven in style, very uneven in coverage, and sometimes repetitive.  Nearly 80% of the document deals with the agenda for only one of the four units.  The other three are dealt with briefly and schematically (with the exception of an essay on the mobile library, discussed below).

There are three types of writing in the Practical Plan.  First, there are eight lists, sometimes comprised of sentences or paragraphs, often just headings or dot points. I will quote the first, a master list headed "The Program", included at the start of the document (104-5):

> I. Research (consisting of six research groups)
>
>> A. Islamology
>>
>> B. Philosophy of History and History of Islam
>>
>> C. Islamic Culture and Sciences[3]
>>
>> E. Islamic Countries
>>
>> F. Art and Literature
>
> II. Educational (consisting of five teaching groups)

        A. Islamology

        B. Qur'anology

        C. Missionary Training

        D. Literature and Art

        E. Arabic and English Languages and Literature

    III. Propaganda

        A. Religious Preaching and Speeches

        B. Scientific Conferences

        C. Scientific Congresses, Seminars, and Interviews

    IV. Logistic Organizational Units

        A. Center for Books, Documents, and Statistics

        B. Mobile Library

        C. Printing House

        D. Publications

        E. Periodicals

        F. Translation

        G. Hajj and Religious Rituals

This does not exactly correspond to the detail of the following document, Shariati obviously having expanded parts of the plan as he went. However, it shows perfectly the scope of the proposal and its characteristic language.

The other lists are expansions of the points in the master list, with one interesting exception. After the main text's treatment of the group for Art and Literature, there is a section called "Research Programs of the Irshad Institution", which is not included in the master list, and could be an earlier version of the whole document. It repeats many of the topics treated before, but with a different structure; and includes quite specific research topics that could be taken up by "volunteers", a point to which I will return.

Mixed in with the lists is a second type of writing: virtually autonomous essays, ranging from one page to twelve in the translation, on particular topics. Some of these, too, might be interpolations, where Shariati (or the compiler) inserted text already written. The shorter ones might have been composed while the lists were being compiled, and there is no sharp distinction between these essays and long

paragraphs within the lists.  Either way, they are an indication of the issues where Shariati felt it important to offer an extended rationale.

On my count, the included essays are:

1. The case for scientific research in an Islamic institute

2. *Ijtihad* and cultural renovation

3. Exemplary personalities

4. Islamic utopia

5. History

6. Cultural problems of Islamic societies

7. Art, literature and beauty

8. Books and literacy.

The longest are the first and seventh.  The first (together with the second, which follows it immediately), re-states Shariati's usual argument about the need for cultural renovation and a linking of modern science with true Islam.  The seventh, a dissertation on art, literature and beauty, is more surprising.  But it is consistent with Shariati's critique of the ugliness of fossilized mainstream religion, and his idea that true Islam is rich with invention, beauty, and creativity.   The new Hosseiniyeh Ershad was not to be a dull academic institution but a site of cultural flowering.

The other surprising essay is the eighth, which comes in an otherwise severely practical list of tasks for the Division of Logistics.  It is found under the heading "Mobile Library", and involves a discussion of popular literacy, an enthusiastic defence of the cultural value of books, an anxious discussion of how people can distinguish good books from bad, and a scheme for spreading access via a mobile library that delivers to people's homes.

The third type of writing, which is perhaps the style that Shariati intended for the whole document, is intermediate between the bare-bones list and the autonomous essay.  It is found in only one place, but a significant one: the agenda for the research Group for Islamology.  The topics to be dealt with are: God, the Qur'an, and the Prophet.

This part of the text, more than others, offers a carefully reasoned and integrated – though still very ambitious – research agenda.  The topics of God, the Qur'an and the Prophet are where Shariati's agenda encroached most dramatically on the preserve of the *ulama*.   Shariati was under attack at this time from religious

conservatives for lecturing on such questions without being properly qualified, i.e., without having had the full training required of religious scholars. He had a religious family background, and was well versed in Islamic history, but his advanced training was secular. He may have felt that this part of his agenda needed special care.

## A politics of knowledge: Expansive, democratic, controlled

If a renewed Shi'ite Islam was the strong energising principle in Shariati's knowledge project, it was certainly not a fence around it. Shariati was emphatic that the project had to canvass the whole field of contemporary thought, whatever its complexion - secular, Christian, Hindu, Sunni, Sufi and more. His adventurous curriculum for research and teaching was implicitly a critique of the formulaic teaching of the mainstream religious schools, just as its religious logic was implicitly a critique of the secular universities.

The sheer expansiveness of Shariati's agenda led him to a principle that can be found in other radical education projects of the 1960s and 1970s. A theme of documentation-from-below can be found in Freire's famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). In 1968 the new-left Free University in Sydney launched a project on class inequality that produced a collection of documents, an annotated bibliography, and a series of articles and books (Irving and Connell 2015). However, Shariati's proposal went beyond such projects in its concern for what we might call meta-knowledge. From start to finish of the Practical Plan, Shariati insisted that the Hosseiniyeh Ershad must become a general centre of documentation, evaluation and record.

In the opening section on Islamology, for instance, Shariati proposed multiple tasks: to collect and translate the works of the great scholars, Islamic and otherwise, who have addressed fundamental problems of religion; to make a new scholarly translation of the Qur'an, and translate all expert studies of it; to translate "and critically annotate" all authoritative biographies of the Prophet, and make a new one; to make a new critical study and an authoritative collection of the *hadith* (attested sayings of the Prophet); and more (118-122). In the concluding section on Logistics, he proposed a vast collection of statistics, books, documents, photographs, audiotapes and conference records relevant to Islamic societies, in multiple languages:

> Compile a scientific and methodological list of all the works, books, articles and handwritten books in different languages classified

*according to their subjects.   This is needed so that research and access to different sources by different people becomes easier. (154)*

Shariati did not concern himself with *how* this was to be done. It is hard to see how it could be done without immense funds, and a computer technology that was still coming into being at the time.  But it is notable that he saw the need.  In the context of an activist project, he was concerned to produce a large-scale, permanent deposit of knowledge as a resource for research and education.

This was not to be just an inert heap of data.  Shariati emphasised that the material was to be subjected to critique and evaluation.  The Ershad's published output was to be the product of tough intellectual engagement and modern scholarly techniques.  This was the spirit of *ijtihad*.

Who was to do this work?  Clearly, Shariati needed trained experts in various fields of knowledge.  He gave two reasons for announcing the Practical Plan. The first was to allow "aware and thoughtful people" to help revise and complete the agenda.  Many items in the lists presuppose that the Ershad would have specialists in mathematics, languages or natural science, and skilled workers in publishing, film and librarianship.  Shariati hoped for help and guidance from "the enlightened ulama of the traditional schools" and for "university professors, writers, scholars, translators, and specialists of the social sciences" (104).

But the project also required a different kind of workforce.  The second reason Shariati gave for announcing the Practical Plan was to invite a much wider group to participate.  Any "enlightened Muslims in our society" (103) could help – with labour, with money, with propaganda, but also with the research.  Later in the document he spoke of "volunteers" doing detailed research (144, 145), choosing a topic within the plan. Here Shariati seemed to be thinking of a knowledge-creation project going outside the walls of the institution. This was consistent with his idea that the knowledge project would be central in a spreading Islamic revival in Iranian society.

Even the specialist intellectual workers were to be part of this revival.  So, their character was to be different from the workforce of a secular university.  In some of the most striking passages of the Practical Plan, Shariati sketched a new kind of knowledge worker, who would combine expert knowledge with religious knowledge and commitment, healing the split in contemporary society and culture:

*A new breed of Muslim scientists will take over, who feel Islam in their hearts and minds, who have scientific familiarity with Islamic culture, civilization, and schools of thought, who know scientific*

*research methodology, know the progress of sciences in the contemporary world, and in short, know both cultures. (114)*

How to produce such a new intelligentsia was not very clear. The Education Section got less than two pages of the whole Practical Plan. Apart from mentioning that "the very humane and progressive educational style of the past Islamic universities will be adopted" (151), these pages said little except to list the fields in which teaching would be done: Islamology (including social science), Qur'anic studies, training of preachers, art, and language and literature. It seems that Shariati was relying on the wider Islamic revival, rather than the Hosseiniyeh Ershad even in its new form, to produce a new consciousness among people with technical or professional training.

The idea of this wider workforce was consistent with Shariati's theme of democratising knowledge. In the essay on books and literacy near the end of the Practical Plan, Shariati noted the recent expansion of education and the need for books. He advocated a mobile library plan as a way of developing habits of literacy and providing the desperately needed "intellectual nutrition" for the people (157). Elsewhere he was critical of colonialism for failing to educate.

Literacy was a familiar concern of anti-colonial movements. The Viet Minh, for instance, conducted literacy campaigns, under the most difficult conditions, in their long struggle against the French colonizers of Vietnam. Shariati envisaged a large outreach programme publishing books, magazines and newspapers. The Practical Plan was peppered with ideas for translation of texts into the language of the people – the Qur'an itself, biographies of the Prophet, the *hadiths*, great texts of Islamic scholarship, and more.

But there was a tension in this agenda. At the point in the Practical Plan where Shariati began the exposition of the detailed research agenda, he announced the mechanism by which it would be directed. There was to be a "Supreme Board of Research", composed of experts - outstanding individuals from the different fields of knowledge, plus the directors of the six research groups within the Ershad. These were to be:

*distinguished scholars, experts, and researchers in many branches of Islamic science, religious schools, history, culture and civilization and in many fields of modern science and culture. Human spirit and the clear outlook of Islamic faith and awareness, which is the main criterion for identifying a committed thinker, should be manifested in their scientific research. (117)*

Doubtless Shariati imagined the Supreme Board as inspiring and leading the research, but the element of control was clear in the inclusion of the research group directors. Control was more conspicuous in Shariati's discussion of popular outreach. He thought there were good books and bad books. Bad books would be a poisonous, corrupting force; to combat them it was necessary to distribute "clean, constructive, and enlightening books". (157) Therefore, lists of the good ones should be prepared regularly under the supervision of another committee, also comprised of "scientists and enlightened and committed thinkers". Only approved ones would be bought and distributed.

The same principle was found in Shariati's long essay on art, literature and beauty. The task was to replace bad, corrupting art with good art that helped to spread the message of Islam. To find, study, expound, and also to produce good Islamic culture was the task of the research group for Art and Literature – which of course was under the direction of the Supreme Board of Research.

Shariati's knowledge project, then, had an elitist as well as a democratic side. The implicit elitism was later criticized by Abdolkarim Soroush, who had seen cultural control from the inside, when conservative religious forces won the post-revolutionary struggle in Iran and set up the Islamic Republic (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2008). The democratic side of Shariati's project is less recognized today, so perhaps needs more emphasis. It includes his concern for translation and publication, his enthusiasm for mass literacy, his insistent critique of colonialism and the state, and his surprisingly inclusive agenda for knowledge-making. Both sides of the project grew from the same root – Shariati's underlying interpretation of Shi'ite Islam as an ideology of struggle against social division and privilege.

## The project's basis: Islam and knowledge

This theological base sharply distinguished Shariati's project from the positivist sociology, separating "facts" from "values", promoted by Gholam-Hoseyn Sadighi in the 1950s and 60s at the University of Tehran (Bayatrizi 2013: 473). In two ways Shariati's theology infused his social and educational vision. First, his emphasis on the concept of *tawhid*, the unity or one-ness of God, implied a conception of the one-ness of the human – producing a radical critique of all forms of hierarchy and social privilege.

This is sometimes written about as Shariati's "marxism". Certainly, Shariati spoke freely about social classes, analyzed the patterns of power in Muslim society, and denounced poverty and exploitation. His social concepts, however, were

eclectic rather than marxist, as the Practical Plan's agenda for the Social Science group clearly shows (132). Shariati's picture of history was far from historical materialism (Bayat 1990). Shariati was generally more concerned with neocolonial domination than with capitalism as such.

Yet he offered a sociology that was as politically engaged as marxist sociology, and this was closely connected with his theology. Shariati understood Islam in the time of the Prophet as being a revolutionary struggle for social justice. He read the history of Shi'ism as the continuation of that struggle. His daring critique of both state and religious elites in the neo-colonial Iran of his own day gained great energy from these Islamic roots.

Second, Shariati heard in Islam a powerful injunction to study and learn. Unlike other religious texts with their domineering attitude,

> the Qur'an (which is a divine book and speaks the language of revelation) – while it considers piety of soul, purity of heart, and sincerity of comprehension to be the basic conditions of accepting the "truth" and of being positioned in the direction of "guidance" – constantly calls upon its followers to think and ponder. Not only for understanding nature, history, and human societies does the Qur'an recommend that its followers observe, think, and do research, but it also recommends the understanding of the philosophy of life, the ultimate reason for creation, the mysteries of existence, and even the nature of God. (105-6)

Not just a religion of the Book, Islam was a religion of research.

> The Prophet of Islam more than any other religious, moral and social leader in the history of mankind, urged his followers to seek education throughout their lives. He made seeking education obligatory for men and women and ordered his followers to seek knowledge in the farthest corners of the globe and obtain it from any source – even from the non-believers. (115)

I quote these passages at length because the principle is central to Shariati's knowledge project. He does not seek to reconcile religion and science as if they were external to each other – the situation produced by colonialism. To Shariati, the drive for knowledge is inherent in true religion. At the same time the process of research, the creation of new understanding across a broad terrain, is absolutely required for the revival of religion.

Therefore, Shariati's Practical Plan involved compiling a massive body of knowledge from secular sciences, both natural and social. It involved studying Sunni texts and traditions as well as Shi'ite. It stretched into art and literature as well as history and the sciences. *All* believers could and should take part in this knowledge project.

The place of the social sciences in this agenda is telling. The section of the Practical Plan giving the agenda for the Group for Social Sciences was the shortest of the six research sections, though it overlapped with the following section on Islamic Countries. Its logic was not systematic but historical. Ghamari-Tabrizi (2004: 511) notes how Shariati set himself to rewrite the whole history of Shi'ism, to reclaim its original progressive core. He now set the Group for Social Sciences the task of rewriting the whole history of Muslim society.

"Islam is a social and civil religion" – a point Shariati frequently made. "From a sociological point of view, what is most important to note is that the Prophet of Islam only laid the foundations of a new society." (132) These foundations, in the Prophet's exemplary community in Medina, were discussed in Shariati's essay in the Islamology section. In the following generations the Muslims became a world civilization and constructed complex, urbanized societies. Shariati's agenda for his research group was to study this process of construction beyond the utopian moment of Medina, especially the social forms and institutions that emerged over the centuries. In effect, the Social Science project was to study the materialization of Islam in the wider social world.

Shariati was unashamedly one of a long line of Islamic modernizers (Hourani 1991, Vahdat 2002). He knew this history and invoked its leading lights: Sayid Jamal al-Afghani, Mohammed Abduh, Mohammed Iqbal, and more. His modernism however was unusually militant and epistemologically radical.

> *Thus, at the outset of our Islamic and scientific research, our most important scientific and Islamic goal is to facilitate the cooperation of these two groups and open a path in which all scientific resources and all existing progress in contemporary research can be utilized in the service of understanding the truth of Islam and its true culture. (114)*

Note well: *all* scientific resources, *all* existing progress. To Shariati, *ijtihad* is a radical principle - nothing is exempt from scrutiny. And because Islam is a social and civil religion, the results of this scrutiny cannot remain in the academy. They too must be materialized in the wider social world. Half humorously, Shariati cited

Trotsky. Entirely seriously, he remarked "In Islam, ijtihad guarantees permanent revolution" (111).

The Pahlavi regime was right. This man was dangerous.

## Shariati's project in global-South perspective

It is not clear, from the texts available in English, exactly why Shariati wrote his Practical Plan. It was not an organizational blueprint nor a plan for expansion. It contained no discussion of funding, buildings, equipment, staff numbers, management, or student recruitment – the practical details of any research institute's life. It did have a section on Logistics, but this was basically a wish list of activities. For instance, the first item under Publishing read in its entirety: "Printing what the Husayniah wishes to publish" (158).

In any case, the whole project was impossible if seriously opposed by the state – which was almost certain to happen. The Pahlavi regime moved against the Hosseiniyeh Ershad in its original form and shut it down without trouble. Shariati was dead before the revolution broke out. But even if he had been alive, it is hard to imagine the Ayatollah Khomeini, the Revolutionary Guard and the Hezbollahi allowing an institution to flourish under their noses which offered such an extended challenge to orthodox clerical authority.

And if we imagine Shariati's project in the world of neoliberalism: what corporate billionaire's foundation would fund a large and expensive research institution that was anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, anti-state, and engaged in a mixture of religious research and popular agitation?

The Practical Plan, then, was notably impractical. Why spell it out in such detail? My guess is that Shariati wrote in detail *because* he knew it could not be done in practice. In Shariati's view, exemplary cases were historically powerful. He said as much in the essay on the Prophet's community in Medina, which revealed how Islam built institutions and created a community in the world. (125-127) He said it even more eloquently in his great lecture on "Martyrdom" (Shariati 1986b), in which he transformed the Shi'ite commemoration of the Imam Hussein, killed at Karbala, from an act of mourning to an act of commitment, celebrating the Third Imam's example of resistance and activism.

Spelling out what a radical Shi'ite knowledge project would attempt was a message to the world about intellectual activism. Shariati's borrowing of Lenin's phrase "What Is to Be Done?" was inexact, because Lenin's famous text concerned

organizational means and practicalities.  But the borrowing had force, because Shariati's agenda showed the scale and depth of the revolution in thought that he considered necessary.

Yet here too there was a tension.  One of Shariati's most insistent themes was that Islam was a realistic, engaged religion that operated in the actual world.  This was the burden of his attacks on the dis-engagement of the mainstream *ulama* and what he saw as their fatal compromise with the neocolonial state.  But offering as an alternative a revolution in thought, a Practical Plan in the imagination - however inspiring, this was far from a transformation of the world.  Shariati, then, was offering an agenda in some sense incompatible with its own foundations.  There seems to be stress, even desperation, in this effort.

Tension is endemic in what I have called "Southern theory" (Connell 2007). Social analyses from the colonized and postcolonial world, responding to empire and the new forms of global power, are commonly produced under stress and often concern destruction, dispossession and exploitation – the shattering of worlds and the attempt to build new ones.  Shariati's revolutionary Shi'ite sociology is notable among them.

Shariati was aware of a range of anti-colonial thinkers, and praised their example of struggle.  He was also critical of anti-colonial thought for its under-estimation or rejection of religion.  Though he insisted that his project should use knowledge from all sources, Shariati's agenda was emphatically Islamic and specifically Shi'ite.  He never seemed to waver from the belief that the Partisans of Ali were the bearers of the true Islam, and that his activist project embodied the Alavi tradition in the contemporary world.

There is an intransigence embedded in this project, which gives it a sharp edge but also creates distance around it.  One cannot sign on to the project, as Shariati expounded it, without a thoroughgoing commitment to Alavi Islam.  Not just an intellectual tolerance, or even assent, will do; the project presumes a practical commitment.  This is where Shariati's project remains unassimilable to the norms of the global knowledge economy. At the same time, it is profoundly resistant to any idea of hybridity, creolism or fluidity in postcolonial culture. There is nothing to negotiate in the command of God.

Since the detail develops from this overwhelmingly demanding point of origin, it is difficult to borrow elements of this agenda for other knowledge projects.  With Shariati we cannot pick and choose.  Yet its very intransigence makes Shariati's Practical Plan one of the most striking examples of a sophisticated, anti-colonial

knowledge project that contests the logic of the global economy of knowledge (Connell 2019).

Shariati's project is not dependent on a positivist separation of facts from values. It does not rest on a Comtean map of knowledge, the now-traditional classification of university disciplines. It greatly values and encourages research, but it does not reproduce the elitist model of the North American research university, now embedded in international "League Tables" and the massively privileged Ivy League. Shariati's project resists the commercialization that is now corrupting the university systems of both rich and poor countries. It emphatically connects professional-quality research with a democratic intention for knowledge. This is impressive and it cannot be assimilated. It is as confronting as a rock on the sand.

Therefore, if people who cannot assent to Shariati's starting point are to learn from his project – as I think we should – we are required to push beyond our usual models of plurality and integration in knowledge. South/South linkages must be constructed in the presence of an absolute; perhaps more than one. Alliances must be constructed around unfamiliar conceptions of struggle. Anyone undertaking such a politics of knowledge will put their own principles at risk, and must be prepared for hard and unexpected learning.

## Note

1.  From here on, page references not otherwise identified are to the lecture "What Is to Be Done?" and the accompanying "A Practical Plan for Husayniah Irshad", posthumously translated in Shariati (1986a). For detail of Shariati's intellectual trajectory and career, I depend largely on the biography by Rahnema (1998).
2.  See the translator's note on this difficulty, in Shariati (1986a), p. 27 note 2.
3.  D, Social Sciences, is omitted in the translation, perhaps accidentally.

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# Reading Alatas in Iran:

## *Demythologizing the Myth of Iranian Exceptionalism*

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> "[we believe] *We are good, they are shit!*"
> ~ Mohsen Namjoo, exert from the song *Geographical Determinism*

> "*For Western women no means no. But is it the same for the Iranian woman? The beauty of Persian literature is that no means a thousand different things*!"
> ~ Mohsen Namjoo on a viral leaked audio file in the aftermath of accusation of sexual abuse.

> "*Historically speaking, tyranny, oppression and exploitation were never the work of whole communities against each other. It has always been the dominant minority of a particular community imposing its will upon its own, or another community or both.*"
> ~ Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*

## Abstract

How should one read Syed Hussein Alatas' *The Myth of the Lazy Native* in Iran? What are its possible contributions towards theorizing an ideological concept that has kept Iranian dynamics of progress in suspense for a long time? This article attempts to expand on the idea of *Iranian exceptionalism*, observe and explain the discourse around it. The author employs Alatas's writings, particularly those from his book The Myth of the Lazy Native, in order to argue that *Iranian exceptionalism* is a mentality created and empowered by internal despotism as well as external semi-colonialism in modern Iran. It is a common sensation simultaneously carry both senses of superiority and inferiority towards the *other*.

**Key Words:** Hussein Alatas, cultural studies, exceptionalism, Iran, ideology

## Introduction

The idea of writing this article is based on the belief that who we are, how we see ourselves, and how others see us, is not removed from the knowledge we produce, and the knowledge others produce about us. Iranian academics as individuals, particularly women who live and work inside and outside of Iran, are not separated from this knowledge. We, along with our work, are constantly isolated, cornered, and defined by others. We, and our work, do not fit in neither of these environments which creates a common sense of frustration situating us in a unique position that can only be explained as "exceptional".

When we work among the White Western academics, our critical knowledge, even when it explores and explains our own societies, cultures and histories is not perceived scientific enough. However, their imagined character of us "female rebel scholars" from the Middle East is often eroticized and exotified. When we work among scholars of color, especially Muslim scholars who study the global South or migration and identities, we are never perceived "Muslim" enough to join the community, or there is no possibility for us, for example, to join the global fight against Islamophobia, predominately because Iranians. Nevertheless, whatever relationship with Islam, the state, and women are deemed exclusive and exceptionally different from that of the Muslim world. Whatever scholarly activism we do is labelled "Islamic feminism" no matter if we engage with religious text or laws.

On the other hand, when we work in the Iranian academia, our critique of Eurocentric or Orientalist modes of knowledge production are seen as being apologetic for the repressive government or dismissed for having the illusion that an autonomous social science in possible. Often times we need to play the "I studied aboard" card in order for our voice to be heard by the structurally male dominated sphere. Applying this inevitable tactic is even more painful as we consciously and willfully situate ourselves in a hierarchal position above those Iranian female scholars who have been denied mobility and access to up-to-date social knowledge and connections with international scholars due to their economic or social conditions. And, finally, by the conservative and dominant section of the academia we are labeled as "Westernized".

Thus, this is the question: How to own this status and liberate ourselves from this forced suspense and for our produced knowledge and scientific work, both inside Iran and outside Iran to be heard and acknowledged? Can this be done simultaneously or if so, should it? In relation to these questions, the relevance of

Syed Hussein Alatas' work became clear for me when I asked myself, borrowing the idea of the "myth of the lazy native", is *Iranian exceptionalism* a myth? And if so how and for whom does it function? Over the next sections I attempt to build-up upon this idea that the mentality of *Iranian exceptionalism* ideologically feeds both the colonial and despotic modes of knowledge production – an ideology that locates at the intersection of the already existing national, religious and gender ideologies about Iranians.

## From Said to Alatas

In Iran as well as the post-colonial West, writing about the notion of the "Other," heads usually turn to Edward Said's masterpiece, *Orientalism.* There, Said gives an account of how Western intelligentsia's exotic yet patronizing image of the orient is constructed. Even the term "Middle East" is exceptional: the state of being in the middle of everything. A region determined to be "middle" because it is in between places; it is Asia but not quite Asia; it is Africa but not quite Africa; it is something so in the middle that of course has to be excluded from any political, cultural, economic, and even geographic categorization. That same exotic image of the Middle East later morphed into the characterizing Middle Easterners as underdeveloped, extremist, and terrorist in the neo-orientalist era and especially in the aftermath of 9/11 (Assayag, 2007).

A rather recent aspect that is often neglected is how in the age of information, global media identity politics of self-orientalization has become more and more vital in order to understand the ways in which people from the Middle East understand themselves and how they are compelled to re-create a constructed image in order to stand out in a globalized network society. To stand-out and fit in at the same time, more than anything, is about the politics of representation. Nowadays, most of the internationally acclaimed art, literature, cultural products, and films that fall into the ideological status I previously discussed are actually being produced by Middle Easterners themselves. Such sense of reduction and restriction is the starting point for reading Alatas in Iran and applying his thought in order to theorize *exceptionalism* as an ideology.

## Nowhere in the World but in Iran

As I already noted, Iran is, or at least is seen as an unusual case in the Middle East. "Nowhere in the world but Iran," "Iran, as usual, is a special case," are familiar

phrases in the daily life of Iranians, international political speeches, and reports about Iran, as well as the Persianate academia. As if to categorize Iran with any other group socially, historically, and culturally is impossible. It is an impression that one easily gets both from books and articles written by Iranian and non-Iranians about Iran. The term *Iranian exceptionalism* has been used countless times to express either Iranian religious identity, or political policy. Its symptoms, without referring to the term, have been observed by sociologists and described as "Iranian behaviors," but almost never viewed as a semi-colonial or imperial construct. "We are the oldest civilized nation, but we are incapable of acting civilized"; "The best of art historically belongs to Iranians, but we are incapable of producing original art"; "Art belongs and only belongs to Iranians"[1]; "Iran holds the world oldest 2500 high cultures, but Iranians are cultureless[2]"; "We are the most hospitable people in the world, but we embarrass ourselves hosting tourists." Are just some of the catch phrases and proverbs used by Iranians to describe themselves in relation to the *Other*.

I suggest that *Iranian exceptionalism* refers to a being and condition of contradiction. It is what makes the nation's imagination of itself both inferior and superior than its *Other* at the same time. It is indeed what makes imagining future change impossible – and therefore ideological.

The question is, how can this ideology be explained and theorized? Unlike Orientalism, *Iranian exceptionalism* is not only a semi-colonial ideology, rather it is an intersectional religio-national and gendered ideology that serves the interest of both the imperial world order and the Iranian state; it is internalized by academics as well as non-academic people in Iran. It does not even have a name as it is more considered a type of behavior or attribution. To put it simply, it is the mentality that "everything about Iran is different than everything in the world."

## The Myth of the Lazy Native

Theorizing a complex behavioral attribution regarding a certain population or community is exactly what has been done remarkably by Syed Hussein Alatas. His analysis of the origins and functions of the *Myth of the Lazy Native* in the reinforcement of colonial ideology not only contributed to the liberation of the Malays, but also towards building an autonomous native social science. The idea is very simple: it is an attempt to trace the origin of the idea that the native Malay population is lazy, untrainable, and at points tempered. As such, it attempts to answer the questions about how this myth was constructed, how it functioned in

colonial Malaysia's labor distribution, and how it was internalized and later affected social movements, knowledge production, and political activism. For Alatas, the Malay, despite their positive contribution to the kind of labor he describes in the development of the country (such as trading culture) into a modern state, were considered indolent, not because they were really indolent, but because they avoided the type of slave labor the Chinese and the Indians were compelled to do owing to their immigrant status (Alatas, 1977).

To borrow his approach in the context of another culture(s), one needs to start from the encounter of the native population with the *Other*(s). In the case of Iran, this would involve Iran's encounter with Europe in 18th and 19th century. In this fashion, in Iran, reading Alatas and his study of the image of the Malay and its ideological function in colonial capitalism is an effort to correct an internalized, but imperial, view of Iranian people and society. From here, I discuss in details, how and why Alatas' *The Myth of the Lazy Native* can open new horizons for theorizing the ideology of *Iranian exceptionalism* that creates of the prevailing image of Iran and Iranians.

> *'I swear to you that to* think *too much is a disease, a real, actual disease.'*
>
> Dostoevsky

Iran's relationship with the *foreign,* particularly with the West, is a historical and complex one. The common narrative is that the enlightened and modern West inspired the Iranian constitutional revolution and a whole generation of intellectuals in the beginning of the 20th century. The West then morphed into the imperialist, colonialist, "great evil" that inspired the "anti-West anti-East" Iranian revolution in 1979. Even if we were to accept this taken-for-granted straightforward narrative, the gap in between the two visions of the West still remains too large a question and thus requires further scrutiny. In his historical book, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Ervand Abrahamian explains how the influence of the West impacted the fragile relationship between the state and Iranian society during the second half of the 19th century. On the other hand, it was the impact of the intelligentsia through modern education, science, and culture that made "Iranians to see their own past through the eyes of contemporary Europeans," and contributed to the formation of modern religious Shi'i and national ideologies (Abrahamian, 1982). Afsaneh Najmabadi in her remarkable work, *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards,* includes gender as the main factor in her analysis of the anxieties caused by the process of Iranian modernity and provides an account of how the presence of Western powers in Iran, and the travels of Qajar kings and elites to Europe, resulted in the loss of

socially and religiously accepted non-binary sexual orientations, as well as female beauty standards in Iran (Najmabadi, 2005). Iran's encounter with the West, as the *foreign[3] or the Other*, is therefore critical and multifaceted, as it accordingly serves as a necessary and useful starting point for this comparison. Additionally, Tavakoli-Targhi, in *Vernacular Modernity,* elaborates on the encounter of Iranian Qajar travelers with European women – how they were gob-smacked by their "different" attires, gestures, which they viewed as more advanced and/or modern. Simultaneously, they nostalgically longed for "traditional" Iranian women, whom in their eyes have higher inner-value (religiously, and nationally) than them. The manner in which "Western women" are described in their reports and memoirs is interesting to trace the historical roots of how hierarchical ordering mechanism were constructed early on, and how Iranian women were situated in an exceptional position in that order. Tavakoli-Targhi also demonstrates how the Iranian culture, tradition, and spirit are imagined, which created modern gendered constructs that later become the "reality" about Iran for Europeans (Tavakoli-Targhi, 2001).

The colonial image of the Malay is not that different from what Tavakoli-Targhi illustrates about Iranian women in the eyes of the Iranian intelligentsia as well as Europeans. Alatas argued that the colonial administrators observed a certain attitude regarding the Malays that can only be described as exceptionalism. As to the Malays of Trengganu, he mentions how High Clifford regarded them as a "very different type." Clifford claimed that the Malays were, as a whole, capable of developing a psycho-pathological disorder called "Latah." In the state of Latah, which can be elicited by sudden noise or a surprising command, the subject appears unable to realize his own identity, or to do anything to imitate, often accompanied by the use of vulgar language. (Alatas, 1977) Colonial rulers were concerned with the impact on traditional Malay society and the introduction of the British rule, as the Malay working class were the labor force and had to now follow the imperial order and abiding the new trading and labor system.

Is that concern similar to the concern about the impact of modernization on traditional Iranian women? Is that a shared view among the Iranian ruling class and imperial complex, which has kept Iranian women in suspense from progress and achieving their rights? Is this sense of suspense imposed on Iranian women as they have been the center of national and religious ideologies for at least the last 100 years? Iranians, women in particular, have been deemed "incapable" of progress adopting to modern standard, values, and work cultures by the same mentality that deemed the Malay "lazy". One of the customary explanation for this sense of suspense (incapability of transitioning from tradition to modernity) is the theory of

transition.[4] For decades Iranian scholars, inside and outside of Iran, have used this theory to explain why "Iran is stuck between to conditions of tradition and modernity". Such mentality, which is an imperial construct internalized by Iranian social scientists, is in fact a re-enforcement of the discussed religio-national gendered ideologies that feeds both the ruling class in Iran (as it justifies the shortcomings of economic, political, and cultural developments in the country), as well as the imperial post-colonial world order. One must ask, are Iranians incapable of changing in between "tradition and modernity" or that is their unwillingness to take part in this hierarchical categorization that has been viewed as contradictory or exceptional?

Alatas talks about the unwillingness of native population instead of what was seen as their indolence by the colonial order. He writes "It was this unwillingness of the European population that made the colonial government rely on the labor of unwillingness natives, and it was this unwillingness that was viewed as indolence" (Alatas, 1977).

If Alatas talked about *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, can I talk about the gendered myth of *Iranian exceptionalism*?

What is brilliant about Alatas is how he demonstrated case-by-case that unlike Orientalist conceptions of the Middle East and its populations, the negative image of the native in Malaysia was not generated by scholars, but rather by a diverse group of people:

> "The negative image of the people subjugated by Western colonial powers, which dominated the colonial ideology, was drawn on the basis of cursory, observations, sometimes, with strong built-in prejudices, or misunderstandings and faulty methodologies. The general negative image was not the result of scholarship. Those who proclaimed the people of the area indolent, dull, treacherous, and childish, were generally not scholars. They were monks, civil servants, planters, sailors, soldiers, popular travel writers, and tourists.  They generated the image of the natives."

> *-Miss, by which woman you are the most inspired and who is your idol in life?* [expected answer was Fatimah, the daughter of prophet Mohammad]

> *-O-shin!* (The protagonist of a Japanese soap opera)

> A viral interview with the national radio from the 1980s

Transcending the 19th century Persia to the 21st century's post-revolutionary Islamic Republic, the country's relationship with *the foreign* has become more multidimensional and gendered. I argue that the relation between Iranian society with *the foreign* has undergone rapid and distinctive ideological transformations over the past four decades. International and geopolitical isolation, as well as sanctions, has contributed to the need for and dependence on the construction of a state ideology to create foreign threats. The relationship of Iran with *the foreign* has consequently become a fabricated reality that is not fabricated

I already mentioned that the ruling class in Iran – as much as they have tried to portray an anti-West image of themselves – have always used a comparison of Iran to the "modern and developed" West as a tool to degrade vernacular cultures, science, and technology. No matter in films, literature, or political speeches, the Iranian spirituality, including its ancient traditions and culture, is admired and valued. While when it comes to good governance, even simple shortcomings such as the troubling driving culture in the country, *Iranian exceptionalism* comes to play as the idea that Iranians are incapable or following law and order with sentences such as "nowhere in the world people drive like that" or "we are still used to driving donkeys".

As I mentioned earlier, *Iranian exceptionalism* is living the state of contradictions. Iranian female bodies are deemed as innocent, striking, and scared, but when it comes to voicing their issues, they are "not yet ready" to make their own decisions, to be socially mobile, to take up high-ranked positions, or even to choose their own clothing. In other words, Western women are used as a suppressing tool to stop Iranian women from progress. However, that is not only the ideology of the state, but has also been internalized in all level of Iran's patriarchal society.

Read one more time the quote from Mohsen Namjoo, a famous and internationally admired critical artist and dissident, at the beginning of this chapter. Mohsen Namjoo said this on a leaked audio file after he was accused of sexual abuse. "For Western women "no" means "no." But is it the same for the Iranian woman? The beauty of Persian literature is that "no" means a thousand different things!" he said (YouTube). It is clear that even when it comes to global movements such as the #metoo movement, which stands against sexual abuse, Iranian women are dismissed as being exceptional. It is the beauty of literature and traditions in Namjoo's opinion that makes them incapable of saying a "firm no" to sexual

assault, which a Western woman is fully capable of. In all its meaning, the ruling class – in government and outside the government – have constantly maintained the ideology of transitioning between tradition and modernity.

## But why would a ruling party be interested in degrading its own community?

Alatas has an answer for this too. One is the sincere belief among some members of the ruling party that the Malays are in a bad situation, the cause of which have been attributed to the Malay character. The second is the desire to uplift the Malay community, relative to the progress achieved by others. The third is the need for a justification for definite plans to improve the general economic condition of the Malay, which in the first place contributed to the advancement of some Malays in power and the success of Chinese businesses (Alatas, 1977).

That need for justification and desire for uplifting the community by humiliation can be borrowed to explain why Iran is seen as a "special case," and why Iranian modernity and unequal progress is seen as contradictory. *Iranian exceptionalism* serves both the Iranian state and the imperial world order as a gendered religio-national ideology. Human relations are discussed in the language of commodities. *Iranian exceptionalism* vitally needs to maintain and control the symbolic and visible conditions and status of Iranian women, who seen as morally superior and materially inferior, for itself in order for it to continue to survive and rule. It is the unwillingness of Iranian women to serve this ideology that has caused them to be viewed as being unable to "fit" in the discourse of progress.

Reading Alatas in enlightens the path to realize the vital role of intellectuals and scholars to the theorization and critique of intersectional ideologies such as *Iranian exceptionalism* – to trace its roots and deconstruct it. It is at the end of the day all about creating discourse, and how knowledge production is instrumental in constructing and conditioning specific discourses. It is only through owning this status by Iranians, especially women, and refusing to be marked "different," that a path towards liberation opens up. As Alatas observes:

> *"The Malay do not refer to characteristics selected by colonial ideology, such as indolence, treacherousness, lack of originality, and so on. It is however the colonial ideology that attempted to construct a homogenous and negative image of the native. The tracing of this*

> *image to the ideological roots and the circumstances surrounding them is the task of the present work."*

More texts are to be read, and even more are to be written. It is essential to produce independent autonomous and comparative knowledge about native populations and their national and international characters from the global South. And Syed Hussein Alatas is unquestionably a key figure in that manner.

## Note

1.   "honar nazd e Iranian ast o bas"
2.   "bi farhang"
3.   Khareji, what is not vernacular
4.   Nazarieh gozar

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# Book Review

***Introduction to Traditional Islam, Illustrated: Foundations, Art, and Spirituality, By Jean-Louis Michon, Foreword by Roger Gaetani, Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008, PP. 160***

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Behind the boisterous media, dominated by headlines of militant and political Islam, resides the more serene and cultivated form of traditional Islam. This form of Islam is more and more under threat from two different extremes: the fundamentalists and the modern secularists. French scholar Jean-Louis Michon (1924–2013) adeptly unveils the lesser-known dimensions of the Islamic tradition, distilling the essence and beauty of this misunderstood religion, which although often overlooked has over 1.5 billion adherents.

As many introductions to Islam devote their attention to the history of the faith, particularly on the Prophet Muhammad and the sacred foundation of the Koran, readers seeking a broader examination of the Islamic tradition often need to amass numerous books to obtain a full picture of the religion. The wide-scope presentation of Islam provided in this volume spares the reader such an endeavor. Roger Gaetani bears witness to the unique qualifications and depth of Michon's perspective, noting in the foreword, "It is difficult to imagine a time when the West has been more in need of a good personal guide to the world of Islam…. Readers of this book certainly have such a guide in Jean-Louis Michon" (p. ix).

This work is divided into four parts: (I) Islam: Foundations; (II) The Message of Islamic Art; (III) Music and Spirituality in Islam; and (IV) The Way of the Sufis. It is beautifully illustrated and contains over two hundred seventy color photographs.

Given the difficulties of finding reliable and accurate information on the world of Islam (dar al-islam), works like this one are not only timely but essential. Although Islam is said to be the final religion of this temporal cycle, it is also the youngest religion, which is facing myriad problems not only from the outside world or non-Muslims, but also within the community of its own believers. Michon astutely observes, "Today, the unity of the Muslim community is more than ever compromised by national rivalries and ideological dissensions which rarely have anything to do with the ultimate interests of believers" (p. 44).

Michon presents the Islamic tradition in such a way as to help the reader better understand the common ground between Islam and other religions, especially the Abrahamic monotheisms of Judaism and Christianity, who are regarded as the "People of the Book" (ahl al-kitab).

The importance and influence of the Muslim community (ummah) on the believer is continually highlighted within the religion. Michon writes,

> *Certainly, in his conduct, a man commits himself alone and it is he alone who will appear before the Supreme Judge to answer for his actions. However, the bond which links him to the social body is so tight that he depends for his salvation largely upon those around him and upon the more-or-less favorable circumstances that prevail there for the accomplishment of revealed Law. (p. 9)*

The centrality of mutual admonition as an essential virtue is stressed in the Koran: "Verily, man is in loss, save only them that believe and perform good works, and exhort one another to Truth and exhort one another to patience" (103:2–3).

The ongoing effort of each believer to submit to the Divine Will, along with the communal framework, serves to further aid in this effort. This is especially apparent in the Islamic city. Michon explains: "in the Muslim city, the striving after individual salvation involves ipso facto the sacralization of the social, whilst inversely the community entrusted with the Divine Message, wise institutions, and the example of the just conserves their content for the benefit of its members" (p. 9).

The declaration of the oneness and remembrance of the Divine are essential goals that the Koran continuously urges believers to strive for. As taught in the Koran: "Nothing is greater than the remembrance of God!" (29:45) The Islamic prayers (salat) are said five times a day: at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and after nightfall. The ambience of prayer impregnates the whole of human existence. Prayer, as Michon writes, "punctuates with its rhythm the entire life of

the individual from puberty to death; by its continuous renewal, it stamps upon time's passing the mark of that unique instant when the primordial Pact to adore their Lord was first joined by souls" (p. 19).

In Islamic art, like all forms of sacred art, "artistic creativity is nothing other than a predisposition which God has placed in man to help him follow the path which leads to Him" (p. 52). Muslim artists are visually able to illustrate in their work the sublime notion such as that of tajalli, "the infinite radiation of the Divine Essence across the multiplicity of levels of existence" (p. 58). Michon also discusses the Divine mark of calligraphy and its connection to the believer: "the Word of God possesses a power of recollection that acts upon the best part of man, assembles his scattered energies, and concentrates them, 'in the path of God', thereby giving him the best chances for spiritual enlightenment, since God has promised 'the good end to those who revere Him' (Koran 7:128)" (p. 66).

The presence of prayer intertwines with the believer's own identity so much so that, as Michon notes, the general believer or "Muslim personality is positively enwrapped in the recollection of divine Unity" (p. 43). He analyzes the meaning of the outward and inward dimensions of the Islamic tradition in the following passage:

> [T]he revealed Message has two dimensions or aspects: one that is outward on the surface and another that is inward and deep. The first is the Law (shari'ah) which is binding on all responsible men and women, ties them to itself by reason, and rules their faculties of feeling and action; followed to the letter, it makes for the restoration to creatures of their original status the shapes them to attain to the felicity promised in the Hereafter. The second is Truth (haqiqah) which concerns the essential realities hidden behind outward appearances and is perceptible only to the "eye of the heart" open to contemplation. It is like the anticipation in this world of the vision God accords to His intimates. (p. 44)

Sufism, or the mystical or inner dimension of Islam, was not something that superimposed itself onto traditional Islam; it was, in fact, present from the inception of Islam, and its presence can be found on every page of the Koran—especially in verses that teach that the Divine is nearer to the human being "than his jugular vein" (50:16), or that God "is the best and the most beautiful recompense" (73:20). It is said that the Prophet Muhammad himself was the first Sufi. The Sufi makes it a practice to always live in a state of moment-to-moment remembrance, not only

when engaged in the five daily prayers, but in each moment throughout the day. As the Koran instructs, "Remember Me, and I will remember you" (2:152). Self-knowledge can be said to be the goal of every mystical quest. Within Islam, this is affirmed by the hadith of the Prophet, "He who knows himself knows his Lord."

Good company becomes a prerequisite for the spiritual path to ensure its success. With this said, there are moments when the traveler is prescribed to take leave, both outwardly and inwardly, from the world to practice dhikr, the remembrance or invocation of the Divine. Of all the distinct formulas of invocation the name Allah is said to be the most complete and efficacious. Michon quotes the advice of one of the great philosophers and theologians within the Islamic tradition, al-Ghazali (d. 1111):

> *The best method consists of breaking totally your ties with the world, in such a way that your heart is occupied with neither family nor … money…. In addition, you must be alone in a retreat to carry out, from among your acts of worship, only the prescribed salat … and, being seated, concentrate your thoughts on God, without other interior preoccupation. You will do this, first by saying the name of God with your tongue, repeating without ceasing Allah, Allah, without relaxing your attention. The result will be a state in which you will effortlessly feel this name in the spontaneous movement of your tongue. (pp. 146–147)*

Introduction to Traditional Islam stands out among many introductory books on the Islamic tradition for the precision, warmth, and beauty in how it conveys the art, spirituality, music, and culture that lie at the heart of this faith, the world's second-largest religion. Giving the urgent need for the West to understand Islam in all its diversity, it is an admirable and timely volume that can assist in this process. Michon recalls the timeworn paths traveled by generations of Sufis who have fulfilled their task "to pass from century to century the good news that there exists a path which leads to God, and to guide along this path the souls enraptured by a Truth which never dies" (p. 149). They have responded to the call to bring to everyone to realize the transcendent wisdom that is "neither of the East nor of the West" (Koran 24:35).