

**Disenchanted Political Theology in Post-revolutionary Iran;
Reform, Religious Intellectualism and the Death of Utopia**

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To My Father, Mehran Sadeghi-Boroujerdi

&

Ostad Homa Katouzian

Those from whom I learned so much without giving anything in return

Abstract

This thesis delineates the transformation of Iran's so-called post-revolutionary 'religious intellectuals' (*rowshanfekran-e dini*) from ideological legitimators within the political class of the newly-established theocratic-populist regime to internal critics whose revised vision for the politico-religious order coalesced and converged with the growing disillusionment and frustration of the 'Islamic left', a constellation of political forces within the governing elite of the Islamic Republic, that following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini increasingly felt itself marginalised and on the outskirts of power.

The historical evolution of this complex, quasi-institutionalised and routinized network, encompassing theologians, jurists, political strategists and journalists, which rose to prominence in the course of the 1990s, and its critical engagement with the ruling political theology of the 'guardianship of the jurist', the supremacy of Islamic jurisprudence, political Islamism and all forms of 'revolutionary' and 'utopian' political and social transformation, are scrutinised in detail. In this vein, the thesis examines the various issues provoked by the *rowshanfekran-e dini*'s strategic deployment and translation of the concepts and ideas of a number of Western thinkers, several of which played a pivotal role in the assault on the ideological foundations of Soviet-style communism in the 1950s and 1960s.

It then moves to show how this network of intellectuals and politicians following the election of Mohammad Khatami to the presidency in May 1997 sought to disseminate their ideas at the popular level by means of the press and numerous party and political periodicals, and thereby achieve ideological and political hegemony. The thesis proceeds to demonstrate the intimate connection between the project of 'religious intellectualism' and elite-defined notions of 'democracy', 'electoral participation', 'reform' and 'political development' as part of an effort to accumulate symbolic capital and assert their intellectual and moral leadership of the polity.

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Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, Strasbourg, October 2013

Transliteration

Modified *Iranian Studies* transliteration scheme

Consonants

z	ض	l	ل
b	ب	z	ذ
t	ط	m	م
p	پ	r	ر
z	ظ	n	ن
t	ت	z	ز
'	ع	h	ه
s	ث	zh	ژ
gh	غ	v	و
j	ج	s	س
f	ف	i	ی
ch	چ	sh	ش
q	ق	'	ء
h	ح	s	ص
k	ک	d	د
g	گ	kh	خ

Vowels

Short	Long	Diphthongs
a (as in <i>ashk</i>)	a (as in <i>ensan</i> or <i>ab</i>)	-
e (as in <i>fekr</i>)	i (as in <i>melli</i>)	ei (as in <i>Khomeini</i>)
o (as in <i>pol</i>)	u (as in <i>Tus</i>)	ow (as in <i>rowshan</i>)

NB: Proper names and nouns which have standardised spellings in the English language, such as Isfahan, Khomeini, Khamenei, Khatami, Iran, and bazaar have not been transliterated in accordance with the above scheme.

Abbreviations

IRI – Islamic Republic of Iran (*Jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran*)

MRM – Association of Combatant Clerics (*Majma'-e rowhaniyun-e mobarez*)

IRGC – Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Sepah-e pasdaran-e enqelab-e eslami*)

JRM – Society of Combatant Clergy (*Jame'eh-ye rowhaniyat-e mobarez*)

GC – Guardian Council (*Shura-ye negahban*)

IRP – Islamic Republic Party (*Hezb-e jomhuri-ye eslami*)

SMEEI – Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (*Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami-ye Iran*)

SMEE – Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution (*Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami*)

PRG – Provisional Revolutionary Government

NAI – Freedom Movement of Iran (*Nehzat-e azadi-ye Iran*)

SFMMI – Council of National-Religious Activists of Iran (*Shura-ye fa'alan-e melli mazhabi-ye Iran*)

PFII – Participation Front for Islamic Iran (*Hezb-e jebheh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami*)

HEM – National Trust Party (*Hezb-e e'temad-e melli*)

DTV – Office for Strengthening Unity (*Daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat*)

JME – Islamic Coalition Society (*Jam'iyat-e mo'talafeh-ye eslami*)

SQST - Society of Qom Seminary Teachers (*Jame'eh-ye modarresin-e howzeh-ye elmiyeh Qom*)

PMOI – People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (*Sazman-e mojahedin-e khalq-e Iran*)

OIPFG - Organisation of the Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas

Introduction

All terms become new when they are transferred from their proper context to another...When we ascend to heaven, we must speak before God in new languages...When we are on earth, we must speak with our own languages...For we must carefully mark this distinction, that in matters of divinity we must speak far differently than in matters of politics.¹

Martin Luther

Democracy is the expression of a political relativism and a scientific orientation that are liberated from miracles and dogmas and based on human understanding and critical doubt.²

Carl Schmitt

It is perhaps cautious to start any academic endeavour by beginning negatively, and stating what this thesis is not trying to do or demonstrate. For starters, it will not attempt to exposit the collective oeuvre of Iran's post-revolutionary 'religious intellectuals' (*rowshanfekran-e dini*) in its entirety. It would be very difficult, if not impossible for a single volume, let alone a doctoral thesis, to do justice to all of their voluminous writings, and the theories and ideas elaborated therein, not to mention the various periods of their intellectual development over the course of some three decades. Nor is this thesis a political history in the conventional sense which carefully and meticulously chronicles a series of events, their causes and ramifications, and the myriad interpretations which accumulate and congeal into established historiographies.

¹ Quoted in Sheldon D. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought Expanded Edition* 2nd., Kindle ed. (Princeton; Oxford Princeton University Press, 2004), p152

² Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* trans. George Schwab, Foreword by Tracy B. Strong ed. (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p42

The core of this thesis will address itself to the more overtly political dimensions of the *rowshanfekran-e dini*'s published writings, assessing the political-ideological milieu and intellectual and institutional networks out of which they originated, as well as their contribution to the various debates over the nature and structure of the post-revolutionary Islamic state. I will map their transformation from ideological legitimators of the newly-established theocratic-populist regime to internal critics whose revised vision for the politico-religious order coalesced and converged with the growing disillusionment and frustration of what will be referred to as, *inter alia*, the 'Islamic left',³ a constellation of political forces within the governing elite of the Islamic Republic, that following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini increasingly felt itself marginalised and on the outskirts of power.⁴

Moreover, this thesis will argue that 1) the political marginalisation of the Islamic left along with various other elements within the Islamic Republic's political class in the course of intra-elite factional struggles during the early 1990s and 2) the perceived failure of the Islamist regime to fulfil the great expectations of its devoted cadres, elicited 1) an intellectual re-evaluation of the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary politico-ideological milieu, and initiated 2) the Islamic left in concert with the intellectual current known as the *rowshanfekran-e dini* to partake in an elite-

³ This term along with 'Khomeinist left', 'Islamic *chap*', will be used interchangeably and explained in detail in **Chapter 3**. For the present let it suffice to stand for Khomeini's disciples who in the 1980s both ascribed this ideological affiliation i.e. left (*chap*), to themselves and for the most part advocated broadly speaking statist solutions in economic policy and social engineering. Following Mohammad Khatami's election as president in May 1997 they sought to rebrand themselves as 'reformists' (*eslahtalaban*).

⁴ Tom Bottomore distinguishes the 'political class' from the 'political elite' or 'governing elite'. The 'political class' refers to all those groups which "exercise political power or influence, and are directly engaged in struggles for political leadership". The "political elite" or "governing elite" consists of those individuals who in fact "exercise political power in a society any given time". Tom Bottomore, *Elites and Society*, Kindle; Second Edition ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), p7:Loc-148-of-2470

managed drive to redefine the central ideological categories of the post-revolutionary political order. Furthermore, in the effort to reassert their political claim on the 'regime' as a political-ideological construct, in tandem with a sustained period of critical reflexivity in the political wilderness, the Islamic left and their 'religious intellectual' allies in the political class, sought to accumulate symbolic power and capital to underwrite their ideological and political efforts to re-appropriate the Islamic Republic's bases of legitimacy. This process of re-appropriation and thrust for civil hegemony⁵ reached its apogee with the electoral victory of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami on 23 May 1997 and the first three years of his presidency. At a far more general level, the ambition of the thesis is to unravel and analyse the relationship between elite discourses of religious and political reform in the 1990s and 2000s.

More specifically, the thesis will show how Iran's religious intellectuals have to a large extent deployed and adapted the theories and critical methods of Western philosophy and the social sciences in their efforts to debunk and challenge political Islamism and clerical political supremacy in the course of the second and third decades of Islamic Republic's existence. It was in this way that they sought to extricate the principles and foundations of political governance and statecraft from the province of theology and Islamic jurisprudence, to conclude they were ultimately extra-religious and therefore cannot be adjudicated through recourse to scriptural exegesis or juridical reasoning and the derivation of religiously binding legal rulings. Because of the explicit focus on the religious

⁵ Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," *New Left Review* 1, no. 100 (November-December 1979), p13

intellectuals' political theories and their material conditions of production, unfortunately many of the epistemological and hermeneutical questions they raise will have to be passed over rather quickly. This is not to claim that the latter are irrelevant or unimportant, but merely that they are not the chief object of our inquiry. By contrast, I will dwell at far greater length on the political, ideological and institutional circumstances and precedents, which impelled this network of intellectuals and politicians to theorise in novel and provocative ways in the context of post-revolutionary Iran. In conceptual terms it is the attention they devoted to issues revolving around individual and human rights, legitimacy, sovereignty, tolerance, pluralism, constitutionalism and ideology that will take centre stage.

Finally, this thesis will not surpass the year 2005. There are several reasons for this decision. The first is that it is arguably too early to provide a satisfactory account of the *rowshanfekran-e dini*'s activities after 2005, and particularly post-2009, in the aftermath of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's controversial electoral victory. This has been further complicated by the fact that since 2005, and certainly post-2009, a number of the central figures of religious intellectualism have either been forced into exile, where they have nevertheless remained active, or subdued into relative quietude on the home front. The question of their socio-political influence in exile by means of the internet and social networking websites will demand further research which cannot be explored here.

Chapter 1 provides a preliminary theoretical framework to the end of situating the texts of this group of intellectuals as political acts and interventions. I will draw on the work of Quentin Skinner in the history of political thought, which attempts to explicate how authorial intentionality might be

seen as embedded in texts. It will also employ some of the insights of Pierre Bourdieu and Antonio Gramsci, in order to think of the *rowshanfekran-e dini* and other relevant socio-political actors in terms of a semi-institutionalised and routinised network whose nodal points possess varying degrees of social capital and hegemony within the political and intellectual fields. It is via this network that religious intellectuals in concert with elements of the Islamic left sought to establish moral and ideological leadership within the context of intra-elite factional struggles. Bourdieu's notions of social capital, field, and symbolic power are particularly relevant if we are to make a case with respect to the *rowshanfekran-e dini*'s relationship to the manifold institutions which comprise the 'regime' of the Islamic Republic, both institutionally and ideologically, and the numerous groups and political tendencies within the post-revolutionary political elite. Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' is crucial to understanding the ideological and political development of the religious intellectuals, since it helps clarify how an abstract and putatively inclusive discourse which combined elements of both political and religious reform was drawn upon to ascertain broad assent while often advancing more sectional interests.

Chapter 2 addresses the ideological context preceding the emergence of the post-revolutionary *rowshanfekran-e dini* and the appearance of Shi'i Islam as a utopian political force with a revolutionary conception of religio-political authority committed to capturing the state. The chapter does not try to provide an exhaustive commentary on the intellectual milieu of the 1950s through to the 1970s. For instance, it does not consider the crucial impact of either the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran or the many variegated trends of Iranian Marxism. To this end, I have focused on three key political figures and ideologues and their distinct contributions to the debate over the nature of the

Islamic state, including: the radical Islamist group, the Fada'ian-e Islam (Devotees of Islam), particularly its leader, Navvab Safavi, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the French-educated ideologue, Ali Shari'ati. These political ideologues, as well as a number of others whom appear on the margins of the chapter, were crucial to Shi'ism's forging a new political identity and foundation in the 20th century, which paradoxically saw the will of man and the artefact of the state as integral to the realisation of the sacred law. It was deemed necessary to provide an exposition of some of these Islamic ideologues' key ideas and their political and intellectual contexts, because the post-revolutionary *rowshanfekran-e dini* would to a large extent be grappling with their legacies; writing both within and against the questions they posed and the answers they provided.

Chapter 3 is intricately linked up with the theoretical issues and analysis offered in **Chapter 1** and attempts to trace a genealogy of the post-revolutionary *rowshanfekran-e dini* as a social and political reality and their historical entwinement with elements of the Islamic left in post-revolutionary Iran. It details how a politically and intellectually engaged assortment of individuals and political activists came to be identified and identify one another under this signifier and other related ones. It describes the chief stages the Islamic *chap*'s political marginalisation and how it came to pass, and discusses in detail the historical coalescence of a routinized network of reading groups, publications, research circles and think-tanks incorporating the activities of public intellectuals ascribing to the *rowshanfekr-e dini* moniker, each possessing varying degrees of social and political capital vis-à-vis the post-revolutionary order.

Chapter 4 outlines the lineage of so-called 'ideological' and 'jurisprudential Islam' (*Islam-e feqahati*) and the dismissal of 'liberalism' as merely Western-imposed licentiousness and then goes on to

examine how such constructs were progressively subject to criticism and reappraisal by religious intellectuals from the early 1990s onwards. By the time of the revolution's second decade, the same cadre of ideologues and politicians which had formerly been on the frontline in providing an intellectual defence of the new regime against the Marxist left and People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran, sought to 'de-ideologise' Islam and thereby dismiss 'ideology' *tout court*. To this end they drew upon the theories of a raft of Western thinkers, in particular those who had become well-known for their scathing criticisms of Marxist ideology such as Karl Popper, Raymond Aron and Friedrich Hayek, amongst others. The chapter gives special attention to the political writings of 'Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari.

While for Iran's pre-revolutionary Islamists capturing the state had been a central preoccupation, the 'religious intellectuals' sought to underwrite notions of individual and democratic rights and the compatibility of faith and liberty. It was also in the course of these years that the *rowshanfekran-e dini*, playing on the Dreyfusard conception of the intellectual as a vanguard of reason, truth and freedom, attempted to perform the role of intellectual and moral leaders. They did this by explicitly challenging the very basis of the clerics' religious and political authority. I hope to show that the *rowshanfekran-e dini*, while certainly not the non-ideological or illumined beacons of reason they often have sought to portray themselves to be, many of their more prominent representatives resolutely broke with a delimited conception of political theology i.e. avowedly deriving political concepts and the sources of political legitimacy from religious sources, especially scripture. In many respects their writings in the 1990s, particularly those published in the journal *Kiyan* (Existence) marked a decided shift against a form of Shi'ite political theology which had come to define the post-revolutionary

‘regime’ (*nezam*), in favour of a political and ethical order which often claimed to take an abstract, rational and autonomous subject as its central axis.

It is the Catholic German jurist and one-time National Socialist, Carl Schmitt, who is generally credited with reviving interest in political theology in Western scholarship. In the third chapter of his slim volume, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (1922), he famously contended, “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts”.⁶ While several of the post-revolutionary religious intellectuals analysed here might reject this contention and claim political concepts have an independent normative and theoretical basis irrespective of their historical origins, others would accept the proposition’s veracity, remaining self-assured that a transition to popular-constitutionalism in parallel with the secularisation of Islamic jurisprudence is both an inevitable and desirable eventuality. What is of even greater interest in the context of the Iranian debate is that Schmitt identified constitutionalism with deism, the idea that reason and observation suffice for the determination of God’s existence. For Schmitt just as constitutionalism endeavoured to banish the sovereign’s power to decide upon exceptions to the legal order, the victory of deism spelt an end to the age of miracles.⁷ We can concur with Schmitt on this point when considering the case of Iran’s own religious intellectuals and their political allies, who in challenging the politico-theological absolutism of the Guardian Jurist engaged in a struggle to constrain his office within the bounds of their reading of the Islamic Republic’s constitution, and

⁶ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p36

⁷ I do not mean to suggest here that all of Iran’s *rowshanfekran-e dini* can be categorised as deists. Ibid., p36

thereby both theorise and enact the dissolution of the sovereign exception and the miraculous. In its stead they advocated both knowingly and unknowingly for the induction of a disenchanted world and regime predicated upon 'apolitical' ratiocinative-scientific administration, and norm-governed behaviour explicable and analysable by philosophy and the social sciences.

Chapter 5 begins by arguing that with the presidential electoral victory of Mohammad Khatami in May 1997, several prominent members within the semi-institutionalised network of think-tanks and periodicals, the chief vehicle for the transmission and diffusion of the religious intellectualist project, took the initiative to set up or edit newspapers in order to reach a wider audience and disseminate many of the theological and political insights of the preceding years in a more accessible and popular format. In other words, they sought to gain public support for their ideas and vision for the future by venturing out of their private-elitist discussion groups and journals to propagate them in the mass-circulation press. The issue of constitutionalism and constitutional reform is also investigated through an extended analysis and comparison of the political thought of President Mohammad Khatami and political theoretician and strategist Sa'id Hajjarian. The chapter continues by illustrating how the dividends of post-revolutionary intellectualism permeated much of Khatami's programme, while also delineating the profound differences which divided the proponents of political reform and development.

Chapter 6 focuses on the philosophical and political thought of Mostafa Malekian, which has received little if any attention in the extant scholarly literature. He is addressed at length in this chapter for several reasons. Firstly, he stands out as an interesting counterpoint to many of the other intellectuals addressed in this thesis and had a somewhat distinct lineage from those who were more

closely associated with the Islamic left. The chapter attempts to argue that Malekian's thought is both the outcome of the groundwork laid down by the post-revolutionary religious intelligentsia in preceding decades, while also breaking with this tradition in several important respects. I will first attempt to provide an exposition of some of the key ideas of Malekian's oeuvre while contending that many of his arguments can be seen as an attempt to acquire distance from the overtly politicized character of the overwhelming majority of religious intellectualism, and focus instead on individual contentment and psychological well-being. The appeal of Malekian to a considerable segment of young and intellectually engaged Iranian adults is interpreted as residing in his conscious shift from political to individual reconstruction and authenticity. The roots of this distinct emphasis find their provenance not only in Malekian's own specific intellectual trajectory, but are also the corollary of a general apathy and disillusionment with politico-religious projects of collective salvation, and even the contentious results of the more modest political project of gradualist social change undertaken in the Khatami era (1997-2005).

Sources

The thesis will draw on a number of different sources, each with their own pertinent reasons.

These include the following:

A corpus-based discourse and conceptual analysis of the theological and political writings of Iran's post-revolutionary religious intellectuals and political engagés e.g. 'Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari, Sa'id Hajjarian, Mohsen Kadivar, Mohammad Khatami and Mostafa Malekian, makes up the bulk of the thesis. These have been published in numerous different formats e.g.

sermons, speeches, articles, interviews etc., and their various styles and mode of delivery aptly convey their social conditions of production.⁸ We will address this issue in **Chapters 1 and 3**.

Speeches, lectures and statements by political figures on the Khomeinist left (post-1997 'reformists') will also be drawn upon in the course of our discourse analysis, since it is crucial to demonstrate the interpenetration of the religious and political discourses of reform and how they have shaped one another through their disparate phases. The emphasis will be primarily on the role of Iran's religious intellectuals, but the issue of cross-fertilization between the 'religious' and 'political' domains, in what is after all a theocratic state, is of the utmost importance. It should steadily become clear in the course of the thesis that the line which is often drawn between 'religious intellectuals' and what I refer to as the Islamic left is somewhat tenuous and difficult to determine, even if such categories and *modus operandi* cannot be conflated.

Periodicals and newspapers. The pertinent intellectual periodicals of the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, which acted as an important forum for the presentation, propagation, exchange and debate of ideas between the luminaries of this specific segment of the Iranian intelligentsia and ruling elite within the political class e.g. *Keyhan-e farhangi* (Cultural Universe), *Kiyan* (Existence), *'Asr-e ma* (Our Epoch), *Rah-e now* (New Way), *Naqd va nazar* (Critique and Theory), *A'in* (Creed), *Rahbord* (Strategy), *Shahrvand-e emruz* (Today's Citizen), etc., are utilised. Relevant newspapers and political periodicals from the same period will also be drawn upon e.g. *Salam* (Peace, Salute), *Payam-e emruz*

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Eagleton, "Doxa and Common Life: An Interview " in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Zizek (London; New York: Verso, 1994, 2012), Loc-6201-of-8003

(Today's Message), *Bayan* (Statement), *Hamshahri* (Fellow Citizen), *Iran*, *Mosharekat* (Participation), *Jame'eh* (Society), *'Asr-e azadegan* (Age of the Free-Thinkers), *Sharq* (East), *E'temad-e melli* (National Trust), *E'temad* (Trust), etc. since they often contain pertinent intellectual supplements with analyses and interviews germane to the core issues of this thesis. In fact, all the thinkers under study developed their ideas and arguments through the medium of journals and most have also had close relationships with their editorial boards.

Interviews have been undertaken with several of the prominent figures of these intellectual and political currents in order to probe their own interpretations of their writings and their political and historical relevance. They have also been relied upon to fill certain gaps which came to my attention in the course of research, and which were not directly addressed in published writings e.g. the *modus operandi* of theoretical discussion groups and editorial boards. Interviews thus, in the final analysis, play only a secondary and supportive role. They will be drawn upon cautiously and a far greater emphasis will be placed on their theoretical and political writings. I have also used where appropriate contemporary and subsequently published interviews and have cross-referenced claims made therein when tenable.

Chapter 1: The Theory and Praxis of Post-Revolutionary Religious Intellectualism

“Words are deeds.”⁹ – Ludwig Wittgenstein

Introduction

The following chapter sets out to adumbrate the theoretical framework that will guide our historical inquiry and what I shall call the ‘general features’ of post-revolutionary ‘religious intellectualism’. While making no claim to exhaust all the possible ways of framing discussion of post-revolutionary religious intellectualism, it lays out some of the chief features and *modus operandi* of the *rowshanfekran-e dini* and their intellectual output.

The General Features of Religious Intellectualism

This section will begin by offering a summary outline of the *rowshanfekran-e dini*’s mode of intellectual production and the general features of their political and ideological orientation.

1) Political Intervention and Performance

The intellectual production of the diverse figures that make up the current known as the *rowshanfekran-e dini* ought to be viewed as performing a number of different roles for a plurality of disparate audiences. One of the main roles focused upon in this thesis is the political and performative character of the *rowshanfekran-e dini*’s multifarious writings encompassing their essays,

⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p53e

speeches, interviews etc., and their place in the intellectual and political life of post-revolutionary Iran. In short, their writings will be read primarily as political and public *interventions* rather than contributions to a specialised academic discipline, intended to address a specific community of fellow experts. In other words, it studies and analyses the *rowshanfekran-e dini*, as public and political intellectuals and personages, not disembodied, apolitical producers of knowledge.¹⁰ While significant attention has been paid to the nature of the ideas and concepts they expound, in the majority of corpus based studies their role as intellectuals operating in the public sphere is either overlooked or understated. While a handful of studies have been more conscientious in this regard,¹¹ most simply endeavour to study elements of these thinkers' corpuses and ideas, without much thought to either their particular historical and political context, or their specific political praxis. The relationship of their writings to those of the country's heterogeneous political elite is also yet to receive much by way of sustained analysis.

The thesis will read these performances as addressing both the educated and reading public, fellow intellectuals and the *nezam*, or ruling political-religious regime. While these works cannot be reduced to such, it will also interpret them as a real effort to gain the assent of those whom they address and thereby impact the nature of the political order.¹² It holds, in keeping with reception theory, that this

¹⁰ Of course the phenomenon of the disembodied, apolitical producer does not exist, except as perhaps an ideal type or regulative ideal against which researchers might aspire to 'objectivity'.

¹¹ One of the few exceptions in this regard is the important research undertaken by Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi. Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform* (London ; New York I.B. Tauris, 2008).

¹² Needless to say, the *nezam* is not a unified or monolithic entity, but comprises individuals and institutions, each with their particular dynamics and ethos. *Nezam* operates as an empty signifier which acquires substance in discourse when named and thereby attributed a particular character or nature e.g. '*nezam* as guardian of

complex array of actors, processes, publics and institutions, possess a relational structure and ought not to be viewed as separate entities, unconnected to one another.¹³ These public and political interventions by the *rowshanfekran-e dini* had a rich variety of functions in the post-revolutionary political and intellectual fields. For example, they sought to criticize the *status quo* and its failure to measure up to certain normative criteria and concepts, such as legality, moral probity, and pluralism etc., which themselves should be considered emergent historical phenomena. Moreover, such interventions and exchanges can be conceived as a struggle over political influence and resources, with a concomitant investment and extraction of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital.¹⁴ We will return to this issue in further detail below.

The texts, debates and various other engagements undertaken by these intellectuals have a public dimension, in that they are concerned with questions which take up critical positions with respect to political, religious and social issues and structures; asking questions such as ‘what should be the role of religion in public life?’, ‘does religious authority confer a right to political rule?’, ‘is religion, in this case, Islam, compatible with modernity?’ More often than not, these were debates with real and intended implications for refashioning the post-revolutionary state and its policies.

Islam’, ‘*nezam* as voice of the people’, ‘the *nezam* as betrayed’ etc. The ‘revolution’ (*enqelab*) qua signifier, operates in similar fashion, and is attributed a determinate character and authenticity, invoking its name and interpellating it into existence.

¹³ Manfred Naumann, "Literary Production and Reception " *New Literary History* 8, no. 1 (1976), p107

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital " in *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Sociology of Education* ed. Stephen J. Ball (London; New York RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).

An important caveat is that in the *rowshanfekran-e dini*'s intellectual output, it is often the ideational and normative contestation of the idea of the *state*, what it is and what it ought to be, which is at stake.¹⁵ In Joel S. Migdal's terminology, we might say the *rowshanfekran-e dini* were primarily concerned with the *image* of the state, and it is the "image" which "amalgamates the numerous institutions of which the performers are members and on behalf of which they exercise authority, into an image of a dominant and single centre of society."¹⁶ Thus when these intellectuals speak of *hokumat-e dini* (religious government) or *mardom salari-ye dini* (religious democracy), they are referencing the amalgamated state of western and Islamic political theory, as a unified centre and agent which comprises a part as well as shapes the socio-political order. Those religious intellectuals who were directly involved in some of the state's founding moments did compete for symbolic power and institutional resources, and engaged in theorizing on how best to succeed in this endeavour.

Generally speaking, practices may serve to recognize, reinforce, and validate forms of state control, but also the social separation between the state and other social formations such as the divide between the public and private spheres.¹⁷ This is why we might suggest that the writings of this diverse group of ideologues and politicians operated on multiple levels, the two main ones being normative-ideational and material practice. 'Material practices' can be defined as objectified cultural constructions, and are often juxtaposed alongside 'symbolic practices' which are the constituting

¹⁵ Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p14

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p16

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p19

elements of agents' internalised social identities.¹⁸ Both are relevant to understanding and framing the activities of the *rowshanfekran-e dini*. As we wish to avoid reductionism, we have also sought to pay attention to the normative dimension of their intellectual practice, which is concerned with the contestation of 'objective' values.

The discourse of the religious intellectuals traverses the abstract and the concrete. It is possible to read their seemingly abstract ruminations as commentary on contemporary political conflicts and polemics. Conversely, in instances where their questions and criticisms appear to have a more immediate applicability and relate to specific political events or policies, their broader significance pertaining to questions of value and normativity can also be discerned. In other words, it is crucial to emphasise that the aforementioned questions and many others like them, did not emerge in a vacuum, but were posed and answered, in a variety of ways, against the backdrop of both domestic and international developments, such as the Iran-Iraq war, the end of the Cold War, the side-lining of the Khomeinist left in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the accession of Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Khatami to the presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1997. Just as religious intellectuals and clerics such as Ali Shari'ati, Mehdi Bazargan, Mahmud Taleqani and Ruhollah Khomeini, took up the roles of both ideologue and statesman, intellectual and political activist, prior to the revolution of 1979, the trend has continued since the fall of the Shah's regime, albeit in various distinct guises.

¹⁸ Giuseppe Delmestri, "Institutional Streams, Logics, and Fields " in *Institutions and Ideology*, ed. Renate E. Meyer, et al. (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, 2009), p120

In the language of the British philosopher J.L. Austin, the literary production of Iran's *rowshanfekran-e dini*, which takes several different formats, has proven to have both illocutionary and perlocutionary force, insofar as it challenges ideological rivals and attempts to outline an alternative approach to engaging religious texts and institutions, in addition to proffering rival values and political structures to those putatively upheld by the political *status quo*. Since the Islamic revolutionary state's establishment, contention and critique by this intellectual current, have been caught in the precarious position of standing both within and external to the shifting bounds and fluid norms deemed 'acceptable' or 'appropriate' by the representatives and agents of the *nezam*. 'Red lines' and official *doxa*, have proven to be neither stable, nor given, but rather constantly fought over, revised and reappropriated by a wide range of socio-political forces. Myriad tugs-of-war take place in a complex matrix of power relations encompassing individuals, institutions and larger socio-economic structures.

As will be argued in greater detail below, Iran's religious intellectuals can be viewed as contestants in an *agon* or political-ideological field, competing with rivals over both questions of value and capital (in the broadest possible sense of the term), and disposing of a wide range of means to propagate their ideas.¹⁹ The means have included, speeches, old and new media, pulpits and sermons, university

¹⁹ Isaiah Berlin is the key modern thinker behind value-pluralism and in some of his writings advocated what John Gray has since sought to define as "agonistic liberalism" in which objective incommensurate values and forms of life are locked in interminable rivalry and competition. Recourse to reason cannot resolve the issue of incommensurability, and a tragic trade-off between such values is the best that can be hoped for. John Gray has taken up Berlin's ideas on this score in order to criticize the Enlightenment's unswerving faith in rationalism and meliorism or moral progress, and the inevitability of a harmonious society of concordant, rational values. For Gray, the modern pursuit of rational consensus upon the best way of life is fundamentally misplaced. John Gray, *Berlin* (London: Fontana 1995), 140, 142

positions, publishers, relationships and familial ties to individuals and groups within the political elite.²⁰ Over the decades the *rowshanfekran-e dini* have enjoyed varying degrees of access to state funded institutions such as think-tanks and universities, mass circulation newspapers, but also leading politicians by means of which to promote their ideas and have them impact state policies and public opinion. While I will not be focusing on their explicit impact on state policy or public opinion, I will attempt to examine the symbiosis of the religious intellectualist discourse and that of the Khomeinist left and later reformist political currents. Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Khatami is the most prominent individual who has endeavoured to straddle both these political and intellectual domains simultaneously. Such opportunities were rarely if ever available to either secular nationalist or Marxist intellectuals, including those who had had prominent roles in supporting the revolutionary overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy.²¹ Both the *agon*, a trope laid out by value pluralists such as Isaiah

While appreciating the importance of “liberal toleration” which was a vital ideal for, albeit not exclusive to Western modernity’s emergence, Gray contends elsewhere that in the midst of ongoing, irreconcilable and irreducible conflicts of value, the best political arrangement which can today be envisaged is a *modus vivendi*. Gray is keen to insist that it is both naïve and dangerous to believe any single scheme of value can be imposed at either the level of the individual polity or beyond. By contrast, *modus vivendi* holds that “there are many forms of life in which humans can thrive. Among these there are some whose worth cannot be compared”. “Modus Vivendi”, Kindle ed., *Gray's Anatomy: Selected Writings* (Allen Lane 2009), Loc-431-of-7544

²⁰ One such example is Mohsen Kadivar, whose sister Jamileh Kadivar is married to Seyyed 'Ataollah Mohajerani, former Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance under President Mohammad Khatami, who has been living abroad for several years now. Another is Seyyed Mostafa Tajzadeh who is married to Fakhr al-sadat Mohtashamipur, who is the daughter of Seyyed Mahmud Mohtashamipur, and cousin to Seyyed Ali-Akbar Mohtashamipur, an important figure of the clerical Khomeinist left and central committee member of the Association of Combatant Clergy. Tajzadeh who was Deputy Minister of the Ministry of the Interior during the Khatami era has been jailed since the controversial re-election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad in 2009. Several of these individuals will receive more detailed attention in **Chapter 3** and **Chapters 4 & 5**.

²¹ See for example, Mehdi Fatahpur, "Dar hashiyeh-ye monazerehha-ye televiziuni-ye Bahar 1360," *Guya* (Tir 1390 [June-July 2011]).

Berlin and John Gray, but also the notion of the 'game' and 'social field' as used by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, are useful for framing the activities of Iran's religious intellectuals, which have on occasion been presented in a polarised or diametrically oppositional relationship i.e. religious intellectuals versus the state. In reality the occupants of these two fields have found themselves engaged in overlapping circles as members of the Iranian intellectual and political elite and have impacted one another in a number of important respects.

2) 'Fallibilism' and 'Historicity'

By the late 1990s all the members of the religious intellectual collective had become well apprised of the perils associated with the state's appropriation of religious doctrine and the divinization of political power i.e. the notion that political power can become a vehicle for the sacred and the implementation of God's law on earth. They also advocated and sympathised with a number of political and epistemological ideas, which could be considered 'fallibilist', in that they admit the susceptibility of human knowledge of the divine to error.²²

This admission came predominantly by means of two routes. The first was to admit the historicity or the fundamentally historical nature of human knowledge and thus human beings' knowledge of

For details on the repression of the Iranian Writers' Association, itself riven by factionalism after April 1980 see, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Protest and Perish: A History of the Writers' Association of Iran," *Iranian Studies* 18, no. Spring-Autumn (1985), p223

²² 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Arkan-e farhangi-ye demokrasi," in *Farbehtar az id'iolozhi* (Tehran: Serat, 1372 [1993]), p270

For Soroush, 'liberalism' and 'fallibility' are inextricably linked to one another. "Mabani-ye te'orik-e liberalism," in *Razdani va rowshanfekri va dindari* (Tehran: Serat, 1377 [1998]), p128

'religion' (*din*) and religious injunctions. The historicity of religious knowledge which became an important idea and principle, albeit in different forms, for the *rowshanfekran-e dini*,²³ was the lynchpin of a whole series of other methodological and hermeneutical approaches to religious texts, including pluralistic, historically critical, and pragmatic readings of religious texts which had previously been the exclusive province of the Shi'i clergy. Because human beings' knowledge of religion is deemed both 'historical' and 'fallible', the rulings and statements of the clergy are included under the same rubric, and thus susceptible to error and criticism from outside the Shi'i clergy's own methodological strictures.

In recent years, for example, Soroush has gone so far as to declare that the "worldly" and "otherworldly" are impossible to reconcile, a point perhaps most prominently raised by Mehdi Bazargan in one of his last and most controversial and posthumously published texts, *Akherat va khoda: hadaf-e resalat-e anbia'* (*God and the Hereafter: The Objective of the Message of the Prophets*, 1998).²⁴ Basically echoing Mehdi Bazargan, one of the founders of the Freedom Movement of Iran and the post-revolutionary order's first Prime Minister, Soroush enacts an essential rift, even polar opposition between the mundane and other worldly when he says "religion must be mundane and of this world,

²³ One of the earlier post-revolutionary uses of the term *rowshanfekran-e din* I have come by in the oeuvre of Soroush is in his essay, "Qabz va bast-e te'orik-e shari'at (1) [Originally published in *Keyhan-e farhangi*, 5, no. 2, Ordibehesht 1367 [April-May 1988]]," in *Qabz va bast-e te'orik-e shari'at: nazariyeh-ye kamel-e ma'refat-e dini* (Tehran: Serat, 1374 [1995]), p192-193.

In this essay Soroush distinguishes the 'religious intellectual' from the traditional cleric or man of religious learning, by averring that the religious intellectual is aware of the historicity of his own methodological orientation towards religious knowledge.

²⁴ Mehdi Bazargan, *Akherat va khoda: hadaf-e resalat-e anbia'* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye khadamat-e farhangi-ye rasa, 1377 [1998]). The book was originally based on an article first published in *Kiyan*, "Akherat va khoda: hadaf-e be'sat-e anbia'," *Kiyan* 5, no. 28 (Azar-Bahman 1374 [Nov 1995-Jan 1996]).

or otherworldly and of the next”.²⁵ His chief target is the clergy and their alleged confidence in religion’s ability to better this world, which is posited in a relationship of continuity with the afterlife. The point is not so much whether this is an accurate representation of the Shi’i clergy and their beliefs, but that his target is the ‘clergy’ and that he purposely frames the problematic in the language of ‘Protestantism’ and the ‘Reformation’.²⁶ It is no coincidence that in the same article Soroush states that Protestantism’s emergence in Europe has “many great lessons to teach us Muslims”.²⁷ Perhaps most crucial of all is the anti-utopianism which is another important consequence of the advocacy of fallibilism and historicity, which runs through the gamut of what Iran’s religious intellectuals have produced over the last twenty years, which in this instance accompanies a direct critique of the clergy. As Soroush says in his essay *Shari'ati va porotestantism* (Shari'ati and Protestantism),

“Intellectual movements that wanted to secure the world and afterlife together and intellectual movements which make the afterlife subject to this world and thus devote their primary struggle to improve the world...is single-minded (*tak hadafi*)...improving the world and the afterlife alongside one another by means of religion is the same thing our clergy in fact believe and until today support this view and chant slogans [in support of it] and of course such a thing in my view is impossible”.²⁸

²⁵ 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Shari'ati va porotestantism," *Madreseh* (Tir 1384 [June-July 2005]), p42

²⁶ Soroush’s characterisation of ‘Protestantism’ is really Protestantism via Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The depiction is a far cry from capturing anything like the real doctrinal and historical diversity which characterised either the Reformation or Protestantism, simply taking Weber’s much famed ‘elective affinity’ between Protestantism and capitalism as given.

²⁷ Soroush, "Shari'ati va porotestantism," p37

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p42

Fallibilism, anti-utopianism and the absolute Otherness of the transcendent are themes which cut across the oeuvres of many of the religious intellectuals who will be addressed in the course of this thesis. That is not to say that tensions and contradictions do not afflict their work, but merely that these features of their oeuvre should be considered in the context of their *Kulturkampf* and critical disposition toward the clergy's monopoly on the knowledge economy of the sacred. These qualities and their overtly dialectical relationship with the political conditions prevailing in the country, are also amongst the reasons why the discourse of the *rowshanfekran-e dini* has been characterised as primarily “negative” (*salbi*), rather than constructive in nature.²⁹

3) Reformist Gradualism

The *rowshanfekran-e dini* like a number of their secular counterparts have concluded against the background of their personal and collective experience of revolution and political marginalization, but also international developments such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, that ‘revolutionary’ political change i.e. political action which seeks to rapidly overturn and replace the entirety of the existing socio-political order, is destined to failure. Their strategic readings in Western philosophy and political theory were also shaped in this context, and were often deployed to reinforce their reservations and newly-found critical comportment towards the idea of revolutionary socio-political change. This in turn has led to a striking dichotomy between notions of ‘reformist’ and

²⁹ Mohammad-Javad Gholam-Reza Kashi, "Rowshanfekran va khatar-e eqbal-e 'omumi," *Rah-e now*, no. 1 (5 Ordibehesht 1377 [25 April 1998]), p3

‘revolutionary’ political transformation, when ironically these very same figures often strove to contest, *inter alia*, the ‘original intent’, ‘meaning’ and ‘legacy’ of Iran’s 1979 Revolution.

The *rowshanfekran-e dini* are till this day engaged in the contestation and appropriation of the meaning and significance of the revolution, Khomeini’s legacy, the Islamic Republic and its constitution. In this respect, they were and are involved in a battle over the discursive representation of what the Islamic Republic *is* and what it *ought* to be, and the perceived disjuncture between the two. An apt illustration of this is in an interview published in 2005 with Mostafa Tajzadeh, a prominent member of the Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (*Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami-ye Iran*, henceforth SMEEI) and Deputy Minister of the Interior in the cabinets of Mir-Hossein Musavi and Mohammad Khatami. The title of the interview is “nezam ya'ni ma”, or “the regime, means us”. Political competition with rival groups and factions within the state apparatus was thus often framed as an issue of ‘fidelity’ and ‘commitment’ to the ‘real’ ideals and principles of the revolution and Islamic state. The *rowshanfekran-e dini* were very much part of this ideational contestation over the meaning of the Islamic Republic, as is clear from Tajzadeh’s remarks in the very same interview:

“Dr. Soroush did not teach there [i.e. the Faculty of Law and Political Science at the University of Tehran], but we had other meetings outside which is famed as the Kiyani circle....What is the relation between religion and the world? How can religion and democracy [be reconciled]? How can religion and modernity [be brought together]? In those meetings lots of issues were clarified for me and we utilised Dr. Soroush a lot”.³⁰

³⁰ Mostafa Tajzadeh and Hossein Salimi, "Nezam ya'ni ma: goftogu ba Mostafa Tajzadeh," in *Kalbodshekafi-ye zehniyat-e eslahgarayan* (Tehran: Gam-e now, 1384 [2005]), p115

The emphasis on political 'reform' in contradistinction to 'revolution' is the product of two factors in particular. Firstly, Iran's religious intellectuals and the strategists of political development and reform were themselves participants in Iran's revolution. Over the last thirty years many of them developed lasting interpersonal relationships and have held official positions in state institutions such as the Council for Cultural Revolution ('Abdolkarim Soroush), the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari, Hassan Yusefi-Eshkevari, Behzad Nabavi), the Ministry of Intelligence (Sa'id Hajjarian, 'Abbas 'Abdi),³¹ the General Prosecutor's Office (Seyyed Mohammad Musavi-Kho'einiha, 'Abbas 'Abdi), the presidency (Mohammad Khatami), Ministry of the Interior (Mostafa Tajzadeh), Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (Mohammad Khatami, Mostafa Tajzadeh), Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (Behzad Nabavi), Ministry of Agriculture (Mohammad Salamati), Ministry of Heavy Industries (Behzad Nabavi, Mohsen Sazgara) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Akbar Ganji, Hashem Aqajari, Mostafa Tajzadeh, Hamid-Reza Jala'ipur, Ali-Reza 'Alavi-Tabar, Emadeddin Baqi), and thus it was difficult to disassociate themselves entirely from the established regime and its purported values.³² To this extent as public intellectuals, ideologues and politicians they received perks, accumulated social capital and achieved social

³¹ 'Abbas 'Abdi was of course one of the radical leaders of the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line, who overran the U.S. embassy on 4 November 1979.

³² Many of these intellectuals and politicians will be fleshed out in greater detail in the course of the following chapters.

mobility,³³ first in their roles as its defenders and later as internal critics. Similarly, their personal histories and identities were bound up with the state's establishment in a highly intricate fashion.

Performance and Political Intervention

In any hermeneutical exercise it is vital to historicize and contextualize the oeuvre in question and Iran's post-revolutionary religious intellectuals are no exception. In order to provide an exposition of their ideas one must also describe their intellectual and cultural milieu and the political history which both preceded and shaped them. A basic reconstruction of the origins of post-revolutionary religious political thought and the many impulses driving its emergence will try to determine what compelled Iran's post-revolutionary religious intellectuals to debate and increasingly challenge the ideological foundations of the theocratic state. An attempt will also be made to contextualise these thinkers through the years of their development and gauge how their thinking has changed in step with the social and political changes which have taken place in the course of contemporary Iranian history.

A number of methodological approaches will be drawn upon to frame our discussion. The first will be that of the so-called Cambridge School in the history of political thought, epitomised in the work of Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock. Discourse analysis and corpus-based exposition will also be deployed to analyse the *rowshanfekran-e dini*'s key political concepts, while also paying careful heed

³³ Noted veteran reformist journalist, Mohammad Quchani, has commented upon many of these men's humble origins, hailing from the more deprived neighbourhoods of Tehran, such as Nazi-abad, Ali-abad, and Emamzadeh Yahya. Mohammad Quchani, *Nazi-abadiha* (Tehran: Nashr-e sara'i, 1383 [2004]), p48

to historical context and philosophical influences. Intertextuality and the traces of many distinct and varying intellectual influences are an inescapable feature of the historical and analytical exposition of any body of intellectual labour.³⁴ In this way, I will try and strike a balance between *substantialist* and *pragmatic* readings of the religious intellectuals' corpus. The former focuses on texts as constructed by their authors and authorial intentions, while the latter addresses how texts are read and received by others.³⁵

What follows is a brief outline of Skinner's approach. As textual criticism still grapples with notions of intertextuality and the death of the author, one must be cognisant of the dangers posed by the effort to appropriate a text and impose a determinate meaning or interlocking chain of meanings upon it.³⁶ Following Skinner, we consider a reconstruction of an author's intended meanings germane to understanding a particular work or oeuvre. We are not merely concerned with the truth-value of a given statement, but also in what the author was doing in saying it.³⁷ Moreover, while an author's intention or compoartment in penning a particular work by no means exhausts the entirety of the 'meaning' of a text, knowledge of such, cannot but condition our response to it.³⁸ Dispensing altogether with authorial intentionality also ignores the extent to which a "successful act of

³⁴ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London; New York: Routledge 2003), p47

³⁵ Martyn P. Thompson, "Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning," *History and Theory* 32, no. 3 (Oct., 1993), p251

³⁶ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), p4

³⁷ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p96

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p96

communication” must be publicly legible and thus rely upon and invoke prevailing conventions which the contemporary audience can recognise and understand.³⁹

Skinner distinguishes between intentions and motives, arguing that the former do not precede the work, but can be discerned within the work itself which harbours a particular purpose in being authored. Following J.L. Austin, Skinner accepts that to issue an utterance is to speak with a certain meaning and thus illocutionary force, and to grasp the illocutionary force of an utterance is equivalent to understanding what the speaker was doing in issuing it.⁴⁰ In contradistinction to the perlocutionary force of utterances which refers to what might be brought about *by* saying something, their illocutionary force addresses what an author may be doing *in* saying something.⁴¹ Skinner expands this idea into the realm of the history of political thought through his examination of the nature of intention in speaking or writing with a certain force.

It is important to distinguish, according to Skinner, between an author’s motives for writing, which he deems irrelevant for the interpretation of the meaning of texts, as opposed to his intentions in writing.⁴² What Skinner means when he speaks of the effort to discern what an author is *doing* in writing in a certain way, is to grasp whether for example he or she is attacking a particular school of thought or argument, while acclaiming another. To characterise a work in terms of its intended illocutionary force is therefore to understand what the writer may have meant by writing in a

³⁹ Ibid.,p97

⁴⁰ Ibid.,p98

⁴¹ Ibid.,p104

⁴² Ibid.,p98

particular fashion.⁴³ A relationship is thereby established between intentions and meaning when the author is held to have meant the text in question as, for example, an attack or defence or elaboration of a specific line of argument, political ideal or philosophical position.

This mode of analysis is appropriate to the very often extemporaneous nature of the *rowshanfekran-e dini*'s intellectual production and thus the sources upon which this thesis is based. The overwhelming majority of their 'writings' are in fact lectures, articles or interviews which were first delivered orally in mosques, universities or various other congregations or published in newspapers, magazines and periodicals and then gathered together and published in a single volume by either their own presses, fellow-travellers or sympathetic publishers. Vestiges of their historical origins are often discernible, and as a result I will try to consider this factor in my analysis of their writings.

Though the author's own account of his or her own intentions is important, they are not definitive, exhaustive or final, since there is the very real chance that the author himself may not be entirely clear with respect to his or her intentions in writing the text in question, or he may well be motivated to retroactively obfuscate them. It is also of far less relevance when assessing the reception of an author's work, which is tied, amongst other things, to the expectations and historical conjuncture of his or her readers.⁴⁴ This is why one must be careful not to conflate the 'meaning' of a particular text with its wider 'significance'.⁴⁵ The particular readerships with which we are concerned, and the

⁴³ Ibid.,p100

⁴⁴ Thompson, "Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning.",p255

⁴⁵ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1.*,p74

‘uptake’ of the illocutionary acts within the texts under study, are fellow public intellectuals, the Islamic Republic’s political elite, and the reading public. These audiences themselves too can be divided up generationally and into a number of different timeframes. For J.L Austin, ‘uptake’ was integral to the illocutionary act. While it doesn’t imply that the illocutionary act in question necessarily had its desired effect, it does mean that it’s crucial for the addressee to understand what has been said in a certain sense, and includes acts such as warning, convincing, and persuading.⁴⁶ Bourdieu phrases it slightly differently and insists that utterances of authority need to be *recognised* as such, and this holds even when such utterances are recognised as a challenge to entrenched authority.⁴⁷

This thesis is not especially interested in vindicating or repudiating the religious intellectuals’ own reading of the Islamic tradition or Islamic history, but rather their intentions in writing what they did and the reflexive loop between their speech acts and the socio-political and historical context of their practice.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as Judith Butler argues, “a statement may be made that, on the basis of a grammatical analysis alone, appears to be no threat. But the threat emerges precisely through the act that the body performs in speaking the act.”⁴⁹ It is not merely a matter of construing the illocutionary force of statements, but also how they have been embodied in declamations of

⁴⁶ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p116

⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge Polity Press, 1991), p112-113

⁴⁸ J.G.A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p67

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), p11

resistance, affirmation and complicity. It is in such embodiments that the *rowshanfekran-e dini* tacitly affirmed as well as exposed themselves and their corporeal bodies to reprisal by their political opponents and carceral violence.

Religious Intellectualism, Hegemony and Capital

Iran's *rowshanfekran-e dini* are not merely disinterested producers of theological and juridical ideas and interpretations, but are socio-political actors, who take positions on a wide variety of social, juridical and political issues.⁵⁰ Nor are the texts they pen straightforwardly containers of meaning, but spaces where relations, influences and meanings coalesce.⁵¹ This may strike the reader as self-evident and obvious. The dominant approach in the academic literature, however, seriously underplays this dimension engaging for the most part in conventional corpus study of the man, the thinker, and the ideas he expounds in his writings.⁵² While I do not seek to impugn the legitimacy of such an approach, indeed this thesis makes ample use of it; I do wish to draw attention to something of a different tact. These intellectuals and the texts they author are situated in a matrix of personal and strategic relationships with political personalities, governmental and non-governmental

⁵⁰ Antonio Gramsci famously offered a pointed critique of the archetype of the intellectual defended in Julien Benda's famous tract, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. He questioned the autonomy of the intellectual and his or her relation to the state and more generally speaking, the intelligentsia's autonomy and independence of the economic, social, and political fields. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (Midsomer Norton, Bath: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p12

⁵¹ Allen, *Intertextuality*, p12

⁵² A recent example of such an approach is, Katajun Amirpur, "The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience: 'Abdolkarim Soroush's New Approach to Qur'anic Revelation," *Die Welt des Islams*, no. 51 (2011).

Forough Jahanbakhsh's monograph is arguably another example of this genre. Forough Jahanbakhsh, *Islam, Democracy and Religious Modernism in Iran, 1953-2000: From Bazargan to Soroush*, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001).

organizations and institutions, while implicitly or explicitly, challenging the authority of other actors in the intellectual and political fields.⁵³ For example, like all public intellectuals, the *rowshanfekran-e dini* oppose and compete with intellectuals of differing political and religious persuasions and one another, in defence of the fruits of their intellectual labour. In the words of Edward W. Said, “all intellectuals represent something to their audiences, and in so doing represent themselves to themselves”.⁵⁴ In other words, they strive to present a particular image of themselves to the public and their opponents and thereby participate in the construction of their public persona and identity. The public space in which representation and self-representations unfold includes the lecture hall, the seminar room, and of course the press, and academic publications, with their many disparate political leanings, norms and expectations. Rhetoric plays an important role in this *agon* of intellectual contestation and field of power. As has been said, intellectuals are not mere knowledge producers, but as Donna Haraway has argued, dexterous rhetoricians who practice the art of persuasion, and endeavour to convince other social actors that their “manufactured knowledge is a route to a desired form of very objective power”.⁵⁵ Their praxis and texts are not reducible to such a description, but it is, nevertheless, a vital part of ‘what intellectuals do’.

Moreover, intellectuals in Iran, like anywhere else, fight and duke it out over the values they hold dear, and in a variety of institutional settings and social networks, to the end of preserving and

⁵³ Loic J. D. Wacquant, "Sociology as Socioanalysis: Tales of "Homo Academicus" [By Pierre Bourdieu]," *Sociological Forum* 5, no. 4 (Dec. 1990), p679-680

⁵⁴ Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: the Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), xv

⁵⁵ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1988), p577

perpetuating the social and cultural capital they have accumulated.⁵⁶ The agonistic nature of such contestation thus has both a normative and social component, the normative one being the battle and contestation of values which might prove incommensurable e.g. divine rights vs. popular sovereignty. Intellectual exchange between rival political and religious tendencies does of course regularly occur and there is often sufficient overlap or a common vocabulary for exchange to take place, even if the values and world-views presented therein remain irreducible to one another. Violence, and numerous forms of power, including the more subtle absence of state patronage have also been employed on a regular basis in order to suppress or cast aside the advocates of rival narratives, including religious ones.

Intellectuals, who argue and engage in public disputation, are also concerned to reproduce their values and arguments and promote them.⁵⁷ In other words, they are preoccupied with propagating their ideas in an effort to obtain and engender public assent and intellectual and moral leadership, what the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci famously called 'hegemony'.⁵⁸ By invoking this Gramscian notion I wish to convey that intellectuals' authority is solicited not by coercion, but by means of ascertaining people's active consent and the acceptance of their intellectual and moral leadership.⁵⁹ The praxis of Iran's religious intellectuals in their efforts to both analytically grasp their life-world and diagnose the perceived ailments of the *status quo* have and continue to possess a distinctive

⁵⁶ Wacquant, "Sociology as Socioanalysis.",p681

⁵⁷ Charles Kurzman and Lynn Owens, "The Sociology of Intellectuals," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28(2002),p63

⁵⁸ Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981),p24

⁵⁹ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci.",p21

character. Gramsci deemed 'civil society' to be "the special field of action of the intellectuals".⁶⁰ What is interesting about the *rowshanfekran-e dini* is that their intellectual re-orientation took place less in public fora, and, at least initially, in 'safer' and less exposed semi-private spaces. These included research units affiliated to the state, elite intellectual circles and controlled university gatherings. State-funded journals or quarterlies sponsored by religious institutions were a resource made available for religious intellectuals sympathetic to the new order and as a result they subsequently availed themselves of the opportunity to publish and test their theoretical mettle. They were also relied upon to respond to the novel problems and issues thrown up by the reality of hierocratic-populist governance.

In the 1980s their readership was largely restricted to the country's Shi'i-religious educated elite and while the Iran-Iraq war raged and Khomeini was still alive, there was little inclination or appetite to challenge the ideological foundations of the *nezam*. While ideological battles between loose political groupings and individuals within the elite took place, they did so largely beneath Khomeini's enveloping shadow. With the inception of the 1990s in the aftermath of the war and the death of Khomeini, the *rowshanfekran-e dini*, along with numerous other intellectuals, steadily but cautiously increased their public activity in the form of articles which were more overtly critical in demeanour and not directly funded by state institutions, as they had been in the 1980s. Masha'allah Shamsolva'ezin and Reza Tehrani's *Kiyan* (Existence)⁶¹ and the Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic

⁶⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *How to Change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, Kindle ed. (London: Little, Brown Book 2011), p314

⁶¹ *Kiyan* can also mean 'nature', 'epicentre' and 'state of being'.

Revolution of Iran's *'Asr-e ma* (Our Epoch) were amongst the most prominent examples of this genre.⁶²

The transition from the religious-ideological and state-sponsored defence of the newly founded religious regime against ideological competitors such as the Marxist Tudeh Party and Organisation of the Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas (OIPFG), liberal-nationalist National Front and Islamist People's Mojahedin, to a financially independent, albeit internal critic of regime elements, was a subtle and incremental process.⁶³

In later years, especially in the run-up to and following Mohammad Khatami's victory in the May 1997 presidential election, Iran's religious intellectuals who hitherto had represented a particular and more limited set of socio-political interests, sought to appeal to a larger bloc and swathe of the population, encompassing women, students, religious and ethnic minorities and the burgeoning middle class. Khatami was himself very much part of this process and the emphasis of his campaign on the 'rule of law' and a rights-centred discourse, was indicative of his effort to invoke issues which were less controversial, but had a broad appeal. He adopted this discourse and its catchwords, 'civil society', 'rule of law' etc., even while, according to his brother Mohammad-Reza Khatami, he had little expectation of winning this fateful election.⁶⁴

⁶² **Chapter 3**, will go into greater detail on this score.

⁶³ Masha'allah Shamsolva'ezin, the periodical's first editor, explains the process whereby *Kiyan* was established and in particular stresses the way in which he and co-founders Reza Tehrani and Mostafa Rokhsefat came "to pursue cultural activities independently". Masha'allah Shamsolva'ezin, "Gozashteh, hal, ayandeh [Originally published in *Kiyan*, no. 1, Aban 1370 (October-November 1991)]," in *Yaddashtha-ye sardabir* (Tehran: Jame'eh-ye Iranian, Bahar 1380 [Spring 2001]),p13

⁶⁴ These issues will be dealt with in far greater length in **Chapter 5, Part I**. Mohammad-Reza Khatami and Hossein Salimi, "Tasavor-e piruzi nemikardim: goftogu ba Mohammad-Reza Khatami," in *Kalbodshekafi-ye zehniyat-e eslahgarayan* (Tehran: Gam-e now, 1384 [2005]),p46

As will be shown in the coming chapters, the discourse and strategy of the *rowshanfekran-e dini* bore numerous similarities with the paradigmatic 'liberal-bourgeois' *weltanschauung* often identified with the spread of western capitalist modernity, from which it also to some extent takes its inspiration;⁶⁵ the same discourse which valorised the rule of law and natural rights against despotic encroachment and demanded respect and security for property rights in the name of a universal humanity.⁶⁶ The glaring difference of course was that rather than a class compelled by historical necessity to overthrow the strictures of feudal absolutism because of their impediment to rapidly changing capitalist relations of production,⁶⁷ what was witnessed in Iran was an elite-led initiative with the desiderata of fending off attacks by the traditional and radical right through the institutionalisation of the rule of law and the mild opening up of political competition amongst trusted religious-political forces. The appeal of abstract citizenship, legality, accountability and their claim to 'represent the national will' went far beyond the elite and constructed an unanticipated and unstable front of the revolutionary elite and subaltern groups willing to pursue their interests through the electoral process and bequeath trust to the executive in guaranteeing their interests and security.⁶⁸ Whether the executive would then prove capable of fulfilling such expectations and thus perpetuating their hegemonic front was another matter. It had largely faded from public view by the

⁶⁵ Soroush, "Mabani-ye te'orik-e liberalism.",p125

⁶⁶ Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, Kindle ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2013),p40

⁶⁷ The veracity of this idealisation and its application to western European history is of course highly debatable.

⁶⁸ Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*,p43

time of the little known mayor of Tehran, Mahmud Ahmadinejad's election, only to once more visibly reconstitute itself in the summer of 2009 and again in 2013.

Quite unlike Gramsci's intellectuals whose social function was ultimately preoccupied with achieving hegemony to challenge the 'ruling class' and instil 'class awareness',⁶⁹ Iran's religious intellectuals throughout the 1990s pursued two objectives. These were the propagation of a more inclusive and critical conception of religious and political authority, while also accumulating and building upon their extant capital and authority, within the possibilities and resources afforded by extant political institutions and the constitution. This effort was accompanied by means of increasing their activity in the public square, which they hoped would dovetail with their political counterparts' deeper strategies for reform. They also set 'reform' and 'revolution' in a strict opposition and often appealed to the Islamic Republic's own constitution in their struggle for greater intellectual and civic freedoms.

In political terms, the strategy for reform post-1997, was most famously exemplified in Sa'id Hajjarian's call for 'pressure from below, negotiation from above', and elaborated at length in an extended interview with the journal, *Rah-e now* (New Way), published in May 1998.⁷⁰ In that interview, published exactly one year after Khatami's triumphant victory, Hajjarian proclaimed defiantly that "the 2nd of Khordad was the completion of republicanism and the fulfilment of constitutionalism",⁷¹

⁶⁹ See, Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, p12-14

⁷⁰ Sa'id Hajjarian and Emadeddin Baqi, "Goftogu ba Sa'id Hajjarian," in *Baraye tarikh: goftogu ba Sa'id Hajjarian* (Tehran: Nashr-e nei, 1379 [2000]), p25

⁷¹ Sa'id Hajjarian, "Dovvom-e Khordad: omidha va bimha: payamha va cheshm-andazha," *Rah-e now*, no. 5 (2 Khordad 1377 [23 May 1998]), p16

while at the same time advocating a gradualist and managed process of political change encapsulated in the aforementioned slogan.⁷² It is also in this regard that one might argue that Iran's religious intellectuals, while themselves comprising part of the Islamic Republic's political-intellectual elite, have attempted to embark upon several 'positional' strategies,⁷³ to engender hegemony and disseminate their ideas. Gramsci himself might have framed this process in terms of 'passive revolution',⁷⁴ by means of which the elite try to forestall revolution or more wrenching and unpredictable political upheaval by incorporating less radical demands and co-opting subaltern groups in the process. In addition to acknowledging this process at work it is also important to grasp how religious intellectuals and their political allies on the Khomeinist left sought not only to critique the *status quo*, but also ascertain support for the dividends of their own intellectual labour, and thereby build on their extant capital and authority.

Iran's religious intellectuals along with a slew of various other socio-political forces and institutions in the post-revolutionary milieu, occupy several 'fields', to use the terminology of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault.⁷⁵ According to Bourdieu, a field does not have any parts or components, but does possess its own rules and regularities organised around struggles over valued

⁷² Ali M. Ansari's seminal book on the Khatami era captures well this aspect of the elite-led and managed process of reform, which those around Khatami hoped to realise. Ali M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change*, 2nd ed. (London Chatham House: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2006).

⁷³ I have refrained from using the Gramscian term of 'war of position' for reasons I lay out, but 'positionality' is helpful as a concept, because it places emphasis on the struggle over meanings and values. See, Steven Jones, *Antonio Gramsci* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p31

⁷⁴ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, p107

⁷⁵ Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J. D. Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Oxford: Polity 1992), p76

resources.⁷⁶ The field is structured by relations of power and thus the production, circulation and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge and status; and it is within manifold fields that the religious intellectual and the current of religious intellectualism is constituted as a subject of historical enquiry.⁷⁷ While an explication of the intellectual's conceptual armoury is of considerable interest in and of itself and makes up much of this study, a prerequisite of understanding these ideas is the context and field out of which they emerged and continue to operate; in particular, the broader field of political power and capital in which these intellectuals with their respective habitus, compete and strategize, is indispensable.

Bourdieu uses the analogy of the 'game' in which the agents or players have a rough idea of the rules and norms which characterise the game, as well as the stakes involved. The players involved have to believe in the game being played and the stakes themselves are in part an outcome of the competition between the players.⁷⁸ The different players in the field have varying levels of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital and in the course of their competition accumulate and deploy their different types and amounts of capital in accordance with their habitus and the balance of forces which structure the field. Capital as has been said can take a number of distinct forms. Bourdieu delineates three states of cultural capital: *embodied*, *objectified*, and *institutionalised*.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ David Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, Kindle ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), Loc-664-of-7267

⁷⁷ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p104; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, et al. (New York Pantheon Books, 1980), p117

⁷⁸ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p98

⁷⁹ Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital ", p17

Cultural capital in its embodied state overlaps with the habitus of the agent and pertains to longstanding dispositions internalised over many years in the course of one's childhood and in later socialisation in, for example, a particular institution or social environment, such as the school, university or seminary. In the objectified state, cultural capital denotes manifest objects such as books, computers etc., but also qualifications and certificates, and often requires economic capital for its appropriation.⁸⁰ Institutionalised cultural capital, which Bourdieu also calls social capital, refers to potential and actual resources conferred by 'membership' of a particular group or durable and semi-institutionalised relationships as part of a social network. In virtue of his or her 'membership' of the social network in question, he or she is entitled to the collective backing of the group's capital and is in this way credited by the broader network. Social capital of this kind was especially important for Iran's religious intellectuals, who, as has already been intimated, initially benefited from direct state patronage and backing, or later indirect support from acquaintances, friends, allies, and relatives in positions of authority.⁸¹ This certainly did not leave them immune to persecution or repression from ideological rivals who did not accept them as part of their own social network or recognised their social capital as legitimate, but it certainly bestowed them with certain privileges, which other intellectuals without such institutionalised cultural capital did not enjoy.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid.,p20

⁸¹ Nodes of a social network, which could be either individuals or institutions, brought together by common norms and values enjoy what is called 'homophily'. Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings*, Kindle ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).,Loc-492-of-6138

⁸² Bourdieu recognises that the existence of a network of social connections is not naturally given, nor does the act of its initial institution guarantee the network is constituted once and for all. Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital ",p22

As Bourdieu states, “players can play to increase or to conserve their capital, their number of tokens, in conformity with the tacit rules of the game and the prerequisites of the reproduction of the game and its stakes; but they can also get in it to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game.”⁸³ In addition to factoring into their intellectual meditations the unstable norms and values of the political culture which they not only helped birth, but by which they were themselves shaped, the *rowshanfekran-e dini* operated within the moving and tacit red lines of the hierocratic state, which have tightened and loosened in accordance with a wide range of factors, the political balance of forces being a key one.⁸⁴ They have also sought to transgress what they and the authorities perceived as the ‘red lines’ and in this process miscommunication and misunderstanding has often occurred. This is because transgressions are frequently tacit or implied and not specifically spelt out, even in cases where the law is putatively codified. Transgressions are possible not only due to the fact that such norms are never completely internalised, but because as Bourdieu argues, intellectuals are capable of critical reflexivity and scrutinizing their partisanship, and thereby transcend the immediacy of their subject position,⁸⁵ even when it might then entangle them in new forms of domination and symbolic violence.

⁸³ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p99

⁸⁴ For example, the incumbent government, but especially the Ministers of Culture and Islamic Guidance and Teaching and Education have proven of great importance on where red lines are practically drawn and recognized as hemming in intellectuals, journalists, writers, editors etc., on what can and cannot be ‘legitimately’ said, argued, and announced publicly and what can and cannot be published.

⁸⁵ Kurzman and Owens, "The Sociology of Intellectuals.", p79

A final important issue which should also come through in the course of the chapters that follow is that during the 1990s and 2000s the *rowshanfekran-e dini* proved most successful in the battle for symbolic power. More than any other species of capital and its accumulation, it was in the battle for symbolic power and capital i.e. the capacity to impose classifications and meanings as legitimate, where they most palpably succeeded.⁸⁶ The process of naming and classifying political and religious terms not only bestowed a carefully crafted identity to this intellectual current, but also endowed it with the necessary symbolic power to acquire considerable assent in its taking the lead in defining the terms of political and religious debate.

⁸⁶ Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals*, Loc-715-of-7267

Chapter 2: Constructing *Behesht-e Jahan*: A Review of Islamist Politics and Theory in the Pahlavi Era and Beyond

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an exposition of the thought and historical development of three prominent Islamist ideologues of the Pahlavi era, and thereby illustrate the ideological lineages and terrain in which the 'Islamic Republic' would be forged. In doing so, I also hope to illustrate the chief politico-ideological concepts the post-revolutionary *rowshanfekran-e dini* would set out to challenge, critique and revise. These ideologues and political actors are Navvab Safavi (d. 1955) and the organisation he founded, the Fada'ian-e Islam, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989) and Ali Shari'ati (d. 1977). This selection as mentioned in the **Introduction** makes no claim to be exhaustive of the religious and ideological ferment of the Pahlavi era, but it is instructive insofar as it illustrates some of the chief objectives and themes characterising the writings of Iranian Shi'i Islamists both in opposition and following the seizure of power, as well as a host of important issues pertaining to the call for 'utopian' socio-political transformation, the institution of the clergy and claims to political authority, Islamic jurisprudence and the status and role of Islamist laymen.

These issues with their various ambiguities and ambivalences are especially notable in the thought of Ali Shari'ati, which would constitute both an object of criticism and inspiration for members of the Islamic left and the *rowshanfekran-e dini* engrossed in their own concrete politico-ideological struggles in the course of the 1990s and 2000s.⁸⁷ In short, it is helpful to analyse these ideologues and the

⁸⁷ See, **Chapter 4** and **Conclusion**.

conditions of their historical emergence and development to understand the eclectic ruling political theology of the 'Islamic Republic' and its many unresolved tensions. The *rowshanfekran-e dini* and their political allies would find themselves thinking and acting in the interstices of these ongoing ideational conflicts.

The establishment of an Islamic state has been amongst the key, if not the key objective of Islamic revivalists of the 20th century.⁸⁸ The historical roots of revivalism are complex and vary from case to case. This chapter will not dwell at length upon Iranian Islamism's historical causes, though the conditions of its emergence will be addressed in the course of an exegesis of some of the more prominent texts in which revivalists elaborated their vision of the Islamic polity. This is necessary if we are to better grasp the political and ideological context out of which Iran's post-revolutionary religious intellectuals emerged and thus the figures and tropes which often turn out to be the object of their criticism.

The two groups focused upon specifically in this chapter i.e. the Islamist clergy and representatives of the modernist laity testify to Iranian Islamists' own internal diversity. Moreover, within these respective groups, the signifier 'Islam' fulfilled different functions and roles in the world-views of individuals who often shared common backgrounds of class, education and culture.

According to Ali Rahnama, in the 20th century Islamic revivalists have designated four essential reasons for the decline of the Islamic world and Muslim peoples.

⁸⁸ Ali Rahnama, *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (New York: Zed Books, 2005), p4

- 1) The erosion of Islamic values and governments' ignorance and inaction in enforcing Islam's socio-economic and ethical ordinances.
- 2) Quietism and the collaboration of the clergy with non-Islamic governments.
- 3) The corruption and injustice (*zolm*) of the ruling classes.
- 4) The ruling classes collaboration and dependence upon non-Islamic and imperialist forces.⁸⁹

Complementing these diagnoses of the prevailing malaise is the proffered antidote: renewal (*tajdid*). The meaning of *tajdid* has hardly remained stable or unchanging, but reflects a longstanding preoccupation of many Muslim thinkers and the perceived need for their faith's periodic revitalization.⁹⁰ *Tajdid* is indissociable from the call for a return to the essential tenets of 'Islam' as presented in the Quran and Traditions (*sunnah, sonnat*) of the Prophet. In Twelver Shi'ism this picture is complicated greatly by the various collations of the Traditions of the twelve Holy Imams and the Twelfth Imam's Occultation, with the faithful still awaiting his promised return. Nevertheless, idyllic images of the first Muslim *ummah* (or *ommat*) of Medina checker the writings of Iranian Shi'i Islamists and modernists as an object of emulation and recreation. There is a tradition traced back to the Prophet Mohammad himself in which he is reported as saying. "God will send to this *ummah* (the Muslim community) at the head of each century those who will renew its faith for it."⁹¹ This tradition has been cited approvingly across the sectarian divide. The agent of renewal is the *mojahed*, one who

⁸⁹ Ibid.,p5

⁹⁰ John O. Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: Tajdid and Islah," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford University Press, 1983),p32

⁹¹ Ibid.,p33

strives in the path of the Almighty. Only he is able to discern and subsequently implement the authentic spirit of the divine message, thereby fulfilling God's will.⁹²

These general features are certainly visible in the rhetoric and political theology of Iranian Islamists, who emerged onto the political scene as a small, albeit militant force in the 1940s.⁹³ Their emergence can best be understood against the background of the steady challenge to the power and authority of the 'ulama posed by the arrival of the idea of the modern nation-state. Political Islam in Iran, as elsewhere, was thus mediated by a plethora of socio-political processes and dislocations, instigated as a direct result of the construction of the modern Iranian nation-state and the often defensive manner in which it was undertaken to ward off the encroachment of imperialist powers. For reasons of contextualizing the emergence and evolution of Iranian Islamism, the present chapter will briefly turn to this process and adumbrate some of its repercussions, which Iran's Islamists had originally set out to overturn, but whose assumptions they often uncritically and unconsciously shared and reproduced.

State-led Modernisation and the Erosion of 'Ulama Power

The idea of the modern nation-state, found passionate advocacy in the hands of a small modernizing elite, who were convinced that whole-heartedly adopting the example set by the West

⁹² Ibid.,p33

⁹³ It should be noted in passing that there were important historical precedents at the beginning of the 19th century, which can be described as amongst Iran's earliest exponents of Islamism and a strong centralised Islamic state. See, Vanessa Martin, "Aqa Najafi, Haj Aqa Nurullah, and the Emergence of Islamism in Isfahan 1889-1908," *Iranian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2008),p165-167

was the best route available, if Iran was ever to escape its lamentable state of 'backwardness' and 'stagnation'. Iran's own state was almost invariably plotted on an idealized trajectory of development vis-à-vis Europe, a trajectory which Europe had already traversed as evidenced by the many appurtenances of civilization and progress testifying to its leadership of human history, while Iran palpably lagged behind. Iran's own deficiencies and successes were conceivable only with reference to the West and as a result the modern intellectual class suffered an uneasy relationship torn between modern (read Europeanized) cultural forms and the traditional beliefs and modes of life of their forefathers.⁹⁴ The encounter with the 'West' and its history and development were crucial, ideationally speaking, in the birth of a new breed of national consciousness amongst an emerging intellectual movement which became the vehicle of a brand of "romantic nationalism". Homa Katouzian describes the make-up of the ideological world-view of the generation of romantic nationalists as follows:

"It was opposed to European imperialism, but also captivated and mesmerized by modern European culture and power. It was contemptuous, sometimes even ashamed, of all the existing norms and traditions – including many a great Iranian heritage, even classical Persian poetry – but was proud, instead, of the romanticized glories of ancient Persia...it was thus both Europeanist and anti-imperialist, both self-glorifying and self-denigrating."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ One of the better known examples of an Iranian intellectual who embodies such a complex and ambivalent relationship is the scholar-statesman, Hassan Taqizadeh, whom during in his own lifetime and posthumously has been much admired and maligned, as a result of his comments exhorting Iranians to whole-heartedly embrace Europeanization both "inside and out". His views and their development are far more complex than many of his supporters and antagonists have let on. For more nuanced views on Taqizadeh and his intellectual trajectory see, Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* Kindle ed. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p46; Loc-1417-of-9882; Homa Katouzian, "Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh: Three Lives in a Lifetime," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 1 (2012).

⁹⁵ *Sadeq Hedayat : The Life and Literature of an Iranian Writer* (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p69

This band of “discontented modern intellectuals” inspired, and yet oblivious of the European nations’ disparate roads to development⁹⁶ would act as a base of support for the Pahlavi state’s intellectual rationale. Even if later on they were to grow weary of the man they had initially rallied behind to bring order in the midst of chaos, a Cossack officer turned king; they had already unleashed a force with which they were patently unprepared to deal. Ironically, along with the traditionalist elements they had so vehemently opposed, they found themselves victims of Reza Shah’s slide into autocracy and arbitrary rule.⁹⁷

To use Charles Tilly’s term, in the absence of accumulated capital, this elite advocated a “coercive-intensive” path to statehood.⁹⁸ The state, specifically the army and internal security forces played a crucial role in the on-going process of nation-construction.⁹⁹ The challenge mounted by the modernizing nation-state was manifold; most salient in setting the stage for the Islamist response were its efforts to wrest away, the legal, juridical and educational functions of the 'ulama in the course of the nation-building process. In breaking the clerical monopoly on these functions, which formed the basis of the 'ulama’s social and political power, the modernizing regime of Reza Shah sought to arrogate them to the state, which toward the final years of his rule, became increasingly identified with his person.¹⁰⁰ Resistance was decisively quashed. Though the Qajar state had already

⁹⁶ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), p224

⁹⁷ Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), p47

⁹⁸ Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, p199

⁹⁹ For further details on the role of the military in the formation of the modern Iranian nation-state see, Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910-1926* (London ; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997), Chapters 4 & 6

¹⁰⁰ Homa Katouzian, *State and society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, Library of modern Middle East studies (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p315

initiated a number of reforms which had undercut clerical power e.g. the establishment of a new secular school system in 1851,¹⁰¹ the reign of Reza Shah is generally understood as inaugurating a new era in state-'ulama relations.¹⁰² A host of reforms initiated during the Reza Shah period (1925-1941) encompassing the legal, judicial and educational spheres compounded those already set in motion by the Qajars, and contributed decisively toward the further erosion of 'ulama power and authority.

This latest phase in state-'ulama relations broke with the *status quo ante* of the last four hundred years and the *de facto* division of authority which had existed between the two, in which issues pertaining to customary law (*'orf*) fell under the jurisdiction of the legitimate monarch (*saltanat-e mashru'*), and issues pertaining to *hisbah*, based on the Quranic maxim of 'enjoining the good and forbidding the evil' (*amr-e beh ma'ruf va nahy az monkar*) and the *shari'a*, to the 'ulama. In this manner a kind of *modus vivendi* emerged between the spheres of Islamic jurisprudence and statecraft, and thus the 'ulama and the ruling monarch.¹⁰³ In theory, a just monarch was expected to be an observant Muslim, defend his coreligionist subjects and the Islamic homeland from foreign intrusion and threat of depredation, and permit the clergy to supervise matters covered by the *shari'a* (*'omur-e shar'i*).¹⁰⁴ While Reza Khan in the lead up to his self-coronation had curried favour with the 'ulama,¹⁰⁵ it quickly

¹⁰¹ Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran : Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), p28

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p37

¹⁰³ Mohsen Kadivar, *Nazariyehha-ye dowlat dar feqh-e Shi'eh* (Tehran: Nashr-e nei, 1376 [1997]), p58

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p59

¹⁰⁵ Mehdi Hairi-Yazdi and Zia Sedghi, "Mehdi Hairi-Yazdi," (Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, 28 January, 4 February 1989 and 29 April 1992), Tape 1, p3

became apparent that the new Shah had no intention of emulating the ideal Islamic monarch subscribed to by the conservative clergy.

The approval of a new Commercial Code (1925), Criminal Code (1926) and Civil Code (1928), based partially on models adopted from the French legal system (though incorporating elements of a codified *shari'a*) and finally the abolition of *shari'a* courts in 1939-40, which were replaced by European-style civil and penal codes, deprived many 'ulama of the fundamental bases of their livelihood.¹⁰⁶ Other issues such as the Conscription Law (1925)¹⁰⁷ and the sale of *vaqf* (endowed) lands¹⁰⁸ also riled segments of the 'ulama against the authoritarian, modernizing regime of Reza Shah. Moreover, as Cyrus Schayegh has argued, the evidence of the “transformative” power of the state had the unintended consequence of promoting an “image of the state as the *only* motor for progress and as *fully* separate from society.”¹⁰⁹ This only went to reinforce the prevailing logics of centralisation and state-led political and cultural change.

A readily *visible* challenge to the 'ulama's presence and prestige in Iranian society was the institution of new dress codes, modelled along European lines, what one scholar has dubbed the Pahlavi state's push for “sartorial westernization”.¹¹⁰ The so-called Pahlavi hat, comparable to the

¹⁰⁶ Nikki R. Keddie and Yann Richard, *Modern Iran : Roots and Results of Revolution*, Updated ed. (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2006), p90

¹⁰⁷ Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran : Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period.*, p37

¹⁰⁸ Vanessa Martin, "Religion and State in Khumaini's "Kashf al-asrar", " *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 56, no. 1 (1993), p44

¹⁰⁹ Cyrus Schayegh, ""Seeing like a State": An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42(2010), p39

¹¹⁰ Houchang E. Chehabi, "Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation-Building under Reza Shah," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3/4 (1993), p212

French *képi* became mandatory for Iranian men.¹¹¹ Though the 'ulama could still wear their traditional attire, strict criteria of eligibility were demanded by the Uniform Dress Law (December 1928), passed into law by the Seventh Majles, which had been packed with regime loyalists.¹¹² Perhaps most controversially of all, Reza Shah launched a campaign forcibly unveiling women as early as 1928, though it had not yet become official policy.¹¹³ After Reza Shah's first and only state visit to Turkey in 1934 and witnessing first-hand the westernizing reforms undertaken by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Shah's will-to-Europeanize took on a new lease of life.¹¹⁴

In 1935 men were ordered to dispense with the Pahlavi hat and wear in its stead the *chapeau* or broad rimmed hat. Compounding resentments *vis-à-vis* over-taxation, Mashhad witnessed the bloody repression by state forces of peaceful protestors taking *bast* in Imam Reza's shrine during July of the same year, resulting in many arrests and the exile of some 70 clerics.¹¹⁵ In his first political tract, *Kashf al-asrar* (1943), Ruhollah Khomeini, then a relatively low-ranking *mojtahed* based in Qom, would openly mock and decry Reza Shah's sartorial reforms. His blistering polemic probably captures the effrontery and trauma felt amongst a considerable swathe of Iran's culturally conservative population, even if they couldn't muster the same levels of venom in expressing their disapprobation. His contempt for its executors was similarly unforgiving:

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*,p212

¹¹² *Ibid.*,p213

¹¹³ *Ibid.*,p214

¹¹⁴ It is inaccurate, however, to assume that Reza Shah merely imitated Atatürk and held an entirely derivative vision for Iran's modernisation. *Ibid.*,p215

¹¹⁵ Fakhreddin Azimi, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran : A Century of Struggle against Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 2008),p98

“Of course those who identify civilization and the excellence of a country with women walking naked through the streets; and as they idiotically say themselves, “with forced unveiling half the population will become workers” (perhaps a line of work you all know and we all know),¹¹⁶ are not prepared to run the country in a rational way or under the law of God. We have nothing to say to those who have so little power of discernment they consider the progress of the country as bound up with a bowler hat (*kolah-e lagani*), which is amongst the dross left by the beasts of Europe...What can we say to someone who has lost so much of his sense and intelligence when confronted with foreigners and in time will copy (*taqlid*) them...The day they put on the Pahlavi hat they all said the country must have national symbols and that the country’s independence would be preserved in wearing it. A couple of days later they put on the bowler hat and all of a sudden their remarks changed; they now said we have contact with foreigners and must all look the same until we become great ourselves. A country which builds its greatness on the basis of a hat or a hat which they [i.e. the foreigners] make for it can be stolen any day and they will also deprive it of its grandeur.”¹¹⁷

Despite heated opposition from important segments of Iranian society, the anti-veiling campaign became a matter of official policy in January 1936 as the veil was prohibited in public.¹¹⁸ The policy was relentlessly pursued and some women even found themselves manhandled by policemen for their defiance. Its effect was not only to alienate the strong, conservative-patriarchal current of Iranian society concerned with women’s ‘chastity’ (*namus*), but also to cause many women, in the provinces and capital alike, to agonize over their appearance in public. More often than not the

¹¹⁶ Khomeini seems to be implying prostitution here.

¹¹⁷ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Kashf al-asrar* (Tehran?/1943), p223-224

Though perhaps not conveyed with such venom there is ample evidence suggesting that Khomeini’s antipathy was widely shared amongst the Tehran clergy as well. Ali-Reza Mola’i-Tavani, *Zendege-nameh-ye siyasi-ye Ayatollah Taleqani* (Tehran: Nashr-e nei, 1388 [2009]), p18

¹¹⁸ Azimi, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran*, p98

traditional and poorer segments of Iranian society were traumatized by the policy and their exclusion from public life was exacerbated.¹¹⁹

Though Reza Shah would abdicate the throne in 1941 with his sartorial regime left in tatters, the reforms of the legal system and judiciary would leave an indelible mark upon a generation of 'ulama, who continued to fundamentally resent the destruction of the occupational prerogatives and socio-political power they had formerly enjoyed. The Fada'ian-e Islam (Devotees of Islam) which was formed in 1945 ought to be read as *one* response to these events and deeper processes of socio-political change, which were at least in part a corollary of the Pahlavi regime's authoritarian drive to craft its image as the agent and embodiment of the modern nation-state's realisation.

The Fada'ian ought not be read as merely a reactionary response to the 'ulama's increasing irrelevance and dwindling authority as a corporate group in Iranian society. Like all revivalists of the modern era their political vision was eclectic insofar as it incorporated elements of 'tradition', e.g. the reactive defence of clerical prerogatives, *and* 'modernity' e.g. utilizing the modern state and its appurtenances, for the propagation and enforcement of the *shari'a*. While its leader was a low-ranking cleric, with little, if any scholarly credentials, the organization's members were a ragtag bunch of the young, unemployed, peddlers, high school students and craftsmen.¹²⁰ The Fada'ian-e Islam's leader and founder, Navvab Safavi, after serving two months in jail for the attempted assassination of the

¹¹⁹ Mehdi 'Araqi, *Nagoftehha: khaterat-e shahid Hajj Mehdi 'Araqi, Paris-Payiz 1357* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye khadamat-e farhang-e rasa, 1370 [1991]), p19

¹²⁰ Sohrab Behdad, "Islamic Utopia in Pre-Revolutionary Iran: Navvab Safavi and the Fada'ian-e Eslam," *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 1 (1997), p45

prominent intellectual and lawyer, Ahmad Kasravi, even consciously decided to recruit local hooligans, ruffians and street toughs for the purpose of forming combat groups in locales across the country.¹²¹ Believing he could kill two birds with one stone, Navvab thought he could reform these one-time troublemakers and put them on the straight-and-narrow in the name of his own cause.¹²² They were hardly representative of the clerical establishment and are better understood as a rebellion against the higher echelons of the clergy's acquiescence and quietism in the face of the perceived 'threat' to the sanctity of religion and its role in public life.¹²³ Moreover, in the limited writings available which adumbrate the political ideas and program of the Fada'ian, the recourse to jurisprudential arguments in favour of the proposed Islamic state are rare, if not entirely absent. Given that its leader, despite his clerical garb only possessed a rudimentary education in the Islamic sciences, the preference for populist slogans and anti-colonial fulminations over jurisprudential reasoning and argument is hardly surprising. The revivalists were not only angered by their modernizing regimes' erosion and on occasion, outright repudiation of 'Islamic' values. The authoritarian manner in which such modernizing drives were carried out along with the perception of subordination to Western imperial interests provoked deep-seated resentment.¹²⁴

Visions of the Islamic State: The Fada'ian-e Islam-Khomeini Connection

¹²¹ 'Araqi, *Nagoftehha*.,p26

¹²² *Ibid.*.,p26

¹²³ Rasul Ja'farian, *Jaryanha va sazmanha-ye mazhabi-siyasi-e Iran: az ruy-e kar amadan-e Mohammadreza Shah ta piruzi-ye enqelab-e eslami* (Tehran: Khaneh-ye ketab, 1387 [2008]).,p208

¹²⁴ Hadi Khosrowshahi, *Zendegi va mobarezeh-ye Navvab Safavi* (Tehran: Etela'at, 1386 [2007]).,p266

The Fada'ian-e Islam led by the young cleric, Seyyed Mojtaba Mir-Lowhi, better known as Navvab Safavi (1924-55), predominantly engaged in small-scale agitation and political assassinations. A *nom de guerre*, Navvab (deputy, lieutenant) consciously chose to identify himself with the dynasty that had first instituted and enshrined Shi'ism as Iran's state religion at the outset of the 16th century.¹²⁵ This tightly-knit Islamist group, comprising a handful of individuals at its core should not be regarded as on a par with comparable regional social or anti-colonial liberation movements in the region such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, whose mobilising power Safavi witnessed first-hand when he met with the organisation's leaders, as well as President Muhammad Naguib and Prime Minister Gamal Abdel Nasser, while on a visit to Cairo in 1953.¹²⁶ Though the Fada'ian certainly had sympathisers and affiliates beyond Qom and Tehran,¹²⁷ the failure to transform itself into a broad-based movement was arguably amongst the chief reasons for its lack of success and subsequent extirpation by the security forces of the monarchical regime. However, their world-view, agenda and committed membership provide a crucial glimpse into the beginnings of the Islamic movement as it would develop in Iran and the seeds of a radical agenda, already burgeoning elsewhere in the Middle East.

Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani (1931-), a member of the Council of the Islamic Revolution (*Showra-ye enqelab-e eslami*), one of the most important political authorities and decision-

¹²⁵ Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (Boston: Oneworld Publications, 1985, 2000), p105

Mehdi 'Araqi states that Safavi was the family name of his maternal uncle, a judge at the Department of Justice, who raised Mir-Lowhi after the death of his father. 'Araqi, *Nagoftehha*, p20

¹²⁶ Khosrowshahi, *Zendegi va mobarezeh-ye Navvab Safavi*, p264

¹²⁷ Nasser Mohajer, "Kard ajin kardan-e Doktor Berjis " *Baran*, no. 19-20 (1387 [2008]), p11

makers established by Khomeini at the outset of the 1979 Revolution, while not a formal member of the Fada'ian-e Islam, considered himself a supporter of the organization.¹²⁸ He recalls his own days as a young seminarian stating that the *tolab* who were prepared to cooperate with the Fada'ian-e Islam were in the minority. He credits the Fada'ian for provoking the first political stirrings in the hearts and minds his fellow classmates in Qom. The picture drawn by Mahdavi-Kani is quite different from the outbursts of political tumult enveloping Qom and the environs of the Feiziyyeh seminary in particular, during the 1960s. It is a portrayal which instead draws attention to a growing political consciousness amongst members of the 'ulama still in an early phase of gestation.¹²⁹ Moreover, though the Fada'ian published newspapers such as *Manshur-e baradari* (The Fraternal Proclamation) and *Nabard-e mellat* (The Nation's Battle), the reading of newspapers was frowned upon in the seminary and, if done at all, was usually concealed from the sight of others.¹³⁰ However, even Mahdavi-Kani's relatively conservative account admits that the Fada'ian "were inspirational and laid the groundwork for our future activities"¹³¹ and along with the political activism of the controversial cleric and Speaker of Parliament (August 1952-March 1953), Ayatollah Abolqasem Kashani (1882-1962), "without doubt had a great effect on Iran's Islamic revolution."¹³² One has to be careful when assessing such statements, especially since following the consolidation of the Islamic Republic a state-

¹²⁸ Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani and Gholam-Reza Khajeh-Sarvi, eds., *Khaterat-e Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 1385 [2006]), p91

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p72

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p93

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p93

¹³² *Ibid.*, p94

funded cottage industry has been established to fashion an official historiography retelling Khomeini and the 'Islamic revolution's' inevitable victory and its continuity with the multifarious 'Islamic' struggles which came before.¹³³ Nevertheless, it's safe to conclude that Navvab and his small organisation did play an important role in politicising and radicalising the younger strata of the clergy, despite the wishes of the clerical and scholastic elite.

Many of the Islamic Republic's founders were either members of the Fada'ian or sympathizers of Navvab and his cohorts' efforts to challenge the steady erosion of Iran's Islamic identity at the hands of native collaborators and menacing foreign imperialists. For instance, several former Fada'ian members and supporters such as Mehdi 'Araqi and Asadollah Lajevardi went on to found the Islamic Coalition Association (*Hei'atha-ye mo'talefeh-ye eslami*) in the 1960s, an organization with strong links to the bazaar that would go on to wield great power in the post-revolutionary order and which was formed on the basis of Khomeini's explicit order.¹³⁴ President Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1989-1997) in his memoir covering the pre-revolutionary period, *Dowran-e mobarezeh* (The Era of Struggle), speaks candidly of his sympathies for the Fada'ian and his admiration for Navvab Safavi, whose speeches he witnessed first-hand, participating in their meetings held in Qom.¹³⁵ Rafsanjani even

¹³³ This has been addressed in part by, Kamran Scot Aghaie, "Islamist Historiography in Post-Revolutionary Iran," in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p236-244. Shahram Kholdi's 2011 doctoral thesis on this subject, however, is more systematic and comprehensive. Shahram Kholdi, "The Politics of Memory in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Memoirs and the Historiography of the Iranian Revolution of 1979" (PhD, University of Manchester, 2011).

¹³⁴ Asadollah Badamchian, *Ashena'i ba jam'iyat-e mo'talefeh-ye eslami* (Tehran: Andisheh-ye nab, 1385 [2006]), p39-40

¹³⁵ Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, *Dowran-e mobarezeh: khaterat, tasvirha, gah shomar*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Nashr-e ma'aref-e enqelab, 1386 [2007]), p108-109

speaks of his and fellow seminarians' anger at Grand Ayatollah Tabataba'i-Borujerdi, arguably the leading religious authority of the Shi'i world at the time, and his dissatisfaction with the Fada'ian's agitations against the remains of the former Shah, Reza Pahlavi, being brought to Qom from South Africa for a funeral service at the Fatemeh al-Ma'sumeh shrine, after which they would be taken to Shahr-e Rey and interred. At one point he goes so far as to say:

“Navvab was sacred (*moqaddas*) for us, very many accepted him...I can say that the essential makings of my political temperament were from that same time, under the influence of the wave of the National Front movement, the struggles of Ayatollah Kashani and more than anything else the Fada'ian-e Islam.”¹³⁶

Mahdavi-Kani also speaks of the Fada'ian's fierce opposition to the imminent arrival of Reza Shah's corpse voiced through a flurry of speeches delivered at the Feiziyyeh seminary.¹³⁷ In a similar vein, Sadeq Khalkhali, the infamous 'hanging judge' appointed by Khomeini to head the Revolutionary Court which sent many members of the *ancien régime* peremptorily to the gallows, contends that the “first revolutionary execution of [the Fada'ian-e Islam] was the assassination of Ahmad Kasravi in Tehran's Department of Justice building.”¹³⁸ According to Khalkhali, the execution of Ahmad Kasravi (1890-1946), the famed historian of the Constitutional Revolution and former cleric turned formidable critic of Shi'ism, by followers of Navvab, was the first step along a revolutionary and hitherto untraveled road. Finally, Khamenei, the incumbent Guardian Jurist, has also testified to meeting Navvab aged eleven when the latter visited Mashhad, the city of Khamenei's birth, and

¹³⁶ Ibid.,p109

¹³⁷ Mahdavi-Kani and Khajeh-Sarvi, *Khaterat-e Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani*,p72

¹³⁸ Sadeq Khalkhali, *Khaterat-e Ayatollah Khalkhali: az ayyam-e talabegi ta dowran-e hakem-e shar'-e dadgahha-ye enqelabi-ye eslami* (Tehran: Nashr-e sayeh, 1379 [2000]),p45

confesses to an infatuation with the persona of Navvab and political Islam developing from that time onward.¹³⁹ During Navvab's visit to the small seminary in Mashhad he attended at the time, Khomeini describes how he sat in front of the leader of the Fada'ian as he delivered a fiery sermon, and how his "entire being was captivated by this man".¹⁴⁰

Nor was the influence between Khomeini, his disciples and Navvab unidirectional. Ayatollah Khomeini's first overtly political tract, the aforementioned *Kashf al-asrar* (Revelation of the Secrets), was published anonymously in 1943,¹⁴¹ and the scholar Sohrab Behdad contends it highly probable that Navvab had read it.¹⁴² This seems probable given that Khomeini's *Kashf al-asrar* was allegedly written at the behest of bazaar merchants in Tehran with the explicit intent of responding to Ali-Akbar Hakamizadeh's polemical tract, *Asrar-e hezar saleh* (Thousand Year Old Secrets) (1943). Hakamizadeh, formerly a man of the cloth, who like Kasravi had decided to set aside his clerical garb in the mid-1930s, now set about challenging his erstwhile colleagues and the enduring 'superstitions' he held them responsible for perpetuating.¹⁴³ Hakamizadeh was known in Qom as the editor of the modernist journal, *Homayun*, and a disciple of Ahmad Kasravi, whose press published the controversial text.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Abdolrahman Hassanifar, ed. *Fada'ian-e Islam dar kalam-e yaran* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 1389 [2010]), p262

¹⁴⁰ "Khaterat-e Ayatollah Khomeini az avvalin didar ba Navvab-e Safavi," *Khabar Online* 27 Dei 1389 [17 January 2011].

¹⁴¹ Martin, "Religion and State in Khumaini's "Kashf al-asrar".", p34

¹⁴² Behdad, "Islamic Utopia in Pre-Revolutionary Iran.", p44

¹⁴³ Yann Richard, "Shari'at Sangalaji: A Reformist Theologian of the Rida Shah Period " in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), p160

¹⁴⁴ I am thankful to Homa Katouzian for alerting me to the point that Hakamizadeh and Kasravi had fallen out at the time of the tract's publication. *Ibid.*, p160

That Kasravi's failed assassin (Navvab shot and wounded Kasravi on 28 April 1945) may have only recently read Khomeini's 300 page point-by-point rebuttal and indictment of Hakamizadeh's pamphlet, and by extension Kasravi's own writings criticizing many of Twelver Shi'ism's basic tenets, is eminently plausible. Though there is as of yet no conclusive evidence of whether Khomeini had sanctioned Kasravi's assassination beforehand, the fate of Islam's enemies was made clear in *Kashf al-asrar*. Designated as *mosfed fi al-arz* (corrupt on earth) by the young *mojtahed*, it was stated unequivocally that an "Islamic government" would "execute these offenders in front of the supporters of the faith".¹⁴⁵ While perhaps greater caution should be exercised in reaching such conclusions, Abbas Milani claims Khomeini's tract was in effect tantamount to Kasravi's death sentence.¹⁴⁶ Khomeini did publish a statement in the spring of 1944 which directly, albeit belatedly called on the clergy and pious to rise up in reaction against the deposed Shah's policies, but more specifically the writings of Kasravi. Entitled 'Read and Act' (*Bekhanid va beh kar bebandid*), the statement reads like a call to arms peppered with attacks on Reza Shah, "the illiterate Mazandarani" with a "dessicated brain", but also "the rascal from Tabriz [i.e. Kasravi] who curses all of your doctrines", Imam Ja'far Sadeq and the Hidden Imam.¹⁴⁷

There is additional evidence of an amicable meeting-of-minds between Khomeini and Navvab. In the post-revolutionary memoir of Safavi's widow, Nayereh ol-Sadat Ehtesham-e Razavi, it has been

¹⁴⁵ Khomeini's *Kashf al-asrar* quoted in Behdad, "Islamic Utopia in Pre-Revolutionary Iran.",p43

¹⁴⁶ Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979*, 1st ed., 2 vols. (Syracuse, N.Y. ; New York, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press ; Persian World Press, 2008),p947

¹⁴⁷ Ruhollah Khomeini, "Nameh-ye Ayatollah Khomeini; 'Bekhanid va beh kar bebandid'," *BBC Persian* (21 March 2012).

claimed that Navvab would regularly frequent Khomeini's home under cover of darkness to evade state harassment.¹⁴⁸ Hojjat al-Islam Fazlollah Mahallati (1930-1985), who was both a member of the Fada'ian-e Islam and student of Khomeini dating back to 1940s, and later went on to become Khomeini's representative in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, also confirms that Navvab would visit Khomeini at his home.¹⁴⁹ Mahallati adds that Khomeini would on occasion relay messages to Ayatollah Borujerdi via Navvab,¹⁵⁰ and that he never actually heard Khomeini explicitly agree or disagree with the political activism of Navvab or the Fada'ian. The far more prominent figure of Ayatollah Kashani, by contrast, publicly endorsed the group until his own falling out with them in May 1951.¹⁵¹ Given Khomeini's close relationship with Kashani, who was in fact the neighbour to his father-in-law, and despite Ayatollah Montazeri's protestations that Khomeini didn't support the Fada'ian,¹⁵² most accounts testify to the meeting-of-minds thesis.

Moreover, Mehdi 'Araqi (d. August 1979),¹⁵³ a member of the Fada'ian-e Islam who played an instrumental role in many of the group's activities, including its assassination attempts against

¹⁴⁸ Nayereh-e Sadat Ehtesham Razavi and Hojjatollah Taheri, *Khaterat-e Nayereh Sadat Ehtesham-e Razavi* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 1383 [2004]), p144-145

¹⁴⁹ Fazlollah Mahallati, *Khaterat va mobarezat-e Shahid Mahallati* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 1376 [1997]); *ibid.*, p37

¹⁵⁰ This claim is questionable given Borujerdi's much publicised disapproval of the Fada'ian-e Islam's activities.

¹⁵¹ Mahallati, *Khaterat va mobarezat-e Shahid Mahallati*, p37

¹⁵² Hossein-Ali Montazeri, *Khaterat-e faqih va marja'-e 'aliqadr hazrat Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri* (PDF Published Online: www.amontazeri.com, 1379 [2000]), p142

¹⁵³ For Khomeini's acknowledgement of his own longstanding acquaintance with 'Araqi following his assassination see, Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, 21 vols., vol. 9 (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1378 [1999]), p350

Ahmad Kasravi and other high-ranking government officialdom,¹⁵⁴ contends that when Khomeini heard of Navvab's imminent execution he went to lobby for Ayatollah Borujerdi's intervention, albeit to little effect.¹⁵⁵ He even reports Khomeini as having left Ayatollah Borujerdi's home in tears.¹⁵⁶ This last ditch attempt to save Navvab's life, along with two letters penned by Khomeini to the statesman Mohsen Sadr, known as Sadr al-Ashraf and Seyyed Mohammad Behbahani, a powerful Tehran cleric with ties to the court,¹⁵⁷ testifies to a deep sympathy for both Navvab and the latter's cause on the part of the future revolutionary leader. Nevertheless, given the nature of the source material at our disposal and the shadow cast by post-revolutionary official historiography, it is perhaps wise to continue to assess the relationship between the two men with a degree of caution.

It would be a step too far to speak of Khomeini's patronage of the Fada'ian-e Islam, since at the time he was a relatively junior *mujtahed*, only receiving his *ejazeh* from Sheikh 'Abdolkarim Ha'eri-Yazdi in 1936,¹⁵⁸ and the group had the backing of high-ranking and more prominent 'ulama such as Ayatollahs Mohammad-Taqi Khonsari, Hossein Qomi¹⁵⁹ and Kashani.¹⁶⁰ Besides, Khomeini was far

¹⁵⁴ 'Araqi, *Nagoftehha*.,p16

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,p137

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,p137

¹⁵⁷ Ja'farian, *Jaryanha va sazmanha-ye mazhabi-siyasi-e Iran.*,p208-209

¹⁵⁸ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999),p36

¹⁵⁹ Seyyed Mohammad Vahedi and Mahnaz Mizbani, eds., *Khaterat-e Shahid Seyyed Mohammad Vahedi* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 1381 [2002]),p51

¹⁶⁰ Ali Rahnema, *Niruha-ye mazhabi bar bastar-e harakat-e nehzat-e melli* (Tehran: Gam-e now, 1384 [2005]),p29

The Fada'ian's alliance with Kashani began in August 1946 and ended in May 1951 with considerable acrimony in the aftermath of Prime Minister Ali Razmara's assassination by a member of the Fada'ian (p162). This is despite the fact that Kashani reportedly issued a fatwa authorizing Razmara's assassination, as revealed in the course of Navvab and his top lieutenants' trial (p164) Farhad Kazemi, "The Fada'ian-e Islam: Fanaticism, Politics and Terror," in *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York, 1984).

from the only individual whose ire was provoked by Kasravi and his disciples' activities, whose excommunication had already been sanctified by Qomi and Khonsari.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, Navvab had first encountered Kasravi's writings in Najaf, Iraq, and with the financial support of 'ulama residing there, including the future *marja'* 'Abolqasem Kho'i, travelled to Tehran to confront Kasravi.¹⁶² Thus far there has not been any substantiated or direct causal connection between Khomeini's writings and the Fada'ian-e Islam's execution of Kasravi.¹⁶³ While certainly feasible, the evidence is at best circumstantial. Even in the Fada'ian memoir literature and contemporary accounts available to us, there is little mention of Khomeini. Nonetheless, and as will be shown in greater detail below, a *politico-ideological affinity* between the Fada'ian and Khomeini's early writings is readily apparent.

Though neither Navvab, nor Khomeini had yet taken the radical step of declaring monarchical rule illegitimate *in principle*,¹⁶⁴ an instrumental deference to the 1906 Constitution is persistently adduced in the two men's writings. Articles I and II of the Supplement to the Constitution of October 7, 1907, in particular, which declared the Iranian state's official religion to be Shi'i Islam and stipulated the necessity for the establishment of a supervisory body of five religious jurists (*mojtahedin*) to determine the compatibility of parliamentary legislation with the *shari'a* are frequently alluded to in both the Fada'ian's *Barnameh-ye hokumati-ye Fada'ian-e Islam* (autumn 1950) (The Governmental

¹⁶¹ 'Araqi, *Nagoftehha*.,p22

¹⁶² Vahedi and Mizbani, *Khaterat-e Shahid Seyyed Mohammad Vahedi*.,p25

¹⁶³ Navvab Safavi's widow confirms that Navvab did order the assassination of Kasravi. Nayereh ol-Sadat Ehtesham Razavi, "Ostureh-ye mehr: goft va shenudi ba "Nayereh al-Sadat Navvab-e Ehtesham" Hamsar-e Shahid Navvab-e Safavi," *Shahed-e yaran*, no. 2 (Dei 1384 [December-January 2005]),p20

¹⁶⁴ Khomeini, *Kashf al-asrar*.,p187

Programme of the Fada'ian-e Islam), also known as *Rahnama-ye haqayeq* (The Guide to Truth(s)), and Khomeini's *Kashf al-asrar*.¹⁶⁵ The instrumental nature of this deferral to the constitution is further underscored by the vaunted status reserved in their writings for the most prominent anti-constitutionalist *mojtahed* of the Constitutional Revolution, Fazlollah Nuri.¹⁶⁶ As a young seminarian in Arak, Khomeini even studied with a close associate of Nuri's, Sheikh Mohsen 'Araqi, which might help to explain Khomeini's lionization of the famous *mojtahed* executed by the constitutionalists.¹⁶⁷ It is worth noting that the demand for a council of *mojtaheds* empowered to veto legislation deemed incompatible with the *shari'a* was the brainchild of Nuri, though his initial proposal was subsequently modified.¹⁶⁸ Khomeini and Navvab's understanding of parliament and its legislative function, not only invoke Nuri's name, but also echo his apologia for royal absolutism, putatively bound by the limits set by the *shari'a* (*mashruteh-ye mashru'eh*). In this arrangement as conceived by Nuri, the "just jurists" (*faqihan-e 'adel*), as general deputies of the Hidden Imam (*na'eban-e 'amm-e imam-e zaman*) would supervise all matters falling under the purview of the *shari'a*, while matters of customary law continued to reside within the monarch's jurisdiction.¹⁶⁹

We will now examine the Fada'ian's *Barnameh* and Khomeini's *Kashf al-asrar* in greater detail and explore its articulation of some of the central themes of revivalist literature and how their vision set

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.,p222

¹⁶⁶ Mojtaba Navvab Safavi, *Barnameh-ye hokumati-ye Fada'ian-e Islam* (Tehran: Bonyad-e Be'sat, 1386 [2007]),p101, p117

¹⁶⁷ Michael M. J. Fischer, "Imam Khomeini: Four Levels of Understanding," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983),p151

¹⁶⁸ Said Amir Arjomand, "The State and Khomeini's Islamic Order," *Iranian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1980),p155

¹⁶⁹ Kadivar, *Nazariyehha-ye dowlat dar feqh-e Shi'eh*,p75

the scene for the development of what would later come to signify ‘Islamic ideology’ or *Islam-e feqahati* (jurisprudential Islam) in the discursive formation of post-revolutionary religious intellectualism (see, **Chapter 4**). The *Barnameh* was originally published in 1950, some five years before Navvab’s execution at the hands of a summary trial convened by a military court. Navvab was arrested and tried along with a handful of his disciples, after the failed assassination attempt against Hossein 'Ala', the Minister of Court, who at the time was due to assume the premiership at the behest of the Shah.¹⁷⁰ The *Barnameh* is a highly repetitious, erratic and meandering text. It obsessively hammers away at two themes in particular: firstly, the irredeemable perversity and depravity of the present age; secondly, Islamic government as a sacred nomocratic order; the one and only panacea capable of bestowing salvation in the here-and-now.

In locating the “roots of ruinous corruption” in Iran and the world at large, Navvab’s vision of human nature is decisive.¹⁷¹ Invoking the Quranic notion of *nafs* or selfhood, which in exegetical literature is shown to be rich and layered with manifold meanings,¹⁷² Navvab identifies *nafs*, *simpliciter*, with the desire (*meil*) and inclination towards sin and sinful acts.¹⁷³ It is, moreover, often identified with man’s base carnality, a quality which makes his conduct and behaviour regularly indistinguishable from that of the rambunctious play of alley dogs.¹⁷⁴ This intrinsic desire to commit evil and sinful acts finds its counterpoint in reason (*'aql*) – reason itself is sanctified with reference to

¹⁷⁰ Behdad, "Islamic Utopia in Pre-Revolutionary Iran.",p51; Milani, *Eminent Persians*.,p40

¹⁷¹ Safavi, *Barnameh-ye hokumati-ye Fada'ian-e Islam*.,p25

¹⁷² C.E. Bosworth et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 7 (Leiden ; New York: E.J. Brill, 1993),.p880

¹⁷³ Safavi, *Barnameh-ye hokumati-ye Fada'ian-e Islam*.,p25

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,p105

the holy Quran. According to Navvab, each and every individual is involved in resistance and is essentially in conflict with him or herself – this conflict is waged by reason, perpetually at war with man’s lascivious and pernicious desires and lust (*shahvat*). Navvab goes so far as to compare reason to “weaponry” (*aslaheh*), resisting the unceasing onslaught of *nafs*.¹⁷⁵ In this way Navvab enacts a strict dualism of the self, one in which reason and the lustful self are in a state of perpetual war. He enters the two forces of *nafs* and reason into a dialogue, personifying and ventriloquizing each one, as they encourage the faithful to pursue their respective paths. The two forces also engage in mutual recrimination. For example, Navvab has *nafs* say: “prison, especially, the prisons of today are a good place to relax. There are also good friends [in prison]. All the better.” Reason, however, coolly replies that “you will be killed because it’s possible that while drunk you will kill someone.”¹⁷⁶ Later in the ongoing debate between *nafs* and *'aql* in which the former praises money-grubbing and gambling, *nafs* continues:

“Death is once and in the end [man] must die and the distress of dying is five minutes, we too have been killed, what meaning does being [killed] have.”¹⁷⁷

Having decreed the inevitability of death and even the transience of suffering a violent death, *nafs* believes it has conclusively defeated *'aql*.¹⁷⁸ But, “all of a sudden ablaze” (*nagah bar afrukhteh*) reason retorts:

“What will you do with God and God’s court and the infamous court of Truth (*haqq*) and God’s perpetual, endless torture that has no end?”

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,p25

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,p26

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*,p26-27

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*,p27

Thus, while a violent death may well prove transient, God's retribution for the sinful is not merely inescapable, but without terminus. With this rebuttal *nafs* descends into deep thought and admits defeat. Having been bested and humbled *nafs* replies:

“yes brother, the court of infamy with the greatness of Truth (*haqq*) beside the Prophets of God and the Immaculate Imams and Holy Zahra and Imam Hossein, Lord of the Martyrs and the innocent of the world and eternal, divine torture is not a joke. I will not commit evil acts.”¹⁷⁹

Evil, temptation and craven desires are integral to humanity's makeup, and such desires which are ultimately the root of all earthly “corruption” will be renounced only under threat of condemnation to the eternal agony of hellfire.¹⁸⁰ “Faith” (*iman*) in the certainty of such condemnation is the only means of curbing the roots of corruption pervading society. “Yes, for the fundamental thwarting of the foundation of corruptions, faith alone in the truths and nurturing of Islam is necessary.”¹⁸¹

Navvab makes the extent of his ambitions readily apparent. He hopes to build a “heaven on earth” (*behesht-e jahan*), a term he deploys repeatedly throughout the course of the text.¹⁸² First on the agenda is the implementation of Islamic ordinances, first and foremost those pertaining to the penal code.¹⁸³ Their non-implementation is one of the main factors for the “wretchedness” (*badbakhti*) of

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.,p27

¹⁸⁰ Hojjat al-Islam Mahallati, who attended Ayatollah Khomeini's classes on ethics in the 1940s, explains how they focused explicitly on the *ayat* of the Quran, which dealt explicitly with hell and its punishments. In this way, one of the most powerful reasons justifying ethical conduct, inculcated into the young seminarians was the fear of hellfire and eternal damnation. Mahallati, *Khaterat va mobarezat-e Shahid Mahallati*,p36

¹⁸¹ Safavi, *Barnameh-ye hokumati-ye Fada'ian-e Islam*,p27

¹⁸² Ibid.,p27,28,103

¹⁸³ Ibid.,p27

the Iranian people's present condition. In the new Islamic order this situation will be rectified with alacrity.

“Yes, yes, the law of Islamic punishments will too be executed. The hand of the thief will be cut, so that he can't rest in the sanatorium and the prison bordello, and the fourth time [he steals] he will be killed; with that where will thievery be?...Fornicators will be flogged in public view and the third time killed. How will they look upon the betrayal of the people's honour (*namus-e mardom*) and after seeing chaste women one or two times trick them and ultimately take them to the whorehouse and after a time with their syphilis ridden bodies dispatch them to the graveyard.”¹⁸⁴

Lust and carnal appetites must be restrained under threat of punishment determined in accordance with the letter of the law. Punishment in the mundane world was not only viewed as essential to avoiding eternal punishment in the next, but also creating the ideal Islamic society in the present.

The issue of feminine sexuality proves to be a particularly sensitive one. Women's 'honour' (*namus*) and chastity, treated as though they were public property and part of community identity and standing, must be preserved at all costs. The failure to do so harbours potentially disastrous consequences for social order. In this way, social cohesion and its preservation becomes inseparable from the control and regulation of women's bodies. At one point Navvab goes so far as to speak of the “fire of lust from the flaming naked bodies of unchaste women burning decent women” along with them.¹⁸⁵ The viral contagion of feminine sexuality must be reined in otherwise society and even the

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*,p30

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*,p32

family unit as we know it, will disintegrate.¹⁸⁶ In emphasizing the perils of unceasing lust (*fa'aliyat-e da'em-e hes-e shahvat*) and the prospects of society-wide conflagration, exemplified and embodied in the female form, Navvab unintentionally illustrates the libidinal economy and obsessions of his own imagination.¹⁸⁷

Only the execution of Islamic law can vanquish society's ills and forge the utopian Islamic polity envisioned by Navvab. It should of course be noted that the Fada'ian's understanding of Islamic law was patently ahistorical, unscholastic and one-dimensional and that Navvab's screed is less the product of a hard-earned erudition, than it is an irascible clarion call for the overhaul of the political order. Devoid of historical consciousness and yet unconsciously suffocating under the weight of centuries of accumulated tradition, as a result of which the *shari'a*, "the path to the watering-place" and metaphor for "the path to felicity and salvation",¹⁸⁸ came to be identified with punitive law, pure and simple. Because such a conception is first and foremost preoccupied with restraining men and women's carnal selves, it can only modulate social relations by means of sanctioning transgressions of the holy writ. Its essentially punitive character thus cannot but give rise to an austere and unforgiving *nomocracy*.

This leitmotif is also evident in the section entitled "Government" (*hokumat*) in Khomeini's *Kashf al-asrar*. There he writes, "it is manifestly true that the law of Islam (*qanun-e Islam*) is more advanced

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,p33

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*,p32

¹⁸⁸ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction*, ed. Omid Safi, Foundations of Islam (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008),p2; Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shi'i International*, Kindle ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993),Loc-74-of-4028

than all other laws in the civilized world and with their enactment the Perfect City (*madineh-ye fazeleh*) will be established.”¹⁸⁹ Only the “government of God” (*hokumat-e khoda*)¹⁹⁰ is able to fulfil its “obligations”, because only the “government of God” is founded on the basis of “justice” (*'edalat*), “reason” (*kherad*), and “truth” (*haqq*). All existing governments, according to Khomeini, were founded on the basis of illegitimate force, or as he repeatedly puts it in the course of his tirade against the Pahlavi state, at “the point of a bayonet”.¹⁹¹ Islamic law allows the state to be born in innocence, *in lieu* of the original sin and founding violence which the human legal order conspires to properly efface.¹⁹² While Khomeini expresses his reluctance to claim the state in the name of the jurist (*faqih*), he says “government must be administered by the divine law (*qanun-e khoda'i*) that is beneficial to the country and the people and this will not be realized without the supervision of the clergy”.¹⁹³ Following this, Khomeini goes on to invoke the constitution, which as was mentioned previously, codified clerical supervision of the legislative process.¹⁹⁴ He reiterates, “no one except God has the right to rule over another, nor do they have the right to legislate...the law is the same laws of Islam...this law is for all and forever.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹ Khomeini, *Kashf al-asrar*, p222

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p222

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p221

¹⁹² I am alluding to Walter Benjamin’s well-known essay on this score, *On the Critique of Violence*. Khomeini of course doesn’t regard the state’s enforcement of the Islamic legal order, employing its monopoly of violence as violent, because the *shari'a* by definition cannot be coercive. Walter Benjamin, "On the Critique of Violence," in *One-way Street and Other Writings* (London; New York: Penguin, 2009), p7; Loc-237-of-4154

¹⁹³ Khomeini, *Kashf al-asrar*, p222

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p222

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p184

That being said, there do already appear to be seeds of Khomeini's later political doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* in *Kashf al-asrar*. While simply stating that the clergy were in possession of *velayat* or "guardianship" would be uncontroversial amongst much of the Shi'i clergy,¹⁹⁶ such "guardianship" was not held to be apolitical. Khomeini explicitly juxtaposes "guardianship" and "government": "during this time government (*hokumat*) and "guardianship" are with the clergy".¹⁹⁷ Moreover, under the section heading of "The Reason for Government by the Jurist in the time of the Occultation" he relates the tradition of Omar ibn Hanzalah, a tradition he would also cite in his later and more famous tract *Hokumat-e eslami*,¹⁹⁸ in defence of his theory of the 'guardianship of the jurist'. In *Kashf* he goes as far as to say that "in this tradition the *mojtahed* is made ruler (*hakem*) and its rejection is a rejection of the Imam and the rejection of the Imam is the rejection of God".¹⁹⁹ This is quite a radical statement given the date of the text's publication. Though it seems at this stage Khomeini still had not repudiated the institution of the monarchy,²⁰⁰ the clergy were conceived as the trustees of the *shari'a* and its exclusive executors. His use of the term *hakem* is also ambiguous since it can mean both 'judge' and 'ruler'. That many years later while in exile in Iraq he would draw upon this very same tradition to legitimate his conception of Islamic government headed by the clergy makes his use of terminology at this early stage of his political career even more intriguing. At other times in *Kashf*

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.,p185

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.,p185

¹⁹⁸ "Islamic Government," in *Islam and Revolution I : Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)*, ed. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981),p92-93

¹⁹⁹ *Kashf al-asrar*.,p188

²⁰⁰ Ibid.,p187

while preserving the role of the “just king” (*soltan-e 'adel*), he says this king should be chosen by those *mojtaheds* who make up the parliament.²⁰¹ He does however admit that the incumbent “rotten government” is better than no government and without the prospect of establishing the “kingdom of God” (*saltanat-e khoda'i*) unjust monarchies are worthy of respect.²⁰²

According to Navvab’s *Barnameh*, only pious Muslims can run in parliamentary elections. Non-Muslims and the “irreligious” are strictly prohibited from standing.²⁰³ Moreover, and crucially, since the right of law-making belongs solely to God, parliament’s activities are restricted to administering the country in accordance with the *shari'a*. It is in this sense that Navvab states the Majles is not in fact a legislative (*qanun-gozari*) body at all.²⁰⁴ Ensuring all law complies with the *shari'a* are the 'ulama who supervise Majles activities.²⁰⁵ Navvab prescribes that all laws deemed non-compliant with Islamic law be purged.²⁰⁶ At the time of authoring *Kashf*, Khomeini was also steadfast in his support for this basic supposition regarding the inadmissibility of positive legislation in conflict with the *shari'a* and the highly limited powers devolved to the Majles for crafting legislation.²⁰⁷ The legislation authored and approved by suitably qualified clergymen in reaction to novel and unprecedented circumstances would by definition escape this pitfall, and be considered ultimately consonant with the precepts of the Divine Law. In this sense, the legislation authored and approved by the *foqaha* i.e.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*,p185

²⁰² *Ibid.*,p186

²⁰³ Safavi, *Barnameh-ye hokumati-ye Fada'ian-e Islam.*,p102

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,p103

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*,p103

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*,p103

²⁰⁷ Khomeini, *Kashfal-asrar.*,p191

Islamic jurists, cannot by definition be categorized as positive legislation. From his first political tract of 1943 through to the eve of the revolution, this basic premise would govern Khomeini's thinking. In an interview with noted scholar, Said-Amir Arjomand, on 2 January 1979 in the Parisian suburb of Neauphle-le-Château, Khomeini confirmed this position with little equivocation, after agreeing unqualifiedly with Fazlollah Nuri's ruling that positive legislation is contrary to Islam, because law in Islam is synonymous with the *shari'a*, whose interpretation falls strictly under the purview of the Shi'i 'ulama:

“In Islam there is no room for the institution of basic laws and if an assembly is installed it will not be a legislative assembly in that sense, but an assembly to supervise government. It will deliberate [and determine] the executive matters of the kind I mentioned [i.e. urban planning and traffic regulations] and not basic laws [which are already laid down by Islam].”²⁰⁸

In this respect the Fada'ian-e Islam and even Ayatollah Khomeini, differ little from other prominent revivalists of the 20th century such as Abul 'Ala Mawdudi²⁰⁹ and Sayyid Qutb,²¹⁰ both of whom, despite being Sunnis and in all likelihood highly dismissive, if not outwardly hostile towards aspects of Iranian Shi'ism, were read and translated by young radicals in Pahlavi Iran with much enthusiasm.²¹¹ In this way, something along the lines of a *lingua franca* of political Islamism developed

²⁰⁸ Arjomand, "The State and Khomeini's Islamic Order.",p156

²⁰⁹ John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007),p263

²¹⁰ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2001),p36

²¹¹ Khomeini had certainly read Sayyid Qutb. For instance, he refers to the latter's Quranic commentary, *Fi zilal al-Qur'an* in his televised commentary on Surat al-Fatiha, delivered and broadcast after the revolution. However, it is referred to only in passing and for the sole purpose of pointing out its inadequacy. It's fair to say that Khomeini's political convictions and temperament developed largely in the context of Reza Shah's creeping autocracy during the 1930s and as a result of the threat he perceived to the clerical establishment and thus 'Islam'. For the reference to Qutb's *Fi zilal al-Qur'an* see, Ruhollah Khomeini, "Lectures on Surat al-Fatiha,"

across sectarian lines. Though one should be careful not to overstate their influence, it is clear that they agree with their Sunni counterparts in the most uncompromising terms that political sovereignty resides with the Almighty and his Will incarnate, the *shari'a*. Genuine differences remain in their respective conceptions of the clergy's role in the envisioned state which has submitted to divine authority, but their basic premise on the whole is the same. Though arguably nascent in some respects, their differences would deepen profoundly with the public appearance and popularization of Khomeini's theorization of *velayat-e faqih*, which locates its rationale explicitly in Shi'i history, theology and jurisprudence.

That being said the *Barnameh* evinces a level of cross-fertilization between the “social imaginaries” of the Fada'ian-e Islam and the etatism of the Pahlavi dynasty.²¹² Each successive section of the *Barnameh* bears the title of a ministry and then proceeds to detail its functions and priorities.²¹³ Neither does Navvab shy away from speaking of the homeland (*vatan*) and its defence in the face of pernicious foreign influences.²¹⁴ Other symbols of ‘statehood’ are also invoked such as flags and the nation's identity – for instance, Navvab repeatedly refers to the “nation” or “people” (*mellat*) as the

in *Islam and Revolution I: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)*, ed. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), p365

The influence of Sayyid Qutb on the younger generation of Iranian Islamists is worthy of further investigation. It is interesting to note, Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the incumbent Supreme Leader of Iran, translated Sayyid Qutb's *Al-Mustaqbal li-hadha'l-Din* from Arabic to Persian. See, Sayyid Qutb, *Ayandeh dar qalamro-ye Islam*, trans. Ali Khamenei, Fifth ed. (Tehran: Daftar-e nashr-e farhang-e eslami, 1386 [2007]), Introduction

²¹² Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press ; Chesham : Combined Academic, 2004), p23

²¹³ Hassanifar, *Fada'ian-e Islam dar kalam-e yaran*, p100

²¹⁴ Safavi, *Barnameh-ye hokumati-ye Fada'ian-e Islam*, p105

“children of Islam and Iran”.²¹⁵ A Fada'ian-affiliated newspaper reiterated the organization's role as defenders of the nation in its title, *Nabard-e mellat* (The Nation's Battle). One front page bore a male caricature ensconced in a union jack in the process of being stabbed by unsheathed swords, while the catchline read, “This wounded pig will be cut to shreds by the terrifying strikes of brave Muslim nations”.²¹⁶ “English imperialism” was the object of incessant attack and much vitriol. Another memorable caricature featured a British bulldog over a map of England, defecating on the Majles speaker's head.²¹⁷ We also know that Navvab during his adolescence was personally incensed by Iran's occupation by British and Russian forces in the course of the Second World War. On many an occasion he sought to rouse his fellow classmates and compatriots into action.²¹⁸ He also is reported to have worked for a brief time in the oil refineries of Abadan, witnessing the abuse and institutional discrimination suffered by Iranians there, and tried his utmost to protest the beating of an Iranian worker at the hands of an English technician.²¹⁹ Through anecdotal evidence, inspection of the *Barnameh* and countless editorials in publications like *Nabard-e mellat*, the extent to which the demand for an Iran purged of foreign influence and domination and the ambition to create an Islamic state were entwined in Navvab's mind is undeniable. As long as Iran was weak and enfeebled by foreign forces, the creation of a truly Islamic polity would be impossible, and without the latter's creation, Iran could never ascend the blissful heights to which the Fada'ian righteously aspired.

²¹⁵ Ibid.,p132

²¹⁶ "Dar in surat mamlekat beh atash khahim keshid," *Nabard-e mellat* 1951?

²¹⁷ "Mellat-e Iran madfu'-e sag ra beh atash mikeshad," *Nabard-e mellat* 4 Esfand 1329 [23 February 1951].

²¹⁸ 'Araqi, *Nagoftehha*,p18

²¹⁹ Ibid.,p21

It is in this way that despite its rebellion against the *status quo* in all its ungodliness, the Fada'ian unbeknownst to themselves ended up reproducing the Pahlavi regime's own étatiste conception of socio-political change and the means of bringing about such change. At the discursive-imaginary level, the discursive construct of the nation-state became the only means by which political transformation could be effected, and such transformation was impossible in the absence of a political program, ideology or world-view. This is not to say the Fada'ian's rhetoric was devoid of pan-Islamist sentiment and proclamations of solidarity. However, even during such moments, the nation-state remained the only conceivable route by which Islamic countries could sever the hand of foreign interference in Muslim lands.

As has been shown with reference to Ayatollah Khomeini's early writings, his own intellectual contribution to Iranian Shi'i Islamism echoed much of the Fada'ian-e Islam's political world-view. His rhetorical style and flourishes are certainly comparable to much of the material found in the Fada'ian's *Barnameh*. Khomeini was not only reputed to be sympathetic to their cause, but was also a potential source of inspiration. The key difference that separates Khomeini's later political project, was that given his rigorous and thorough grasp of virtually all the disparate branches of Islamic knowledge, including *feqh*, Islamic philosophy (*hekmat*) and mysticism (*'erfan*), he was able to construct an innovative *theory* justifying Islamic government, and, in particular, the rule of the Shi'i jurists (*foqaha*). Despite finding precedents in the work of figures such as Molla Ahmad Naraqī (1771-

1829) and others, it was Khomeini who would make the case for clerical political supremacy in the most forceful and uncompromising terms and at the most politically opportune time.²²⁰

Khomeini and the Formalization of *Velayat-e Faqih*

“Even in historical times the transition from the prophet to the legislator is fluid...In no case did such a legislator or his labour fail to receive divine approval, at least subsequently”.²²¹ – Max Weber

While the Fada'ian's own political program remained heavily reliant on asserting 'Islam' and the *shari'a* would guarantee their utopian vision's realization, during his time in exile Khomeini radicalized his conception of Islamic government working in a concerted fashion to legitimate the rule of a specific occupational-corporate group i.e. the Shi'i 'ulama. Based on the Quran and Traditions of the Prophet and Holy Imams, Khomeini sought to justify the clerics' *right* to rule. This was initially undertaken for the benefit of the community of fellow-scholars and later communicated to a broader public by Khomeini's lieutenants.²²² It was the general principles of Khomeini's theory of Islamic government that went on to inform the construction of the newly-founded revolutionary state. The proviso of 'general principles' is stipulated since it would be misleading to suggest the constitutional set-up of the Islamic Republic ought to be viewed as a direct translation of what Khomeini had envisaged almost a decade earlier in his famous lecture series delivered in Najaf in the

²²⁰ Kadivar, *Nazariyehha-ye dowlat dar feqh-e Shi'eh*, p17

²²¹ Max Weber, "The Prophet " in *On Charisma and Institution Building*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p256

²²² Said Saffari, "The Legitimation of the Clergy's Right to Rule in the Iranian Constitution of 1979," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 1 (1993), p68-77

first months of 1970 and compiled in book form by his disciples under the title, *Velayat-e faqih* or *Hokumat-e eslami* (Islamic Government). We are not speaking of the practical obstacles and constitutional wrangling which almost tore the Islamic Republic apart, while teetering on the brink of civil war, but the politico-philosophical vision, which contends sovereignty, executive and legislative, resides solely with God and the clerical class as representatives of the Hidden Imam from the time of the Lesser Occultation (*gheibat-e soghra*) (874-939 AD).²²³ This vision as laid out in Khomeini's tract, *Hokumat-e eslami*, is explicitly acknowledged in the Introduction to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.²²⁴ The 'ulama as the possessors of political guardianship (*velayat*) are the only legitimate representatives and interpreters of this divinely ordained sovereignty.²²⁵ It is this uncompromising articulation of clerical supremacy and its epistemic basis i.e. Islamic jurisprudence (*feqh*) and clerical custodianship of Islamic jurisprudence that Iran's post-revolutionary intellectuals would set about challenging and subject to unremitting criticism.

This section will now attempt to provide a brief exposition of Khomeini's contribution to Shi'i theories of government. One wing of this discourse sought the valorisation of clerical political pre-eminence as exegetes and executors of the *shari'a*, while the other urged the mobilization of the

²²³ Khomeini, "Islamic Government.",p42

²²⁴ Abdollah Shams, *Qanun-e asasi: az farman-e mashrutiyat ta emruz* (Tehran: Dark, 1386 [2007]),p89

²²⁵ Khomeini, "Islamic Government.",p61

In two statements issued by Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri on 22 June 1979 in reaction to the second draft constitution presented by the provisional revolutionary government and prior to the convening of the Assembly of Experts, which would go on to enshrine the principle of *velayat-e faqih* into the constitution of the Islamic Republic, he clearly and succinctly delineates the principle of clerical guardianship. Though Montazeri's statements go into greater detail regarding specific articles and issues of the constitution, the broad strokes are in keeping with the vision of Islamic government presented by Khomeini in *Hokumat-e eslami*. *Majmu'eh-ye Dow Payam* in Montazeri, *Khaterat-e faqih va marja'-e 'aliqadr hazrat Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri*,p890

masses in support of this vision, exemplified in the oft-repeated dictum, '*hozur-e mardom dar sahneh*' (the presence of the people on the scene). Both pieces of the puzzle have essentially elitist implications, one being 'Platonic', and the other 'populist-clientelistic'. Because of issues of space the arguments for clerical political authority will be the main focus of the following sections. It is not the ambition here to explore Khomeini's world-view exhaustively. It is, however, necessary to understand the lineaments of his philosophical and juridical arguments, which in disparate contexts and forms have contributed to the ideological-religious identity and dimensions of the Islamic Republic and its constitutional order. The contours of this identity and the arguments rationalising its existence would go on to shape and determine the conditions under which future generations of intellectuals would engage and labour.

What strikes one immediately upon opening Khomeini's *Hokumat-e eslami* is the conviction of his doctrine's rectitude and self-evidence. He even goes as far as to say that it "has little need of demonstration".²²⁶ Khomeini does however offer a defence of his conception of Islamic government, but first deems it necessary to assure his audience that Islam is a total and complete system. Through the Prophet Mohammad, God sent down laws and practices covering all human activities from the cradle to the grave. Accordingly, there "is not a single topic in human life for which Islam has not provided instruction and established a norm".²²⁷ Material progress is in vain, if not grounded in faith and morality – his antipathy towards the authoritarian modernizing regimes of the Pahlavi Shahs

²²⁶ Khomeini, "Islamic Government.",p27

²²⁷ Ibid.,p30

clearly had only intensified with time. Moreover, he blames the “propaganda of the imperialists” for disseminating the falsehood that Islam is without a specific form of government and serves, if it does at all, in a purely legislative capacity.²²⁸ Like a number of his other revivalist counterparts he models his desired form of government on an idealized image of the government headed by the Prophet Mohammad.²²⁹ The Prophet “was...a political person” he asserts.²³⁰ His proposition is simple. The Prophet had laid down laws for his community and those laws hold for all time. A law unimplemented ceases to be a law at all and thus Khomeini argues, a “[l]aw requires a person to execute it”.²³¹ Therefore, law, of necessity begets an executive power. This is a key presupposition of Khomeini’s argument in favour of an Islamic state. A law unexecuted isn’t worthy of the name. Not only that, but unless this law is executed by a central authority capable of divining when the *shari’a* ought to be implemented or has been transgressed, the law is also deemed superfluous. This decision cannot be left to the individual believer’s discretion, but must be determined by an authority capable of judging and evaluating the acts of men and women comprising the community over which it rules. Because it is a government predicated on law, or more accurately Islamic law, Khomeini defines it as a form of ‘constitutional’ government. He does however, qualify this statement immediately and state that while certainly “constitutional” (*mashruteh*) and in no way ‘absolutist’ or ‘tyrannical’ it is not a constitutional regime as commonly understood. It is not a government which passes laws in

²²⁸ *Ibid.*,p36

²²⁹ *Ibid.*,p36

²³⁰ *Ibid.*,p39

²³¹ *Ibid.*,p36-37

accordance with the demands of the majority.²³² It is constitutional merely insofar as it is constrained to abide by laws in keeping with the ordinances set down in the Quran and the Traditions as determined by the 'ulama.²³³ This is of course because the model Islamist à la Khomeini believes the power to legislate belongs exclusively to God. "The Sacred Legislation of Islam is the sole legislative power. No one has the right to legislate and no law may be executed except the law of the Divine Legislator."²³⁴ Khomeini argues that Muslims by virtue of being Muslims submit to the *shari'a*, and it is strictly in this sense that Islamic government might be said to "belong" (*mota'alleq*) to the people.²³⁵ Legitimacy thus emanates from the divine legislator, while approval from below derives from Muslims' submission to the *shari'a* by virtue of their being Muslims.

The question that follows on naturally from the necessity of executive power is "who is entitled to rule"? Contrary to his earlier position, he now declares monarchy and hereditary succession as "wrong and invalid".²³⁶ What is needed rather is "an executor of the law", as the Prophet had been in the case of the first Medinan *ummah*. The Prophet had "implemented the penal provisions of Islam: he cut off the hand of the thief and administered lashings and stonings".²³⁷ The successor to the mantle of the Prophet must be prepared to undertake the same responsibilities. The laws promulgated by the Prophet are perfect and complete, which means that his political successor need

²³² *Velayat-e faqih va jihad-e akbar* (Tehran: Seyyed Jamal Hedayat, ?),p45

²³³ "Islamic Government.",p55

²³⁴ *Ibid.*,p55

²³⁵ *Velayat-e faqih va jihad-e akbar.*,p42

²³⁶ "Islamic Government.",p31

²³⁷ *Ibid.*,p37

not engage in the fashioning of legislation *per se*, but merely guarantee the *shari'a*'s implementation.²³⁸ The ordinances of Islam are not limited by time or place, “they are permanent and must be enacted until the end of time”.²³⁹ The caveat should perhaps be added that the text of *Hokumat-e eslami* offers a particularly astringent and exacting version of Khomeini’s political vision written from the comfort of exile and unmitigated by political realities. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic he would exhibit a far greater degree of pragmatic discretion in dealing with the many exigencies generated in the process of governing the apparatus of a modern state, which should not be interpreted as evidence of moderation. While the *means* employed for realizing his ambitions were often eminently flexible, the *end* towards which he strove remained essentially uncompromised

Rather than ask who is entitled to rule, it might prove more accurate to ask “who is to be the executor of the law?” Both these questions would be subject to concerted criticism by a number of Iran’s post-revolutionary intellectuals in the 1990s (see, **Chapter 4**), but for the present it should be noted that Khomeini is conventional in stipulating that the rightful Islamic ruler must possess two qualities above all others: first and foremost he must possess a thorough knowledge of Islamic law and second, he must be just.²⁴⁰ These two qualities have a longstanding pedigree in Islamic intellectual history, as the qualities expected of a *mujtahed* and have been advocated by such luminaries as the Shafi'i theologian and jurist, Abu Hamid Mohammad al-Ghazali.²⁴¹ The stipulation of knowledge or

²³⁸ Ibid.,p37

²³⁹ Ibid.,p41

²⁴⁰ Ibid.,p59-60

²⁴¹ Ahmad Kazemi-Moussavi, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam: From the Office of Mufti to the Institution of Marja'* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996),.p166

'*elm*, however, has an established history in the Shi'i tradition dating back to at least the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadeq, where it was thought to be definitive of the Imam's claim to religious authority and thus the Imamate.²⁴² The species of '*elm*, which acted as guarantor of the Imamate was however essentially different to that which would later be claimed for the *mojtahed* class. It was a power of discernment bestowed in hereditary succession from Imam to Imam.²⁴³

In the context of *Hokumat-e eslami*, knowledge of Islamic law is fundamental for obvious reasons. If, as Khomeini argues, Islamic government is a government based on Islamic law, it is a necessity for the ruler to have more than merely a working knowledge of the law, but to "surpass all others in knowledge".²⁴⁴ This elitist dimension of Khomeini's thought in which a specific class or individual functions as privileged interpreter and exegete of the Sacred Law has been variously linked to the Platonic 'Philosopher-King' as conceived in *The Republic*, the 'Perfect Man' (*ensan-e kamel*) of the *Sheikh al-akbar*, Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi²⁴⁵ and the political philosophy of Abu Nasr Mohammad al-Farabi.²⁴⁶ Khomeini's intellectual influences though no doubt important need not distract us here. What is crucial to grasp is the identification of political power with the knowledge economy of Islamic law. In this way it is determined that not only the 'ulama must rule any future Islamic state, but that only

²⁴² Marshall G.S. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shi'a become Sectarian?," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75, no. 1 (1955), p11 ; Etan Kohlberg, "Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period," in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p25

²⁴³ Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shi'a become Sectarian?," p11

²⁴⁴ Khomeini, "Islamic Government.", p59

²⁴⁵ Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, Chapter 3; Alexander Knysh, "Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy," *Middle East Journal* 46, no. 4 (1992), p635

²⁴⁶ Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*, New ed. ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), p34-35

the *faqih* who surpasses all others in terms of his knowledge of the law can rightfully rule the community of the faithful, the *ommat*.

Exoteric and esoteric knowledge claims complement one another without contradiction.²⁴⁷ At the esoteric level, man aspires to annihilation in God. This is achieved by the purification (*tazkiyah*) of the self and its worldly attachments and the transcendence of one's corporeal form, achieved, in principle, by means of the renunciation of everything other than God.²⁴⁸ In annihilation (*fana*) man reaches true perfection and thereby "dies to his humanity" in the words of Allameh Tabataba'i, the famed Quranic exegete and Islamic philosopher.²⁴⁹ Such proximity to God is one possible vindication of the perfect man's vicegerency as the incarnation of the divine Logos (*kalimat Allah*).²⁵⁰ The perfect man as portrayed in Khomeini's *Misbah al-hidaya ila al wilaya wal khilafa* (Light of Guidance Towards an Understanding of Wilaya and Caliphate) fulfils the role of God's 'vicegerent' (*khalifa*) or 'deputy' (*na'ib*), as his representative in the created world. As God's deputy on earth, he is invested with the task of ensuring it is properly guided and preserved.²⁵¹

To reiterate, while undoubtedly important to a proper understanding of his philosophico-political world-view,²⁵² Khomeini's mysticism despite being part and parcel of the distinguished aura he cultivated over the course of many decades, and radiating outward from his public persona and

²⁴⁷ Knysh, "Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy.", p633-636

²⁴⁸ Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *The Return to Being: A Translation of Risalat al-Walayah*, trans. Fazel Asadi Amjad and Mahdi Dasht Bozorgi, Introduced and annotated by S.K. Toussi ed. (London: ICAS Press, 2009), p46

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p45

²⁵⁰ Knysh, "Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy.", p645

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p645

²⁵² Mahallati, *Khaterat va mobarezat-e Shahid Mahallati.*, p39

charismatic appeal, two other intellectual streaks played a significant role in determining the basis of his politico-theological *weltanschauung*. These obviously demand greater elaboration because the identity of the revolutionary state is intertwined with that of its formidable founder and the public representations thereof. Khomeini's legacy was undoubtedly a complex one, and different factions of the Islamic Republic's ruling elite have tried to operationalize disparate and often contradictory elements of his legacy, as they have construed it. Daniel Brumberg has termed this process "dissonant institutionalization". The process whereby contending visions of authority are embedded within a number of official and quasi-official arenas, such as competing ideological factions, formal constitutions and the rhetoric of political leaders.²⁵³ Khomeini's person and his politico-ideological legacy have often been at the very heart of this drama.

Khomeini's Usulism is also important to understanding his arguments in favour of clerical rule, as is his penchant for mysticism. The *Usuli* school which was revived under the aegis of Aqa Baqer Vahid Behbahani in the latter half of the eighteenth century and the development of the notion of *a'lamiyat* led to the establishment of a hierarchy in the knowledge economy of Twelver Shi'i Islam.²⁵⁴ In winning a protracted battle with the rival Akhbari school, which emphasized the Quran and hadith of the Prophet and Imams as the sole sources of law, the speculative legal reasoning (*zann*), general knowledge (*'elm-e ejmali*) and scholarly consensus of the jurists acquired a pre-eminence

²⁵³ Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p100

²⁵⁴ Ahmad Kazemi-Moussavi, "The Establishment of the Position of Marja'iyat-i Taqlid in the Twelver-Shi'i Community," *Iranian Studies* 18, no. 1 (1985), p37

unprecedented in Shi'i history.²⁵⁵ This newly acquired pre-eminence arrogated to the legal rulings issued by the clerical class, simply reinforced the longstanding claim to vicegerency (*niyabat*) of the Imam and the representation of his authority during the Greater Occultation.²⁵⁶

Behbahani and the *Usuli* school shored up two principles which could be said to have paved the way for Khomeini's own hierocratic vision of political authority, even if they by no means made it inevitable. First, the special status assigned to juristic reasoning (*ejtehad*), and the religious ordinances (*ahkam*) derived therefrom, of Shi'i *mojtaheds*.²⁵⁷ The second development was the *Usuli* school's innovation requiring that believers who were not *mojtaheds* choose from among the ranking *mojtaheds* whose right to derive legal ordinances had been transmitted in a "chain of discipleship" which found its provenance in the inner circle of the infallible Imams.²⁵⁸ Despite numerous precedents, it was in the late 19th century that Seyyed Tabataba'i-Yazdi (d. 1920) clearly formulated the idea that a believer ought to choose a *mojtahed* on the basis of his learning and erudition in the Islamic sciences. Moreover, those who decide to follow his rulings should consider him to be amongst the "most learned" (*a'lam*) of his peers.²⁵⁹ As a result, the *mojtahed* in question would become the believer's *marja'* (source) and followed in matters which fell under the purview of Islamic law.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam* (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p66

²⁵⁶ Kazemi-Moussavi, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam*, p148

²⁵⁷ "The Establishment of the Position of Marja'iyt-i Taqlid in the Twelver-Shi'i Community.", p38

²⁵⁸ Roy P. Mottahedeh, "Shi'ite Political Thought and the Destiny of the Iranian Revolution," in *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability*, ed. Jamal S. Al-Suwaidi (Abu Dhabi ; London ; New York: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996), p71

²⁵⁹ Kazemi-Moussavi, "The Establishment of the Position of Marja'iyt-i Taqlid in the Twelver-Shi'i Community.", p39

²⁶⁰ Mottahedeh, "Shi'ite Political Thought and the Destiny of the Iranian Revolution.", p71

There were of course normally a number of potential sources and insofar as none could claim the status of *primus inter pares*, religious authority resisted concentration in any one source. The few instances in which this has occurred, as is believed in the case of Sheikh Morteza Ansari (d. 1864),²⁶¹ and in the 20th century with Ayatollah Hossein Borujerdi, recognition of a *mojtahed's a'lamiyat* with respect to his counterparts was not coerced or imposed from above, but consented to by the scholastic community. In this sense, *a'lamiyat* could be said to emerge in rare instances of scholarly consensus amongst the highest ranking 'ulama. Even when such a convergence of opinion would occur, it continued to be a largely 'informal practice', without cut and dried criteria or specific legal prerogatives being designated to his office.²⁶² While in the past most *mojtaheds* would eschew claiming *a'lamiyat* for themselves, Khomeini broke with tradition by delineating the distinct possibility by means of which a single *mojtahed* could claim political and legislative authority on a par with the Prophet himself.²⁶³ Khomeini makes this claim with aplomb in *Hokumat-e eslami*:

“If a worthy individual possessing these two qualities arises and establishes a government, he will possess the same authority as the Most Noble Messenger...in the administration of society, and it will be the duty of all people to obey him.”²⁶⁴

One of the important implications of this audacious conclusion is that in the event of a single *faqih* assuming the position of *vali-ye faqih*, his authority surpasses and is binding upon all people living under his purview, including other *mojtaheds*. While the *status* of the ruling *faqih* is not equal to that

²⁶¹ Kazemi-Moussavi, "The Establishment of the Position of Marja'iyat-i Taqlid in the Twelver-Shi'i Community.", p39

²⁶² Abbas Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), p181

²⁶³ Mottahedeh, "Shi'ite Political Thought and the Destiny of the Iranian Revolution.", p72

²⁶⁴ Khomeini, "Islamic Government.", p62

of the Prophet and the Imams, his authority to govern is one and the same. Khomeini often seems to be of two minds when addressing his audience of fellow clerics. On the one hand, he repeatedly speaks of the *faqih* and his executive *velayat* in the singular. However, he also at one point expressly states that the authority of the *foqaha* is not so absolute that its rulings can oblige the compliance of fellow clerics.²⁶⁵ The question is whether this was merely a rhetorical gesture by Khomeini to avoid alienating the raft of sceptics in the clerical establishment at this early date and an effort to attenuate the magnitude of his break with Shi'i tradition. "If this task [i.e. the establishment of Islamic government] falls within the capabilities of a single person, he has personally incumbent upon him the duty to fulfil it; otherwise, it is a duty that devolves upon the *fuqaha* as a whole".²⁶⁶

The concentration of executive authority in either the person of a single *faqih* or council of *foqaha*, without authority to bind the religious establishment, would arguably perpetuate the same inveterate dichotomy and rival claims to authority setting apart the temporal and religious institutions of the past.²⁶⁷ Without the power to bind it would emerge as an essentially dysfunctional arrangement, since other clerics could always issue legal rulings in direct contradiction to those issued by the state, undermining its authority at will. Khomeini would only fully resolve this tension with the conception of the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurisconsult (*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*), which will be analysed in the next section.

²⁶⁵ "There is no hierarchy ranking one *faqih* higher than another or endowing one with more authority than another." Ibid.,p64

²⁶⁶ Ibid.,p64

²⁶⁷ For Sa'id Hajarrian's take on this issue and how he believes Khomeini resolved it, see, **Chapter 5, Part II.**

In *Hokumat-e eslami*, Khomeini equates 'authority' with the administrative and executive roles of government, which finds its *raison d'être* in the necessary implementation of the *shari'a*. The authority or guardianship (*velayat*) invested in the *faqih* is thus understood by Khomeini as 'extrinsic' or 'acquired' (*e'tebari*), as opposed to 'intrinsic' or 'existential' (*takvini*), the latter being the exclusive possession of the Prophet and Holy Imams. The *faqih's velayat* is thus essentially administrative and not envisaged as a corollary of the *faqih's* spiritual or 'supernatural' powers.²⁶⁸ Such authority is derived by virtue of the *faqih's* occupation of the office of *vali-ye amr* and is not intrinsic to his personality and is immediately divested upon the occupant's relinquishment of the office's duties and responsibilities. In this way, the rule of the *faqih*, he adds, exists as a type of appointment. The considerable lacuna left unaddressed by Khomeini was the procedure of appointment and who appoints the *faqih*, preferring to instead skip on to detail the *faqih's* responsibilities, such as the enforcement of the Islamic penal code and collection of taxes.

In so far as the rule of the *faqih* is a type of appointment, it is also highly paternalistic. At one point, Khomeini goes as far to say there is "no difference between the guardian of a nation and the guardian of a minor."²⁶⁹ In this way he extends the *velayat* of the 'ulama traditionally reserved for legal minors (*saghir*) and the mentally incapacitated (*mahjur*)²⁷⁰ to the polity in its entirety. Most crucially, Khomeini endowed the *faqih* with executive powers to which the mainstream of the 'ulama hadn't

²⁶⁸ Hamid Enayat, "Iran: Khomeini's Concept of the 'Guardianship of the Jurisconsult'," in *Islam in the Political Process*, ed. James P. Piscatori (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1983), p163

²⁶⁹ Khomeini, "Islamic Government.", p63

²⁷⁰ Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism.*, p190

previously laid claim. To paraphrase Abbas Amanat, in the absence of the Hidden Imam, few jurists propounded the 'authority to judge' (*velayat-e qaza*) beyond issuing legal rulings (*fatavi*), and even in such instances there was no corresponding power to guarantee their enforcement.²⁷¹ Khomeini's radicality *vis-à-vis* his clerical contemporaries was his overturning of this traditional stance and theorization of the executive-administrative rule of the clergy in the governance of the modern nation-state. Khomeini attempted to deny any plaudits for the originality of his doctrine and instead tried his utmost to naturalise it as an unchanging obligation incumbent on the 'ulama, which pervades the gamut of the Shi'i legal canon: "the subject of the governance of the *faqih* is not something new that I have invented; since the very beginning, it has been mentioned continually."²⁷²

The Sanctification of *Maslahat* and the Rupture with Traditional Religious Authority

In order to understand a number of the key issues the *rowshanfekran-e dini* would set out to reinterpret and challenge during the course of the 1990s it is necessary to consider an event following the establishment of the Islamic Republic which irrevocably transformed the nature of *velayat-e faqih* and thus Khomeini's conceptualisation of the ultimate basis of the sovereign Islamic state. This was the octogenarian Ayatollah's famous decree of 6 January 1988. The decree held that the 'expediency' (*maslahat*), sometimes translated, not unproblematically in this instance, as 'public interest', of the regime (*nezam*) took precedence over the primary ordinances (*ahkam-e avvalieh*) of the *shari'a*. This was Khomeini's final and arguably most radical pronouncement in the course of his long and

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p190

²⁷² Khomeini, "Islamic Government.", p124

turbulent lifetime. In the name of regime preservation even the most fundamental tenets of the *shari'a* could be abrogated and suspended indefinitely by the state. This was articulated most forcefully in his well-known rebuttal of the Friday Prayer Sermon of the incumbent President, Seyyed Ali Khamenei, who according to Khomeini had misunderstood his statement issued to the Guardian Council regarding a disputed labour law already passed by the Majles. Without getting embroiled in the specifics of the dispute itself, its consequences for the Islamic Republic, and even the issue of religious authority as a whole in Shi'i Iran, are of major importance. Khamenei sought to diminish the decisiveness of Khomeini's endorsement of statist intervention and thus the Musavi government, given that tensions had been mounting between the latter and the Guardian Council over the scope of the central state's authority and powers.²⁷³ Khamenei averred that the Imam had not actually meant to insinuate that the primary ordinances of Islam could be abrogated by the state if deemed expedient. Khomeini brusquely dismissed his disciple retorting:

“It appears from the honourable gentleman's statements during Friday prayers that you do not approve of government in the sense of absolute guardianship which was granted by God to the Prophet...and more important than all divine injunctions (*ahkam-e elahi*) and having priority over all religious injunctions (*ahkam-e shar'ieh-ye elahiye*). The interpretation of what I said as meaning that the state's powers are operative within the framework provided by the divine injunctions (*ahkam-e elahi*) was entirely contrary to my statement. If the powers of government operate in the framework of divine secondary injunctions (*ahkam-e far'iye-ye elahiye*) the scope of divine government and absolute guardianship (*velayat-e motlaqeh*) entrusted to the Prophet must be thought meaningless and devoid of content, the consequences of which cannot oblige anyone: for example,

²⁷³ Bahman Baktiari, *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran: The Institutionalization of Factional Politics* (Gainesville; Tallahassee; Tampa: University Press of Florida 1996), p142

the building of roads which requires the destruction of a house or its environs cannot be undertaken within the framework of secondary ordinances.”²⁷⁴

He then goes on and states the heart of the matter with the unflappable conviction for which he was renowned:

“I must say government which is a branch of the absolute guardianship of God’s Prophet, is one of the primary injunctions (*ahkam-e avvaliye*) of Islam and is prior to all secondary injunctions (*ahkam-e far’iye*), even prayer, fasting and hajj. The ruler can destroy a mosque or house obstructing a road and compensate the home’s owner. The ruler at the necessary time can close the mosques...the state can unilaterally abrogate religiously sanctioned agreements (*qarardadha-ye shar’i*) it has concluded with the people, when that agreement is deemed contrary to the interests of the country and Islam. And it can prevent any matter, whether devotional (*‘ebadi*) or non-devotional, when it disagrees with the interests of Islam. The time that the state deems it contrary to the good of the Islamic country it can temporarily suspend the hajj pilgrimage, which is amongst the most important divine obligations.”²⁷⁵

The reasons for Khomeini’s decision to take this step are complex and tied to his efforts to alleviate the rampant factionalism which he believed harboured the seeds of division and potentially even the regime’s dissolution. Sensing death not far around the corner this decree was part of an effort undertaken by the revolutionary patriarch to smooth the transition for his successors. Khomeini faced the genuine dilemma of finding a politically likeminded individual with the requisite religious credentials to succeed him, the inimitable and incomparably charismatic leader, who had come to be known singularly as the Imam, a term traditionally reserved for Shi’ism’s Twelve Infallible Imams. While scandalizing some of the leading members of the Shi’i ‘ulama, it also meant that in the eyes of

²⁷⁴ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, 21 vols., vol. 20 (Tehran: Mo’asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1378 [1999]), p451

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p452

his followers, Khomeini was reckoned irreplaceable. This clearly created a dilemma for the revolutionary state's founder, who no doubt wished to be secure in the knowledge that the state, which he had been instrumental in founding would live on to see future decades over the horizon.²⁷⁶

It is more important to grasp the new primacy which *maslahat* (expediency / public interest) was apportioned at the expense of religious authority *per se*, which had previously revolved around the concepts of *marja'iyat* and *a'lamiyat*. This transformation in the ruling system's sources of legitimacy and scope of authority, formally codified in the constitution of the Islamic Republic with the amendments of 1989, Article 109 specifically marking a decisive break with the regnant understanding of religious authority within the Shi'i establishment. While the Guardian Jurist post-1989 was required to have a competent grasp of *feqh* and possess the ability to issue legal rulings (i.e. he ought to be a *majtahed*), an equal emphasis was placed on the Leader's "proper political and social insight, foresight (*tadbir*), courage, administration and sufficient power to lead". Moreover, in the same article, Article 109 of the constitution, "political vision" is explicitly mentioned alongside an "Islamic legal view" (*binesh-e feqhi*).²⁷⁷ Apart from the fact that Khomeini was a *marja'-e taqlid* himself, the previous constitution's stipulation of *marja'iyat* as a necessary qualification of the *vali-ye faqih* could be viewed as a gesture toward the bastions of Shi'i religious learning in Qom and Najaf. The

²⁷⁶ Another potentially mundane reason postulated for Khomeini's decree was the conflicts between Iranian demonstrators and Saudi security forces during the annual hajj pilgrimage. Minor demonstrations by Iranian protestors occurred during the pilgrimage of 1980, which turned increasingly violent in 1981 and 1982. These tensions reached their denouement in 1987 when 402 pilgrims were killed. Iran subsequently boycotted the hajj from 1987 to 1990. See, James P. Piscatori, "Religion and Realpolitik: Islamic Responses to the Gulf War," in *Islamic Fundamentalism and the Gulf Crisis*, ed. James P. Piscatori (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991), p8

²⁷⁷ Shams, *Qanun-e asasi: az farman-e mashrutiyat ta emruz*, p157

qualification of *marja'iyyat* meant that not only would the Guardian Jurist stand amongst the highest echelons of the 'ulama, but that he would also enjoy a substantial following amongst the faithful, who would imitate his religious rulings (*fatavi*). Moreover, the authority of the *marja'* was theoretically delimited within the bounds of the *shari'a*. Khomeini's decree in one fell-swoop had effectively brushed this set of scholarly and institutional norms and traditions to one side.

More radically still Khomeini had even discarded the idea, of which he himself had once been an advocate i.e. that all governmental legislation had to accord with the dictates of the *shari'a*. Because of his view of guardianship as 'absolute', and first and foremost concerned with political rule, Islamic government and its establishment emerged as an incumbent obligation religiously superseding all others. So whereas in *Hokumat-e eslami*, the rationale and justification of Islamic government, specifically government by the *foqaha*, derived from the obligation to execute the *shari'a*, in January 1988, government, under the umbrella of absolute guardianship took pride of place, to the point of being endowed with the right to unilaterally abrogate all previously religiously sanctioned agreements and even the devotional and ritual practices incumbent upon individual believers. Practices hitherto postulated in that very same tradition as intimately bound up with assuring the believer's own personal felicity in the hereafter. As a result, post-revolutionary Iran witnessed an unparalleled and vaunted status ascribed to the notion of *maslahat* and underwritten by the state without historical precedent in Shi'i jurisprudence; it also consequently emerged as a staple of the official political idiom.

Shari'ati, Revolutionary Religion and the Committed Intellectual

The purpose of this section is to analyse a particular dimension of Ali Shari'ati's thought which has received a great deal of attention and criticism in Iran's post-revolutionary intellectual climate: the so-called 'ideologisation of Islam'.²⁷⁸ Shari'ati is also of great importance for our enquiry because of his considerable impact, in particular, though by no means solely, on the laymen and women of the post-revolutionary Islamic left, who would openly revive his criticisms of clerical conservatism following Khomeini's death.²⁷⁹ The nature of this later appropriation of Shari'ati by reformist ideologues will be touched upon in greater detail in **Chapter 4** and the **Conclusion**.

Though we have predominantly focused on the different clerical faces of Iranian Islamism, Shari'ati was undoubtedly amongst the most important of the pre-revolutionary Islamic ideologues; particularly insofar as he made 'Islam' a politically respectable force for many young men and women in Iran's traditional middle classes, many of whom had come from provincial towns and villages to embark on a course of study at either Tehran University or the more recently founded Arya-Mehr University of Technology (today known as Sharif University of Technology), often as the beneficiaries of government largesse. Shari'ati, amongst others, offered an enchanting and seductive rendering of Shi'ism, especially for those who were educated in the modern sciences and to a lesser extent the humanities, and had been born and raised in devout Shi'i households. These young men and women were politically alienated from the Pahlavi regime and the traditional clergy, with its strict hierarchy of *marja'* and compliant *moqalled*. They were often both emotionally and psychologically bound to the

²⁷⁸ This issue will be addressed in greater detail in **Chapter 4**.

²⁷⁹ See **Chapter 5**, *Kalam-e Jadid and Religious Intellectualism* and **Conclusion**.

faith they grew up in, while at the same time demanding that their religion respond to their contemporary needs and aspirations, which increasingly became political in nature. In the case of those who were attracted to the rhetorical fervour of Shari'ati and political groups such as the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran,²⁸⁰ the political struggle against the Shah's autocracy, along with the restitution of socio-economic injustices were foremost in their minds. By fusing the archetypal figures, myths and narratives of the early Islamic and, specifically, the Shi'i community, an apparently religious discourse and rhetoric emerged as a formidable rival to secular ideologies such as liberalism and the varieties of Marxist doctrine advocated by the communist Tudeh Party and during the 1970s, the Organisation of the Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas.

His timely criticisms of clerical passivity and also the clergy's pretension to act as the sole legitimate 'representative' of the Hidden Imam also resonated with many pious, socially mobile and educated Iranian youth. They would also have considerable repercussions for his post-revolutionary legacy and its adherents. It is for this reason he ought to be viewed as a *transitional* and *divided* figure. On the one hand, he was the propagator of a new and uncompromising revolutionary credo, which arguably harboured a multitude of authoritarian, elitist and potentially violent implications. While on the other hand, he struggled to break the clerical monopoly on religious knowledge production by promoting the layman's capacity to engage the narratives of Islamic history and seminal doctrinal

²⁸⁰ For instance, see the Mojahedin's tract, *Tahlili az nehzat-e Hosseini* (An Analysis of Hossein's Movement), which bears a number of similarities with some of the most important themes of Shari'ati's corpus, some of which will be examined in greater detail below. Ahmad Reza'i, *Tahlili az nehzat-e Hosseini (Sazeman-e mojahedin-e khalq)* (Springfield, MO1975).

texts, without any of the requisite training for which the seminaries had been expressly established. This considerable break with 'tradition', allowed him to interpret Shi'ism, in a heterodox fashion, melding it with the often scatty insights he had gleaned from the leading lights of the French intelligentsia and beyond, while earning him plaudits and adulation, as well as numerous enemies in clerical circles.

Prior to the revolution, Khomeini very adeptly managed to remain ambiguous on Shari'ati, not wishing to alienate a possible ally, along with the many young people, who had accepted him as their ideological guide and teacher.²⁸¹ Shari'ati himself also appeared to be positively disposed towards Khomeini, passing over without comment the Ayatollah's positions vis-à-vis land reform or women's suffrage in reaction to the Shah's so-called 'White Revolution'.²⁸² Following the turmoil of June 1963 which eventually led to Khomeini's exile, Shari'ati even resigned from the editorial team of the National Front's organ abroad, *Iran-e azad* (Free Iran), over their refusal to publish an article he had penned entitled "Mosaddeq: The National Leader, Khomeini: The Religious Leader".²⁸³

Shari'ati's ideas undoubtedly influenced a notable swathe of the younger generation of men and women who would go on to compose the Islamic Republic's political elite, both clerical and lay, even

²⁸¹ Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p275. We also know that Khomeini closely read Shari'ati while in Najaf. Ja'farian, *Jaryanha va سازمانها-ye mazhabi-siyasi-e Iran.*, p603-605

²⁸² For an insightful analysis of the ideological basis and construction of Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi's 'White Revolution' see, Ali M. Ansari, "The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, 'Modernization' and the Consolidation of Power," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 2001), esp. p12-16

²⁸³ Afshin Matin-asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Cost Mesa, California: Mazda 2002), p72-73

if they discarded some of his less congenial formulations.²⁸⁴ In spite of his not uncommon anti-clerical sentiments, which were for the most part aimed at the traditionalist clergy who advised against political involvement, this future political class nonetheless imbibed a great many of his arguments and attitudes which empowered them to land blows on leftist rivals and demonstrate their familiarity with modern political ideas and philosophies. This process of osmosis, however, could not elide the competition, rivalry and jealousy which emerged between lay-ideologues such as Shari'ati and even initially sympathetic members of the politically active clergy, especially as the former's renown and popularity overtook their own. The ambivalence of Shari'ati's discourse vis-à-vis the clergy was sensed and severely criticised by several prominent figures while Shari'ati was still alive and exemplified in the rift, which emerged between Shari'ati and Morteza Motahhari, a student and disciple of Khomeini. Motahhari, who one prominent scholar has named the "chief ideologue of the Islamic Revolution",²⁸⁵ much like Shari'ati, undoubtedly played a significant role in what has since come to be widely known as the 'ideologisation of Islam'²⁸⁶ and the emergence of the 'new theology' (*kalam-e jadid*), which Iran's post-revolutionary religious intellectuals would take up themselves and develop in a number of distinct directions. More importantly, the rift with Shari'ati embodied the

²⁸⁴ For instance we know that Khamenei regularly participated in poetry circles along with Shari'ati and other literati in Mashhad. Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*.,p77-78

Also see Khamenei's speech on the anniversary of Shari'ati's death delivered in the A'zam Mosque in Qom during June 1980 and reproduced in the newspaper *Jomhuri-ye eslami*, 25 June 1980.

²⁸⁵ Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006).,p147

²⁸⁶ I will address what this phrase came to mean in the pre- and post-revolutionary milieu in further detail in this section and **Chapter 4**. Murtaza Mutahhari, *Fundamentals of Islamic Thought: God, Man and the Universe*, ed. Hamid Algar, trans. r. Campbell, Contemporary Islamic Thought, Persian Series (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1985).,p51

deep-seated tensions between a considerable segment of the clergy and elements of the lay intellectual class, which despite being played down in the name of political unity while in opposition and exile, proved only to intensify with time.²⁸⁷

Shari'ati's most celebrated attempt to turn Shi'ism into an ideology of revolutionary agency was embodied in the fabricated dichotomy between Ali's Shi'ism (*Tashayo'-e 'Alavi*) and Safavid Shi'ism (*Tashayo'-e Safavi*). 'Alavi Shi'ism or the Shi'ism of Ali and his descendants is conceived by Shari'ati as first and foremost a “no”, an act of repudiation and negation protesting the *status quo* (*e'teraz beh vaz' mojud*).²⁸⁸ This founding gesture of rebellion was somewhat akin to Albert Camus' depiction of the rebel, with which Shari'ati was familiar:²⁸⁹

“Islam was a religion that entered human history with the “no” of Mohammad – heir to Abraham and apotheosis of the religion of divine unity and the unity of creation. A “no” that begins with the slogan of divine unity (*towhid*), a slogan that Islam began in the face of polytheism, the religion of the aristocracy and expediency.

And Shi'ism, was an Islam that with the great Ali's “no” – heir to Mohammad and the apotheosis of the Islam of justice and truth – which made both its character and direction clear in the history of Islam.”²⁹⁰

He continues:

“in the school of Ali, the Shi'a as the embodiment of the sufferings and hopes of the innocent masses and aware and rebellious against the oppression of the ruler, obtained their most fundamental slogans:

For liberation from the guardianship of tyranny (*velayat-e jowr*)

²⁸⁷ This issue in its post-revolutionary manifestations is addressed in greater details in **Chapter 4** and the **Conclusion**.

²⁸⁸ Ali Shari'ati, *Tashayo'-e 'Alavi va Tashayo'-e Safavi* (Tehran: Entesharat-e chapkhash va bonyad-e farhangi-e Doktor Ali Shari'ati, 1388 [2009]), p7

²⁸⁹ “What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation.” Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Foreword by Sir Herbert Read ed. (New York: Vintage, 1991), p13

²⁹⁰ Shari'ati, *Tashayo'-e 'Alavi va Tashayo'-e Safavi*, p5

The guardianship (*velayat*) of Ali!
 For the branding of trash and stamping of unbelief and usurpation (*ghasb*) on the
 forehead of the Caliphate:
 “Imamate”!
 And for the overthrow of the regime of contradiction and discrimination that is
 ownership (*malekiyat*):
 “Justice”!”²⁹¹

In the view of Shari'ati, Safavid Shi'ism came to stand for order, the state, political passivity and inaction, political despotism, stasis, class exploitation, and a reactionary and ossified reading of Shi'ism.²⁹² Ali's Shi'ism provided an answer to the question ‘what is to be done?’ (*ch eh bayad kard?*), a question posed regularly in Shari'ati's writings, no doubt cognisant of Lenin's famous tract of the same name.²⁹³ In another text named *Shi'eh, yek hezb-e tamam* (Shi'ism, A Complete Party), Shari'ati goes so far as to assert that action takes precedence over belief.²⁹⁴ Ali's Shi'ism was a revolutionary force in history which engaged in perpetual struggle and exertion (*jihad-e mostamer*) in both theory and practice against any and every despotic regime wedded to oppressive class-systems and discriminatory hierarchies.²⁹⁵ This is because Ali's Shi'ism is an “armed revolutionary party”, “in possession of a very profound and clear ideology”. In this respect the Islam Shari'ati was advocating

²⁹¹ Ibid.,p6-7

²⁹² Ibid.,p,129,221,258-263

²⁹³ Ibid.,p7

Shari'ati was familiar with Marx and a whole raft of major Marxist thinkers, including Lenin, from the time he spent at the Sorbonne attending the lectures of the neo-Marxist sociologist Georges Gurvitch. *Rahnema, An Islamic Utopian.*,p124,125,288

Shari'ati regularly invoked Lenin's writings and his deeds, and often favourably. Ali Shari'ati, "Ommat va imamat," in *'Ali* (Tehran: Nashr-e amun, 1386 [2007]),p428

²⁹⁴ In this text he describes the *ommat* as a “committed group” (*goruh-e mota'ahed*) in which action (*'amal*) takes precedence over belief (*'aqideh*) (p79). “*Ommat* means one “believing committed group”! (p80). “*Shi'eh yek hezb-e tamam*,” in *Shi'eh* (Tehran: Elham, 1362 [1983]).

²⁹⁵ *Tashayo'-e 'Alavi va Tashayo'-e Safavi.*,p8

in the course of his lectures and speeches, with their many rhetorical flourishes, was essentially a “this worldly” (*in jahani*) and resolutely political venture. It was a doctrine that played the role of an “enlightener” (*aqahi dahandeh*), and promoter of social responsibility, and this is why Islam for Shari'ati uniquely, and in contradistinction to other world religions, was inseparable from politics (*beguneh-ye bi-naziri az siyasat tafkik-napazir (ast)*).²⁹⁶

This brings us to what might be called ‘Shari'ati’s paradox’, since while Shi'ism for Shari'ati was indubitably political, with the establishment of its own governmental interests and priorities (*masaleh-ye hokumati*) it was bound to forsake its original verve and objective of bestowing an enlightened and revolutionary consciousness to the masses: “after the seizure of power, Shi'ism becomes ruler over its destiny and society, but comes to a standstill”.²⁹⁷ In this sense, Shi'ism imbrication with state power is by definition corrupting.

While certainly a pervasive theme in Shari'ati’s oeuvre, another point of focus recurs in his writings of the early 1970s, which is that of political organization and mobilization. If the overriding objective and horizon of such organization and mobilization was not the abolition of the existing order and its replacement with a new one free of the ills and maladies prevailing in the *status quo*, such activities would seem to slide into mere superfluity. This doesn’t seem to be the case, and Shari'ati’s repeated assertions of man’s utopian impulses would also appear to run counter to the idea that Shari'ati didn’t have at least a vague idea of the ideal political order he saw replacing the regime

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*,p125

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*,p180

against which he fought and deemed a fount of oppression and injustice. It should be added that Shari'ati's 'internationalism' and 'emancipatory project' were not restricted to the territorial nation-state, or even the Muslim *ommat*. Ultimately, every human being was responsible for the "salvation" (*rastegari*) of humanity.²⁹⁸

Quite unlike Navvab Safavi, Shari'ati was flexible in his recommendations that the *shari'a* be tailored to the circumstances of time and place and the basic needs of "the people".²⁹⁹ Despite such apparent pragmatism and laxity, deciding what circumstances demand and what constitute the people's basic needs would be stringently dictated by political considerations. Shi'ism was in Shari'ati's mind, "a complete party" (*yek hezb-e tamam*).³⁰⁰ A party with a powerful ideology of its own, which he called Abrahamic ideology (*idi'olozhi-e ebrahimi*): "Abrahamic ideology is that shared doctrine (*maktab*) of all of history's prophets and the people's guides to redemption and justice to which humankind has been invited in all times and all regimes."³⁰¹ Moreover, "ideology is a faith that is based firmly upon the concepts of self-awareness, guidance, redemption, fulfilment (*kamal*), value, ideal(s) (*arman*) and responsibility."³⁰² Ideology engenders self-awareness and creates values, it impels one to act, while it recreates its subject in the process. He exclaims at one point and in all

²⁹⁸ "Shi'eh yek hezb-e tamam.",p59

²⁹⁹ Ibid.,p91

³⁰⁰ Ibid.,p90

³⁰¹ Ibid.,p92

³⁰² Ibid.,p93

seriousness: “Ideology creates you”.³⁰³ Echoing Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach,³⁰⁴ Shari'ati proclaims that while the philosopher and scientist are essentially observers of the world, ideologues, by contrast, “command the good and prohibit evil” and have an unparalleled capacity for both destruction and creation.³⁰⁵ “Ideology says: it must be thus and philosophy and science, only say thus it is.”³⁰⁶ The undeniable attraction of ideology for Shari'ati was that he believed it endows men with the capacity to radically transform their society and the prevailing social relations within it. Ideology in conjunction with praxis allows man to break free of his consummate bondage and liberate himself and those around him. Shari'ati claims that ideology, in its most “brilliant” (*alitarin*) and most “progressive” (*motaraqitarin*) sense, and Islam which is “the perfect divine religion” (*kameltarin din-e elahi*), speak with a single voice.³⁰⁷ The difference between Islam and “progressive” ideology are barely discernable.

“Ideology:

Message – Mission (*resalat*) – Commitment – Responsibility – Struggle – People (*mardom*)!

Islam:

Invitation (*da'vat*) – Mission (*resalat*) – Duty – Responsibility – Jihad – People (*nas*)!”³⁰⁸

³⁰³ Ibid.,p94

³⁰⁴ “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000),p173

Shari'ati paraphrases Marx’s eleventh thesis in Ali Shari'ati, *Jahatgiri-e tabaqati-e eslami* (Tehran: Qalam, 1388 [2009]),p171

³⁰⁵ “Shi'eh yek hezb-e tamam.”,p95

³⁰⁶ Ibid.,p98

³⁰⁷ Ibid.,p95

³⁰⁸ Ibid.,p95

A little further down Shari'ati in fact unambiguously states that “Islam is an ideology, not a culture, philosophy or science.”³⁰⁹ Both “ideology” and “Islam” stress a sense of mission and committed struggle in the name of the masses. For Shari'ati man's true nature, or his philosophical anthropology, as a “utopian” (*utopist*) and “rebel” (*'osiyān konāndeh*)³¹⁰ is realized in the disposition cultivated by the ideological cast of mind. Man, by his lights, is a “builder of heavens” (*behesht-saz*). “Perhaps every human being in every historical era built a utopia in his mind in accord with his own understanding and excellence”.³¹¹ Much like in the writings of Navvab and Khomeini, a concerted effort to imagine an ideal society free of contradictions and failings runs through Shari'ati's musings and rhetorical fulminations. Whether their respective visions were qualitatively similar is of course another question, but in all of their writings a certain utopian impulse to imagine an ideal and pristine political order repeatedly comes to the fore. One interesting difference is that Shari'ati speaks little about the state *per se*, while Navvab and Khomeini focused squarely on the powers and duties of the modern territorial state (*hokumat*), albeit in rather broad terms.³¹² Shari'ati's own reintroduction of hierarchy and order manifests itself in the form of the party, the cadre and the enlightened warrior intellectuals whose task it is to save the masses, perhaps even in spite of themselves. Those who remain unenlightened and fail to reach self-consciousness of their political

³⁰⁹ Ibid.,p103

³¹⁰ Ali Shari'ati, "Ta'arif-e din," in *Ensan-e bikhod* (Tehran: Qalam, 1389 [2010]),p21

³¹¹ Ibid.,p21

³¹² At one point in “Shi'eh, yek hezb-e tamam” Shari'ati does speak of the Prophet's founding of a “powerful centralized state” (*hokumat-e markazi-ye niru-mandi*) upon his migration to Medina in glowing terms. He claims it was necessary for the Prophet to go beyond the more limited project of “individual reform” or more literally “individual-building” (*fard-sazi*) to the founding of a government (*hokumat*) as a prerequisite of its identity as a global and universal (*jahani*) movement. Shari'ati, "Shi'eh yek hezb-e tamam.",p128

destiny are condemned to be “imperfect” and in some sense “paralysed” (*falaj*).³¹³ In demarcating a certain philosophical anthropology, or conception of “human nature” he is thereby able to ascribe a norm to human conduct. Those who fail to abide by this norm or behave in the manner it prescribes are deemed basically deficient or incomplete. Man’s aspiration for utopia from Shari’ati’s perspective is one of the key features which distinguish him from the rest of God’s creation.

Another relevant point to bear in mind is that Shari’ati was novel in terms of his education and intellectual influence. Unlike Navvab and Khomeini he was a layman, who never donned the turban and never claimed to speak on behalf of, or represent the interests of the clergy. Despite, some post-revolutionary attempts to paint Shari’ati as a committed advocate of the Guardianship of the Jurist, the guides and saviours he actually had in mind were people much like himself, committed or engaged intellectuals (*rowshanfekran-e mota’ahed*).³¹⁴ These committed intellectuals were presented as explicit alternatives to the clergy, who not only had long cravenly worked in the service of despotic regimes across the ages,³¹⁵ but had falsely presented themselves as the only true and legitimate mediators between God and the faithful. On many occasions Shari’ati in the strongest of terms denounced the clergy as harbingers of reaction and despotism. For example in his essay *Bazgasht beh khishtan* (Return to Self), he states, “Clerical despotism is the most severe and detrimental of all forms of despotism in human history”.³¹⁶ This anti-clerical discourse would surface politically in the

³¹³ Shari’ati, "Ta'arif-e din.",p23

³¹⁴ Shari’ati, "Shi'eh yek hezb-e tamam.",p105

³¹⁵ *Jahatgiri-e tabaqati-e eslami.*,p130,170

³¹⁶ *Bazgasht* (Tehran: Elham, 1384 [2005]),,p224

rhetoric of groups like the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (post-June 1981), *Forqan*, and *Arman-e mostaz'afin* (Ideal of the Oppressed), the very first political group to be proscribed after the revolution.³¹⁷ It would, as we shall see, also ironically resurface in the second and third decades of the revolution in the work of individuals like Soroush and Aqajari,³¹⁸ who had played a vital role in justifying the curtailment of the previously mentioned groups.

We will now consider Shari'ati's elitist conception of the intellectual vanguard or the "warrior intellectual" (*rowshanfekr-e mojahed*). He often depicts the warrior intellectuals as a committed cadre who having espied man's true nature and political destiny, shine light upon the darkness enveloping the toiling masses. *Mojahed* also has clear religious connotations, meaning one who strives in the name of the faith. By means of the warrior intellectuals' benevolent intervention a new self-consciousness and a form of "this-worldly" redemption would be imparted to the masses, without which the latter would have remained blinded by their own inveterate ignorance.³¹⁹ These committed warrior intellectuals are the true successors to the Prophet and the rightful inheritors of his legacy.³²⁰ They were more than mere armchair revolutionaries in Shari'ati's view. They were warriors prepared to fight in the name of justice and the establishment of a new "monotheistic regime" (*nezam-e towhidi*). Shari'ati's own discourse of revolutionary insurrection and armed struggle themselves were part of a broader political and intellectual shift which began to gain ground amongst political activists

³¹⁷ Ja'farian, *Jaryanha va sazmanha-ye mazhabi-siyasi-e Iran*, p677-689

³¹⁸ See, **Chapter 4** and **Conclusion**.

³¹⁹ Shari'ati, "Shi'eh yek hezb-e tamam.", p95

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p101,126-127

and the intelligentsia post-June 1963, in the aftermath of the White Revolution and the Shah's repression of the subsequent protests. This paradigm shift, led by a number of politically active men and women, including the founders of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI), incited many to part with groups such as the Freedom Movement of Iran (NAI) and the idea that peaceful political reform pursued through legal channels had any genuine chance of success.³²¹ Support for the idea of armed struggle as the only remaining alternative steadily accumulated supporters and was itself under the influence of international developments and the intellectuals who defended them, namely, the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the American quagmire in Vietnam.³²² Armed resistance to imperialist penetration and the Third World's ability to proffer just and indigenous solutions to the unjust and exploitative practices of erstwhile colonial masters had captured the imagination of a considerable section of Iranian intellectuals, just as it had captured the imaginations of many members of the intelligentsia and new emerging groups and classes across the developing world.

In Shari'ati's mind the warrior intellectuals were first and foremost preoccupied with action not contemplation, and specifically with enacting justice in the here and now, much like the Prophet Mohammad himself when he embarked upon his own prophetic mission.³²³ According to Shari'ati, there was one Islam which took the form of "uninformed and inherited devotional rulings,

³²¹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1989), p85; Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and the Fadai Period of National Liberation in Iran, 1971-1979*, Kindle ed. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), Loc-208-of-3648

³²² Direct US military involvement in Vietnam ended in August 1973.

³²³ Shari'ati, "Shi'eh yek hezb-e tamam.", p100

ceremonies and rituals for the backward (*'aqab mandeh*)” and another Islam requiring scientific and technical expertise or “technical Islam” (*Islam-e fani*). The first Islam belongs to the unthinking and uncritical hereditary believer, and the second to the rule-obsessed clergyman. Shari'ati dismisses both in favour of the Islam of the warrior intellectual. The Islam of the warrior intellectual “is a light which illuminates the heart”.³²⁴ This Islam is not a form of “technical awareness” he tells us, but natural or innate self-consciousness (*khod-agahi-ye fetri*), which he then goes on to identify with “enlightenment” (*rowshanfekri*), “recognising the path” (*shenakht-e rah*) and the “science of guidance” (*elm-e hedayat*).³²⁵ The “correct path” or “just society” to which Shari'ati's committed warriors will lead the oppressed masses often remains vague and unspecified. He repeatedly describes it with adjectives such as ‘just’ and ‘emancipated’ without going into further detail.

The warrior intellectual's role was not to excessively dwell on the content of values but to proclaim them boldly, not because he had rationalized them and could support his position with a host of valid and epistemically justified reasons, but because he felt and yearned for such values' realization on a visceral level, at the level of his innermost nature. This attitude was exemplified best in the Prophet's companion Abu Zarr, who was often depicted by Shari'ati as a proto-socialist.³²⁶

Shari'ati does speak of a transitional period in which the Muslim community would choose leaders who best exemplify the community's revolutionary ideals.³²⁷ This period of leadership would come to

³²⁴ *Ibid.*,p100

³²⁵ *Ibid.*,p100

³²⁶ *Rahnema, An Islamic Utopian.*,p57-61

³²⁷ Shari'ati, "Shi'eh yek hezb-e tamam.",p104

an end with every member of the *ommat*'s revolutionary transfiguration, and avowed willingness to martyr him or herself in the name of the people. The "*ommat* chooses its martyr (*shahid*), the symbol of all its transcendent and ideal values, as leader, till it is itself able as martyr to take up that leadership role and every individual within the *ommat* can be a martyr in the cause of the people...Every individual of Mohammad's community is a leader for the people."³²⁸ The procedure or mechanism for discerning the point, whereby members of the community have been sufficiently empowered or revolutionised to embark upon their own martyrdom for the greater good is left unaddressed by Shari'ati. Much like the Marxist promises of the state's eventual 'withering away' along with the dissolution of proletarian dictatorship, the sceptic is left wondering whether the day of transition to a truly 'liberated society' would indeed ever arrive. While the Imamate is accepted on the basis of the "authenticity of its thought" (*esalat-e fekr*) and the "truth of the doctrine" (*haqaniyat-e maktab*) with their manifest self-evidence in the course of revolutionary upheaval, there is virtually no consideration of the relinquishment of its power.³²⁹

In his essay, *Ommat va imamat* (Community and Leadership), Shari'ati speaks candidly of the Marxist "dictatorship of the working class" and the accompanying antipathy towards liberalism and "Western democratic freedom", it entails.³³⁰ He lambasts those Iranian intellectuals who continue to be enamoured of the passé assurances of nineteenth century liberalism, and shrugs off the criticisms to which he has been subject for his condemnation of democracy and defence of "ideologically

³²⁸ Ibid.,p104

³²⁹ "Ommat va imamat.",p395

³³⁰ Ibid.,p347

committed leadership” (*rahbari-ye mota'ahed-e idi'olozhik*). Liberalism and “its slogans of freedom of expression (*azadi-ye ara'*) and free elections weaken the battle front and justify undemocratic regimes and one-man despotisms (*estebdadha-ye fardi*)” he proclaims in his characteristically bombastic style.³³¹ The life which members of the *ummah* ought to be leading is not free and disengaged (*azad va raha*), but a committed and responsible (*mota'ahed va mas'ul*) one. This is guaranteed for Shari'ati by the Imamate, the community leadership, which at least at this phase of Shari'ati's career, becomes synonymous with the enlightened cadre of revolutionary intellectuals about which we have been speaking.

As Shari'ati stressed on a number of occasions, the Imam is human, but acts as a paragon (*osveh*) upon which the *ommat's* members ought to be modelled³³² and if someone considers themselves part of the community, they must accept the leadership.³³³ It quickly emerges that here Shari'ati is advocating a 'Shi'i' counterpart to the Marxist-Leninist 'dictatorship of the proletariat', or in his own words, a “guided democracy” (*demokrasi-ye hedayat shodeh*) or “committed democracy” (*demokrasi-ye mota'ahed*) by means of which the society would be ruled by a small elite or perhaps even a single man.³³⁴ At one point he even refers to the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and the theory of the *Übermensch* or “Superman” as proof of humanity's repeated need for great men to lead the masses as “manifestations of sacred transcendence” (*mazaher-e moqaddas-e mota'ali*) on earth and awaken

³³¹ Ibid.,p347

³³² Ibid.,p386,388

³³³ Ibid.,p348-349

³³⁴ Ibid.,p426

them from their petrified and satisfied indifference.³³⁵ He then goes on to attribute a quote to the Victorian essayist and satirist Thomas Carlyle (d. 1881), stating that “history consists in the creation of history’s heroes by means of the mediocre, and were it not for these heroes the mediocre would possess nothing except a monotonous and bestial existence.”³³⁶ The individual counts for nothing on this view. The individual is mere fodder for the great men of history, who are history’s real makers and final arbiters. In a similar vein, and despite having earlier in the text brazenly dismissed the Sufi notion of *fana* or ‘annihilation’ in God, Shari’ati later and without regard for his preceding dismissal invokes the Sufi notion of the *ensan-e kamel* or ‘perfect man’ in support of his argument for ‘great men’ as models of emulation.³³⁷ Ironically, in these pages he reproduces a comparable dichotomy of ‘emulated’ and ‘emulator’ defended by Usulism and the traditional Shi’i ‘ulama; a dichotomy which in its clerical guise Shari’ati expended a great deal of time and effort criticizing and ridiculing.

Such arguments clearly attest to Shari’ati’s implicit and explicit spiritual and political elitism, which sits well with his conscious defence of the revolutionary leadership’s prerogative to decisively execute its ideological program irrespective of the traditions and desiderata of the led.³³⁸ In fact, the committed leadership, Shari’ati tells us, are not bound by the views and opinions of the majority.³³⁹ Shari’ati’s “guided democracy”, like Tito’s Yugoslavia or Sukarno’s Indonesia, would be a one-party

³³⁵ Ibid.,p372

³³⁶ Shari’ati does not provide a reference, but the quote is most likely paraphrased from Carlyle’s short book, *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*. Curiously enough, this slim volume by Carlyle has chapters on both the Prophet Muhammad and Luther. Ibid.,p372

³³⁷ Ibid.,p364

³³⁸ Ibid.,p427

³³⁹ Ibid.,p428

state or lifetime appointment for the revolution's leader (*entekhab-e madamol'amr-e rahbar-e enqelab*), spurning "liberalism and Western free democracy".³⁴⁰ This is because the people, who he self-assuredly compares to sheep, will follow wherever their stomachs lead them. Without the necessary ideological awakening the people will be bewitched and bedazzled by the "spell of money", "demagogic magicians", "puppet masters" (*kheimeh-shab-bazan*) and the clergy.³⁴¹ Because of such a serious lack of confidence in the masses own ability to better their condition, he deems the right to vote guaranteed in Western liberal democracies as little more than a "free vote for *abgusht*" (*ara'-e azad-e abgushti*), *abgusht* being a traditional Iranian stew of meat, potatoes and chickpeas, generally eaten by the poorer segments of Iranian society. Just as Lenin had stressed in the last years of his life, the revolutionary leadership would have to continue for several generations until the requisite levels of "self-consciousness" had been reached.³⁴² Then progressively as more and more people assimilated the leadership's revolutionary message, suffrage would be expanded to permit them the vote.³⁴³ Western liberal democracy could not provide any answers since it stood for little more than "democracy of the elites".³⁴⁴ Revolutionary leadership was the only feasible political alternative

³⁴⁰ Ibid.,p433

³⁴¹ Ibid.,p431

³⁴² Ibid.,p433-434

Shari'ati seems to be correct on this score. A central tenet of *The State and Revolution* was that "a classless, egalitarian, prosperous society could be established only by means of socialist dictatorship" (Loc-9118-of-12777) over a protracted period of time (Loc-8949-of-12777). Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography*, Kindle ed. (London: Pan Books, 2002 [2000]).

³⁴³ Shari'ati, "Ommat va imamat.",p433

³⁴⁴ Ibid.,p431

which could breakdown and rebuild a “reactionary” and “traditional, backward society” such as Iran.³⁴⁵

Shari'ati exudes confidence as he proclaims that under a “great and exalted leadership”, society would be propelled towards “absolute perfection”, “absolute knowledge” and “absolute self-consciousness” and the discovery of “transcendent values”.³⁴⁶ “The *ommat* is a society becoming eternal (*abadi*), towards absolute transcendence (*ta'ali-ye motlaq*)!”³⁴⁷ And this “absolute transcendence” is nothing but God himself.³⁴⁸ God for him becomes the revolutionary process itself, which mysteriously leads to something he calls “eternity” (*abadiyat*) and the “absolute” (*motlaq*), in a process of “infinite evolution” (*takamol-e layetanahi*).³⁴⁹ Those traditions and ways of thinking which promote stagnation and retard progress must be destroyed and condemned. There is little elaboration on how such a process is to be evaluated and whether it could go awry. Except for an allusion to Maxime Rodinson, the famous French Marxist biographer of the Prophet, Shari'ati simply asserts that “Islam is committed government (*hokumat-e mota'ahed*), the Prophet is a committed leader (*rahbar-e mota'ahed*)”.³⁵⁰ In this way we see how Shari'ati not only advocates a conception of political leadership comparable to the Marxist-Leninist ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, but also an image of the Prophet and the first Islamic government from Rodinson, the Prophet’s Marxist

³⁴⁵ Ibid.,p430

³⁴⁶ Ibid.,p349

³⁴⁷ Ibid.,p350

³⁴⁸ Ibid.,p350

³⁴⁹ Ibid.,p350

³⁵⁰ Ibid.,p428

biographer, who explicitly described Islam as a political ideology which after Mohammad's demise went on to conquer half the known world.³⁵¹

Upon the assumption of power the leadership proceeds to implement a program not on the basis of the "expediency" (*maslahat*) but on the basis of "truth" (*haqiqat*), *tout court*. Which truth, Shari'ati rhetorically asks himself, "a truth shown by ideology and doctrine believed by the individuals of the *ommat*".³⁵² The goals of the leadership he states are predicated on the dictum "that which must be" (*ancheh keh bayest bashad*).³⁵³ His praise of conviction and revolutionary leadership dispenses with issues of dialogue and consent and instead conflates mundane political action on the part of the warrior intellectual elite who benevolently guide the *ommat* in the name of its own 'interest', with the construction of an ideal or utopian society, and even with a process of becoming God himself. In the revolutionary process the transcendent inheres and becomes immanent in socio-political relations and processes. Shari'ati's political vision, according to Farzin Vahdat, owes a great deal to his view of human existence as a theomorphic 'journey' or 'movement'; a journey whereby human beings begin as 'matter' and progressively ascend to the level of the divine spirit.³⁵⁴ But how mundane human relations, political organization and activism partake in the traversal and actualization of such a 'theomorphic journey' and on a macro-societal scale is obfuscated. 'Ideology' plays a

³⁵¹ Maxime Rodinson, *Mohammed*, trans. Anne Carter (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p299-300

³⁵² Shari'ati, "Ommat va imamat.", p347

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p349

³⁵⁴ Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity*, 1st ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), p140

tautological role in this equation. What is true is ideological and ideology is what is true. Moreover, there is no capacity for criticism, because to criticize is also by default, to lack commitment.³⁵⁵

Conclusion

All the ideologues about which we have spoken, have believed in political power's ability to bring a utopian society into the world. 'Heaven' can be made mundane. They believed this because they were convinced they had discerned and grasped 'the truth' and that truth is both eternal and absolute. How they thought about these categories subtly differed, but it's nonetheless clear that unwavering conviction in one's knowledge of an absolute reality, whether it goes by the name of 'shari'a', 'Islamic state' or 'revolutionary ideology', was intertwined with the grand utopian political scheme each thought was his mission to bestow to the world. They were in different respects caught between the impulse to affirm the divine will as they saw it, which existed in an explicit relationship of obedience regarding the human subject, while at the same time valorising man's revolutionary potential and self-sufficiency to shape and determine his political reality and fate. Shari'ati undoubtedly went further than any of the other Islamic ideologues considered in this chapter in affirming man's freedom and the sacred nature of human values in and of themselves.³⁵⁶ This is why,

³⁵⁵ This double-edged sword is also reminiscent of Lenin's association of "freedom of criticism" with "opportunism" in *What Is to Be Done?*, V.I. Lenin, *Essential Works of Lenin: "What Is to Be Done?" and Other Writings* Kindle ed. (New York: Dover, 1987 [1966]), p56; Loc-913-of-7114

³⁵⁶ For instance, at one point Shari'ati states that the Imam is just as human as any other member of the *ummah*. He also stresses that "human values (*arzeshha-ye ensani*) are superior to all metaphysical values" (Shari'ati, "Ommat va imamat.", p384). Such comments however are totally undermined at other points in the same essay. For example, earlier in *Ommat va imamat*, Shari'ati speaks of the construction of the "absolute or transcendent human" (*sakhtan-e ensan-e motlaq ya mota'ali*). Ibid., p365

in addition to his lay status and subsequent radical critique of the clerical monopoly on interpreting and defining Shi'ism, he might be considered a transitional figure, challenging orthodoxy and representing a new class of laymen who would take it upon themselves to interpret the tradition in novel and subversive ways. The countervailing poles of the infinite and finite, and God and man, along with their various tensions evince themselves in different ways in the writings of the chief ideologues considered here, and they certainly disagree upon the intensity and relative strength of each. But nonetheless this basic tension recurs throughout their writings, and is at least partially responsible for the quixotic invention of an Islamic utopia, forged in some cases by Islamic law and the true *maktab*, and in others by Islamic values and the 'perfect monotheistic ideology'.

Chapter 3: Who are the *Rowshanfekran-e Dini*?

This chapter will attempt a historical sketch of the political events and conflicts, which defined the post-revolutionary *rowshanfekran-e dini*'s lives and times during the 1980s and 1990s, and how the political environment impacted their intellectual identities, affiliations and ideological positions vis-à-vis the 'Islamic Republic of Iran', whose foundation they supported both practically and ideologically in the first decade of the revolution. Building on the insights gleaned from Gramsci and Bourdieu in **Chapter 1** it will also attempt to offer a novel way of thinking about the *rowshanfekran-e dini* as embedded within the Islamic Republic's political class and harbouring multi-faceted relationships with elements in the political elite by means of a complex quasi-institutionalised and routinized network of publications, research centres, university faculties, and study groups.

Rowshanfekran-e dini (religious intellectuals) or *now-andishan-e dini* (new religious thinkers),³⁵⁷ will be used interchangeably in this thesis, and describe a specific group of Iranian thinkers, theologians, jurists, academics and public intellectuals, who while by no means subscribing to a single political manifesto or political doctrine, do comprise a complex intellectual community, ethos and social network.³⁵⁸ A small number of the individuals featured here are less immediately connected up with

³⁵⁷ It should be acknowledged that amongst 'religious thinkers' in Iran that there is a debate over the distinct semantics of these two terms. As will be seen in the chapter addressing the thought of Mostafa Malekian, he deems the term *rowshanfekran-e dini* paradoxical and contradictory. It should be added that he no longer considers himself part of the 'religious intellectual' collective, and as we shall see, advocates a form of 'spirituality' in its stead (See, **Chapter 6**).

³⁵⁸ Randall Collins in his "global" study is keen to stress that "the history of philosophy is to a considerable extent the history of groups" and subsequently analyses the way in which philosophers and their schools of thought tend to periodically cluster. Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p3

this social network, but have nevertheless managed to impact post-revolutionary religious thought and political theology. However, insofar as their writings have proven influential, and have been popularised in the post-revolutionary intellectual milieu, it has been predominantly either by means of the propagation of their views in the journals and newspapers of the socio-political and intellectual groups and network under study.

They do not possess a single or unified identity, narrative or background, though there are certain commonalities which can be discerned amongst the majority of them e.g. their provenance in lower to middle class and traditionally religious families and university educated in the course of the 1970s.³⁵⁹ This however is a rather broad category and encompasses a considerable segment of the Iranian population in the 1960s to 1970s; perhaps too general to be very meaningful. This is why we will have to specify the contours of this group with greater precision.

Over the course of the last twenty years Iran's *rowshanfekran-e dini*, have both individually and collectively changed and reordered their priorities in terms of what they oppose and the values for which they claim to stand. In this way they can also be defined to some extent by the normative values and political order they set themselves against, or claim to advocate. Like anyone who lives for and by their intellectual labour we see shifts and realignments, as experience and maturity make their presence felt and new texts and theories are encountered. The relevance of personal

³⁵⁹ Mojtahed-Shabestari and Yusefi-Eshkevari are exceptions to this trend since they went through the traditional seminary first.

animosities, rivalry, and material opportunities also have a role to play in the shifts and realignments which periodically occur.

The term *rowshanfekran-e dini*, however, is not a term imposed from outside, and is one that in recent decades has been continuously invoked, but also contested by those who claim to speak on its behalf, as well as those claimed amongst its partisans. It is thus endogenous to the discourse of the intellectuals under examination. While it is usually contrasted with the *rowhaniyat* or clergy, the traditional guardians and propagators of religion, there is no reason why a man of the cloth cannot be considered amongst their number. At one level, a necessary, although not sufficient condition, is the issue of methodology and an effort to draw on new philosophical and critical methods in the understanding and explication of religion and its sacred texts; this is one of the reasons why it is suggested that it ought to be in part viewed as an activity and distinctive praxis.³⁶⁰

Moreover, the label 'religious intellectual' in the context of a theocratic-populist state, is one that is not immediately threatening, since it stresses a basic pre-occupation with *din* (religion) and implicitly acknowledges that intellectual activity is undertaken as a believer in defence of the faith, rather than *against* it. It has also lent its exponents' activities and positions another kind of legitimacy, since by calling themselves 'intellectuals' they were consciously emphasising their difference from 'ideologues' wedded to political interests, as they had often been portrayed during the 1980s. Instead they sought to represent themselves as independent and disinterested 'thinkers' concerned solely with an impartial search for universal 'truth'. Finally, it should be acknowledged that in calling this

³⁶⁰ This issue will be further elaborated below.

assortment of individuals, *rowshanfekran-e dini*, we are also reaffirming and reproducing their constitution in language and thus turning them into an accessible and analysable entity, with a social existence.³⁶¹

A further qualification is necessary. This thesis will not attempt to address *all* those figures who could be said to comprise part of the ‘religious intellectual’ family, to invoke Wittgenstein’s metaphor, but focus predominantly on those thinkers and public intellectuals who comprised part of the intellectual circle which did much of the intellectual groundwork for what retroactively came to be known as the 2nd of Khordad Front (*Jebheh-ye dovvom-e Khordad*), 2nd of Khordad (23 May 1997) marking the date of Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Khatami’s election as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Many of these thinkers have at various points either been affiliated with or sympathetic to the activities of the Khomeinist left and its affiliated groups such as the *Majma'-e rowhaniyun-e mobarez* (Association of Combatant Clerics, henceforth MRM), *Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami-ye Iran* (Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, SMEEI), and following Khatami’s election, the *Jebheh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami* (Participation Front of Islamic Iran, henceforth PFII) and *Hezb-e e'temad-e melli* (National Trust Party, HEM). These individuals not only had a shared background and series of experiences in working for state or neo-statist institutions, but emerged out of a distinct epistemic community and ethos in the intellectual and political milieu of post-revolutionary Iran. As a result of such similar backgrounds and experiences these men also possess a comparable habitus, which Bourdieu defines as a form of “socialized

³⁶¹ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p2

subjectivity”.³⁶² The habitus is the complex and internalised series of habits, dispositions, appreciations, gestures, behaviours, cognitive and evaluative categories which structure the agent’s relations with the world. Bourdieu also refers to the habitus as an “open system of dispositions”, which though durable, is constantly subject to new experiences which can either reinforce or change extant patterns of behaviour.³⁶³ As **Chapter 1** argued, the *rowshanfekran-e dini* under examination in this thesis are not merely bound together by an intellectual and political mutual sympathy, but also their embodied, and institutionalized social, cultural and symbolic capital.

These thinkers and politicians acted as both contributors to and addressees of a renewed bout of intellectual and political ferment which began with the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in June 1989. They did such primarily by acting as academics, public lecturers, political activists and strategists, journalists, editors, writers and columnists. Accordingly, part of their intellectual output was published in newspapers, journals, magazines, which steadily entered the public domain and sought to challenge and reframe many of the ‘revolutionary orthodoxies’ which had been established in the preceding decades. Their statements were always already dialogical in nature to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term, insofar as they emerged from a complex history of antecedent works, in addition to responding to and soliciting responses from, a disparate range of institutions and social contexts.³⁶⁴

³⁶² Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p126

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p133

³⁶⁴ Allen, *Intertextuality*, p19

Journals such as *Keyhan-e farhangi* (Cultural Universe) in the 1980s, *Iran-e farda* (Tomorrow's Iran), *'Asr-e ma* (Our Epoch), and most prominently *Kiyan* (Existence) in the 1990s, and newspapers such as *Salam* (Peace), *Jame'eh* (Society), *Sobh-e emruz* (This Morning), *Khordad*, *Tus* and *Neshat* (Joy), all of which with the exception of *Salam* came into being after Khatami's electoral victory, played an indispensable role in not only driving debates in the public sphere and print culture, but also responding to questions which had long been asked, but rarely discussed in the public domain. They also actively participated in public life by teaching in Iran's institutions of higher learning, delivering public speeches at religious and non-religious venues, undertaking and publishing research in state-funded research centres, and convening gatherings and discussion groups that would give impetus to a raft of criticism and self-reflection in the 1990s and 2000s. Such gatherings were frequented by members of the political elite, as well as other political functionaries sympathetic to the issues being raised. In this sense, as already mentioned, in the first two decades following the revolution these intellectuals availed themselves of important opportunities to publish, teach and participate in public life in a way which had been denied to the overwhelming majority of their liberal, leftist, and more secularly-inclined ideological competitors. It is also noteworthy that while these thinkers participated in Iranian intellectual life, a slew of highly consequential socio-political changes were taking place as the number of university educated Iranians, both men and women, markedly

increased.³⁶⁵ As a result, the number of those individuals who were able to follow and engage the writings of these thinkers was also considerably augmented.

It is important to acknowledge that the terms *rowshanfekr-e dini* or *now-andish-e dini*, denote a specific meaning in the post-revolutionary Iranian context. The specificity of this term and its application are also an apt illustration as to why Skinner's linguistic contextualism is appropriate in certain instances and helps clarify our approach to understanding the group in question (See, **Chapter 1**). If we were to take it to merely signify an 'intellectual' i.e. anyone who is preoccupied with criticism, ideas or more widely the production of knowledge in the public sphere, then the designation, *rowshanfekr-e dini*, might include anyone whose fundamental intellectual preoccupation was religion from a faith perspective, and whose ruminations grappled with religious doctrine and ritual, while drawing on the humanities and social sciences or claimed to advocate a 'rational approach' to religion.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Shamsolva'ezin, "Rowshanfekri-ye dini va jomhuri-ye sevvom.", p89; Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, "Human Resources in Iran: Potentials and Challenges," *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2005), p126

³⁶⁶ Mohsen Kadivar makes something like this claim, arguing that religious intellectuals are "rationally-oriented" (*kherad-gara*). Mohsen Kadivar, "Rowshanfekri-ye dini [Originally published in *Neshat* Esfand 1377 (March 1999)]," in *Daghdaghehha-ye hokumat-e dini* (Tehran: Nashr-e nei, 1376 [1997]), p463

Prior to the revolution the eminent Iranian historian Feridun Adamiyat (d. 2008) had used the term "rowshanfekran-e dini" to refer to Islamic modernists such Asad-Abadi and the Ottoman, Namik Kemal (d. 1888). In particular, Adamiyat speaks of their vernacularisation (Islamicisation) of ideas such as the "social compact" and "republicanism". In this way, the "social compact" became an issue of *ejma'* (consensus) and *bei'at* (oath of allegiance), and republicanism was deemed compatible with the *shari'a*. Adamiyat, unsurprisingly, and in keeping with his own world-view which was heavily coloured by the European Enlightenment, declared such efforts "meaningless". Feridun Adamiyat, *Andishehha-ye Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh* (Tehran Kharazmi, 1349 [1970]), p152-153. Compare Khatami and Hajjarian's understanding of comparable terms in **Chapter 5**.

In the post-revolutionary Iranian milieu, the label of *rowshanfekr-e dini*, despite its retroactive application to a whole host of pre-revolutionary individuals such as the 19th century pan-Islamic political and religious reformer, Seyyed Jamaledin Asad-Abadi (d. 1897), better known as al-Afghani, is first and foremost applicable to the group of individuals who came together in a nascent form at the journals of *Keyhan-e farhangi* (Cultural Universe) and then *Kiyan* (Existence). It was the individuals at the centre of these publications with their regular discussion groups and seminars who came to form the so-called Kiyān circle (*halqeh-ye Kiyan*).³⁶⁷ Another group by the name of the A'in circle (*halqeh-ye A'in*) was manned by other prominent intellectuals and politicians, some of whom also participated in the *Kiyan* circle, and operated within the fold of the Khomeinist left, and included individuals such as Mohammad-Reza Khatami, Hadi Khaniki, Sa'id Hajjarian, Mostafa Tajzadeh, Mohsen Amin-Zadeh, 'Abbas 'Abdi, and Mohsen Kadivar.³⁶⁸ While less well-known than the Kiyān circle, their activities were initiated directly by Mohammad Khatami himself, who after his resignation as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in the Rafsanjani administration,³⁶⁹ decided to apply for a licence to publish a journal by the name of *A'in* as a podium and outlet for himself and like-minded individuals.³⁷⁰ Even though the journal *A'in* was not published until several years after

³⁶⁷ Soroush contends that the term 'Kiyān circle' was one which was not consciously used by the group and only came to be used much later, after the journal was closed. Abdolkarim Soroush and Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi, "Khatami's Election Victory was Detrimental to Kiyān: An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," <http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-Kian.html>.

³⁶⁸ Salman 'Alavi-Nik, *8 sal-e bohran afarini-ye eslahtalaban* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami 1389 [2010]), p169

³⁶⁹ This is addressed in greater detail below.

³⁷⁰ Khatami and Salimi, "Tasavor-e piruzi nemikardim," p42-43

Khatami took office as president, a small group had been engaged in intellectual collaboration in the interim.

The three groups of the Kiyan circle, the A'in circle and the Presidential Strategic Research Centre (PSRC), emerged as key intellectual hubs or nodal points in which innovations in both theology and political theory unfurled and simultaneously coalesced into a more coherent, albeit differentiated series of ideological and political positions. It also established some degree of continuity between the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line (*Daneshjuyan-e mosalman peirow-ye khatt-e Imam*), who infamously overran the U.S. embassy taking 52 Americans hostage for 444 days (4 November 1979 - 20 January 1981) and the backers of Mohammad Khatami's presidential electoral bid less than twenty years later.³⁷¹ This watershed victory would of course mark the inauguration of a new 'reformist' era in the Islamic Republic, a term not initially used by Khatami himself. This is not to say that academics and intellectuals outside this more immediate network of groups were not influential or failed to impact these individuals' intellectual development, but merely that the chief points of activity which revolved around journals, publishers, intellectual gatherings and research units, did not have an incidental degree of contiguity.

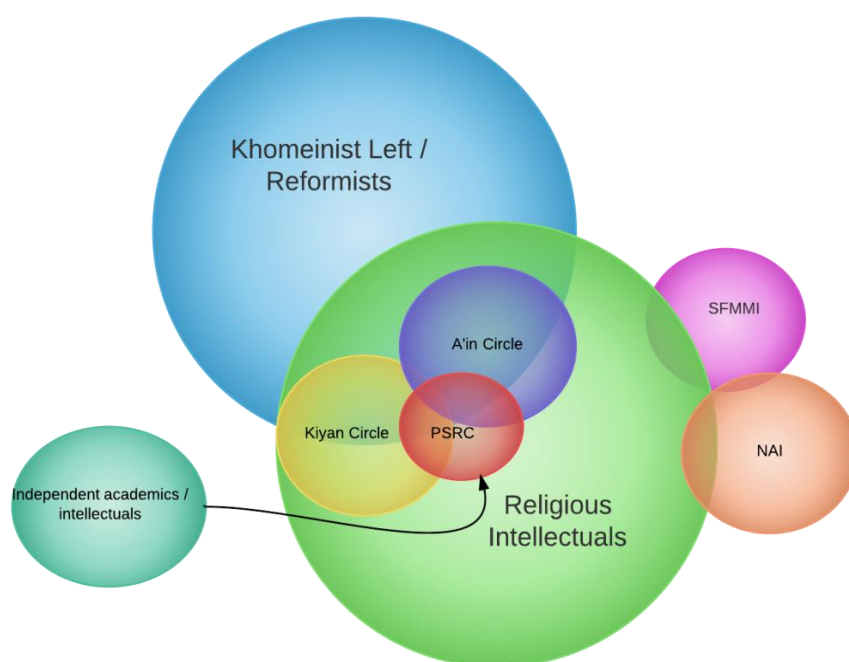
The term 'Khomeinist left' and 'Islamic *chap*' (left) are adapted from Mohsen Armin's famous breakdown of the Islamic Republic's elite factional composition which was published in a series of

³⁷¹ For example, two people who lectured in the U.S. embassy during the hostage taking were the Students' clerical mentor, Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Musavi-Kho'einiha, the second chairman of the MRM, and political strategist, Sa'id Hajjarian. See, **Chapter 5, Part II** for more details.

articles in *'Asr-e ma* (Our Epoch), the SMEEI's biweekly journal during the first half of the 1990s.³⁷² The reason for the adjective 'Khomeinist' is because just like their counterparts on the 'right', they saw Khomeini as the final arbiter and source of authority on all political and religious matters, though they were attracted to and drew upon their own reading of Khomeini's decisions, statements and legacy. 'Islamic left' is not ideal as a term, since it could also denote groups such as the People's Mojahedin, which had both the trappings of an 'Islamic' identity and espoused Marxist views on history, society and economics. Nevertheless, I have used it on occasion with this important caveat in mind. For the sake of variety and given that this elite political tendency consciously used the term *chap* when referring to itself, I will also use 'Islamic *chap*' throughout the thesis. Due to issues of space I cannot address their socio-economic views in much length, though I will certainly touch upon certain features of this designation in the following sections. The main groups which fall under this category are the MRM, the SMEEI, which was reconstituted in 1991 (1370), with a different central committee membership, and the student organisation, the Office for Strengthening Unity (*Daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat*). The history of this faction or elite political tendency and some of its leading personalities will be briefly discussed in the following pages, along with their ideological re-orientation as 'reformists' (*eslahtalaban*). The latter political shift will be tackled in greater detail in **Chapter 5**. Armin's own analysis is not taken at face-value since for all its analytic insight, it was itself a partisan document, indelibly marked by the ideological and political *agon* of intra-elite rivalry.

³⁷² Mohsen Armin, "Negahi-ye kutah beh barkhi az teif bandiha-ye jadid-e fekri-siyasi-ye jame'eh," *'Asr-e ma* (7 Dei 1373 (28 December 1994) through to 10 Khordad 1374 (31 May 1995)).

Fig. 1 – Religious Intellectuals and Politicos of the Islamic *Chap*: Overlapping Affiliations and Groupings



Kiyan – Kiyān Circle

A'in - A'in Circle

SMEEI - Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of Iran

NAI - Freedom Movement of Iran

MRM – Association of Combatant Clerics

PSRC - Presidential Strategic Research Centre

Ershad – Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance

SFMMI - Council of National-Religious Activists of Iran

HJMIE - Participation Front for Islamic Iran

SFMMI - Council of National-Religious Activists of Iran

Khatt-e Imam – Though often used more broadly, here it designates the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line and those affiliated with them.

Serat – Serat Institute and Publisher

(P) – Signifies individuals who were not amongst the formal or regularised members of the group or circle in question, but contributed intermittently to either its periodical or publications.

It must be noted that the above table does not indicate frequency of attendance and this varies considerably between individuals.

* Soroush was not a formal member of the PSRC, but he did attend the Centre on occasion.³⁷³

μ Soroush was on the Supreme Book Council at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Other members included Gholam-Ali Haddad-'Adel, Reza Davari-Ardakani, Nasrollah Purjavadi, and the clerics Fazel Harandi, Ahmad Jannati, and Rasuli Mahallati.³⁷⁴

∞ Hajjarian was not a formal member of the SMEEI, but he did write regularly for their periodical *'Asr-e ma*. He also was not formally a member of the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line, but delivered lectures at the US embassy in the course of the hostage crisis.

³⁷³ Alireza Alavi-Tabar and Ali Mirsepassi, "Alireza Alavi-Tabar and Political Change," in *Modern Democracy in Iran: Islam, Culture, and Political Change* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2010), p139

³⁷⁴ Hashem Aqajari, Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi, and Amir Hossein Bala'i, "Sharh-e zendegi-ye yek enqelabi-ye naaram: Goftogu ba Hashem Aqajari," *Andisheh-ye puya* 2, no. 11 (Mehr-Aban 1392 [October-November 2013]), p42

Fig. 1 is an attempt at an approximate representation of these disparate groups and their overlapping memberships. While it does not capture the complexity of the network or the fluidity of 'membership', it does have some heuristic value in explaining connections between different groups, affiliations and their intellectual activities. Thus we can see the overlapping membership between the Khomeinist left and religious intellectuals, along with the various groups within the latter's fold, such as the A'in and Kiyan circles and Presidential Strategic Research Centre (PSRC). This is because, as has been stated above, while religious intellectualism can be defined as an activity with a distinct praxis, one must also take due note of the fora in which their activities took place e.g. intellectual circles, gatherings and think-tanks which possessed varying degrees of formality and institutionalisation. It also conveys the contribution of the Freedom Movement of Iran (NAI) and Coalition of National Religious Activists of Iran (SFMMI) to the broader project of religious intellectualism, even if they are marginal to our present study. Another weakness of the diagram is that it does not capture the diachrony and dynamism of membership and affiliation and the way in which some one-time self-professed *rowshanfekran-e dini* and their partisans ceased to identify with this label after several years and in course of major political events over a sustained, continuous period of time. **Fig. 2** similarly attempts to represent the overlapping group-memberships, affiliations and histories of a dozen of the more prominent figures on the Islamic left and the religious intellectual current.

A Profile: The Historical Entwinement of the Khomeinist Left and Religious Intellectualism

The concern of this thesis must be specified further. As has already been mentioned, this socio-political network was comprised of individuals who had held offices in the state apparatus, and others who were less identified with the state *per se*. Nonetheless, even the latter in the first two decades following the revolution, considered themselves *delsuzan-e nezam* i.e. those invested in and sympathetic to the 'regime',³⁷⁵ as they perceived the 'regime' and the 'Islamic Revolution', and working within the bounds of the constitution, law and legitimating procedures of the Islamic Republic.³⁷⁶ The Khomeinist left and *rowshanfekran-e dini* were and are not two discrete and hermetically sealed groups with mutually exclusive identities. With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the end of the Iran-Iraq war a considerable swathe of the Khomeinist left and those who shared their world-view and religious intellectuals who had supported Khomeini in the first years of the revolution and referred to him with the honorific 'Imam' in their writings, found common cause and experienced a convergence of their shared interests.³⁷⁷ In this section an attempt will be made to

³⁷⁵ This description is used by the editor of *Kiyan*, Shamsolva'ezin, in an article which was published in *Kiyan* in the summer of 1997 following Mohammad Khatami's presidential electoral victory. Shamsolva'ezin, "Rowshanfekri-ye dini va jomhuri-ye sevvom.", p96

³⁷⁶ The younger generation amongst the *Kiyan* circle which included individuals such as Arash Naraqi, are an exception here and do not conform to this description. They had barely reached adolescence upon the revolution and thus were not embroiled as advocates of revolutionary change or within the dilemmas of founding a new state in the aftermath of the fall of the Pahlavi monarchy and establishment of the Islamic Republic.

³⁷⁷ I am attributing authorship to '*Asr-e ma*'s editor, Mohsen Armin, based on an interview with PSRC member, Ali-Reza 'Alavi-Tabar. In that interview the latter unequivocally states that the fourfold factional taxonomy was Armin's creation. Alavi-Tabar and Mirsepassi, "Alireza Alavi-Tabar and Political Change.", p138-139

Moslem attributes authorship to Behzad Nabavi (Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 2002), p92). It is not clear whether others such as Mohammad Salamati, Behzad Nabavi or Sa'id Hajjarian contributed to these analyses. In a number of instances Hajjarian's writings

provide a brief history of the political events and conjunctures which shaped the historical context of the religious intellectuals' operation. The overlap and interpenetration of the two nominal groups was strengthened as a result of several factors, the main ones will now be recounted for the remainder of this chapter.

1) The Split between the Khomeinist Right and Left in the Society of Combatant Clergy

The split within the Society of Combatant Clergy (*Jame'eh-ye rowhaniyat-e mobarez*, henceforth JRM), which led to the establishment of the Association of Combatant Clerics (*Majma'-e rowhaniyun-e mobarez*, henceforth MRM) by clergymen on the Khomeinist left in the spring of 1988 (1388), is

were published anonymously with the initials "S.S" and he is even introduced as "one of *'Asr-e ma's* readers", who supposedly submitted an article for the editorial board, who then decided to publish it because of its "important contents". See for example, S.S. [Sa'id Hajjarian], "Mashru'iyat, mashrutiyat, jomhuriyat," *'Asr-e ma*, no. 14 (13 Ordibehesht 1374 [3 May 1995]). It was not until the publication of Hajjarian's *'Asr-e ma* articles in, *Jomhuriyat: afsun-zoda'i-ye qodrat* (Republicanism: The Demystification of Power), that it became publicly known that Hajjarian was the author. For more details see, **Chapter 5, Part II.**

Armin's articles were published from 7 Dei 1373 (28 December 1994) through to 10 Khordad 1374 (31 May 1995). In the course of the articles he traces the history and socio-political views and makeup of the four chief factions which had developed in the course of Khomeini's lifetime as *vali-ye faqih* and since his death in June 1989. These factions according to Armin consisted of the traditional right (*rast-e sonnati*), the new right (*rast-e jadid*), the left (*chap*), which I have and will continue to refer to as the Khomeinist left, and the new left (*chap-e jadid*), which was closer to a brand of Islamist neo-conservatism today associated with the Endurance Front of the Islamic Revolution (*Jebheh-ye paidari-ye enqelab-e eslami*) patronised by Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbahi-Yazdi. *'Asr-e ma* was the publication of the SMEEI and thus the typology itself should be read critically. They are, however, a seminal series of articles on how the Islamic *chap* viewed their ideological and political rivals and the development of their world-view since the first years of the Islamic Republic and in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war and death of Ayatollah Khomeini. A copy of the document was made available to the author by a member of the SMEEI, Mohsen Armin, "Negahi-ye kutah beh barkhi az teif bandiha-ye jadid-e fekri-siyasi-ye jame'eh," *ibid.*(7 Dei 1373 (28 December 1994) through to 10 Khordad 1374 (31 May 1995)),p13

amongst the most important events in evolution of elite factionalism in post-revolutionary Iran.³⁷⁸

The JRM was founded just prior to the revolution with the support of Khomeini and other clerical luminaries such as Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari in 1977, but had evolved significantly as an organisation since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The split took place with Khomeini's approval and the MRM's first chairman was Hojjat al-Islam Mehdi Karubi. It became public knowledge when the two clerical groups offered up two separate electoral lists for the Third Majles' election held on 8 April 1988 (19 Farvardin 1367). Following the split, members of the MRM accused the JRM of being purveyors of "American Islam" and apologists for capitalism with the JRM returning insults in kind.³⁷⁹

The reasons for the split are delicate, but the immediate impetus for the break was the presentation of two figures by the JRM's left faction, nominally headed by Mehdi Karrubi, Fakhreddin Hejazi and Hadi Ghaffari, who proved too controversial and unacceptable to members of the JRM's Central Council.³⁸⁰ The failure of Hojjat al-Islam Mahmud Do'a'i to obtain a majority from the Central Council of the JRM also contributed to discontent amongst the wing led by Karrubi. It was in the

³⁷⁸ 'Abbas Shadlu, "Hezb-e jebbeh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami," in *Etela'ati dar bareh-ye ahzab va jenahha-ye siyasi-ye Iran-e emruz* (Tehran: Nashr-e vozara', 1387 [2008]), p311

³⁷⁹ A major issue which proved divisive was whether mines could be regarded in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence as public property and thus justifiably appropriated and utilised as the state saw fit. The JRM claimed they opposed such on the basis of a pre-revolutionary fatwa issued by Khomeini himself. The chairman of the JRM, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani, in a speech delivered before the Society of Islamic Engineers, despite expressing unqualified fidelity to the by then deceased Khomeini, was dismayed by the Imam's more recent position in favour of statist intervention and the legislation passed by the Third Majles. "Entekhabat-e Majles-e chaharom va e'lam-e mavaze'-e Jame'eh-ye rowhaniyat-e mobarez," *Bayan*, no. 16 (Bahman 1370 [Jan-Feb 1992]), p28

³⁸⁰ Ali Kordi, *Jame'eh-ye rowhaniyat-e mobarez az sheklgiri ta enshe'ab* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 1386 [2007]), p190-191

aftermath of this incident and the failure of Hejazi, Ghaffari and Do'a'i to obtain a place on the JRM's prospective electoral list that a decision was made to secede, and found an alternative organization.³⁸¹

According to Hojjat al-Islam Ali-Akbar Mohtashamipur, Mohammad Khatami and Mohammad Musavi-Kho'einiha, were crucial in the decision to found an alternative clerical organization, and believed it essential for the representation of the interests of clerics of the Khomeinist left.³⁸²

Subsequently, much to their rival's dismay, the MRM won the majority of seats in the Third Majles' election.³⁸³

One of the deeper reasons for the spilt was the respective clerical factions' views on the economic powers of the state vis-à-vis the private sector as covered in article 44 of the Islamic Republic's constitution and the religious status of the state-enforced redistribution of wealth.³⁸⁴ The conservative-traditionalist clergy and their allies were cautious, if not altogether hostile to nationalisation, state taxation, land reform, and worker profit-sharing.³⁸⁵ The economic reasons for the parting of ways between the Islamic *chap* and *rast* would steadily fade into the background by the

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*,p191

³⁸² *Ibid.*,p192

³⁸³ Hamid Kaviani, *Pishgaman-e eslahat: naqsh-e sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami-ye Iran dar tahavolat-e siyasi-ye daheh-ye 70* (Tehran: Salam 1379 [2000]),p17

³⁸⁴ Armin, "Negahi-ye kutah beh barkhi az teif bandiha-ye jadid-e fekri-siyasi-ye jame'eh.",p55

For a fairly detailed English-language account of Article 44 see, Evaleila Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence: reform and counter-reform in the post-revolutionary era* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011),p43

³⁸⁵ Armin, "Negahi-ye kutah beh barkhi az teif bandiha-ye jadid-e fekri-siyasi-ye jame'eh.",p8-9; Mehdi Karrubi, "Mosahebeh ba Hojjat al-Islam va al-Moslamain Karrubi: aksariat-e fe'li aksariat-e Majles-e ayandeh khahad bud," *Bayan*, no. 16 (Bahman 1370 [Jan-Feb 1992]),p24

time Khatami was elected to the presidency in 1997, and was replaced by the putatively ‘liberal’ agenda, which focused on the rule of law, civil society and increased personal freedoms.³⁸⁶

The split within the JRM and consequent founding of the MRM had been preceded by Khomeini’s suggestion that Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Ali Khamenei refrain from party politics in the form of the Islamic Republic Party (*Hezb-e jomhuri-ye eslami*, IRP), stating that they should act as “national figures” and thus resign from the party.³⁸⁷ As a result, Rafsanjani and Khamenei asked Khomeini for permission to end party activities. This initial and temporary cessation of activities began on 1 June 1987 (11 Khordad 1366) and led to the effective, if not actual dissolution of the party.³⁸⁸ Moreover, prior to the party’s dissolution there were already tensions within its central committee, tensions that were the seeds of deeper rifts to come. Hojjat al-Islam Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri, who was Interior Minister from 1981-1985 and Parliamentary Speaker in the 1990s, claims that there were three groups within the IRP at the time and palpable tensions between Mir-Hossein Musavi and Habibollah Asgarowladi, but also the incumbent president and head of the IRP, Khamenei, who opposed Musavi’s reintroduction as a candidate for a second term as premier in the autumn of 1985.³⁸⁹ It was only after Khomeini unambiguously stated in a meeting with Rafsanjani, Nateq-Nuri, and Ayatollahs Ahmad Jannati, Mohammad Yazdi and Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani, that “as an ordinary citizen I announce that the election of anyone except him [i.e. Musavi] is a betrayal of Islam”

³⁸⁶ For details see, **Chapters 4 and 5.**

³⁸⁷ Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri and Morteza Mirdar, *Khaterat-e Hojjat al-Islam Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, Autumn 1384 [2005]), p78

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p78

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p76

that Khamenei withdrew overt opposition to Musavi's candidacy, even if he continued to surreptitiously oppose the latter.³⁹⁰ Despite Khomeini's seemingly unequivocal support for Musavi's re-election as premier, 99 MPs remained steadfast in their opposition to his candidacy and voted in the Majles accordingly, with President Khamenei allegedly considering himself their unofficial 100th member.³⁹¹

Armin even goes so far as to claim that the apparent unity which characterised Khomeini's followers was the result of "the existence of enemies and those opposed to the revolution, regime and leadership".³⁹² With the impeachment of President Abolhasan Bani-Sadr on 21 June 1981 and the repression and effective political marginalisation of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI),³⁹³ National Front of Iran (*Jebheh-ye melli-ye Iran*), and Freedom Movement of Iran (*Nehzat-e azadi-ye Iran*), along with the gamut of the armed Marxist and Kurdish groups, the list of common foes and threats faded, and many of the nascent tensions and ideological-religious disagreements which had been relegated to secondary importance in the revolution's first years could no longer be

³⁹⁰ According to the memoir of Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri, Khomeini told his son Ahmad to make it clear that his preference for Prime Minister was Mir-Hossein Musavi. "Any time they asked the Imam in this regard [i.e. regarding the proposed premiership of Musavi], the Imam confirmed Engineer Musavi. Little by little the Imam explicitly stated his opinion and had announced to the office that no one except Mr. Musavi is expedient (*maslahat*)". Ibid.,p74-75

³⁹¹ Ibid.,p80

³⁹² Armin begins with the fissures within the Followers of the Imam's Line and the SMEEI and then broadens his analysis to encompass other important political actors. Armin, "Negahi-ye kutah beh barkhi az teif bandiha-ye jadid-e fekri-siyasi-ye jame'eh.",p7

³⁹³ For more information see, Mohammad Ja'fari, *Taqabol-e dow khatt ya kudeta-ye Khordad 1360* (Frankfurt: Barzavand, 1386 [2007]),p415

For Behzad Nabavi's allegedly decisive role in Bani-Sadr's ousting also see, Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr, *My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution & Secret Deals with the U.S.*, Foreword by Ambassador L. Bruce Laingen ed. (Washington; New York: Brassey's (US), INC.; A Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991),Chapter 3

ignored.³⁹⁴ 'Abdolkarim Soroush whose writings will be analysed in **Chapter 4** also had a direct hand in debunking, debating and attacking the ideological rivals of the Khomeinists, in particular the Marxist left,³⁹⁵ the PMOI, and the Islamic Republic's very first president, Abolhasan Bani-Sadr.³⁹⁶ In one notable text, aimed squarely at the deposed president Bani-Sadr, Soroush in his now well-known florid style asserts "the manifestation and rise of the Islamic Republic in this land are from the same merciful breeze of God".³⁹⁷ A historical irony of course was that by the end of the 1980s and early

³⁹⁴ At one point Armin candidly speaks of the Khomeinist left and right's alliance in the process of eliminating (*hazf*) what he refers to as the "intellectual current known as liberal" (*jaryan-e fekri mowsum beh liberal*), which generally pertains, if not altogether accurately, to the Freedom Movement and the National Front. Armin, "Negahi-ye kutah beh barkhi az teif bandiha-ye jadid-e fekri-siyasi-ye jame'eh.", p55

³⁹⁵ Soroush's televised debate on the issue of dialectics alongside Mesbah-Yazdi and against the Organisation of the Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas leader (Majority Faction), Farokh Negahdar (b.1946-) and Tudeh Party ideologue, Ehsan Tabari (1917-1989), from the spring of 1981 has been published in recent years by the research institute headed by Mesbah-Yazdi. Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi et al., *Gofteman-e rowshangar dar bareh-ye andishehha-ye bonyadin: monazereh-ye aqayan-e Ehsan Tabari, 'Abdolkarim Soroush, Farokh Negahdar, Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi* (Qom: Mo'asseseh-ye amuzeshi va pazhuheshi-ye Imam Khomeini, 1385 [2006]); Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Yaser Hashemi, *'Obur az bohran: karnameh va khaterat-e sal-e 1360 Hashemi-Rafsanjani* (Tehran: Daftar-e nashr-e ma'aref-e enqelab, 1378 [1999]), p85-87

³⁹⁶ Soroush wrote a frontal attack on both Bani-Sadr and the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI) in a pamphlet entitled, 'Abdolkarim Soroush, *Bani-Sadr, sazman-e mojahedin va hegelism* (Rome: Markaz-e farhangiy-e eslami-ye orupa, 1362). The only copy of the pamphlet I have been able to examine is the version published in 1982 (1362) by the Islamic Cultural Centre in Rome. The ambassador to the Vatican at the time was Hojjat al-Islam Hadi Khosrowshahi, a well-known Islamist ideologue and chronicler of the Fada'ian-e Islam, and the text is based on an extended dialogue between Khosrowshahi and Soroush. The text also repeatedly refers to the Mojahedin as the *Monafeqin* or "Hypocrites", which has since become the standard and official state term for the PMOI. See, **Chapter 5, Part I**.

At the more public level Soroush's televised debates with the Marxists, Farokh Negahdar, of the OIPFG, Majority faction, and Ehsan Tabari, the leading theoretician of the Tudeh Party, alongside Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, had a greater immediate impact. Tabari was later jailed in 1983 (1362) and under torture compelled to recant his Marxist beliefs and express his 'conversion' to Islam. Incidentally, it was the writings of Soroush's early mentor, Morteza Motahhari, whom Tabari declared in his televised confession, prompted his re-examination and repudiation of his erstwhile and now "totally spurious" beliefs. Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*, Kindle ed. (Berkeley University of California Press, 1999), p204

³⁹⁷ Soroush, *Bani-Sadr, sazman-e mojahedin va hegelism*, p5

1990s, much of the theoretical arsenal Soroush had borrowed from Karl Popper, Friedrich Hayek and a number of other Western thinkers, and which he had used to critique the Islamic Republic's broadly speaking Marxist and Islamist-leftist rivals, steadily began to turn its attention to the 'ideological thinking' and 'dogmatism' within the ranks of the Islamic Republic's own political and ideological establishments.³⁹⁸

2) The Marginalisation of the Khomeinist Left

The increasing political marginalization of the Khomeinist left's clerical and non-clerical politicians in the Fourth Majles, the election for which was held on 10 April 1992 (21 Farvardin 1371), was another important event in the history of the Khomeinist left and their ideological allies.³⁹⁹ It is in the course of this election that the Guardian Council (*Shura-ye negahban*, henceforth GC) most unabashedly asserted its prerogative to disqualify candidates on the basis of its interpretation of article 99 of the constitution.⁴⁰⁰ At this historical juncture the GC unilaterally arrogated the power of approbatory supervision (*nezarat-e estesvabi*) and struck a severe blow to the Khomeinist left, since the GC,

³⁹⁸ See, **Chapter 4** for more details.

It is worth noting that in the mid-1990s Soroush repeated his willingness to debate members of the conservative JRM. "Nazarat-e yeki az nazdikan-e Dr. Soroush dar mored-e dargiri-ye daneshgah-ye fani-ye Daneshgah-e Tehran [Originally published in *Salam* 29/7/74 (21/10/1995)]," in *Siyasat-nameh* (Tehran: Serat, 1378 [1999]), p107

³⁹⁹ It should be noted in passing that the Assembly of Experts' election of 8 October 1990 (16 Mehr 1369) was also very much part of this process and saw a number of high-profile MRM clerics such as Sadeq Khalkhali, Asadollah Bayat, Seyyed Hadi Khamenei, and Ali-Akbar Mohtashamipur disqualified. The Fourth Majles election can be considered a watershed, however, because the Islamic left ceased to control a single branch of government as a result of the policy pursued by the Guardian Council. Moreover, at this time, the GC still hadn't 'clarified' its position on article 99, which didn't take place until December 1991. Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, p160

⁴⁰⁰ Kaviani, *Pishgaman-e eslahat*, p18; Mostafa Tajzadeh, *Dar defa' az entekhabat-e azad va adelaneh* (Tehran Farhang va andisheh, 1381 [2002]), p14

dominated by the traditional right could now disqualify its ideological rivals en masse.⁴⁰¹ The Fourth Majles' elections saw 41 incumbent MPs disqualified from running in the election and 9 electoral districts voided.⁴⁰² 'Non-Muslim candidates' from the Tudeh Party had been disqualified in the course of the First Majles, not in virtue of article 99, but with recourse to articles 64 and 67, which stipulated that candidates must believe in God and swear an oath on one of the holy books of the three main Abrahamic religions and Zoroastrianism.⁴⁰³ This was not the sole reason however. Another reason for the Islamic left's lack of success in the Fourth Majles' election was its perceived intellectual and ideological sterility.⁴⁰⁴ Their dogged refusal to entertain the opening of Iran's economy to the global

⁴⁰¹ This was not always the SMEEI's position. In August 1979 the organization issued a critique of what Randjbar-Daemi has referred to as the June text of the draft constitution, in which they demanded a fourth branch of government, a "guardianship branch" which would directly supervise the Majles and presidency. The text was entitled, *Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami, matn-e pishnahadi-ye pishnevis-e qanun-e asasi* (Tehran, 1979). It has been republished here, Mehdi Sa'idi, *Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami; az ta'sis ta enhelal 1358-1365* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 1385 [2006]), p258-261

See, Siavush Randjbar-Daemi, "Building the Islamic State: The Draft Constitution of 1979 Reconsidered," *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 3 (2013), p15

While the criticisms and recommendations in the above text bore the seal of the entire organization, and thus must have had the support of all the members of the organization's central committee, the group was dissolved as a result of political differences between the right and left-wings of the organization in 1986. The organisation would then reinstate its activities with a different central committee in 1991 (1370), which was then banned in 2009, following the controversial re-election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad.

⁴⁰² Tajzadeh, *Dar defa' az entekhabat-e azad va adelaneh*, p16

⁴⁰³ Tajzadeh does not object to the Tudeh candidates' disqualification on the grounds of their inability to pledge allegiance to one of the religions officially recognized by the constitution of the Islamic Republic. Tajzadeh's argument is rather that the Tudeh members' disqualification did not take place under the rubric of 'supervision' or *nezarat* and thus was irrelevant to the Guardian Council and the electoral veto powers it later appropriated for itself. *Ibid.*, p12

⁴⁰⁴ For example, in a notable interview prior to the Fourth Majles' elections with a monthly affiliated to the Islamic left, *Bayan*, Hojjat al-Islam Mehdi Karrubi, who was still Speaker of the Third Majles at this time, unapologetically defended Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie and his faction's inveterate hostility towards the United States and Israel. Karrubi, furthermore, explicitly identified the possibility of a faction, namely the right, using the Guardian Council as a means to disqualify members of the Islamic left ahead of the upcoming elections. He was, nonetheless, convinced that the leader i.e. Khamenei, and the upper echelons of

market and antipathy to Rafsanjani's attempts to soften the country's foreign relations with the West, especially the United States, are perhaps the two most notable examples.⁴⁰⁵

With the death of Khomeini in 1989 the Khomeinist left had also lost their patriarch, and the only figure capable of mediating and intervening on their behalf. When alive Khomeini had tried to prevent the outright supremacy of either the left or right factions nestled beneath his ultimate authority as the 'charismatic leader of the revolution'.⁴⁰⁶ The arrogation of approbatory supervision by the GC would serve as a perpetual target for the Islamic left following their Fourth Majles defeat, and continues to be subject to unrelenting criticism by many politicians and intellectuals within the 'reformist' fold.⁴⁰⁷ Behzad Nabavi, a former minister in the cabinet of Mohammad-Ali Raja'i and founding member of the SMEEI, who was himself disqualified from running for the Fourth Majles,⁴⁰⁸ describes the beginnings of the intellectual and political re-orientation which took place amongst a

the regime, would prevent the GC and traditional right from undertaking the "political elimination" (*hazf-e siyasi*) of the Islamic left in the Majles. Karrubi, "Mosahebeh ba Hojjat al-Islam va al-Moslamain Karrubi: aksariat-e fe'li aksariat-e Majles-e ayandeh khahad bud.", p22

⁴⁰⁵ 'Abbas Shadlu, *Jostari-ye tarikhi piramun-e takasor-gara'i dar jaryan-e eslami va peidayesh-e jenah-e rast va chap-e mazhabi* (Tehran: Vozara', 1381 [2002]), p219

⁴⁰⁶ This comes through in the famous *Manshur-e baradari* (Proclamation of Fraternity), which will be analysed in greater detail below. In the *Manshur*, Khomeini warns against the elimination of one faction (*jenah*) at the expense of others. Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam* 21 vols., vol. 21 (Tehran Mo'asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1378 [1999]), p179

⁴⁰⁷ See, **Chapter 5, Part II.**

⁴⁰⁸ Behzad Nabavi and Hossein Salimi, "Eslahat piruz shodeh; goftogu ba Behzad Nabavi," in *Kalbodshekafi-ye zehniyat-e eslahgarayan* (Tehran: Gam-e now, 1384 [2005]), p305

As a result of his disqualification Nabavi wrote his famous open letter to President Rafsanjani on 25 April 1992. Nevertheless, Nabavi insists that "More than any issue, I emphasise this point, that despite all the difficulties and unkindness I have endured for the last 14 years since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, as before and God willing as long as I am alive I regard as obligatory (*vajeb*) the protection and preservation of the regime". Kavian, *Pishgaman-e eslahat*, p284

considerable swathe of the Islamic *chap* as, "A process that if we want to state precisely, after the death of the Imam and the end of the war gradually enveloped the important issues which occupied our minds".⁴⁰⁹

The SMEEI, one of the most important non-clerical groups of the Khomeinist left, was itself originally formed from seven different Islamist militant groups after the revolution in the spring of 1979. At this point it bore the name the Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution (SMEE), only adding 'Iran' when the organisation was reconstituted some years later. In an audience with Khomeini on 3 July 1981 (12 Tir 1360), the latter approved of the organization's activities and existence, and insisted its representatives cultivate strong relations with the Islamic Republic Party, Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp, Basij and the armed forces.⁴¹⁰ According to Mohammad Salamati, who later became the chairman of the reconstituted organization in 1991, prior to the revolution the seven militant groups, which initially comprised the Mojahedin had little to no organizational links;⁴¹¹ and as Armin confirms, formed essentially a militarised bulwark against those groups which were not

⁴⁰⁹ Nabavi and Salimi, "Eslahat piruz shodeh.",p309

⁴¹⁰ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, 21 vols., vol. 15 (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1378 [1999]),p271

⁴¹¹ Mohammad Salamati, "Didgahha-ye sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami-e Iran dar bareh-ye tahazob va fa'aliyatha-ye tashkilati," *'Asr-e ma*, no. 1 (27 Mehr 1373 [15 Oct 1994]),p3

There were however informal links. For instance, Hashem Aqajari and Mohammad-Baqer Zolqadr, who would go on to become the Deputy Commander of the Revolutionary Guards, were housemates prior to the revolution and, despite certain disagreements, were linked by their deep-rooted allegiance to Khomeini (39). Just as economic disagreements had polarised the traditional right linked to the mercantile class and represented by groups like the Islamic Coalition Association (*Hei'atha-ye mo'talefeh-ye eslami*), it was also disagreements over economic policy and ideology that had a decisive role in provoking the split between the right and left of the SMEE (41). Aqajari, Khojasteh-Rahimi, and Bala'i, "Sharh-e zendegi-ye yek enqelabi-ye naaram."

accepted by Khomeini and his clerical disciples, and similarly refused to fully submit to the authority of the latter.⁴¹² The targets of its antagonism were several armed political groups, the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran in particular, as illustrated by its chosen name.

In 1983 (1361) thirty-seven members of the organisation's left-faction, including Behzad Nabavi, Feizollah 'Arabsorkhi, Mohsen Armin, Hashem Aqajari, Mohammad Salamati, and Mostafa Tajzadeh, submitted their joint resignation. The reason for their decision was twofold. The first reason was that despite his previous encouragement to cooperate with the IRGC, by the spring of 1982 Khomeini had issued an ultimatum to the SMEE calling on senior members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC) to resign their membership from all political parties. Pursuant to this ultimatum the SMEE issued a statement to its members on 3 April 1982 calling on them to choose between the SMEE and the IRGC or army.⁴¹³ A number of those men who were in the upper-echelons of the IRGC accordingly resigned from the organisation.⁴¹⁴ Later disagreements with Hojjat al-Islam Hossein Rasti-Kashani, Khomeini's representative to the organisation, however, were at the heart of the matter and the chief reason for the aforementioned men resigning on 20 January 1983 (30 Dei 1983), after having decided in April of the previous year to retain their membership following Khomeini's ultimatum.⁴¹⁵ Rasti-Kashani had from the outset been regarded as too close to the rightist-faction of the SMEE. He was

⁴¹² Hajjarian performed a comparable role in the Intelligence Ministry and has recently recounted how he was involved in the interrogations of the so-called 'Nowzheh coup' plotters, and various other activities. Sa'id Hajjarian and Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi, "Eslahatchi, cheriki nemishavad: sharh-e yek zendegi-ye siyasi-fekri," *ibid.*(Tir-Mordad 1391 [July-August 2012]),p41

⁴¹³ Sa'idi, *Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami; az ta'sis ta enhelal 1358-1365.*,p155

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*,p155

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*,p234

also criticised for abjuring consultation with the left in collective decision-making, prior to January 1983. Finally, he was not seen as truly reflecting Khomeini's views and positions in a number of areas, particularly on economic matters.⁴¹⁶ In October 1986 Khomeini approved the request for the organization's dissolution made by Rasti-Kashani.⁴¹⁷ The SMEE was later reconstituted as the Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (SMEEI) with a different central committee in 1991 with Nabavi, Salamati, 'Arabsorkhi, Armin, Tajzadeh, and Aqajari amongst its leading members. The organisation and its periodical *'Asr-e ma* would go on to play a pivotal role in re-theorizing the Islamic state's ultimate sources of legitimacy.⁴¹⁸

Another development linked to the above and explicitly mentioned by *Kiyan's* editor, Masha'allah Shamsolva'ezin, was the review of the Islamic Republic's constitution which Khomeini ordered prior to his death in April 1989, and which as Mehdi Moslem concurs, restructured the state in favour of the rightist factions.⁴¹⁹ Shamsolva'ezin interprets the revision of the constitution as the beginning of the second republic,

“the birth of the meaning of the absolute guardianship of the jurist in the constitution and the emergence of the notion of authoritarianism (*eqtedar-gara'i*) on the basis of the political philosophy of the caliphate in place of charismatic leadership and the transformation of the duality of executive power between the president and prime minister, to the duality amongst the president and leadership, are amongst the first signs of the second republic, and considered as the signs tracing the direction of the future state (*vaz'iyat*)”.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.,p153

⁴¹⁷ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, 20.,p139

⁴¹⁸ See, **Chapter 5, Part II.**

⁴¹⁹ Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran.*,p86

⁴²⁰ Shamsolva'ezin, "Rowshanfekri-ye dini va jomhuri-ye sevvom.",p88

At present it is sufficient to acknowledge that the constitutional revisions approved in July 1989, following Khomeini's death, increased the scope of the Guardian Jurist's institutional powers,⁴²¹ and streamlined the executive branch of government.⁴²² The person who took the office of Guardian Jurist, Seyyed Ali Khamenei, is also of great significance given his uneasy relationship with many members of the Khomeinist left. Shamsolva'ezin's analogy of the transition from charismatic leadership i.e. the Prophet and his household/Khomeini, to a staid caliphate i.e. Khamenei/Umayyad Dynasty, so abhorred in traditional Shi'ite literature, also cannot but grab the reader's attention and highlight the deep animosity and trepidation with which the new political order had been greeted by the Islamic left and its sympathisers.

3) The Ouster of Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri

The removal of Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri as heir-designate to Khomeini in March 1989, and the earlier arrest and execution of Mehdi Hashemi on 28 September 1987 and the routing of Montazeri's disciples, were another series of events which deepened divisions and animosities within the political and ideological elite of the Islamic Republic.⁴²³ Because of issues of space we are unable

⁴²¹ For an itemised list of the *vali-ye faqih's* additional powers see, Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Ali Lahuti, *Karnameh va khaterat-e 1368: bazsazi va sazandegi* (Tehran: Daftar-e nashr-e ma'aref-e enqelab, 1391 [2012]), p603

⁴²² Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, p79

⁴²³ Akbar Ganji speaks of his time in the IRGC and the divisions between the left and right-wings of the SMEE which also permeated the IRGC at the time and how the left actively opposed IRGC commander, Mohsen Reza'i, (who had been on the right of the SMEE upon its founding) in 1984-1985, insisting that Khomeini was being misled by the right vis-à-vis events and promises of imminent victory on the war-front. The left during this

to address the details, but the estrangement between Khomeini and Montazeri came to a head upon the latter's written objections to the mass execution of imprisoned political prisoners which began on 19 July 1988 just preceding Iran's acceptance of UNSC Resolution 598, the UN-brokered ceasefire ending the Iran-Iraq war.⁴²⁴ It is however crucial to note that many clerics on the Islamic left and members of the MRM, such as Mehdi Karrubi, Hamid Rowhani etc... not only supported Khomeini's decision and side-lining of Montazeri, but publicly castigated him following his ousting.⁴²⁵ The left faction of the SMEE was also not very well-disposed towards Montazeri's economic views which favoured the bazaar.⁴²⁶ Many politicians on the Islamic left, Karrubi perhaps being the most notable example, only began to re-evaluate their past actions and attitudes towards Montazeri, when it appeared there was little they could do to stave off their own political marginalization at the hands of traditional conservative forces, which strongly supported the theocratic basis of the Leader's unchecked political authority.

time had close contact with Montazeri, and the latter prior to his ousting as heir-designate, conveyed the left's misgivings about the conduct of the war to Khomeini. Ganji left the IRGC in the spring of 1985 shortly after disagreements with Reza'i broke out into the open and they were prevented, he speculates by Khamenei, from meeting with Khomeini. Akbar Ganji, "Jang-e Iran va 'araq; dorughgu'i va siyosat-bazi," *Radio Zamaneh* 24 Shahrivar 1392 [15 September 2013].

Alavi-Tabar also speaks of his time in the IRGC and his closeness of Montazeri. Alavi-Tabar and Mirsepassi, "Alireza Alavi-Tabar and Political Change.", p132

⁴²⁴ Nasser Mohajer and Mahnaz Matin, "Koshtar 67, pardeh-ye dovvom-e Khordad-e 60," *Asr-e now* (8 November 2006).; "Negahha-ye gunagun beh si va panj sal-e koshtar," *Arash*, no. 110 (Bahman 1392 [February 2014]), 317-319; Iraj Mesdaq, *Raqs-e qowqnuusha va avaz-e khakestar* (Stockholm: Pezhvak, 2011), p10-12

⁴²⁵ See, Mehdi Karrubi, Hamid Rowhani, and Mehdi Emam Jamarani, "Nameh-ye aqayan-e Karrubi, Jamarani va Rowhani beh mo'azam lah," in *Khaterat-e faqih va marja'-e 'aliqadr hazrat Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri [1379 (2000)]* (PDF Published Online: www.amontazeri.com, 29 Bahman 1367 [18 February 1989]), p1257 published as an appendix in Montazeri, *Khaterat-e faqih va marja'-e 'aliqadr hazrat Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri*.

⁴²⁶ Aqajari, Khojasteh-Rahimi, and Bala'i, "Sharh-e zendegi-ye yek enqelabi-ye naaram.", p42

The transition to 'reformism' on the part of the Khomeinist left can to a considerable extent be framed in terms of political marginalisation and their parallax view as they progressively shifted from within the heart of the state to the outskirts of power. In this vein, Emadeddin Baqi, a former religious seminarian and student of Montazeri, who went on to become one of the most outspoken journalists of the reformist era contended, "While most of the revolutionary forces were within the power structure they looked at the issue [of reform] from the inside and were more inclined to the second method i.e. the preservation of purity and a limited circle of aides and their retinue. But when for whatever reason because of their diminished power they came out or were driven out of the power structure their interpretations and views were subject to change".⁴²⁷ Hashem Aqajari, a prominent religious intellectual of the Khomeinist left and longstanding member of the SMEE and later reconstituted SMEEI has made the same point more recently elsewhere: "the farther away the left faction became from ruling and was turned into a critical force and minority, to the same extent its democratic concerns increased. The Combatant Clerics (i.e. MRM) also had the same experience".⁴²⁸

4) Economic without Political Development

With the end of the war and the election of Hojjat al-Islam Ali-Akbar Rafsanjani as president of the Islamic Republic, the Islamic left found itself increasingly excluded from the key decision-making institutions of the state. Furthermore, while Rafsanjani's administration had emphasised economic

⁴²⁷ Emadeddin Baqi, "Cheguneh nasl-e enqelabi, eslahtalab shod?," *Shahrvand-e emruz*, no. 36 (14/11/1386 [3 February 2008]), p63

⁴²⁸ Aqajari, Khojasteh-Rahimi, and Bala'i, "Sharh-e zendegi-ye yek enqelabi-ye naaram.", p42

development and attempted to rebuild Iran's relations with some regional and Western states,⁴²⁹ there were few opportunities for the Islamic left to resume the prominence it had enjoyed in the revolution's first decade. It is under these conditions that the newspaper *Salam* headed by Musavi-Kho'einiha, became the chief outlet for the Islamic left, along with the monthly *Bayan* overseen by Mohtashamipur;⁴³⁰ both high-profile clerics in the MRM.

Crucially, between 1990 and 1994 Kho'einiha, along with numerous other figures on the Islamic left were active at the Presidential Strategic Research Centre (PSRC),⁴³¹ which had several subdivisions, but increasingly began to think through and theorise the notion of 'political development' (*towse'eh-ye siyasi*).⁴³² Kho'einiha was also briefly managing director of the PSRC's periodical *Rahbord*⁴³³ (spring 1992) with important articles by Hajjarian and Mohsen Kadivar appearing in the pages of the first four issues.⁴³⁴ By the second issue Kho'einiha had been replaced by future president, Hojjat al-Islam Hassan Rowhani, and by the third issue Hashemi-Rafsanjani's vice-president for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs (1989-1997), 'Ataollah Mohajerani, had become

⁴²⁹ This will be explored in greater detail in **Chapter 4**.

⁴³⁰ Mohammad Quchani, *Pedarkhandeh va chapha-ye javan: mobarezeh baraye naqd-e qodrat Dei 78 ta Khordad 79* (Nashr-e nei, 1379 [2000]), p52

⁴³¹ For a critical account see, Jahandar Amiri, *Eslahtalaban-e tajdidnazar-talab va pedarkhandehha* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, Bahar 1386 [Spring 2007]), p141-150.

For a more sympathetic account by one of the members of the unit in question see the interview with 'Ali Reza Alavi-Tabar in, Alavi-Tabar and Mirsepassi, "Alireza Alavi-Tabar and Political Change.", p132

⁴³² Sa'id Hajjarian, "Tallaqi-ye akademik az towse'eh-ye siyasi," *Rahbord*, no. 1 (Bahar 1371 [Spring 1992]). See, **Chapter 5, Part II** for more details.

⁴³³ Musavi-Kho'einiha's name appears as *modir-e mas'ul* in the first issue of the journal.

⁴³⁴ Mohsen Kadivar, "Nazariyehha-ye dowlat dar feqh-e Shi'eh (1)," *Rahbord*, no. 4 (Paiz 1373 [Autumn 1994]). This essay was later comprised part of Kadivar's influential text on theories of government in Shi'i jurisprudence, *Nazariyehha-ye dowlat dar feqh-e Shi'eh*.

Rahbord's editor. The shift in the nature and tone of analysis on offer was palpable, and those questions grappling with basic issues of political and theological legitimacy were quietly placed on the backburner.⁴³⁵

Hajjarian, whose writings will be interrogated in greater detail in **Chapter 5, Part II**, was the head of the political section of the Centre during Kho'einiha's tenure and began work there in 1989 (1368).⁴³⁶ In later years, while working at the PSRC during the mornings, Hajjarian would on an almost daily basis frequent the offices of both *Salam* and *'Asr-e ma*.⁴³⁷ The Centre also funded several of its number such as Mohsen Mirdamadi to obtain graduate degrees abroad in the social sciences, who would later become leading members of the Islamic Iran Participation Front in the aftermath of Khatami's presidential victory.⁴³⁸ While abroad these men developed their burgeoning ideas and encountered other new critical methods for engaging both the religious and political realities they felt confronted the country and its political system.⁴³⁹

A further interesting point worth noting was that while members of the Khomeinist left along with their religious intellectual colleagues held the leading positions at the Centre, the work of more secular-minded academics was drawn upon and some were invited to present their research. Hossein Bashiriye, who was a political science professor at the University of Tehran, is perhaps the best

⁴³⁵ See for instance, Sa'id Hajjarian, "Negahi beh mas'aleh-ye mashru'iyat," *Rahbord*, no. 3 (Bahar 1373 [Spring 1994]).

⁴³⁶ Hajjarian and Baqi, "Goftogu ba Sa'id Hajjarian.",p27; "Mo'arefi-ye markaz-e tahqiqat-e esteratezhik," *Rahbord*, no. 3 (Bahar 1373 [Spring 1994]),p73

⁴³⁷ Hajjarian and Khojasteh-Rahimi, "Eslahatchi, cheriki nemishavad.",p45

⁴³⁸ For more details see, **Chapter 5, Part II**.

⁴³⁹ 'Alavi-Nik, *8 sal-e bohran afarini-ye eslahtalaban.*,p189

known,⁴⁴⁰ but as has been mentioned in a number of sources others, several of whom were based in the West, were also key influences. These included Homa Katouzian, Dariush Ashuri, 'Ezatollah Fuladvand, Dariush Shayegan, Javad Tabataba'i, Sa'id-Amir Arjomand and Baqer Parham.⁴⁴¹ The dialectic between these various groups and intellectuals and their respective ideas was very intricate, and later chapters will make some effort toward elaborating on the 'anxiety of influence' which traverses the *rowshanfekran-e dini's* writings.

5) Khatami's Resignation and Dashed Hopes for "Cultural Prosperity"

The Keyhan Institute which was headed by Khatami provided an opportunity for debate within the parameters and tacit red lines set down by regime authorities,⁴⁴² in particular via the journal *Keyhan-e farhangi*, which published the articles of numerous religious intellectuals, including 'Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari.⁴⁴³ Khatami's initial appointment in November 1980 was on the order of Khomeini, and Khatami had also been a longstanding friend of Khomeini's son, Seyyed

⁴⁴⁰ For more on Bashiriyeh see, **Chapter 5, Part II.**

⁴⁴¹ Sa'id Hajjarian and Hossein Salimi, "Suteh delan gerd-e ham amadand: goftogu ba Sa'id Hajjarian," in *Kalbodshekafi-ye zehniyat-e eslahgarayan*, ed. Hossein Salimi (Tehran: Gam-e now, 1384 [2005]),p59; Amiri, *Eslahtalaban-e tajdidnazar-talab va pedarkhandehha.*,p142

⁴⁴² According to Hossein Shahidi, "the press law became "the basis for the banning of most of the 175 publications that were closed down in the first three years of the Islamic Republic". Hossein Shahidi, *Journalism in Iran: From Mission to Profession* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge 2007),.p43

⁴⁴³ Khatami was appointed as head of the *Keyhan* newspaper on the order of Ayatollah Khomeini on 16 November 1980 (25 Aban 1359) and was approved by the Majles as Mir Hossein-Musavi's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance on 9 November 1982 (18 Aban 1361). He was then approved by the Majles once again as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance on 25 October 1985 (6 Aban 1364). On 29 August 1989 (7 Shahrivar 1368) Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani presented Khatami once again as Minister of Culture, a post which he held until August-September 1992 (Shahrivar 1371). Ali Mohammadpur, *Dovvom-e Khordad, hamaseh beh yad-mandani: farayand-e entekhabat-e dowreh-ye haftom-e riasat-e jomhuri az negah-e matbu'at* (Tehran: Resanesh, 1379 [2000]),.p315

Ahmad, who similarly endorsed the appointment and Khatami in glowing terms.⁴⁴⁴ In the early 1970s Khatami and Ahmad had both been politically active in Qom and members of a group called the Society of Combatant Clergy Inside the Country (*Jame'eh-ye rowhaniyat-e mobarez dakhel-e keshvar*). In the course of these years, Khatami even wrote a preface for a Xeroxed copy of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran* (On the Service and Betrayal of the Intellectuals), which was then distributed throughout Qom.⁴⁴⁵ Khatami's father, Seyyed Ruhollah Khatami, was also a respected clergyman on good terms with Khomeini and was appointed after the revolution by the latter as prayer leader of Yazd in the summer of 1982.⁴⁴⁶

With Khatami's appointment as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in November 1982, Seyyed Hassan Shahcheraghi, took over the Keyhan Institute and initially nurtured *Keyhan-e farhangi* as an "intellectual and religious centre".⁴⁴⁷ The first issue was published in the spring of 1984 (Farvardin 1363). Shahcheraghi, who had previously been elected to both the First and Second Majles and had attended the Haqqani School,⁴⁴⁸ was killed in the course of the Iran-Iraq war a year later (Esfand 1364). Seyyed Mostafa Rokhsefat, who would also go on to play an important role in the

⁴⁴⁴ See Khomeini's order for Khatami's appointment to the Keyhan Institute and Ahmad Khomeini's comments praising Khatami in an interview with *Keyhan* following the appointment on 23 November 1980, *ibid.*, p316

⁴⁴⁵ It was of course in this work that Al-e Ahmad elaborated upon and elevated the oppositional role of the clergy in modern Iranian history claiming they could play the role of Gramscian "organic intellectuals" in confrontation with the Shah's regime and American imperialism (p225). In this posthumously published work he also lauded Khomeini directly as just such an example, even reproducing his well-known speech of 27 October 1964 (p253-260). Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran* (Tehran: Majid, 1388 [2009]).

⁴⁴⁶ Mohammadpur, *Dovvom-e Khordad, hamaseh beh yad-mandani.*, p312

⁴⁴⁷ Shamsolva'ezin, "Gozashteh, hal, ayandeh.", p11; Amiri, *Eslahtalaban-e tajdidnazar-talab va pedarkhandehha.*, p142

⁴⁴⁸ "Shahidan-e madreseh: Shahid Seyyed Hassan Shahcheraghi," <http://www.madresehaghani.ir/>.

founding of *Kiyan*, was also instrumental to *Keyhan-e farhangi*'s conception, publication and editorship at the Keyhan Institute along with Hassan Montazer-Qa'em, another early member of the SMEE,⁴⁴⁹ and Kamal Haj Seyyed Javadi.⁴⁵⁰ It was in these years that the nucleus of the Kiyān Circle, particularly those centrally responsible for its publication would be formed.

The pressure that was brought to bear on this journal at the end of the 1980s as a result of its inclusion of a number of controversial articles by Soroush, particularly his famous series of articles which were later published in book form under the title of *Qabz va bast-e te'orik-e shari'at* (The Expansion and Contraction of the Theory of the *Shari'a*), eventually led to the temporary closure of the journal in 1990 (Khordad 1369) on the orders of Khatami's successor and Ayatollah Khamenei's representative at the Keyhan Institute, Hojjat al-Islam Seyyed Mohammad Asghari.⁴⁵¹

Khatami's resignation as Minister of Culture was also a key event in the development of the Islamic left's intellectual evolution, as one of the last prominent personages of the Islamic *chap* in the executive to be felled. Khatami's exit from office and a broader evacuation of many on the Khomeinist left from political positions of authority were to have serious repercussions in the coming years. Tajzadeh, for instance, was Deputy for International Affairs at the Ministry of Culture under Khatami

⁴⁴⁹ Aqajari, Khojasteh-Rahimi, and Bala'i, "Sharh-e zendegi-ye yek enqelabi-ye naaram.", p40

⁴⁵⁰ See, "Tali'eh; kalameh-ye avval," *Keyhan-e farhangi* 1, no. 1 (1363 [1984]).; Personal correspondence, Arash Naraqi and Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 11 April 2013.

⁴⁵¹ Shamsolva'ezin, "Gozashteh, hal, ayandeh.", p13

Arash Naraqi also relates how he was told by Mohammad Khatami who was then Minister of Culture, that Supreme Leader Khamenei had called an emergency session of the Council for Cultural Revolution in the aftermath of the publication of *Qabz va bast-e te'orik-e shari'at*, and also "critiqued it for half an hour" believing it "dangerous". Arash Naraqi and Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Arash Naraqi," (17 March 2013).

at the time, and his comments several years later while Political Deputy in the Ministry of the Interior under then President Khatami are worthy of quotation on this score,

“After one or two years I did not have any other choice but to study, because with the change of government many of the managers were dismissed. It’s interesting that at one time in the Faculty of Law at the University of Tehran we had come together in one faculty along with Messrs Hajjarian, Amin-Zadeh, Asghar-Zadeh, Khosrow Tehrani, Nasiri, Monfared etc. This was surprising for many. They asked what’s going on and whether there is a plan underway? On the other hand, the majority of the individuals were doing research alongside Behzad Nabavi, 'Abbas 'Abdi, Armin, Aqajari and a number of other friends in the Centre for Strategic Research. This Centre did research about the revolution and social and political subjects. At the national level we had political and party activities. The principle centre for the assembly of most of the above friends was the publication *'Asr-e ma*; it was there that individuals such as Messrs Khaniki and Mazru'i gathered together and continued until the presidential election”.⁴⁵²

Khatami’s resignation contributed and was part and parcel of an exodus of veteran political personages on the Khomeinist left, many of whom held positions in state ministries during the 1980s. Many found a new home in institutional and quasi-institutionalised centres revolving around think-tanks and publications, which would then go on to theorise the notion of ‘political development’ and enlightened religiosity, so crucial to both the reformist and religious intellectualist discourses, which came to the fore in 1997.

Returning to Khatami’s resignation some further elaboration is warranted. In his letter of resignation Khatami explicitly spells out his view and belief that Khomeini was an intellectual pathbreaker who insisted Islam keep pace with contemporary exigencies, and not fall prey to

⁴⁵² Mostafa Tajzadeh, "Goftogu-ye sarikh ba Mostafa Tajzadeh, mo'aven-e vazir-e siyasi-ye keshvar: bozorgtarin eteham-e ma in ast," *Payam-e emruz*, no. 41.,p43

“superstition” (*khorafeh*) and “ignorance” (*jahl*). What is also of note is that even at this early stage Khatami refers to the importance of “the rule of law” (*hakemiyat-e qanun*), a term which would act as a lynchpin in his presidential campaign several years later.⁴⁵³ Apart from such principled stances, it appears there were also other motives at work and reasons for the Culture Minister’s resignation. In the letter Khatami tells then President Rafsanjani that he had sought to resign prior to the Fourth Majles elections were held, in which, as has been mentioned, a raft of the Khomeinist left’s sitting MPs were disqualified from running.⁴⁵⁴ The resignation letter is worth quoting at length since it aptly depicts Khatami’s world-view and the endeavour to reconcile the revolutionary Islamist discourse of Khomeini with a notion of “cultural prosperity” (*rownaq-e farhangi*),⁴⁵⁵ which is a forerunner to many of his later ideas.

“It was the epochal openings (*rah gosha'iha-ye dowran-saz*) of the Imam [Khomeini] which brought just, lettered and artistic disciples, in particular the educated faithful with exuberance and hope into the arena of struggle and cultural jihad. And it was such, that in all circumstances after the revolution, and even during the imposed war, the cultural face of our revolutionary society directed toward the future, was eminent and radiant, whether inside or outside [the country].

...The creation of stability in the arena of thought and the struggle for the rule of law (*hakemiyat-e qanun*) and building the grounds for the growth of pious and effective forces in this area was not easy, but with God’s kindness this auspicious occurrence was realised up to an acceptable point, so that the disciples of thought and culture and art can act within the framework, criteria and law, with a sense of security, which is a condition of creativity. I was and am sure about preparing the ground for a healthy cultural flourishing, the increase of the intellectual

⁴⁵³ "Matn-e este'fa nameh-ye Hojjat al-Islam Khatami az semat-e vezarat-e ershad-e eslami," *Jomhuri-ye eslami* 27 Tir 1371 [18 July 1992], p3

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p3

⁴⁵⁵ It is worth noting that *Kiyan* editor Shamsolva'ezin argued for “cultural development” in the second issue of the periodical in the fall of 1991. Masha'allah Shamsolva'ezin, "Towse'eh-ye farhangi [*Kiyan*, no. 2, Azar 1370 (Nov-Dec 1991)]," in *Yaddashtha-ye sardabir* (Tehran: Jame'eh-ye Iranian, 1379 [2000]), p24

capabilities of society and the creation of immunity for a generation which is in the midst of the storms of monstrous atheism, deviance, petrification, and corruption from every direction. It is natural that abetting cultural prosperity has prerequisites and consequences that only the superficial and impatient do not tolerate, even at the price of the suspension of thought and the negation of religiously legitimate (*mashru'*) and legal freedoms. This will produce dreadful and devastating results.

...if in this bedlam (*ashofteh bazar*) the accepted foundations of the regime, such as the views and fatwas of his holiness the Imam, both implicitly and explicitly, are confronted and opposed, even though this rejection and casting of doubt begins with some of the policies relating to art (*siyasatha-ye honari*), the basis of that view and firm and specified position is the Imam's [own]. We can be sure that in such an event we will witness the beginning of a dangerous process, the waves of which will shake most of the principles and other foundations. I have said that disagreement with the views of the Imam (whether from well-meaning or malign intentions) on music begins, but will not end there, and let not God bring such a day...

...On the cusp of the Fourth Majles Election I asked of his Excellency [i.e. President Rafsanjani] on the pretext of the Majles [election] that you accept my resignation. But this demand was not accepted by his Excellency, and despite the expression of kindness and support for this ministry, you emphasised the necessity of endurance and continuing along [the aforementioned] path. Though I did not have much hope for a change in the conditions and circumstances, that would be favourable to thought and culture, I maintained my deference to your view...I prefer without the distress of executive responsibility, [to work] in freedom and with suitable control, in defence of Islam and the expediency of the regime [*maslahat-e nezam*], in the way I recognise and believe, and also confront the rigidity (*jomud*) and petrification (*tahajor*) and reaction (*vapas-gara'i*), which I deem as the biggest scourge of a religious government and regime which has attained power."⁴⁵⁶

In his resignation letter Khatami offers an interpretation of Khomeini and his jurisprudential legacy, which takes its point of departure from the latter's well-known rulings pertaining to music and film. At the time, Khomeini's statements, which because of his status as a *marja'*, led to their

⁴⁵⁶ "Matn-e este'fa nameh-ye Hojjat al-Islam Khatami az semat-e vezarat-e ershad-e eslami.",p3

reception as fatwas, and were deemed relatively progressive within the remit of clerical opinion. Khatami's references to "reaction" and "petrification" were themselves used on occasion by Khomeini in his periodic invectives against the traditionalist-conservative clergy. It also related to Khomeini's well-known insistence on a dynamic conception of Islamic jurisprudence (*feqh-e puya*), which stressed the need of jurisprudence to take into account the exigencies of time and place (*zaman va makan*).⁴⁵⁷

In a letter to Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Ali Ansari on 1 November 1988, less than a year before his death, a letter which is better known as the *Manshur-e baradari* (Proclamation of Fraternity), Khomeini made it explicitly clear that the burden of Islamic government had made it a duty incumbent on the clergy to voice their rulings on the pressing issues of the day and that the "gate of *ejtehad* was always open".⁴⁵⁸ While certainly sensitive to the popular mood, he also sought to mediate between the left and right-wing of the ruling clergy, stating that differences of opinion on legal matters should not lead clergymen to conclude those who disagreed with them had "acted contrary to truth and in violation of God's religion".⁴⁵⁹ It was only,

"if differences became substantive (*osuli*) and foundational, they will cause frailty in the regime. *The issue is clear that between the individuals and extant wings (jenahha) bound to the revolution, if there is disagreement, it is merely political. This is even if a doctrinal form is given to it, because all are united on principle (osul), and it is for this reason I confirm them. They are loyal to Islam, the Quran and the revolution and*

⁴⁵⁷ This is of course not at all novel amongst Islamic modernists and Salafis in the Arab world and South Asia as Muhammad Qasim Zaman and others have shown. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p28; Loc-654-of-13053

⁴⁵⁸ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam* 21., p176-177

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p176

they are concerned for the country and the people. All of them have a plan and view for the growth of Islam and service to the Muslims, which in their view will bring about salvation (*rastegari*)...Both currents must not be negligent with respect to the deviousness of these two imperialist demons and must know that America and the Soviet Union are thirsty for the blood of Islam and their independence... You have so many common enemies that you must stand against them with all your power, though if you see someone breaching the fundamentals (*osul*), stand decisively against him".⁴⁶⁰

In this proclamation Khomeini was solely addressing those members of the Shi'i clergy who had accepted the exigency of Islamic government during the 12th Imam's Occultation and his own political-religious leadership. Moreover, Khomeini's unwillingness to countenance laymen encroachments on to what in his view was exclusively the province of the Shi'i clergy is well-known,⁴⁶¹ and need not be elaborated here.

While it appears that Khomeini sought to criticise what he viewed as the *tahajor* of the traditionalist clergy, some of whom, much to his chagrin objected to his famous ruling which sought to justify the abrogation of the primary ordinances of the *shari'a* in the name of 'regime expediency' (*maslahat-e nezam*),⁴⁶² it is unsurprising that the Islamic left sought to interpret such statements in their favour and as the revolutionary patriarch's confirmation of their own political views.⁴⁶³ For example, in another statement on 22 February 1989, *Determining the Strategy of the Regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Mission for the Seminaries or the Charter for the Clergy* (*Ta'in-e esteratezhi-ye nezam-e*

⁴⁶⁰ Italics added. Ibid.,p178-180

⁴⁶¹ See, *ibid.*, 19.,p302-303

⁴⁶² See, **Chapter 2.**

⁴⁶³ Armin similarly claims that Khomeini had a "leftist tendency" and that it was Khomeini's protection which prevented the Islamic left's total exclusion from power. Armin, "Negahi-ye kutah beh barkhi az teif bandiha-ye jadid-e fekri-siyasi-ye jame'eh.",p9,56

jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran-resalat-e howzehha-ye 'elmiyeh-manshur-e rowhaniyat), Khomeini in his own inimitable and brusque fashion berated the “petrified clergy” who he denounced as “snakes” and “purveyors of American Islam”. He stated this while also contending that Salman Rushdie’s controversial novel, *The Satanic Verses*, for which he infamously issued a religious order legitimating the British-Indian writer’s execution, was penned “to strike at the roots of religion and piety, the apex of which is Islam and the clergy. Certainly if the world-devourers could they would have burned the roots and name of the clergy, but God is always the preserver and guardian of this sacred torch”.⁴⁶⁴

It is on issues such as the privileged, even “sacred” role of the clergy, where fissures, tensions and theoretical aporias amongst the religious intellectuals and Khomeinist left later rose to the surface. This was because many of their number, particularly those who had been especially active as members of the leftist faction within the IRP, MRM and Imam’s Line, sought out ‘Khomeini’, while he was both alive and posthumously, as the final arbiter of the Islamic Republic’s ‘regime of truth’ and thereby establish themselves as the rightful heirs to Khomeini’s legacy. As can be seen above, Khatami endeavoured to ascribe dynamic and forward-looking cultural values to Khomeini. As will be demonstrated further in **Chapter 5**, Khatami and his allies would constantly strive to emphasise the ‘popular’ elements of Khomeini’s politico-religious legacy. By the revolution’s third-decade a

⁴⁶⁴ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam* 21.,p278

Khomeini uses similar terms such as *motahajer* and *vapas-gara*, when referring to the Pahlavi regime, which appears to indicate that his use of such terms was far from consistent and was generally invoked when he sought to impugn the credibility of his political and clerical opponents. See, Khomeini’s letter to Hamid Rowhani, one of the ‘official’ historians of the revolutionary clerical movement. *Ibid.*,p240

handful of religious intellectuals such as Kadivar and Ganji,⁴⁶⁵ though the style and substance of their criticisms often differed, publicly extricated themselves from this bind, while others in the Khomeinist left, such as Khatami, have continued through to the present to wholeheartedly defend their understanding of Khomeini's political thought and legacy.⁴⁶⁶

6) *Kiyan, A'in, Serat: Political Exodus and Intellectual Re-orientation*

To return to the issue of the relationship between the Khomeinist left and the *rowshanfekran-e dini*, Soroush himself has spoken of his regular meetings with Khatami since the latter took up the post of Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and as will be shown in **Chapter 5**, the former's impact on Khatami's own discourse is palpable, despite the numerous differences which continued to divide

⁴⁶⁵ The dates of publication of Kadivar and Ganji's two books reflect two distinct historical periods in both the Islamic Republic and religious intellectualism. Kadivar's *Hokumat-e vela'i* was published in the first years of the Khatami administration and offered an avowedly Shi'i and juridical disputation of Khomeini's theory of *velayat-e faqih*, which tried its utmost to show respect for Khomeini as a *marja' al-taqlid*, while throughout the volume using the honorific of Imam. He was nonetheless arrested and condemned to jail by the Special Court for Clerics, which had been formally re-established to address the case of Hojjat al-Islam Mehdi Hashemi in June 1987. Mohsen Kadivar, *Hokumat-e vela'i*, Andisheh-ye siyasi dar Islam (2) (Tehran: Nashr-e nei, 1377 [1998]).

Ganji's *Bud va nomud-e Khomeini: va'deh-ye behesht, barpa'i-ye duzakh* (The Existence and Appearance of Khomeini: The Promise of Heaven and Establishment of Purgatory), by contrast was written in exile following Ahmadinejad's 2009 re-election, is a polemical text, which depicts Khomeini as a malign and power-hungry despot. It is notable because it breaks every taboo to which the overwhelming majority of the Islamic *chap* and the religious intellectuals under study had previously been prepared to argue in the public domain. Its relevance to the religious intellectual project is questionable given that by this time Ganji had ceased to identify himself with the 'religious intellectual' label and had, in principle if not in practice, claimed to adhere to a more standard creed of Western-style liberal democracy and secular republicanism. Akbar Ganji, *Bud va nomud-e Khomeini: va'deh-ye behesht, barpa'i duzakh* (Berlin Gardun velag, 2011).

⁴⁶⁶ Mir-Hossein Musavi, *Chenin goft Mir-Hossein; majmu'eh-ye sokhanraniha, goftoguha, bayaniehha, yaddashtha, etela'iehha va payamha-ye Mir-Hossein Musavi* (Online PDF: Kanun-e Doktor Ali Shari'ati & Kalameh, Khordad 1391), p822-823

them intellectually.⁴⁶⁷ After leaving the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Khatami was appointed head of the National Library. While at the National Library, Feizollah 'Arabsorkhi, a central committee member of the SMEEI, was Khatami's deputy and over the course of these years the future president would conduct research in the history of Islamic and Western political thought,⁴⁶⁸ and hold regular discussions in his office with several of Iran's most prominent intellectuals and academics.⁴⁶⁹

Amongst the most important events following Khatami's exit from the Ministry of Culture was that two of the key members of *Keyhan-e farhangi's* editorial team, Masha'allah Shamsolva'ezin and Reza Tehrani, along with Mostafa Rokhsefat, went on to found *Kiyan*, which became the flagship journal of religious intellectualism in the 1990s.⁴⁷⁰ Its first issue being published in the autumn of 1991. Its name, according to Shamsolva'ezin, was "reminiscent of *Keyhan-e farhangi* and through this name, represented the first core of the religious intellectual movement".⁴⁷¹ Reza Tehrani and

⁴⁶⁷ Mohammadpur, *Dovvom-e Khordad, hamaseh beh yad-mandani*.,p329

Kamal Kharrazi, who would become Foreign Minister in Khatami's cabinet, was also a long-time associate of Soroush and would often attend his lectures at the University of Tehran. Naraqi and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Arash Naraqi."

⁴⁶⁸ One of the products of these years of research and discussion was, Mohammad Khatami, *A'in va andisheh dar dam-e khodkamegi: seiri dar andisheh-ye siyasi-ye mosalmanan dar faraz va forud-e tamadon* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1378 [1999]).

⁴⁶⁹ These included individuals such as Soroush and even Javad Tabataba'i. Naraqi and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Arash Naraqi."

After 1989 (1368) Feizollah 'Arabsorkhi along with Ali Mazru'i, Mohsen Amin-Zadeh, Mohsen Armin, Hadi Khaniki and Ahmad Setari, began working in the newly established unit within the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance entitled the Office for Media Affairs and Propagation (*mo'avenat-e omur-e matbu'at va tabliqati*) until Khatami's resignation, at which point 'Arabsorkhi accompanied Khatami to the National Library. 'Ali Mazru'i, "Yaddasht-e 'Ali Mazru'i dar bareh-ye Feizollah 'Arab Sorkhi: "Feizollah" dalili ast bar mahkumiyat-e zendanban," www.ghatreh.com

⁴⁷⁰ It should be added that Khatami did not by any means approve of all of *Keyhan-e farhangi's* content. Naraqi and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Arash Naraqi."

⁴⁷¹ Shamsolva'ezin, "Gozashteh, hal, ayandeh," p10

Shamsolva'ezin invited a number of individuals including Arash Naraqi, Akbar Ganji, Hossein Qaziyan, and Mohammad-Javad Gholam-Reza Kashi to participate as part of an advisory council. The council would meet on a weekly basis and discuss the articles that had been submitted for publication and also issues believed worthy of discussion for future issues of the periodical.⁴⁷² After the first year of publication, Soroush increasingly became the centre of these meetings, which broadened out to include other intellectuals and politicians, who would meet every Wednesday afternoon, in which someone would be invited to speak on a chosen subject.⁴⁷³ The meetings later became known as those of the “Wednesday companions” (*ashab-e chaharshanbeh*).⁴⁷⁴

In addition to Ganji and Soroush, other key members of the Kiyani circle included Reza Tehrani, Shamsolva'ezin, Sa'id Hajjarian, Mohsen Armin, Morteza Mardiha, Arash Naraqi, Ebrahim Soltani, Mohsen Sazgara, Mohammad-Javad Gholam-Reza Kashi, Hossein Qaziyan, Nasser Hadian, and Mostafa Tajzadeh.⁴⁷⁵ Tajzadeh also regularly chaired the meetings.⁴⁷⁶ Other notable individuals who worked at the Presidential Strategic Research Centre (PSRC) such as Ali-Reza 'Alavi-Tabar and Mohsen Kadivar also frequented the discussions.⁴⁷⁷ In addition, 'Arabsorkhi, the longstanding aide to Khatami, and Hamid-Reza Jala'ipour, a former IRGC commander and Deputy Governor of Iranian

This was also confirmed by author's interview with a member of the Kiyani Circle, Naraqi and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Arash Naraqi."

⁴⁷² "Interview with Arash Naraqi."

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Soroush and Khojasteh-Rahimi, "Khatami's Election Victory was Detrimental to Kiyani: An Interview with Abdulkarim Soroush".

⁴⁷⁶ Naraqi and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Arash Naraqi."

⁴⁷⁷ Also see, **Chapter 5, Part II**.

Kurdistan, who would become an important Khatami era editor and journalist and central committee member of the Participation Front, would also occasionally venture into these sessions. After the meetings had been firmly established, at the suggestion of Ganji and 'Abbas 'Abdi, the group decided to also meet for a monthly dinner at a hotel in Tehran which was serendipitously also named *Kiyan*.⁴⁷⁸

In a move reminiscent, albeit distinct from Habermas' descriptions of the emergent bourgeois public sphere,⁴⁷⁹ a salon was reserved in the hotel and a larger and more diverse circle of individuals would attend, still marked however by elitist and exclusionary tendencies. These meetings included Emadeddin Baqi, Mohsen Amin-Zadeh (Deputy Foreign Minister under Khatami and founding member of the Participation Front), 'Arabsorkhi, Ahmad Borqani (reformist journalist, Deputy Minister for Publications in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and MP in the Sixth Majles), and Isa Saharkhiz (Director of Domestic Media in the Ministry of Culture, 1997-1999), amongst others.⁴⁸⁰ Beyond these elite circles, *Kiyan's* influence had also in its final years established a noteworthy readership amongst the general public. According to a survey undertaken by *Kiyan* in one of its final issues it was concluded that its readership stood at 100,000 strong, since on average five people would read each copy of its 20,000 circulation.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁸ Naraqi and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Arash Naraqi."

⁴⁷⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Oxford: Polity, 1992), p33,65

⁴⁸⁰ Naraqi and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Arash Naraqi."

⁴⁸¹ Soroush and Khojasteh-Rahimi, "Khatami's Election Victory was Detrimental to *Kiyan*: An Interview with Abdulkarim Soroush".

Another relevant institution was the Serat Institute and Press founded in 1988 (1367) by Ganji, Mohsen Sazgara and Mohammad-Taqi Banki, who was Minister of Energy in Mir-Hossein Musavi's second government. Mojtabeh-Shabestari and Seyyed Mojtaba Shobeiri were also members of the institute's governing council (*hei'at-e modireh*). It was initially established in order to publish and distribute the writings of Soroush and the weekly lectures he delivered at the Aqdasieh mosque in east Tehran, which were also overseen by Ganji. The press would go on to publish the writings of several other prominent religious intellectuals such as Abolqasem Fana'i and Arash Naraqi and even secular intellectuals such as Dariush Ashuri and Morad Farhadpur. Ganji left Serat in 1997 (1376), after which Soroush's brother Javad Dabbagh took the reins, and in the spring of 1998 began publishing a periodical entitled *Rah-e now* (New Path) which for a short time emerged as another pre-eminent forum for the writings of individuals such as Hajjarian, Kadivar, 'Alavi-Tabar etc.⁴⁸²

The Khomeinist left and several religious intellectuals who were not in their immediate circle gradually coalesced in the first half of the 1990s as a result of their common experiences of opposition to the Shah's regime prior to the revolution, their support of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Republic's founding, and their later marginalization by the right (*jenah-e rast*), both modern and traditional. It is their gradual congregation that would give rise to the elite-managed discourse of the 2nd of Khordad Front, which of course doesn't preclude the possibility that their discourse was itself both impacted and in part a response to popular pressures and restiveness from below. In the opening issue of *Kiyan* its editor, the veteran journalist Shamsolva'ezin, declared in bold terms the journal's

⁴⁸² Amiri, *Eslahtalaban-e tajdidnazar-talab va pedarkhandehha.*,p142

hegemonic mission, in the Gramscian sense of intellectual and moral leadership explicated above: “Schools of thought (*maktabha*) must be victorious in the conscience of society (*vojdān-e jame'eh*), not in the minds of ruling cadres”.⁴⁸³ In this way, these politicized intellectuals and theoretically-minded political activists sought to theorise their past experiences of revolution and revolutionary Islamism and provide a diagnoses of ‘what had gone awry’ and led to the political crisis they now confronted. They also sought to engage new ideas in keeping with the times, while adopting and adapting contemporary methodological approaches in theology, jurisprudence and political theory.

The SMEEI’s journal, *'Asr-e ma*, from its first issue published on 19 October 1994 (27 Mehr 1373) under the editorship of Mohsen Armin, a leading member of the SMEEI and Kiyān circle, sought to emphasize that,

“if we accept the principle of political participation and determination of [the nation’s] destiny by the people, one of the most important pillars for building a free, mature and developed society, the activity of political organizations such as the media, will appear to be a natural, necessary, and useful matter...We hope our political society will reach such a political development and maturity that it will construe the diversity of views and political thinking and thus the presence and activities of political parties’ activities and publications in the framework of the national interest, as a desirable, necessary and constructive reality”.⁴⁸⁴

This discourse was initially hatched at the level of the political and intellectual elite and thereafter progressively simplified, popularised and related to the more immediate and mundane preoccupations of ordinary Iranians. Mohammad-Reza Khatami, President Khatami’s brother, claims that “we could organise 2-3 million around this idea [i.e. the 2nd Khordad project]...in the form of an

⁴⁸³ Shamsolva'ezin, "Gozashteh, hal, ayandeh.",p14

⁴⁸⁴ "'Asr-e ma chera?', " *'Asr-e ma*, no. 1 (27 Mehr 1373),.p1-2

intellectual current (*jaryan-e fekri*),⁴⁸⁵ but there was a need for an “elite force” (*niru-ye nokhbeh*), which could organise and mobilise a hitherto loose and unorganised ideological-political current of sympathisers towards the end of impacting the future trajectory of the Islamic state.⁴⁸⁶ Mohammad-Reza Khatami describes the gradual congregation of individuals, who would make up this much needed “elite force” and attempt to take on this challenge thus,

“An opportunity for us was created in the first half of the 1990s. Our intellectual patronage concerned three fields. One was the field of thought imported in the form of translation. In addition to philosophical thought, sociological theories and the experiences of other countries which had traversed the stage of transition (*gozar*). The second field was domestic religious intellectuals. The most influential of those was the Kiyan circle. There were also other individuals who offered new thinking in the field of politics. The third field; was the re-reading of national-Iranian thought which did not necessarily have a religious basis...In 1996-1997 the coming together of these forces resulted in the victory of Mr. Khatami.”⁴⁸⁷

As was already mentioned the A'in circle was another intellectual hub which contributed to the 2nd of Khordad discourse and was largely composed of those who shared an intellectual affinity with Khatami. Its members included Hojjat al-Islam Fazel Meibodi, Sa'id Hajjarian, Hadi Khaniki, Mohammad Shari'ati, and [Mohammad 'Ali?] Khalili-Ardakani. Mohammad-Reza Khatami describes how this important group of likeminded individuals took shape and some of the repercussions of their activities.

“In 1996 (1375) because of my own work or our activities, in 1997 (1376) we started to have close relations with many individuals who in 1996 (1375) we didn't have direct relations. Each person worked in their own field. In 1997 a series of them, in the form of one group, which at that time got the name A'in, and had regular

⁴⁸⁵ Khatami and Salimi, "Tasavor-e piruzi nemikardim.",p44

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.,p43

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.,p42

weekly meetings. They had had experiences in different areas over the years and had exchanges...The series of events and programmes brought these tendencies close together. Someone who worked in the field of religion and new discourses in the area of religion worked with someone in the field of sociological issues and new ideas in the world. In this way, they reached one another. I think that thing which appeared on the 2nd Khordad, was the conflict (*tazarob*) and outcome of the ideas of that group.”⁴⁸⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to draw upon the interpretative framework presented in **Chapter 1** to understand the historical and politico-ideological phenomenon of ‘religious intellectualism’ in post-revolutionary Iran. It has also attempted to demonstrate how this phenomenon was embedded in a broader network of socio-political relationships and institutions which shaped its orientation and priorities in a number of crucial respects. Importantly it delineated a historically dynamic and emergent network of nodal points occupied by members of the political and intellectual elite, which gave rise to the congregation of likeminded and mutually sympathetic individuals, and the profound confluence of the discourse of religious intellectualism and ‘political development’, which would form the bedrock of elite-managed reform in the late 1990s. The nodes of this network included *Keyhan-e farhangi* and its editorial team, the SMEEI and its publishing arm *Asr-e ma*, the Ministry of Culture under Khatami, the Presidential Strategic Research Centre, the Kiyan Circle, A'in Circle, the Serat Institute and Press, and *Salam* newspaper, amongst various others. These disparate hubs, each of which enjoyed different degrees of institutionalization and capital in the post-revolutionary order, would express solidarity and provide mutual support against common ideological and political foes

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.,p42-43

and compete for ideological and moral leadership that went beyond the confines of the IRI elite. Another conclusion of this chapter is that it proves exceedingly difficult to disentangle the political Khomeinist left and religious intellectuals into two discrete groups. Their relationships are a lot more intricate and reciprocal than most accounts in the existing literature on religious intellectualism in post-revolutionary Iran allow for.

The *rowshanfekran-e dini* and the Khomeinist left were united in part by their opposition to an understanding of 'religion' (*din*) in which the political, albeit conservative clergy sought a monopoly on religious and political authority. Indeed, following the death of Khomeini and the introduction of Rafsanjani's first cabinet on 19 August 1989 [28 Mordad 1368], the new order was being described in leftist circles as a *coup d'état*.⁴⁸⁹ The opposition of the Khomeinist left and the new religious intellectuals was not, however, merely politically opposed to conservative control of the state's chief institutions, but also to an understanding of 'Islam',⁴⁹⁰ which bestowed unqualified pre-eminence to the clergy and an unyielding conception of Islamic jurisprudence, at the expense of all other conceivable understandings of Islam, its sacred texts, and the nature of religious experience.⁴⁹¹ The Khomeinist left, and *rowshanfekran-e dini* were allied, but by no means monolithic or single-minded

⁴⁸⁹ Coincidentally Rafsanjani's cabinet was introduced on the same day as the national government of Prime Minister Mosaddeq was overthrown. The Khomeinist left seized on this in their rhetoric in order to denounce their own perceived marginalisation, despite their on-going control of the Third Majles. Hajjarian and Baqi, "Goftogu ba Sa'id Hajjarian.", p39

⁴⁹⁰ Faisal Devji's comments on how 'Islam' became a proper name without historic precedent in colonial India are provocative on this score. How and when 'Islam' emerged as a seemingly self-explanatory proper name in the Iranian context would require a separate investigation of its own, which we unfortunately cannot undertake here. Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (London: Hurst & Company, 2013), p203

⁴⁹¹ Tajzadeh and Salimi, "Nezam ya'ni ma.", p103

in their efforts, both politically and intellectually, to pose a challenge to the 'traditional right' (*rast-e sonnati*), at the level of both religious and political authority.

Chapter 4: Revolution and its Discontents: Ideology, Religious Democracy and Free Faith

“The appeal of Utopianism arises from the failure to realize that we cannot make heaven on earth.”⁴⁹²

Karl R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*

“No individual or single institution can claim a monopoly on truth. The truth is the objective property (*melk-e 'eini*) of all, and everyone must enjoy freedom and the opportunity to search and obtain the truth”.⁴⁹³

'Abdolkarim Soroush, *Arkan-e farhangi-ye demokrasi* (The Cultural Pillars of Democracy)

Introduction

Speaking from without the discourse of ‘religious intellectualism’ as it developed in the late 1980s and 1990s, one might say that this post-revolutionary group of intellectuals gradually came to represent a *liberal turn* in Iranian politico-religious thought i.e. broadly speaking, they held that state power should be limited, the rule of law guaranteed and civil and human rights protected.⁴⁹⁴ This “liberalism of fear” to use Judith N. Shklar’s fortuitous phrase was borne out of the lived experience of precarious life as several of Iran’s post-revolutionary religious intellectuals shifted subject position from ideological legitimators of the revolutionary Islamist regime to more ambivalent internal critics

⁴⁹² Karl R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002), p487

⁴⁹³ Soroush, "Arkan-e farhangi-ye demokrasi.", p270

The lecture was first delivered in Prague in 1991. The relevance of the location of the speech and the world-historical events which had occurred only two years previously shouldn’t be lost on the reader.

⁴⁹⁴ This is a very general set of characteristics and essentially negative in character. In this regard most religious intellectuals are conceptually closer to the tradition of classical liberalism. John Gray, *Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), p56

on the outskirts of power and thereby subject to the state apparatus' and its agents' wanton caprice.⁴⁹⁵ Moreover, we say from *without* the discourse, because the epithet 'liberal', but also the ideology of liberalism, were still heavily laden with a host of negative connotations on the politico-ideological landscape of post-revolutionary Iran. In fact, religious intellectuals rarely, if ever referred to themselves as 'liberals' or adherents of liberalism. In the Islamic Republic's first decade, 'liberal' had actually been transformed into a term of derogation by all factions active under Khomeini's aegis, as well as Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist political groups and organisations.⁴⁹⁶

One key political group which was held to be 'liberal' by the Khomeinist clergy and their lay allies was the Freedom Movement of Iran (*Nehzat-e azadi-ye Iran*, henceforth NAI), headed by Mehdi Bazargan, Iran's first post-revolutionary Prime Minister (February 1979-November 1979). This was despite the fact that the NAI had proactively sought to distinguish itself from secular rivals and on the first anniversary of the new constitution's ratification proclaimed itself the first party to have

⁴⁹⁵ "Intellectual modesty does not imply that the liberalism of fear has no content, only that it is entirely nonutopian". Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p26

⁴⁹⁶ Khomeini held 'liberals' to be Westoxified, beholden to imperial powers, and hostile to the clergy and Islam. For an example of his pejorative use of the term 'liberal' see, Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam* 21., p284-286

The influence of Marxist-Leninist groups and their great disdain for 'liberals' and 'bourgeois culture' was also palpable, along with the conviction that cultural transformation was part and parcel of political and economic revolution.

Iran is not unique in this regard. As C.A. Bayly notes in his magisterial study of the reception and transformation of liberalism in colonial India 'liberalism' was associated in the eyes of many Indian intellectuals with the appeasement of colonialism and liberal imperialism's pretension to be engaged in a 'civilising mission'. C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* Kindle ed., Ideas in Context (Cambridge; New York Cambridge University Press, 2012), p3,4,14

accepted Khomeini's leadership in 1963.⁴⁹⁷ Despite such efforts, the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) and the NAI were embattled from the outset, highly dependent on Khomeini's approbation, and out of step with the revolutionary mood which had gripped the country.⁴⁹⁸ The hostage crisis initiated on 4 November 1979 by the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line and their mentor Hojjat al-Islam Musavi-Kho'einiha decisively ended the NAI's role in government once and for all. The day after the students seized the U.S. embassy on the 5 November 1979 Khomeini declared the event "a revolution that will be greater than the first revolution".⁴⁹⁹ Subsequently, the uncoordinated act by the radical students quickly came to be touted as "the second revolution" and brought to a premature end the NAI's already highly attenuated role in the post-revolutionary government.

By the late 1980s there were further indications of how much the NAI's star had fallen and the extent to which their 'liberal' orientation had become an object of derision. The letter of Hojjat al-Islam Ali-Akbar Mohtashamipur, the incumbent Minister of the Interior and a prominent figure within the Khomeinist left, to Khomeini on 8 February 1988 (19 Bahman 1366) pertaining to the political activities of the NAI and Khomeini's reply, might be held up as one of the better illustrations

⁴⁹⁷ H. E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990), p287

Even as late as December 1999 the NAI under the leadership of former Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) Foreign Minister, Ebrahim Yazdi, contended the organisation was "bound to the principle of *velayat-e faqih* and dissolved in it (*zob shodeh dar an*)". *Nehzat-e azadi-ye Iran*, "Pasokh beh nameh-ye aqa-ye Hamid Ansari," (Tehran02/10/1378 [23 December 1999]).

⁴⁹⁸ It was, of course, Bazargan who famously referred to his time in government as "a knife without a blade". Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p52

⁴⁹⁹ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, 21 vols., vol. 10 (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1378 [1999]), p493

of the tensions between the so-called liberals and their conception of Islam and the one advocated by the revolutionary clergy. The Guardian Council had disqualified members of the NAI from running in the Third Majles election held in April 1988 (17 Farvardin 1367). Despite their disqualification and the fact that they had been refused permission to operate as a legal party by the Ministry of the Interior, the group continued its political activism.

In his letter to Khomeini, Mohtashamipur accused the NAI of “spreading poison”, and claimed that since the resignation of the PRG, the NAI had opposed the Islamic Republic, and been responsible for “confusing minds” (*maghshush kardan-e azhan*).⁵⁰⁰ Mohtashamipur also accused the Freedom Movement of rejecting the “absolute” (*motlaqeh*) nature of the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* and endeavouring to weaken the regime.⁵⁰¹ Khomeini replied by pointedly mocking the Freedom Movement, calling it “the movement of so-called freedom”, and claiming they were “serious supporters of Iran’s dependence on America”. More importantly Khomeini spelled out his view that,

“the movement of so-called freedom is not qualified for any governmental, legislative or judicial affair and their noxiousness is their pretence to Islam and with this weapon (*harbeh*) they will pervert our dear youth and also with their frivolous interference in interpreting the noble Quran and the honourable hadith

⁵⁰⁰ Quoted in Shadlu, *Jostari-ye tarikhi piramun-e takasor-gara'i dar jaryan-e eslami*, p130

⁵⁰¹ The Freedom Movement has disputed the authenticity of Khomeini’s reply to Mohtashamipur and later alleged that Ahmad Khomeini was the real author of the letter. This accusation was in turn rejected by the latter. A long series of court cases ensued and after many years and a number of interregna, on 12 November 1997 [21 Aban 1376] a court gave its final judgement in the case and ruled in favour of the Foundation for the Order and Publication of the Imam’s Corpus (*Mo'asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e asar-e Imam*), the head of which had been Ahmad Khomeini until his death in 1995. The NAI was also fined by the court (p139). Mohtashamipur has claimed that the letter was written with Khomeini’s own hand, and its importance was certified by the fact that 5 copies were distributed to the executive, legislative and judiciary, the Minister of Intelligence and Mohtashamipur himself. This was despite the letter having been a personal communication between Khomeini and Mohtashamipur. In such instances the protocol had been to send one copy for the recipient, while Khomeini’s office retained the original (*ibid.*, p134).

and ignorant exegesis it is possible they will bring about great corruption. [This corruption] is greater than the damage of other groups, even the Hypocrites [*monafeqin*, i.e. the People's Mojahedin], those dear children of Engineer Bazargan. The Freedom Movement and its people know nothing of Islam and are not familiar with jurisprudential Islam (*Islam-e feqhi*)".⁵⁰²

As stated in preceding chapters, this thesis will not dwell at any length upon the politico-religious thought of Bazargan or other prominent members of the NAI.⁵⁰³ However, in introducing this chapter one of the great ironies of the Khomeinist left must be mentioned. Despite its pivotal role in fundamentally undermining and decrying the PRG and Bazargan himself in the first years of the revolution, the 1990s post-revolutionary intellectual scene dominated by the *rowshanfekran-e dini* and their political allies on the Islamic left, would be essential to resuscitating the image of individuals like Bazargan as enlightened and unappreciated in their own time, and as having constituted a much lamented missed opportunity.⁵⁰⁴ Moreover, even while the NAI had consistently endeavoured to

⁵⁰² Khomeini quoted in *ibid.*, p132

⁵⁰³ For such an exposition see, Saeed Barzin, "Constitutionalism and Democracy in the Religious Ideology of Mehdi Bazargan," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 1 (1994).

⁵⁰⁴ There are many such examples, but the group around *Kiyan* was perhaps one of the first outside of the NAI and its affiliates to publish the writings of individuals such as Mehdi Bazargan, Ebrahim Yazdi, Gholam 'Abbas Tavasoli, and 'Ezatollah Sahabi in the years following Khomeini's death. In the first half of the 1990s these efforts were complemented by those of 'Ezatollah Sahabi, son of an NAI founding father Yadollah Sahabi, who took up editorship of the periodical, *Iran-e farda* (Tomorrow's Iran) which became the main outlet of the so-called 'religious-nationalists' (*melli-mazhabiha*) until its forcible closure in spring 2000. The extent to which the *Kiyan* circle was under the direct influence of these figures is a far more nebulous question, which cannot be addressed here. See for example, Mehdi Bazargan, "Seyr-e andisheh-ye dini-ye mo'aser: goftogu'i ba mohandes Mehdi Bazargan," *Kiyan* 11 (Farvardin-Ordibehesht 1372 [March-April 1993]).

Other organisations on the Khomeinist left, however, in the Khatami era and beyond continued to distinguish themselves from the 'liberals'. For example the General Secretary of the SMEEI, Mohammad Salamati, in the summer of 1999 continued to distinguish his organisation's ideological orientation as Islamic or Muslim, in contradistinction to 'liberal' (313). Salamati also stressed that the Mojahedin did not accept the "licentious" (*bi band o bar*) conception of freedom (314). Finally, he clearly stated that he regarded the Freedom Movement of Iran as *ghair-e khodi* or outsiders, because they do not support the idea that "Islamic ideology" can rule; "they do not believe in this regime (*nezam*)" (319). For Salamati in 1999, however, because the NAI did not

operate within the political and institutional confines of the Islamic Republic and profess its fidelity to the country's constitution and the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*, in private its members increasingly began to challenge the authoritarian clerically-dominated conception of Islam advocated by Khomeini and his disciples. Indeed, the NAI pamphlet, *Tafsil va tahlil-e velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih* (Exposition and Analysis of the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist), authored in March-April 1988, was circulated by NAI activists and quickly came to be recognised as one of the earlier and more notable intra-religious critiques of the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist among those forces which had allied themselves with Khomeini on the cusp of the revolution.⁵⁰⁵ Religious intellectuals such as Soroush and Mojtabah-Shabestari, not directly affiliated with any political party, and laymen of the Islamic left who had been influenced by Shari'ati in their adolescence,⁵⁰⁶ himself a founding member of the NAI outside Iran, would continue along this path and arguably go to even greater lengths to undermine the clerically-determined and nomocratic / jurisprudential understandings of Islam.⁵⁰⁷ This is the subject of the present chapter which will examine the political thought of Soroush and

aim to overthrow the regime they should be permitted to undertake political activity. Esmā'il Azadi, "Mohammad Salamati: haft goru-ye cheriki, yek sazman-e siyasi," in *Ahزاب-e siyasi dar Iran: tabarshenasi-ye jaryanha-ye siyasi va asibshenasi-ye ahزاب dar Iran* (United Kingdom: Mardomak: H&S Media, 1390 [2011]).

⁵⁰⁵ This 100 page document as implied by the title was a critique and analysis of the 'absolute guardianship of the jurist'. *Nehzat-e azadi-ye Iran*, "Tafsil va tahlil-e velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih," (Farvardin 1367 [March-April 1988]).

Though unstated in the document itself, according to Mehdi Nurbakhsh, Ebrahim Yazdi's son-in-law and today a leading member of the Freedom Movement of Iran, the authors were Mehdi Bazargan, Ebrahim Yazdi, Reza Sadr and Bazargan's son, Abdol-Ali Bazargan. Mehdi Nurbakhsh and Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Correspondence with Dr. Mehdi Nurbakhsh," (May 2013).

⁵⁰⁶ For definitions of these designations see, **Chapter 3**.

⁵⁰⁷ Massoumeh Ebtekar and Fred A. Reed, *Takeover in Tehran: The Inside Story of the 1979 U.S. Embassy Capture* (Vancouver Talon Books 2000), p49

Shabestari at length and its relationship to both the Islamist ideologues who were the subject of **Chapter 2** and the governing state orthodoxy.

Excursus on 'Ideology'

I will now outline, drawing on the work of Michael Freeden, a theoretical framework for the analysis of ideologies, as opposed to 'ideology'. In doing such the following sections will endeavour to dissect and problematize Soroush's, amongst others, highly influential conception of 'ideology' propagated in the first half of the 1990s, and the latter's affinity with the new political, economic and ideological orientation of the administration of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani in the aftermath of Ayatollah Khomeini's death. This will permit a more nuanced understanding of the ideological and political milieu in the years which preceded the election of Mohammad Khatami in May 1997.

Both during and since the end of the Cold War, 'ideology' has taken on a raft of pejorative connotations.⁵⁰⁸ Philosophers and sociologists such as Karl R. Popper, Raymond Aron,⁵⁰⁹ Daniel Bell,⁵¹⁰ Edward Shils, and Leszek Kolakowski,⁵¹¹ have all argued, in different ways, that dogmatism, violence and irrationality are a necessary outcome of an 'ideological' cast of mind. 'Ideology' and 'Lysenkoism' became idiomatic expressions synonymous with the distortion of 'truth' and 'objectivity' in the

⁵⁰⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p196; Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p23

⁵⁰⁹ Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, with a new introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield and a foreword by Daniel J. Mahoney and Brian C. Anderson ed. (New Brunswick ; London: Transaction Publishers, 2001), xxiii, 305

⁵¹⁰ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Cambridge, Mass ; London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p393

⁵¹¹ Also see, Leszek Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p232

political and scientific domains respectively, all justified in the name of rigid and infallible dogmas.⁵¹²

This is, of course, merely one highly influential interpretation of ideology and the function it serves, and to a considerable extent a corollary of the intellectual battle waged by dominant elites in the so-called First World against a rival ideological and political bloc ruled by variations of state communism. This view of 'ideology' and 'utopian' political programmes was further consolidated with the Soviet bloc's eventual collapse and thus, so the argument goes communism's proven and self-evident historical failure. This section will by no means attempt to provide a survey of the manifold meanings and complexities of 'ideology' from Karl Marx to Fredric Jameson. It will, however, attempt to adumbrate a number of the debates surrounding the concept, before examining the post-revolutionary religious intellectuals' own critique of 'ideological Islam'.

Taking our cue from Clifford Geertz, one might conclude, the conception of 'ideology' deployed by Iran's new religious intellectuals, is itself ideological.⁵¹³ In this ideological figuration of ideology, it is invariably described as indistinguishable from "bias, oversimplification, emotive language, and adaptation of public prejudice".⁵¹⁴ Karl Popper, the author of the seminal critique and explication of the origins of authoritarianism in Western political thought, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945), and a great source of intellectual inspiration for several of Iran's religious intellectuals,⁵¹⁵ famously argued utopian political projects aim to realize a society that is "wholly good", without conflict or

⁵¹² 'Abdolkarim Soroush, *Naqdi va dar amadi bar tazad-e dialektiki* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye farhang-e seraf, 1373 [1994] (1357 [1978])),p315; *Idi'olozhi-ye sheitani* (Tehran: Seraf, 1373 / 1994 [1359 / 1980]),p23

⁵¹³ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*,p193

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*,p193; Soroush, *Idi'olozhi-ye sheitani*,p18-19

⁵¹⁵ "Mabani-ye te'orik-e liberalism.",p135

trade-off.⁵¹⁶ On this reading of ideology there is a promise of finality, the attainment of an unsurpassable condition in which there is nothing left to correct or improve.⁵¹⁷ Popper in the context of the Second World War and the beginnings of the Cold War, powerfully argued that somewhat paradoxically, utopian ideologies, both implicitly and explicitly, deem violence as necessary, because violence is inseparable from the task of forging earthly paradise.⁵¹⁸ Ideology, or what Popper regularly refers to as “utopian engineering”,⁵¹⁹ provides the blueprint for the realization of the wholly good society, and because this ultimate political objective arrogates to itself a sacred status, the utopian blueprint becomes increasingly difficult to change, for fear of undermining its *raison d'être* and the objective to which it aspires.⁵²⁰

Clifford Geertz has argued the identification of “ideology” with “totalitarian ideology” *tout court*, is misconceived.⁵²¹ Not all ideology is totalizing dogma harbouring a Manichean view of the world, even if such a form of thinking can be said to exist and often prevail amongst the more vituperative of ideologues. In a similar vein, Karl Mannheim had distinguished between “particular” and “total” conceptions of ideology.⁵²² While the *particular* conception of ideology is a reflection of an express group’s interests, which are not necessarily defined in accordance with strictly economic criteria, the *total* conception, in the words of Daniel Bell, is an “all-inclusive system of comprehensive reality...a

⁵¹⁶ Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, p485; *The Poverty of Historicism* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1957), p61

⁵¹⁷ Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial*, p132

⁵¹⁸ Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, p483

⁵¹⁹ *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 2002), p175

⁵²⁰ *Conjectures and Refutations*, p484

⁵²¹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p199

⁵²² Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Worth and Edward Shils (Orlando: Harcourt, 1936), p56-57, 64-70

set of beliefs, infused with passion [which] seeks to transform the whole of a way of life".⁵²³ As will be demonstrated below, Soroush and a number of other religious intellectuals would come to identify 'ideology' as a whole with something approximating the 'total' conception of ideology described by Bell.

Just as the 'ideologised' conception of 'ideology' that emerged in the aftermath of WWII and the advent of the Cold War was at least in part a reaction to the rise of Nazism, Stalinism and the horrors unleashed in the course of the Second World War,⁵²⁴ Iran's generation of post-revolutionary religious intellectuals' understanding of ideology, albeit on a considerably smaller scale, is perhaps best seen as tempered by a particular set of socio-historical circumstances following the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the ensuing eight-year war with the Ba'thist regime of Saddam Hussein.⁵²⁵ As has already been mentioned and as will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections, the *rowshanfekran-e dini* would draw on some of the critiques of 'ideology' and 'ideological thinking' proposed by an earlier generation of Western critics. For instance, not only was Soroush an avid reader of Popper, but he had also read and drawn upon Raymond Aron's seminal *The Opium of the Intellectuals* in combating the ideologues of Iranian Marxism.⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Bell, *The End of Ideology*.,p399-400

⁵²⁴ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.,p200

⁵²⁵ On a side note, the post-revolutionary religious intellectuals' impressions of Iranian Stalinist currents both prior to and following the revolution were also of some import, even if their mentors such as Motahhari and Shari'ati had borrowed a great deal from Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. I say 'rhetoric' because serious theoretical engagement was a rare occurrence. The vulgarity of much Iranian Marxism was often as much at fault, as was the superficial pruning undertaken in the polemics of Iranian Islamists.

⁵²⁶ Soroush, *Idi'olozhi-ye sheitani*.,p116

Analytically speaking, the inquiry of this chapter will be guided by the insights provided by Michael Freeden's important work, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*. We shall focus upon those parts of his analysis most germane to the subject of this chapter. According to Freeden, ideologies are consumed by groups and perform a range of services, including legitimation, socialization, simplification and action-orientation. It is in this way that ideologies abet the function of societies.⁵²⁷ Ideologies "are ubiquitous forms of political thinking, reflecting as they do variegated perceptions, misperceptions, and conceptualizations of existing or imagined social worlds."⁵²⁸ Ideologies ultimately succumb to analysis because they are ideational formations, each with their own distinctive morphology consisting of political concepts.⁵²⁹ Such a conception of ideology is distinct from the one articulated in the course of the Cold War era, which predominantly identified ideology with dogma and closed, abstract "isms".⁵³⁰ According to Freeden, it was only in this limited sense that the 'end of ideology', a phrase coined by Albert Camus in 1946 during an intense period of introspection by the Western European intelligentsia in the immediate aftermath of WWII,⁵³¹ was ever realizable and thereby surpassed. A homologous conception of ideology informs the writings of a number of the new religious intellectuals' critiques of political Islamism and 'Islamic ideology' in the post-revolutionary period. Thus, we might suggest, ideology has not been surpassed and dispensed with in post-revolutionary Iran, while in the agonistic struggle for political and symbolic

⁵²⁷ Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p22

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, p22

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, p48

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, p23

⁵³¹ Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p411

capital new political concepts and ideas have been forged and they have generated much political, intellectual and cultural activity in their name.⁵³²

According to Freeden, both political philosophy and ideology are forms of political thinking.⁵³³ An important difference which separates them is that ideologies mix rational and emotive debate relatively freely, whereas political philosophy claims to be based on disinterested reason, sober reflection, and critical self-consciousness.⁵³⁴ What is crucial to grasp is that while every political idea or utterance is not ideological, articulations of political thinking or speech acts include ideological elements.⁵³⁵ Any one ideology is comprised of particular patterned clusters and configurations of political concepts, which constitute its basic units of meaning.⁵³⁶ Drawing upon and recasting the categories of Saussurean structural linguistics in order to properly comprehend the form/structure or ‘morphology’ of ideologies, Freeden suggests we view the terms of political discourse as signifiers and the political concepts to which they refer as the signified.⁵³⁷ There is thus a direct relationship between political term (word) and political concept (thought). While the morphology of political ideologies is essentially ahistorical (synchronic), the interpretation of political concepts is subject to the vicissitudes of history (diachronic).⁵³⁸ What is interesting about ideologies, according to Freeden, is their effort to “cement” the word-concept relationship i.e. the relationship between political term

⁵³² See **Chapter 1** for details on how I have sought to delineate the features of this political *agon*.

⁵³³ Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p27

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p30,41

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p45

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p50,54

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p50

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p52

qua signifier and political concept *qua* signified.⁵³⁹ The meaning of a concept is determined and thereby a single meaning is fastened to a political term. It is in this respect that ideologies ought to be understood as configurations of *decontested* meanings of political concepts.⁵⁴⁰ In this manner an ideology will affix determinate meanings to its own particular conceptions of justice, liberty, social structure, authority and human nature etc. Ideologies are groupings of decontested political concepts and the core of any ideology is comprised of a cluster of such concepts, since ideologies are not in Freeden's view, exemplified by one central organizing concept.⁵⁴¹ Rather, the reciprocal influences of an ideology's political concepts are determined in accordance with their specific morphological configuration, which establishes their location and relations to one another. The political concepts form a system of internal relations, subject to the influence of bordering concepts and as a result undergo regular permutations.⁵⁴²

Ideologies often assert and impute determinate meanings to complex socio-political phenomena e.g. Islam is political or Islam is democratic, and this comes about largely as a result of ideology's need to straddle the domains of political thought and action.⁵⁴³ They have the power to legitimate a single meaning for a signifier *in lieu* of another, while simultaneously delegitimising other possible meanings. Moreover, because the political sphere is characterized foremost by decision-making and decision-making is itself a means of decontesting other viable courses of action, while the meanings

⁵³⁹ Ibid.,p76

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.,p76

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.,p84

⁵⁴² Ibid.,p82

⁵⁴³ Ibid.,p76

of political concepts are perpetually contested, the end of the political process is to make decisions which prioritize one course of action over another.⁵⁴⁴ In this way, ideologies bridge the gap between contestation and determinacy, allowing for a transition from a plethora of alternatives to certainty and conviction, which is the prerequisite of political decision-making, and forms the basis of political identity.⁵⁴⁵ Freedon's analysis of ideology is thus useful, not merely for the study of the so-called 'ideological Islam', but equally illuminating for our examination of the *rowshanfekran-e dini* and their political allies. In further examining the emergence and critique of 'jurisprudential Islam' and the latter's equation with 'ideology' *tout court* in post-revolutionary politico-religious discourse, I hope to shed light on a significant development in Iranian intellectual life during the 1990s.⁵⁴⁶

Bazargan, 'Ideology' and 'Jurisprudential Islam'

During the 1990s, two prominent figures whose writings are under consideration in this chapter, 'Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari, came to identify *Islam-e feqahati* (jurisprudential Islam) as a species of ideologised religion.⁵⁴⁷ *Islam-e feqahati* is Islam understood strictly within the bounds of Shi'i jurisprudence (*feqh*), thereby subjugating or even eliding the many others dimensions which comprise Islamic civilization as a whole, such as mysticism (*tasavvof*),

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p76

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p76-77

⁵⁴⁶ As will be seen in **Chapter 5** a combination of Freedon's analysis of ideologies and Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic power and capital is illuminating vis-à-vis members of the Islamic *chap's* theorisation of 'reform' and 'legality'.

⁵⁴⁷ 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Idi'olozhi-ye dini va din-e idi'olozhik [Originally published in *Kiyan*, no. 16, Azar-Dei 1373 (November-December 1995)]," in *Modara va modiriyat* (Tehran: Serat, 1387 [2008] [1375 (1996)]), p149; Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari, "'Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?," in *Naqdi bar qara'at-e rasmi az din: bohranha, chaleshha, rah-e halha* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]), p31

philosophy (*hekmāt, falsafeh*), theology (*kalam*), literature and art.⁵⁴⁸ Such an understanding is seen as safeguarding clerical pre-eminence in both the political and spiritual domains, as both the earthly deputies of the Hidden Imam and thus the sole legitimate defenders of the Shi'i faith. Mehdi Bazargan, Iran's first post-revolutionary Prime Minister, and a prolific author on religious topics, in his well-known account of the revolution, *Enqelab-e Iran dar dow harakat* (Iran's Revolution in Two Movements, 1984), claims the term *Islam-e feqahati* gained currency halfway through the second year of the revolution as it rapidly became clear that the Khomeinist clergy were in the process of dominating the still unstable post-revolutionary political order at the expense of all the other political forces comprising the loosely-knit coalition which overthrew the Shah. It was this initial broader-based coalition which Bazargan famously dubbed the "first movement" of the revolution. It should also be noted in passing that Bazargan associates *Islam-e feqahati* with a corresponding interpretation of Islam, *Islam-e motlaq* (absolutist Islam).⁵⁴⁹ This world-view, identified by Bazargan with the revolutionary clergy and their supporters, held that even those intellectuals and thinkers who were devout Muslims immersed in the Quran and Islamic culture, were both "deviant" (*enherafi*) and "eclectic" (*elteqati*) as laypersons who stood outside the ranks of the clergy.⁵⁵⁰ Their 'deviance' from the terms of the debate set by the clergy i.e. the confines of Islamic jurisprudence, was thought dangerous and a serious threat to the revolutionary *rowhaniyat*'s political leadership. Such individuals

⁵⁴⁸ Mostafa Malekian, "Goftari dar bab-e kalam-e jadid," in *Moshtaqi va mahjuri: goftogu dar bab-e farhang va siyasat* (Tehran: Nashr-e negah-e mo'aser, 1385 [2006]), p203,206

⁵⁴⁹ Mehdi Bazargan, *Enqelab-e Iran dar dow harakat* (Tehran: Naraqī, 1363 [1984]), p127

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p127

could not be suffered gladly, and were consequently assured their own ridicule, marginalization and even elimination.

In his assessment of *Islam-e feqahati*, which he also identifies with *maktabi budan* (being doctrinaire) and its ascendancy since the beginning of the revolution, Bazargan quotes Hojjat al-Islam Seyyed Ali Khamenei's report and assessment of the three years which had elapsed since the triumph of the revolution. In his assessment Khamenei, who was then the incumbent president of the Islamic Republic, candidly divides the Revolutionary Council (*shura-ye enqelab*), which was a consultative body of well-established figures approved by Khomeini to help direct and supervise the revolutionary transition, into two groups: 1) Those who argued for the political pre-eminence of *feqahat* or Islamic jurisprudence and, 2) Those who while religious did not believe in Islamic jurisprudence's political supremacy or at least were reluctant to accept such an eventuality.⁵⁵¹ Khamenei then elaborates on his commentary, now referring explicitly to the PRG of which Bazargan was the head: "Not being doctrinaire (*gheir-e maktabi*) does not mean that they [i.e. the Provisional Revolutionary Government] did not accept Islam, perhaps the majority of the members of the Provisional Government were pious and religious, but they did not accept the idea that the basis of the management of society should be based on the jurisprudential rulings of the Quran. They did not believe in Islam as a doctrine (*maktab*) that must manage society."⁵⁵² Having drawn the reader's attention to the incumbent president and future Guardian Jurist's ideological demarcation, Bazargan probes further what it means to reduce

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.,p127

⁵⁵² Ibid.,p127-128

Islam to a doctrine (*maktab*) or ideology, to which all political programmes, goals, and methods must conform. On his reading it is essentially Procrustean and can only understand and order the world through its own limited field of vision. Islam as a doctrine, according to Bazargan, is also characterized by another dimension to which has already been alluded i.e. Islam as identified explicitly with Islamic jurisprudence and the clerical institution, and that the latter armed with the former must rule over law, politics and culture.⁵⁵³

Continuing his elaboration of the doctrinaire outlook which was zealously pursued by the revolutionary clergy, Bazargan argues that it intentionally subordinated “expertise” (*takhasos*) to “doctrine” (*maktab*); a distinction, as will be shown below, which Soroush and Shabestari amongst others would also adopt wholesale in later years. To demonstrate this he quotes a number of statements and speeches by the late Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti (1928-1981), one of the most important members of Khomeini’s inner circle and leader of the Islamic Republic Party. For instance, in a statement on 24 November 1980 (3 Azar 1359) Beheshti candidly stated that “in societies where the divine doctrine (*maktab-e elahi*) determines society’s direction in choosing individuals for jobs and tasks the first question should be their fidelity [to doctrine] and the second question one of expertise”.⁵⁵⁴ In a bid to further illustrate the dogmatism he associates with doctrinaire (*maktabi*) thinking Bazargan also quotes a speech delivered by the late Mohammad-Ali Raja’i on 10 September 1980 (19 Shahrivar 1359), when he was Prime Minister stating, “we say that a doctrinaire revolution

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*,p128-129

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,p130

is one where there exists the guidance of a leader (*rahbar*), who is the most righteous person who can identify the contents of the doctrine (*maktab*). If we accept this revolution and this movement, we must be completely and totally obedient. If someone does not accept this they are not within the bounds of the Imam's line (*khatt-e Imam*)...The problem is as I have said, if someone does not believe in the Imam's leadership of the *ommat*, this person does not accept completely and entirely the ideology (*idi'olozhi*) of this revolution and this person cannot be a teacher of this revolution's ideology."⁵⁵⁵ In this way, Bazargan sought to demonstrate that 'Islamic ideology' in the post-revolutionary climate had not only become a matter of Islam's politicization or the sanctification of the clergy's right to executive power, but also one of *taqlid* or imitation and total, unthinking obedience to Islamic doctrine as defined by the revolution's leader, Ayatollah Khomeini.⁵⁵⁶ Moreover, according to the Ayatollah himself as quoted by Bazargan immediately afterwards, "Being doctrinaire means being Islamic, those who mock the doctrinaire (*maktabi*) mock Islam. If he is a believer [and mocks the doctrine] he is an innate apostate (*mortad-e fetri*) and his wife is illegitimate to him and his property must be given to his child. He himself must also be killed."⁵⁵⁷ From this we might speculate that Bazargan's intention was to draw attention to this very identification, which was ongoing at the time of the book's publication: he, who opposed doctrine, opposed Islam itself, and it was Khomeini who at least in the eyes of his acolytes defined the contents of doctrine and therefore Islam. Ergo, to

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.,p131-132

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.,p132

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.,p132-133

break with the Imam was to break with Islam itself and cast oneself in the role of apostate, whose fate left little to the imagination.

As the former Prime Minister reminded his readers, the dangers of such an outlook whose style of thinking was best exemplified by the slogan, “all those who are not with us, are against us”.⁵⁵⁸ This style of reasoning and thinking had resulted in the stratification of the polity into “insiders” (*khodiha*) and “outsiders” (*gheir-e khodiha*) whereby a privileged few monopolize power at the expense of all those who fall outside the bounds of the *maktab*, and thus the line determined by Khomeini and his disciples.⁵⁵⁹ Though factional infighting has always informed the practical politics of the Islamic Republic, the imagined line separating regime loyalists from its critics and insiders from outsiders has continued to pervade and define Iran’s political geography till this day. Bazargan’s diagnosis describes for his readers the transformation of the revolution from a broad coalition which sought the overthrow of the Shah’s despotic rule (*estebdad*), what he calls the first movement, to a situation whereby executive power found itself increasingly concentrated in the hands of the revolutionary clergy, whose doctrinaire ideology called for their complete monopolization of power to the exclusion of everyone else. This ideology called for the clergy armed with their knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence to manage and order society, all under the wise and discerning leadership of Khomeini. Bazargan dubbed this next phase the “second movement”. At this point in time and while Khomeini was still alive, the Islamic left remained inveterately hostile to such criticisms and viewed the NAI

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,p134

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,p137

with keen suspicion. It wasn't until the early 1990s when a handful of intellectuals who had played an important part in lending ideological legitimacy to the ruling clergy's political takeover, with much circumspection began to articulate criticisms akin to those of Bazargan adumbrated above, while nevertheless continuing to show much reverence for the Imam and his legacy.

Sorush and the Cultural Revolution

The importance of 'Islamic ideology' in the writings of (pre-revolutionary) Bazargan,⁵⁶⁰ Shari'ati, Taleqani, Motahhari and the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran prior to the revolution,⁵⁶¹ and the ongoing significance of the term for the Khomeinist left in the 1980s had led to its emergence as something of a lodestar in the revolutionary establishment's political lexicon.⁵⁶² Indeed, the *Khatt-e Imamiha*, or those who were self-proclaimed followers of the Imam's line on the Islamic left, were also known as the *maktabiha*, the doctrinaire. In the 1980s Sorush had not only been an advocate of 'Islamic

⁵⁶⁰ But even at this early point Bazargan's outlook had an identifiable set of 'liberal' preoccupations e.g. natural rights, democratic governance, respect for the individual. *Be'sat va idi'olozhi* (Mashhad: Tolu', 1345 [1966]), p120-121

⁵⁶¹ Lotfollah Meisami an early member of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran has described in detail how he attended a meeting at the home of Freedom Movement of Iran member, Ali-Asghar Hajj Seyyed Javadi, and even Jalaloddin Farsi, the radical pro-Khomeini ideologue and member of the post-revolutionary Council for Cultural Revolution, in which the latter stressed the imperative for an Islamist 'ideology' to the end of analysing social and political phenomena (p156-158). This need (*niaz*) was taken very seriously by other members of the PMOI such as Taqi Shahram and Torab Haqshenas, both of whom later became Marxist-Leninists and broke with their ancestral faith (p160-162). Lotfollah Meisami, *Az nehzat-e azadi ta mojahedin*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Samadieh, 1383 [2004]).

⁵⁶² The term 'Islamic ideology' has a far longer history and was first used by the political group, the Socialist God-worshippers (*Khodaparastan-e sowsialist*), and their leader Mohammad Nakhshab. It also appeared in the political charter of the NAI in spring 1961 [1340]. Hassan Yusefi-Eshkevari, *Kherad dar ziyafat-e din* (Tehran: Qasideh, 1379 [2000]), p68

ideology',⁵⁶³ but had played a very public role in arguing for its superiority to the 'satanic ideologies' of Marxism, Darwinism, and Freudianism.⁵⁶⁴ He had also been appointed on 13 June 1980 as a member of the Council for Cultural Revolution (*Setad-e enqelab-e farhangi*, henceforth SEF). During this time he was firmly committed to the Islamicisation of the humanities and the purge of Marxist and so-called 'eclectic' (*elteqati*) thought, often a byword for the People's Mojahedin,⁵⁶⁵ from university campuses. Khomeini's decree appointing Soroush along with six other individuals, a number of whom were well-known members of the Islamic Republic Party, called for the council "to prepare programmes in different fields, to devise educational and cultural policies for the universities on the basis of Islamic culture".⁵⁶⁶

In an interview with the journal *Daneshgah-e enqelab* (University of the Revolution), the Council for Cultural Revolution's official periodical, published in the autumn of 1981, Soroush distinguished the "Islamic university" from the "wicked university" (*daneshgah-e palid*).⁵⁶⁷ The council was appointed by Khomeini in order to ensure Islamist hegemony was consolidated in one of the few places which had been a bastion of support for various leftist groups and the People's Mojahedin, but also a home

⁵⁶³ Yusefi-Eshkevari quotes a statement by Soroush made on 31 Shahrivar 1359 [22 September 1980] in the newspaper *Keyhan* defining ideology in terms Soroush would over a decade later in his essay *Farbehtar az idi'olozhi* attribute to Shari'ati. This is hardly a surprise given the enthusiasm the young Soroush harboured for Shari'ati. *Ibid.*,p80

⁵⁶⁴ Soroush, *Idi'olozhi-ye sheitani*,p40

⁵⁶⁵ Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Hashemi, *'Obur az bohran*.,p106

⁵⁶⁶ Reproduced in Shahrzad Mojab, "The State and University: The "Islamic Cultural Revolution" in the Institutions of Higher Education of Iran, 1980-87" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991),p287

⁵⁶⁷ 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Setad-e enqelab-e farhangi az aghaz ta kanun: mosahebeh ba doktor 'Abdolkarim Soroush," *Daneshgah-e enqelab*, no. 4 (Mehr 1360 [September-October 1981]),p8

for secular-minded professors seen as ambivalent and lacking in commitment to the new order.⁵⁶⁸

Because of issues of space it's not possible to address the very complex issue of the Cultural Revolution, but for now it should suffice to note Soroush accepted Khomeini's appointment and the remit of the SEF set out in the latter's ruling, and following his appointment concurred with the Imam that "our universities are greatly behind the revolution".⁵⁶⁹ Those professors who were "committed" would support the activities of the council, while those professors who proved recalcitrant "have moved contrary to the direction of this revolution".⁵⁷⁰

Soroush and other members of the council also met with Khomeini and sought out his support in securing a greater role for the clergy and seminaries in the overhaul of the humanities and the Islamicisation of the "university environment" (*faza-ye daneshgah*).⁵⁷¹ By Soroush's own contemporary account, high level members of the clergy, including even the clerical members on the council, such as Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad-Javad Bahonar (a member of the Revolutionary Council and Prime Minister until his death in 1981) and Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad-Mehdi Rabbani-Amlashi (later Chief

⁵⁶⁸ Nasser Katouzian, *Az koja amadeh'am, amadanam bahr-e cheh bud? zendegi-ye man* (Tehran: Sherkat-e sahami-ye enteshar, 1385 [2006]), p241; Nasser Mohajer, "Enqelab-e farhangi sal-e 1359," in *Gozir-e nagozir: seh revayat-e gozir az jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran*, ed. Mihan Rusta, et al. (Koln: Noqteh, 1387 [2008]), p228

The new council which was made of up seven individuals: 'Abdolkarim Soroush, Shams Al-e Ahmad (brother of Jalal), Jaleddin Farsi, Ali Shari'atmadari, Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad-Javad Bahonar, Hassan Habibi, and Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad-Mehdi Rabbani-Amlashi.

⁵⁶⁹ Soroush, "Setad-e enqelab-e farhangi az aghaz ta kanun.", p6

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p6

⁵⁷¹ "We tried to use the clergy in particular in the committees for the humanities and the committees that are relevant to the Islamicisation of the university environment". *Ibid.*, p6

Such statements clearly show that Soroush and the Council for Cultural Revolution's remit was far greater than what he has been prepared to admit in interviews in the 2000s, where he insists that the Council was established merely to "reopen the universities". "Pasokh-e Soroush beh montaqedanesh dar bareh-ye enqelab-e farhangi: dorosti va doroshti," *E'temad-e melli* 20/04/1386 [11 July 2007], p11

Prosecutor and member of the Guardian Council, until his assassination in July 1985), were often preoccupied with other issues.⁵⁷² Khomeini suggested Soroush and other members of the SEF contact Ayatollahs Meshkini and Montazeri, to whom they addressed a letter requesting guidance. Ayatollahs Mohammad Beheshti and Musavi-Ardebili were also consulted.⁵⁷³ In another meeting on 4 October 1983 [12 Mehr 1362] with Ayatollah Khomeini at his residence in Jamaran, at which Soroush was present, along with the incumbent Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Musavi and Mohammad Khatami, both of whom had been added as members of the council, the *vali-ye faqih* told the council members, “attention must be heeded after the reopening [of the universities], to never let deviant individuals corrupt our youth with the injection of deviant matters. We greatly need people for the supervision of this matter”.⁵⁷⁴

On Soroush’s 1981 account, Hojjat al-Islam Javadi-Amoli actively participated in discussions with the committee relating to the philosophy of the humanities,⁵⁷⁵ in addition to the many clerics from Tehran and Qom who were involved in the committee pertaining to the Islamicisation of the universities.⁵⁷⁶ Moreover, Soroush states, “in truth all university resources had been put in the control of the Council for Cultural Revolution”, which subsequently founded the so-called University Jihad (*Jihad-e daneshgahi*), which acted as “our arm and was our child”, and which had an active role in

⁵⁷² "Setad-e enqelab-e farhangi az aghaz ta kanun.",p6

⁵⁷³ Ibid.,p59

⁵⁷⁴ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, 21 vols., vol. 18 (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1378 [1999]),p166

⁵⁷⁵ Soroush, "Setad-e enqelab-e farhangi az aghaz ta kanun.",p7

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.,p7

monitoring and badgering faculty members at the universities.⁵⁷⁷ The aim of the aforementioned committees by Soroush's own admission was "the production and genesis of the new Islamic humanities".⁵⁷⁸ Moreover, he states in plain contradiction to many of his later interviews on the issue of the Cultural Revolution that, "if we cannot reach a satisfactory and palatable programme whereby we feel satisfied by its Islamicness (*eslami budani-ye an*) we prefer that those disciplines remain closed and remain at a standstill until we, God willing, reach a desirable result".⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.,p8

Nasser Katouzian, a prominent law professor at the University of Tehran, whom was purged in the course of the Cultural Revolution, has stated in his memoir that the University Jihad assigned students to scrutinise the salaries of faculty members and sign-off on their salaries. The head of the faculty managed to resist the demands of the University Jihad on this issue. Katouzian, *Az koja amadeh'am, amadanam bahr-e cheh bud? zendegi-ye man.*,p241

Katouzian's description has also been confirmed to the author by Professor Hossein Bashiriyeh, who had been newly appointed to the University of Tehran in 1983, following the re-opening of the universities. He states that the *Jihad-e daneshgahi* was responsible for carrying out the rules and regulations set by the Council for Cultural Revolution. Hossein Bashiriyeh and Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Professor Hossein Bashiriyeh," (1 June 2013).

A Baha'i-born leftist English literature faculty member, Ha'ideh Dar-agahi, has also claimed that Soroush, following a meeting of the Jihad for Cultural Revolution with the faculty at the University of Tehran expressed to her through one of his guards (*pasdar*) that she should not return to the university "otherwise it's not clear what they will do with her". The next day she was formally dismissed. Ha'ideh Dar-agahi, "'An keh beh koshtan-e cheragh amadeh bud'," in *Gozir-e nagozir: seh revayat-e gozir az jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran*, ed. Mihan Rusta, et al. (Koln: Noqteh, 1387 [2008]),p70

⁵⁷⁸ Soroush, "Setad-e enqelab-e farhangi az aghaz ta kanun.",p57

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.,p59

Daneshgah-e enqelab published an article by Soroush in July-August 1981 (Mordad 1360) in which he theorised the Islamicisation of the humanities, which itself is a transcript of a speech delivered at Tehran University on the anniversary of the Council for Cultural Revolution's establishment during June 1981. A version of the article was later printed in Soroush's book *Tafarroj-e son'*, which was first published in 1987 [1366], three years after Soroush's exit from the SEF. The book has been reissued a number of times. The reprint of 2000 (1379) cites the speech delivered on 16 June 1981 [26 Khordad 1360]. The two articles are not identical however, and it seems that the original published in *Daneshgah-e enqelab* has been altered in the reprinted version appearing in *Tafarroj-e son'*. For example, the sentence where Soroush declares "if someone thinks that "thought" is subject to geography or an historical era, he has not recognised thought", does not appear anywhere in the original article published by *Daneshgah-e enqelab*. See, "'Olum-e ensani dar nezam-e daneshgahi," in *Tafarroj-e son'*:

It is difficult to pin down when Soroush finally broke with the drive to Islamicise the humanities in Iran's universities, but he had officially ceased to be a member of the Council for Cultural Revolution in 1984, even if the exact circumstances of his exit remain obscure.⁵⁸⁰ By the late eighties and early nineties Soroush had decisively broken with the convictions which led him to accept Khomeini's appointment as a founding member of the SEF. In his essay 'Loftier than Ideology' (*Farbehtar az idi'olozhi*), published in *Kiyan* in August-September 1993 (Shahrivar 1372), he offered his first explicit critique of 'Islamic ideology'.⁵⁸¹ Previous essays, above all *Qabz va bast-e te'orik-e shari'at* (The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the *Shari'a*) had already demonstrated Soroush's firm break

goftarha'i dar akhlaq va san'at va 'elm-e ensani (Tehran: Serat, 1379 [2000]), p191 and compare with "'Olum-e ensani dar nezam-e daneshgahi," *Daneshgah-e enqelab*, no. 2 (Mordad 1360 [July / August 1981]), p10

In *Tafarroj-e son'* only the speech at the University of Tehran is mentioned. *Daneshgah-e enqelab* published the transcript of the speech some two months after the speech was first delivered. It remains unclear whether the original speech was altered in the later version, albeit attributed to 1981, and published in 1987 [reprinted in 2000]. For the moment we can state confidently that the version of the essay published in 1987 [2000] differs at a number of significant points from the 1981 publication in *Daneshgah-e enqelab*. A number of statements which convey a more sceptical attitude to the Islamicisation of the humanities do not appear in the 1981 essay. It is also worthy of note, that this essay was published prior to the above cited interview in which Soroush unambiguously declared that any discipline in the universities which cannot be satisfactorily Islamicised will remain closed. In fairness it should be added that Soroush does contend that the humanities should not be simply dismissed without consideration because of their origin in either the East or West. It is necessary, however, first and foremost to prevent "Muslim youth and the students of those sciences [i.e. human sciences] departing from the road of guidance (*jadeh-ye hedayat*)". He then pointedly adds, "if the society is Islamic, the university must be Islamic", while at the same time arguing that the humanities will bear the "colour and scent" of the land of their provenance. *Ibid.*, p11

The version published in 2000 also differs here and has been noticeably reworked. "'Olum-e ensani dar nezam-e daneshgahi," p192-193; "'Olum-e ensani dar nezam-e daneshgahi," p11

⁵⁸⁰ For one of the best analysis of Soroush's role in the Cultural Revolution see, Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform.*, p105-129. Ghamari-Tabrizi is effective in breaking down Soroush's total lack of compunction and dismissiveness vis-à-vis his role in the Cultural Revolution, and failure to come to terms with the significance of his lending ideological legitimacy towards the Islamicisation of the universities and the revolutionary clergy of the IRP against all other political and ideological competitors.

⁵⁸¹ These writings by Soroush are addressed in detail below.

with several ideas which had enjoyed immense influence amongst Islamists since the early 1960s. *Farbehtar az idi'olozhi* while building on the arguments of *Qabz va bast* was in many ways distinct because of its explicit political content and attack on 'ideology', mediated through a highly ambivalent reading of Shari'ati. Soroush sought to pull apart two concepts which had been conjoined in Iran's political-religious nomenclature for over two decades i.e. 'Islam' and 'ideology', causing quite a stir and provoking several replies and rebuttals within the Kiyani circle and beyond.⁵⁸²

The essay lacks systematic exposition, meanders, and is at times repetitive. It moves from a critique of Shari'ati, to an attack on the notion of ideology as deployed in totalitarian states such as the Soviet Union. The essay then continues by making a number of criticisms of 'ideology' as he conceives it, while Shari'ati constantly lingers in the background. He then finally argues why 'ideology' and 'religion' (*din*) are mutually exclusive phenomena, and cannot be synthesized without hazardous consequences. I will now analyse some of the arguments presented therein in greater depth.

⁵⁸² In a notable essay published in *Kiyani* Hajjarian makes the case that ideologies have the capacity to reconstruct traditions and provide order for developing societies undergoing an unsettling period of dislocation. Sa'id Hajjarian, "Naqdi bar nazariyeh-ye "Farbehtar az idi'olozhi" [Originally published in *Kiyani*, no. 15, Mehr-Aban 1372 (September-October 1993)]," in *Az Shahed-e qodsi ta shahed-e bazari : 'orfi shodan-e din dar sepehr-e siyasat* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1380 [2001]), p157

Another critical reaction was that of Hojjat al-Islam Hassan Yusefi-Eshkevari, who was generally closer to individuals in the NAI and the religious-nationalists around *Iran-e farda*, and keen to stress that the interpretations of 'religion' and 'ideology' given by Soroush, were strictly idiosyncratic to Soroush himself. He argued that there was such a thing as "social Islam" (*Islam-e ejtema'i*) and it had been essential to the projects of Muslim reformers since at least the 19th century that had revived "the forgotten dimensions of religion" (79). He also contends that Soroush doesn't have a clear or adequate conception of ideology, and that he fails to realise that 'ideology' is not essentially good or bad. It is the content of the ideology which can either promote 'reason' or 'superstition'. There are different kinds of ideology, not one "absolute ideology" (81). Yusefi-Eshkevari, *Kherad dar ziyafat-e din*.

From the Repudiation of 'Satanic Ideology' to the Rejection of 'Ideology'

Under the influence of Popper, but also a whole raft of Western critiques of Soviet communism, which had been the intellectual grist to the mill of the Cold War *Kulturkampf* in the course of the 1950s and 60s, Soroush attributes a slew of features to what he calls 'ideology'. The most important features of his conception are enumerated and analysed below.

- 1) **Ideology justifies and serves power.** Ironically citing Marx, Soroush avers that ideology serves the function of providing legitimacy to the ruling powers and assuages contradictions at the objective level of society and subjective level of the consciousness of individuals.

- 2) **Ideology is unfalsifiable (*ebtalnapazir*).** The 'falsifiability' of testable hypotheses was Popper's chief criterion for any theory aspiring to the status of science.⁵⁸³ Many Marxists sought to portray historical materialism as 'scientific', and following suit, Shari'ati on occasion also aspired rather superficially to do the same for 'Islamic ideology'. He never offered any predictions on the basis of postulated 'historical laws', however. Soroush's eagerness to adapt Popper's critique of historicism and teleology often led him to build straw-men and targets that were incongruous simulacra of the actual objects of his criticism. More vaguely, what he attempts to argue is that ideology is not 'knowledge' but rather a form of sophistry, which is motivated by interests and power as opposed to reasons and truth.⁵⁸⁴ How ideology might mask material interests while proving thoroughly dogmatic and incapable of

⁵⁸³ 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Idi'olozhi chist?," in *Farbehtar az idi'olozhi* (Tehran: Serat, 1372 [1993]), p80

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p80-81

versatility isn't dwelled upon, and Soroush subsequently forgoes consideration of the process whereby economic and political interests might evolve and change, and the ideology of the group or class in question leavens and adapts over time. Instead he proclaims that 'ideology' only takes the form of argument, but "the essence of ideology is a collection of ordinances (*ahkam*), which logically and empirically cannot be proven or falsified".⁵⁸⁵ Here Soroush's conception of 'ideology' mirrors his representation of *feqh* as little more than a set of rigid and inert rules.

3) **Ideology is monolithic.** While for Shari'ati ideology and ideologisation were necessary because the former acted as a vehicle for ideals and values, and more crucially, guided praxis in the course of the individual's political and ethical struggle against oppression in the mundane world.⁵⁸⁶ For Soroush in the early 1990s, ideology's primary definition was that of an all-encompassing, monolithic and impenetrable belief system. It determines one's attitude towards everything: philosophy, history, anthropology, as well as one's vision of the nature and constitution of the ideal society and ideal human being.⁵⁸⁷ It was by definition utopian and total.

4) **Ideology is a weapon and dependent on an enemy for its existence.** Ideology acts as a weapon of war in order to induce and galvanise action against a clearly defined enemy. Soroush also claims that 'ideology', as he narrowly defines it, is invariably transient because it defines itself in relation to its

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.,p82

⁵⁸⁶ "Farbehtar az idi'olozhi," in *Farbehtar az idi'olozhi* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye farhangi-e Serat, 1372 [1993]),,p104

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.,p105

perceived foe, and as soon as the foe in question is defeated, the ideology loses its efficacy.⁵⁸⁸ He does not state such directly, but he seems to imply the well-known if rather hackneyed argument that 'ideological regimes' demand a permanent enemy in order to stave off disintegration.⁵⁸⁹ Ideology also perforce cultivates hatred (*nefrat-varzi*) of this enemy in order to guarantee the unity of its own adherents,⁵⁹⁰ and shows itself fully prepared to trample moral principles under foot for the realisation of its paramount objectives.⁵⁹¹

- 5) **Ideology must be rigid and dogmatic**, Soroush argues, in order to perform its role as a weapon of ideological-political struggle. As a result it will inevitably have a selective conception of religion, which completely elides any and all ambivalence and ambiguity.⁵⁹² The people are expected to merely imitate and engage in *taqlid*.⁵⁹³ In opposition to *taqlid* he posits "free reasoning", which acts in diametric opposition to 'ideology',⁵⁹⁴ since "untested certainties" are the "worst enemy" of rationality.⁵⁹⁵ While the quest for certainty and knowledge is an important task for humankind, belief in one's absolute certainty crowds out the possibility of rational and critical thinking. Because of a dearth of critical reflexivity, ideological societies are destined to stagnate. In the final analysis,

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*,p107

⁵⁸⁹ This view obviously ignores the extent to which Western liberal democracies have also invoked enemies and evil empires in order to justify and defend controversial foreign and domestic policies.

⁵⁹⁰ Soroush, "Farbehtar az idi'olozhi.",p136

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*,p150-151

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*,p107

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*,p132

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,p140

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,p145

Sorush concludes, “no ideology is reformable. The only path for the reform of an ideology is its execution (*e'dam*)”.⁵⁹⁶ Hardly an inconsequential statement given that Sorush is well aware that many in the Islamic Republic see the *nezam* as the embodiment of ‘Islamic ideology’.

- 6) **Ideology demands permanent upheaval.** Sorush contends that ideology for Shari'ati was a call for movement (*nehzat*) in contradistinction to the institutionalisation / establishment (*esteqrar*) of a new *status quo*. The upshot of ideology’s clarion call for a perpetual state of upheaval and revolution, he insists, was stagnation, rather than a flourishing civilisation. He paraphrases Shari'ati’s well-known dictum that when the Shi'i were a blameless and oppressed (*mazlum*) minority on the margins of power, Shi'ism acted as a great source of dynamic resistance and remained faithful to the spirit of Karbala and Imam Hossein’s martyrdom. The dilemma emerges when the struggle is victorious, the enemy vanquished and a new order established. As Shari'ati himself argued with much flair, once in power Shi'ism becomes a torpid and reactionary force for conservatism. To avoid such an eventuality he prescribed a form of popular dictatorship by a conscientious and committed vanguard of intellectuals modelled on the example already set by Marxism-Leninism. He named this political arrangement, as explicated in **Chapter 2**, ‘guided democracy’.

The dilemma as Sorush sees it is that “permanent revolution” (*enqelab-e modavem*) is untenable in the long-term and eventually a new political order must be founded. But according to his hypostatized understanding of ‘ideology’, it fails to think through a future state beyond ‘movement’

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.,p147

and thus advocates the unceasing preponderance of revolution. In making this argument, Soroush seems to have contorted the position of Shari'ati as well as revolutionary leftists like Leon Trotsky who lost the internal battle with Stalin to succeed Lenin in part as a result of his desire to export socialism beyond Russia's borders. Without wishing to lionise Trotsky, who was himself complicit in Bolshevik authoritarianism prior to Lenin's death and subsequent imposed exile,⁵⁹⁷ it's fair to say that Soroush ignores the historical and socio-economic factors which led to the Stalinisation of the Soviet system and thus is at a loss in trying to explain how 'permanent revolution' relates to the USSR's actual historical trajectory of development, if it does at all. Instead, he simply asserts that it is somehow intrinsic to 'ideology' itself. In fact Trotsky, the main advocate of so-called 'permanent revolution', not unproblematically, had accused Stalin of purveying a brand of 'Thermidorianism', claiming the latter had abducted the workers' state and deprived it of its revolutionary verve.⁵⁹⁸ Similarly, given that Shari'ati expressly wished to avoid the eventuality of just such a rigid, languid socio-political system by invoking the notion of 'permanent revolution' it isn't immediately obvious why it necessitates the advent of stagnation and lethargy.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ Even in exile Trotsky had few scruples about his role in the repression of the Mensheviks and the Kronstadt Revolt both of which preceded his political defeat and ejection from the Soviet Union. Rather than repudiate the authoritarianism of the Bolshevik Party itself, he merely rejected Stalin as a legitimate representative of 'true Bolshevism' and the proletariat. Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders, The Golden Age, The Breakdown*, trans. P.S. Falla (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p943-944

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p940

Kolakowski does however show how Trotsky, particularly in his pamphlet *Their Morals and Ours* essentially reduces all moral values and criteria into a function of the class struggle. *Ibid.*, p946

⁵⁹⁹ Soroush, "Farbehtar az idi'olozhi.", p115

As intimated above, Soroush declaims that 'ideology' has no programme or plan after the denouement of conflict. "[Ideology] only thinks of roaring, slashing and warring and it does not think that the period of war will one day come to an end".⁶⁰⁰ In this caricature, 'ideology', battle-hardened by its blood-lust gives rise perforce to a battle-worn and inflexible order which cannot help but turn its insatiable appetite for destruction inward and eviscerate the post-bellum polity. Unfortunately recourse to such an abstract, hypostatised conception of 'ideology' does very little to explain what actually transpired in the Soviet Union or any other totalitarian regime. A more appropriate starting point, amongst several others, might have been to focus on the nature of the Soviet state bureaucracy and its highly centralised structures of decision-making nascent in the 'democratic centralism' of the Bolshevik vanguard itself, for which there is no exact equivalent in the Iranian state. Because his analysis is fixated on the discursive figure of 'ideology' as an almost mono-causal explicator of the failures of 'revolutionary' regimes he overlooks this issue as well as the far larger one of rapid state-led modernisation under conditions of underdevelopment and its implications for democracy.⁶⁰¹

Through his particular conceptualisation of 'ideology', and reading of Shari'ati, an essentially polemical allegory, however, is not hard to espy. Prior to the revolution the Islamic movement had been an oppressed, dynamic fount of righteous action and moral probity, fighting against an idolatrous dictatorship. Upon assuming power at the helm of an Islamic state, it began to take on a new guise and failed to dispense with the combative rigidity which had formerly acted as a source of

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.,p115

⁶⁰¹ Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*.,p941

strength, and whose unyielding intransigence had been so important for its political success. Citing Trotsky's desire to export communist revolution on a global scale, he makes no direct mention of the Islamic Republic's own efforts in the course of the 1980s to export its revolution throughout regional states, particularly those with significant Shi'i minorities such as Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. One can only assume that his audience, some of whom had been directly involved and advocated such 'Islamist internationalism' would quite readily make the connection. Also, given that President Rafsanjani had begun to dispense with such a foreign policy orientation and progressively mend relations with Saudi Arabia and other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Soroush's sentiments were very much in keeping with the government's own shift in policy.

- 7) **Ideology requires an "official class" of interpreters.** Soroush also argues just as Shabestari would a couple of years later, and from a different philosophical vantage point, that 'ideology' requires "a leader or determinate class of official interpreters (*mofaseran-e rasmi*)".⁶⁰² It needs this class to officiate and guide praxis which is immobilised by a plurality of different views and opinions. The official interpretation's role is to prevent any such eventuality and thereby annul any prospect of "social discord".⁶⁰³ Using the term very liberally, he states that the "clergy"⁶⁰⁴ (*rowhaniyat*) and its "official reading" are fundamentally "one-dimensional" and "inflexible".⁶⁰⁵ Soroush, Akbar Ganji and

⁶⁰² Soroush, "Farbehtar az idi'olozhi.",p116

⁶⁰³ Ibid.,p117

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.,p137

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.,p122

numerous other religious intellectuals took their cue from a raft of literature penned by repentant communists and critically-minded dissidents in Eastern Europe such as the Yugoslav Milovan Djilas, whose book *The New Class* (1957) provoked a sensation when it argued that the communist party elites had established a corrupt bureaucracy and lived a luxurious and privileged lifestyle, despite their pretensions to proletarian solidarity.⁶⁰⁶

While for Djilas the communist party cadres and bureaucrats of Eastern Europe and the USSR turned out to be a new exploitative class having accrued great power through their role in the country's industrialisation, despite not formally owning the means of production,⁶⁰⁷ Soroush and Ganji saw the "official class" as first and foremost concerned with assuring its political supremacy through its monopoly on truth and the prerogative to define Islam and determine the nature of its obligatory ordinances. It was thus primarily a discursive imperium with which they were concerned. Djilas had seen the 'new class' as 'totalitarian' in nature, and committed to exclude all rival power centres and constantly augment its power throughout society. Both Soroush and Ganji would concur and apply this description to their ideological foes on the traditional right, while remaining reticent vis-à-vis Iran's lack of anything like a central-bureaucratic party of the likes which had existed in the Soviet

⁶⁰⁶ Akbar Ganji, "Din-e ensani, sowsialism-e ensani: negahi beh tajrobeh-ye Nagi, Dubchek, Gorbachof va Khatami," in *Tallaqi-ye fashisti az din va hokumat: asibshenasi-ye gozar beh dowlat-e demokratik-e towse'eh-gara* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]), p325

Shari'ati had made a comparable argument prior to the revolution in his own critique of Marxism. Asef Bayat, "Shari'ati and Marx: A Critique of an "Islamic" Critique of Marxism," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (1990), p25

⁶⁰⁷ Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (San Diego; New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985 [1957]), p45

Union or Nazi Germany.⁶⁰⁸ In fact, any such hope had been decisively flouted with the effective dissolution of the Islamic Republic Party in June 1987. Their appraisal, in particular that of Soroush, tends to latch onto the ‘clergy’, a term regularly employed by him to refer to a determinate institution i.e. the Iranian Shi'ite hierocracy occupying the worlds of political and religious administrative authority. He especially tends to stress, building upon some of Motahhari’s pre-revolutionary writings regarding the potentially negative repercussions of the clergy’s financial dependency on the “plebs” (*avam*),⁶⁰⁹ that “reaching power by means of religion is no different than attaining wealth by means of religion”.⁶¹⁰ In both cases the freedom of religious thought is hampered and impugned.

The use of the term *tamamtkhah* or totalitarian and also *fashist* (fascist) was increasingly deployed by religious intellectuals, the Khomeinist left and those sympathetic to their cause in the mid-1990s. This was unsurprising given their heavy debt to Western theorists of ‘totalitarianism’, whose chief case studies in the 1950s and 60s were invariably Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. In truth, it was used to designate domestic political forces with an authoritarian outlook, which were prepared to

⁶⁰⁸ The Islamic Republic shares many of the characteristics of a totalitarian regime as classically enumerated by Juan J. Linz. Crucially, it doesn’t have a single mass party, nor does it have a single ideology. Instead it has a highly fragmented and internally contested discourse and canon revolving around the person of Khomeini and the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. Three decades after the state’s founding there are also a whole host of vested institutional interests, in addition to the more traditional familial and clerical networks of the past. It does however possess mobilisation organisations, concentrated power in an individual and his collaborators and arguably cannot be dislodged by institutionalised, peaceful means. This would exclude the practice of civil disobedience. Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner 2000), p67

⁶⁰⁹ It should be noted that Motahhari even in his famous essay *Moshkel-e asasi dar sazman-e rowhaniyat* (The Fundamental Problem in the Organisation of the Clergy) still referred to the clergy as “the sacred institution”. Morteza Motahhari, "Moshkel-e asasi dar sazman-e rowhaniyat " in *Bahsi dar bareh-ye marja'iyat va rowhaniyat* (Tehran: Sahami, 1962), p165

⁶¹⁰ 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Horiyyat va rowhaniyat," in *Modara va modiriyat* (Tehran: Serat, 1385 [2006]), p45

use violence and the threat of violence against real and imagined adversaries. It probably would not, despite noteworthy similarities, qualify as ‘fascism’ in the light of contemporary research, and the palpable absence of the key ingredient of palingenetic ultra-nationalism.⁶¹¹

- 8) **Ideology calls for an unrealisable holistic transformation of state and society.** Soroush adapts Popper’s arguments in *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957), which objected to holistic social engineering, but also Friedrich Hayek’s critique in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), which viewed centralised socio-economic planning as paving the way for fascism and totalitarianism. No single planner could ever have

⁶¹¹ See for instance, Roger Griffin, *A Fascist Century: Essays by Roger Griffin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008),.xii

This issue is complicated on a number of counts. While not a ‘nationalist’ regime *per se*, given the presence of transnational and internationalist Islamist and Shi’i solidarities, there was certainly a sense in which the discourse surrounding the ‘Islamic Revolution’ and ‘Islamic state’ sought to build a new political order following the ‘destruction’ of what was perceived as the ‘dependent’ and ‘degenerate’ Pahlavi monarchy. The presence of authoritarian ideology and committed ideological cadres, para-militarism, concerted state propaganda, a centralised economy, and mass mobilisation in the post-revolutionary state’s first decade, lent themselves to analysis in terms of the totalitarian model. Ervand Abrahamian famously characterised ‘Khomeinism’ as a third-world authoritarian-populist ideology. Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1993),.Chapter 1

The issue however is that Soroush and Ganji are using ‘fascism’ in the 1990s, some years after Khomeini had passed, and while continuing, at least publicly, to regard the latter with much reverence. Soroush uses it directly against ideological adversaries such as Mesbah-Yazdi. 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Jaryan-e Mesbah ya'ni fashism," *Baztab-e andisheh* No. 80(1384/11/10 [30 January 2006]).

During the second half of the 1990s, Ganji used it often to designate ‘rogue elements’ in Iran’s intelligence services, ‘pressure groups’ (*goruha-ye feshar*) which carried out violence against intellectuals, students and dissidents, the ‘new left’ (based on the *'Asr-e ma* typology, see **Chapter 3**) which has since been recast as Iran’s own brand of ‘neo-conservatism’, associated with individuals such as Mesbah-Yazdi. Akbar Ganji, "Shari'ati va fashism: avalin fashist sheitan ast [Originally published in *Kiyan*, no. 39, Azar-Dei 1376.]," in *Tallaqi-ye fashisti az din va hokumat: asibshenasi-ye gozar beh dowlat demokratik-e towse'eh gara* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]),.p189

In fairness to Ganji upon being questioned he does distinguish between “fascist government” and “fascist movement”. He argues, somewhat contradictorily, that in Iran the “fascist movement” has no social base and has been rejected by the Iranian electorate. "Porsesh va pasokh," in *Tallaqi-e fashisti az din va hokumat: asibshenasi-ye gozar beh dowlat-e demokratik-e towse'eh gara* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]),.p215

sufficient knowledge about the actual processes of society to rationally reorder it.⁶¹² Ideology, according to Soroush, with its singular and inflexible programme is fundamentally misguided in believing it can achieve its goal, since the sheer volume of information militates against any possibility of the holistic transformation of society.⁶¹³ Similar arguments would become the cornerstone of neoliberal ideology from the late 1970s onwards.⁶¹⁴

The analogy drawn, however, once again proves somewhat strained given that a considerable swathe of the IRI elite, namely the Society of Combatant Clergy, Society of Qom Seminary Teachers, and the Islamic Coalition Society were either directly linked to the bazaar and mercantile class or considered it a key base of politico-economic support. Statist-populist policies had in fact been pursued by the Islamic left and as mentioned in **Chapter 3** opposed by the ‘traditional right’. Moreover, Rafsanjani and his allies had managed to leave their mark on the First Five-Year Plan which was passed by the Majles in January 1990, and called for privatization, foreign loans and private investment from abroad to revive the flagging economy. It thus bore little resemblance to anything like the command economies found in the USSR.⁶¹⁵

While this comparison and series of analogies were often short on nuance or parity with the complexities and composition of the Islamic Republic elite and political structure, it served a useful purpose. It was employed by critical religious intellectuals, the Khomeinist left and its sympathisers

⁶¹² Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*, Kindle ed. (London: Profile Books, 2011), p281; Loc-4440-of-12604

⁶¹³ Soroush, "Farbehtar az idi'olozhi.", p133

⁶¹⁴ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p21

⁶¹⁵ Pesaran, *Iran's Stuggle for Economic Independence*, p74-75

to establish a vivid and emotive connection and chain of intimations between the western social scientific discourse on Soviet totalitarianism and fascism and the traditional right, and implicitly the incumbent *vali-ye faqih* and his office, even if names were rarely named.⁶¹⁶ They were not prepared to extend it to the regime or its past in its entirety, or the events of the 1980s, and restricted its appellation to those political actors possessing both official and unofficial links to state institutions and who were directly hostile to their political and intellectual activities.

On another level, the issue of the 'official class' seems to point to a more general issue which was rather straightforward: a critique of dogmatic thinking and worldviews which assert their own rectitude to the complete exclusion of others. To this extent, Soroush, Mojtabeh-Shabestari and the Khomeinist left, specifically the Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, had the traditional and radical Islamic right in mind, when formulating their deep reservations vis-à-vis what they perceived as its inveterate hostility to any alternative views which might challenge its dominance. This is also supported by Soroush's declamation in the course of the essay: "It is our belief this depiction is not imaginary, but an issue in our time and in our homeland which has had and has many examples".⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁶ Ganji would dub 'fascist' the *Ansar-e Hezbollah* and their associated publications such as *Yalasarat* and *Shalamcheh*, the latter being edited by Mas'ud Dehnamki, a once infamous 'club wielder' turned film director, *Keyhan* newspaper, as well as the conservative monthly *Sobh*, which he accused of advocating a "fascist reading of religion". Ganji, "Porsesh va pasokh.", p216

⁶¹⁷ Soroush, "Farbehtar az idi'olozhi.", p121

The Mutual Exclusivity of Ideology and Religion

Sorush wants to preserve what he believes to be religion's "mystery" (*raz-alud*), "wonderment" (*heyrat-afkan*) and elusive ethereal quality.⁶¹⁸ This would appear to assuage, if not fundamentally deny the prospect of any individual or class of individuals' declaring an exclusive monopoly on the determination of its truth content. Religion as he sees it is not "ideologisable" (*id'iolozhi shodani*) and Islam was never offered in a specific Procrustean mould.⁶¹⁹ In his first highly influential series of essays on the 'expansion and contraction of the *shari'a*', Sorush sought to essentially de-world religion, claiming for it a noumenal existence human understanding could never fully apprehend. This haphazard filleting of Kant, and the writings of the late British theologian, John Hick (1922-2012), on the one hand was combined with a superficial rendering of the semantic holism of the French philosopher of science Pierre Duhem (1861-1916) and American philosopher Willard van Orman Quine (1908-2000). Sorush contended, religious knowledge or human beings' understanding of religion was historically conditioned and interconnected with other bodies of knowledge, such as the natural sciences, so that if the status of human knowledge in such disciplines underwent change and transformation, human beings' understanding of religion and religious issues would as well.⁶²⁰

Not only did the clergy not possess a monopoly on religious insight, but if they wished to eschew total irrelevancy they would be compelled to familiarise themselves with "the exigencies of the time" and come to terms with the reality that their own comprehension and methodological approach

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.,p126

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.,p125

⁶²⁰ "Qabz va bast-e te'orik-e shari'at (1).",p167,187

towards religion and its injunctions were theory-laden and therefore afflicted by the vagaries of history. 'Religion-in-itself' remains pristine and unscathed by the depredations of time,⁶²¹ but human beings' understandings and conceptions were not so fortunate. Soroush never provides a means by which to bridge this ontological chasm between human beings' understandings and cognition of religion and noumenal religion, and their relation is never adequately explained.

An obvious upshot of his analysis is that it undercuts any claim to an ahistorical and timeless understanding of religion and its ordinances and thus any contention to stand outside the stream of temporality. This would include his own ungrounded positing of the notion of 'religion-in-itself'. Nonetheless, he continues to insist, even if the grounds of his assertion remain opaque, that 'ideology' reflects the needs and goals present within a particular society, whereas "religion doesn't target any specific historical society whatsoever".⁶²² He ignores the vast literature which has depicted the Prophet Mohammad as a reformer of Arab Bedouin society, of which he was undoubtedly aware, and instead merely asserts that 'mysticism' is indicative of the depth of 'religion', which cannot be ideologised.⁶²³ In this instance, he also ignores the many acknowledgments in the course of his oeuvre, as well as that of other Islamic reformers, which contend many of the Prophet's rulings and actions were specific to the culture and time of their occurrence, which meant they might be

⁶²¹ Ibid.,p199

⁶²² "Farbehtar az idi'olozhi.",p127

⁶²³ Ibid.,p129

considered inessential to the world-view and obligations of contemporary Muslims.⁶²⁴ It is in this way that his effort to de-world religion becomes unstuck, since if human knowledge of 'religion' is articulated in language, culture, history, and mediated by the state of scientific knowledge, how and on what basis can Soroush posit it beyond all of the aforementioned mediating factors?

In reply to Soroush, Sa'id Hajjarian strongly disagreed with the attempt to make an ontological claim for some asocial and ahistorical kernel of religion, arguing instead that there were only disparate interpretations of religion and that 'ideology' was itself eminently important for the deconstruction and reconstruction of beliefs, traditions and practices for developing societies in a period of transition.⁶²⁵ Hajjarian also argued that the ideologisation of religion, while perhaps reproducing and disseminating the sacred in the short term, inevitably acted as a catalyst to secularisation (*'orfi shodan*);⁶²⁶ an eventuality which he did not view negatively, but rather part of Iran's entry into the modern era.

Soroush's characterisation and criticism of 'ideology' had a huge impact in the 1990s and despite the fact that it possessed a great many shortcomings, was timely and struck a nerve with many who had grown weary of what as a result of the war with Iraq turned into a decade of upheaval, conflict, death and destruction. For these men the 1980s had become a dystopian decade of perpetual

⁶²⁴ Soroush of course did some years later emphasise explicitly the historically contingent elements of prophetic experience. "Bast-e tajrobeh-ye nabavi [Originally published in *Kiyan*, no. 39, Azar-Dei? 1376 (December-January? 1997-1998)]," in *Bast-e tajrobeh-ye nabavi* (Tehran: Serat, 1378 [1999]).

⁶²⁵ Sa'id Hajjarian, "Din-e 'asri dar asr-e idi'olozhi [Originally published in *Kiyan*, no. 17, Farvardin-Ordibehesht 1373 (March-April 1994)]," in *Az shahed-e qodsi ta shahed-e bazari: 'orfi shodan-e din dar sepehr-e siyasat* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1380 [2001]), p161

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p163

revolution. While, in this respect, certainly a decade of unceasing ‘movement’, many were divided on whether it had been for the better. Now it was the time to re-build and establish stability and it was the former Majles Speaker, now President Rafsanjani, who had promised he would do just that under the self-effacing title of Commander of the Reconstruction.

Rafsanjani, Technocracy and Self-Styled ‘De-politicisation’

A great irony is that it was during Rafsanjani’s presidency that a new period of intellectual ferment for Iran’s religious intellectuals steadily unfurled. This was not purposively willed by Rafsanjani or his administration, but it was at least in part an outcome of his desire to de-emphasise the overtly partisan infighting which had resulted in a slew of fraught relationships within the political elite. One way in which this took place politically, as briefly recounted in **Chapter 3**, was the political marginalisation of the Khomeinist left, in particular following the outcome of the Fourth Majles elections which came to an end in May 1992. In that election several high profile members of the MRM, such as Karrubi, Mohtashamipur and Hadi Khamenei,⁶²⁷ failed to get re-elected, and many others had found themselves disqualified by the Guardian Council, even before the election had been held. Furthermore, Mohammad Khatami who was Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance during Rafsanjani’s first term resigned his post in July 1992 after something of a turbulent stint.⁶²⁸ Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that there was a marked change from the political rhetoric which had prevailed in the 1980s.

⁶²⁷ Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, p186

⁶²⁸ See, **Chapter 3** for further details.

In stark contrast to the Manichean binaries which often characterised the speeches of Khomeini e.g. the oppressed versus the oppressor, Rafsanjani in the aftermath of a debilitating and protracted war with neighbouring Iraq initiated a new reading of the revolution and revolutionary values. Instead of ideological commitment and zealotry for its own sake, he would cite technical expertise and effective management. Rather than laud the virtues of poverty and austerity, he made the case that the credentials of a bona fide revolutionary were not contingent on abstention and jettisoning luxury and material affluence.⁶²⁹ Whether this rhetorical shift reflected a genuine political shift is disputatious, especially since as is well-known the president is far from controlling the entirety of the state apparatus;⁶³⁰ but what is beyond doubt is that during the mid-1990s, because of their extant political capital, Iran's religious intellectuals and the Khomeinist left had limited space to think and reflect and publish their evolving intellectual output. Though it was perhaps originally hoped by Rafsanjani that such research activities would keep 'troublesome' elements of the Islamic left preoccupied and pre-empt their perceived 'political mischief-making', its long-term repercussions were to be significant for the polity as a whole.⁶³¹ Even though many of their ideas and recommendations might have been firmly rebuffed by the ruling establishment, this period in the political wilderness was indispensable to their ability not only to rethink their erstwhile outlook, but

⁶²⁹ Mohammad Quchani, *Yaqeh sefidha: jame'eh-shenasi-ye nehadha-ye madani dar Iran-e emruz* (Tehran: Naqsh va negar, 1379 [2000]), p128

⁶³⁰ For an interesting take on this issue during the Rafsanjani era and its relevance for the IRI's foreign policy, see Maximilian Terhalle, "Revolutionary Power and Socialization: Explaining the Persistence of Revolutionary Zeal in Iran's Foreign Policy" *Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009), p557-586

⁶³¹ See, **Chapter 3** and **Chapter 5, Part II** in particular.

also disseminate their critical engagement with the past for a broader public. The public in question remained relatively modest, but nevertheless provided an opportunity for a fresh political language to gradually enter the public domain. These activists and intellectuals in virtue of their pivotal cultural, political and ideological role in the 1980s were afforded qualified room to manoeuvre, often accompanied by state patronage, which neither secular intellectuals, the so-called *digar-andishan* (alternative thinkers), nor the Freedom Movement of Iran (NAI) had the good fortune to enjoy. In fact, the former were actively persecuted and viewed by a considerable swathe of the IRI political class as perpetrators of a ‘cultural onslaught’ designed to undermine the *nezam* by means of a soft culture war.⁶³² Thus while the SMEEI was given permission to restart its political activities in the fall of 1991 as a recognised political party, official recognition of the NAI wasn’t forthcoming. This also might have been because according to Rafsanjani himself, the Khomeinist left, in particular the MRM, actively supported his segue into the newly restructured executive branch of the presidency in their meetings with Khomeini prior to his death.⁶³³

⁶³² The accusations of ‘cultural onslaught’ presaged those of ‘velvet revolution’ which post-2009 were launched against the Islamic left itself. In this earlier formulation domestic secular intellectuals and dissidents were linked to foreign exiles, capital and governments hell-bent on overthrowing the IRI (p19). Mehdi Khaz'ali, the son of the arch-conservative and one-time GC member, Ayatollah Khaz'ali, wrote the publisher’s introduction to the published transcript of the infamous *Hoviyat* programme vilifying members of the so-called *digar-andishan*. There he lambasts the “alternative thinkers” and “bad thinkers” (*bad-andishan*) for spreading “infidelity” (*kofr*) by means of “culture” and not force of arms. It’s especially interesting given his later imprisonment as an outspoken critic of the Ahmadinejad administration and defender of the post-2009 Green Movement (p5). Mas'ud Khorram, *Hoviyat* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye farhangi-ye entesharati-ye hayan, 1376 [1997]).

⁶³³ Sadeq Ziba-Kalam, Fereshteh Sadat Etefaq-Far, and Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Hashemi bedun-e rotush: panj sal-e goftogu ba Hashemi-Rafsanjani* (Tehran Ruzaneh, 1386 [2007]), p122

In Tehran the mayoral tenure of Rafsanjani ally, Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, was also significant for several reasons, including the establishment of the municipal newspaper, *Hamshahri* (Fellow Citizen), which sought to eschew overt partisanship and the fiery rhetorical flourishes which had been a mainstay of the press throughout the 1980s. The political commentator Mohammad Quchani equated these efforts by Rafsanjani and his allies, who in the first months of 1996 founded a party by the name of the Executives of Reconstruction Party (*Hezb-e kargozaran-e sazandegi*), and of which Karbaschi became the General Secretary, with the president's mission for "depoliticisation".⁶³⁴ While not an accurate diagnosis, since Rafsanjani certainly had his own political vision and priorities,⁶³⁵ the Commander of the Reconstruction and his allies made efforts to present their mission statement as beyond partisanship or *fara-jenahi*. The proto-Kargozaran sought to lend a non-political and 'scientific' air to their policies, and thereby place them beyond factional disputes, equating them with Iran's self-evident and identifiable national interest.⁶³⁶ Despite such claims however, Rafsanjani's

⁶³⁴ Quchani, *Yaqeh sefidha*, p129

Rafsanjani also tried to claim that his own politics, in this instance, the selection and presentation of his first cabinet, had been above partisanship (*fara-jenahi*), and that this had irked the Islamic *chap* and the reason why the Third Majles, which the latter then dominated, was reluctant to approve of his proposed ministers. Ziba-Kalam, Sadat Etefaq-Far, and Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Hashemi bedun-e rotush*, p123

⁶³⁵ In 1967, over a decade prior to the 1979 Revolution, Rafsanjani wrote a monograph on Amir Kabir, the Qajar era Prime Minister and reformer executed on the order of Nasser al-Din Shah in 1852, who has since been the subject of much hagiographical literature and nationalist historiography. In that volume he depicted Amir Kabir as a "combatant hero against imperialism", whose internal reforms were similarly predicated on the fight against foreign domination of Iran. Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, *Amir Kabir: ya qahreman-e mobarezeh ba este'mar* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye matbu'at-e Farahani, 1346 [1967]).

⁶³⁶ As illustrated by Cyrus Schayegh's seminal monograph, the social capital and strategic deployment of Western science in the formation of modern Iranian society has a long and distinguished lineage in the late 19th and 20th centuries, but particularly from the 1920s onwards. Given that Rafsanjani and his ministers came of age in the Pahlavi era, they couldn't but have been affected by this legacy with its implications for the nature of expert authority and the emergence of a new middle class in many ways predicated on such technical

support for the Guardian Council's disqualification of Islamic leftist candidates in the Fourth Majles was forthright, as was his support for his longstanding friend and ally Khamenei.⁶³⁷

Nevertheless, this image of 'depoliticisation' has been persistent, if not altogether accurate. The founding of the newspaper *Hamshahri* by the Tehran municipality during Karbaschi's tenure in the winter of 1992, dedicated considerable coverage to social and cultural issues, and avoided the minutia and polemics emanating from factional disagreements and personal animosities. For example, in its first run *Hamshahri* published a bold editorial arguing that "social participation" (*mosharekat-e ejtema'i*), "is a definite necessity for development and the progress of development programmes".⁶³⁸ Development and rational management were readily discussed while more contentious issues were quietly placed on the back-burner. However, in parallel, newspapers and periodicals such as *Kiyan*, *'Asr-e ma*, and *Iran-e farda*, in concert with the research produced by the Presidential Strategic Research Centre, were actively developing their own lines of thinking and gradually drawing the conclusion that mere 'rational and realistic governance' would prove insufficient to guarantee prosperity.⁶³⁹ It was at this point in the early to mid-1990s that an ever-increasing convergence began to take shape between religious intellectuals who had in recent years distanced themselves from the political fray, and the Khomeinist left.

expertise. Cyrus Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900-1950* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2009), p7

⁶³⁷ Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, p185

⁶³⁸ "Yaddasht-e ruz: mosharekat-e ejtema'i-ye mardom," *Hamshahri* 4 Bahman 1371 [24 January 1993].

⁶³⁹ For details see **Chapter 5, Part II**.

Sorush in particular sought to make the most of Rafsanjani's public and private assurances, since he had known the latter from his days at the Council for Cultural Revolution.⁶⁴⁰ In a number of private and open letters to the president, Sorush protested public statements made by Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi amongst others comparing him to the murdered intellectual and critic of Shi'ism, Ahmad Kasravi (1890-1946).⁶⁴¹ In one private letter to President Rafsanjani in the aftermath of a disruption and attempted assault on his person at a talk he gave in Isfahan on 18 June 1995, Sorush not only said that he found the comparison to Kasravi an insult (*tohmat*), but also made the rather poorly judged claim that "perhaps since the establishment of the Islamic Republic till now, nobody has been insulted and attacked by the media as much as yours truly".⁶⁴² He then pointedly asks the president, "shouldn't a better way than this be shown to them [i.e. the vigilantes] for the defence of the jurisprudential-political theory of *velayat-e faqih* and the encouragement of others to accept it?"⁶⁴³ In a last-ditch private effort to convince the president to take action, while of course selectively forgetting his own active role in the Cultural Revolution and the assault on intellectual-academic freedom he disingenuously contends, "as a teacher I can never believe that someone in this country could be rewarded and encouraged to fight with teachers and to scare artists and intellectuals from thinking or writing".⁶⁴⁴ Prior to issuing an open letter to Rafsanjani on 9 May 1996 he insisted that he

⁶⁴⁰ This will be addressed in more detail in the following sections of this chapter.

⁶⁴¹ For more on Kasravi see, **Chapter 2**.

Sorush, "Nameh-ye khosusi beh riyasat-e jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran (Aqa-ye Hashemi-Rafsanjani) va riyasat-e goveh-ye qaza'ieh (Aqa-ye Mohammad Yazdi).", p5

⁶⁴² "Nameh-ye khosusi beh riyasat-e jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran (Aqa-ye Hashemi-Rafsanjani).", p13

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p17

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p18

had remained quiet and not delivered any speeches or accepted any such invitations for 8 months out of a desire to “preserve the interests of the country”.⁶⁴⁵ However, as events of future years and the further curtailment of Soroush’s public activities would testify, much like Sa'id Hajjarian’s calls for greater political openness in his consultations with Rafsanjani at the beginning of the 1990s,⁶⁴⁶ Soroush’s epistolary indignation and exhortations would fall on deaf ears.⁶⁴⁷

Mojtahed-Shabestari and the “Official Reading” of Religion

Hojjat al-Islam Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani in his diary of 1981, *'Obur az bohran* (Passing the Crisis), describes a meeting with the theologian and sitting MP for Shabestar, Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari, which took place on 6 April of the same year. As related by Rafsanjani, Mojtahed-Shabestari had come to discuss and ask him as a member of the Revolutionary Council and Khomeini’s inner circle of trusted disciples, what distinguished the “essence of the disagreements between us

⁶⁴⁵ "Nameh-ye sar-goshadeh beh riyasat-e jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran (Aqa-ye Hashemi-Rafsanjani).", p33

⁶⁴⁶ See, **Chapter 5, Part II.**

⁶⁴⁷ As testified to by an open, rather than private letter to Rafsanjani dated 9 May 1996 the threats against his person by so-called ‘pressure-groups’ (*goruha-ye feshar*) continued unabated (p32). At one point he even compares himself analogously with Galileo and Giordano Bruno (p34). Soroush, "Nameh-ye sar-goshadeh beh riyasat-e jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran (Aqa-ye Hashemi-Rafsanjani).", p32

A letter dated 18 July 1995 [27 Tir 1374] had been previously sent to Rafsanjani and was co-signed by a host of prominent members of the Islamic left e.g. Aqajari, Armin, Baqi, Banki, Ganji, Tajzadeh, Khaniki, 'Arabsorkhi, Hajjarian, Mazru'i, as well as a number of sympathetic academics and publishers, deploring the disruption of a speech Soroush had delivered in Isfahan on the anniversary of Shari'ati's death. They insisted Rafsanjani's role as president was that of “guarding the constitution”. This was merely one of many similar instances whereby the political and social capital of the Islamic left was deployed in defence of an individual they perceived not merely as an important ally, but their leading intellectual light. This is despite the fact that as was made clear in **Chapter 3**, Soroush was never a member of the Islamic left or any of its party political organisations. The letter was published in issue 25 of *Kiyan*. "Nameh-ye dahha shakhsiyat-e farhangi-ye keshvar beh ra'is-e jomhur.", p84-87

(the Imam's Line) and the liberals [Mr. Bani-Sadr and the Freedom Movement] and he [i.e. Shabestari] wanted an explanation". Rafsanjani then relates his reply, which supports the analysis of Bazargan above: "I said the issue is with respect to jurisprudential Islam (*Islam-e feqahati*). They do not accept this Islamic jurisprudence, [and] we don't see any other path than the implementation of the same *feqh* (with greater effort and vibrant *ejtehad*). I brought many examples that this was the desire of the Imam [Khomeini] and we defend it".⁶⁴⁸ One can only speculate but it is certainly curious that Shabestari went to seek Rafsanjani's counsel and clarification to determine the difference between Khomeini's diehard supporters, the Imam's Line, and the so-called 'liberals', encompassing the incumbent president, Bani-Sadr and the NAI. Though one must be cautious about imputing motives to Shabestari, one can ponder whether certain doubts about the path taken by the revolution had not already begun to prey on the cleric's mind. His virtual abandonment of active politics following the First Majles to focus on intellectual and academic pursuits seems to indicate this might well have been the case.

Nevertheless, less than twenty years later, Shabestari no longer accepted Rafsanjani's assertions regarding ideology and *feqh*, and on the basis on his study of hermeneutics and contemporary theology, would publicly repudiate root and branch, *feqh's* political-executive role in the governance of the modern state.⁶⁴⁹ In fact, he would entitle one of his best known collections of articles and interviews, "the critique of the official reading (*qara'at*) of religion", and in turn identified the "official

⁶⁴⁸ Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Hashemi, '*Obur az bohran*..p53

⁶⁴⁹ Mojtaheed-Shabestari, "*Feqh-ye siyasi bastar-e 'oqala'i-ye khod ra az dast dadeh ast*." p169

reading” with the domination of jurisprudential Islam.⁶⁵⁰ Shabestari’s writings, along with those of Soroush were amongst the most important authored by *rowshanfekran-e dini* in arguing against so-called ‘ideological Islam’, which had been ardently supported by elements of the Islamic left, many of whom continued to act and think in the ideological shadow of Khomeini, Motahhari, Taleqani and Shari’ati.

Despite his growing hostility to *Islam-e feqahati*, he refused to abandon the “revolution of Iran” which he argued was seen as a “rational movement” by the country’s Muslim population. The message of the revolution was decidedly “rational-humane”. Furthermore, the “reading of Islam” advocated by the revolution harboured a political message, which called on Muslims to fight against despotism and colonialism, and to found a political regime on the values of freedom, justice and independence.⁶⁵¹ However, with the founding of the Islamic Republic *Islam-e feqahati* became the “official state reading” (*qara’at-e rasmi-ye hokumati*). Affirming much of Bazargan’s early analysis, Mojtabah-Shabestari states that those who support the “official reading” hold that Islam prescribes a “fixed” and “eternal” political regime. In the “official reading” the form of government is putatively derived directly from the Quran and hadith and it is the obligation of the state to implement Islamic ordinances. While Shabestari does not say such, this description bears a great deal of resemblance to the image of the Islamic state envisioned by Khomeini in *Hokumat-e eslami*.

⁶⁵⁰ ""Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?." ,p31

⁶⁵¹ "Enqelab-e eslami va qara'at-e ma'qul az din." ,p21

Despite the aforementioned comments made by Rafsanjani in 1981 or even the contents of Khomeini's own writings on the nature of the Islamic state, Shabestari, contends that "jurisprudential Islam" acquired dominance in the Islamic Republic's second decade.⁶⁵² After Khomeini's death it has often been argued that there was a concerted effort on the part of the traditional right to monopolise all the main state institutions by means of the Guardian Council and the judiciary. As one might expect, the traditional right's conception of jurisprudence was held to be correspondingly 'traditional'. The Islamic left, while critical of Rafsanjani, who was seen as the patron of the 'modern right' (*rast-e jadid*), reserved a special venom for the 'traditional right' (*rast-e sonnati*), which was seen as unfairly dominating many of the state's unelected institutions.⁶⁵³ Shabestari held a comparable political and theological stance, believing that the "official reading" in the aftermath of Khomeini's death had led the revolution astray from its "rational-humane" message. Also, like most Khomeinist leftist accounts pertaining to the 1980s there is no mention of encroaching political authoritarianism, the mass execution of political prisoners throughout the 1980s which culminated in the 1988 prison massacres or the many other infringements on civil liberties and human rights which took place when numerous Islamic leftists held key posts of authority in the state edifice. While one should certainly try and fathom the immense inexpedience and danger posed by dwelling on such events, it is also worthwhile pointing out this common act of occlusion and omission which has impinged upon

⁶⁵² ""Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?." ,p31

⁶⁵³ See, **Chapter 3**, where I touch on Mohsen Armin's famous factional topology.

the historical narrative of the revolutionary state, its founding and development as told by the so-called religious intellectuals and especially the Islamic left until fairly recently.

The main target of Shabestari's criticism remain the traditional right i.e. the alleged adherents of the "official reading", who understand basic individual rights laid down in the constitution in accordance with "traditional jurisprudence".⁶⁵⁴ More controversially, he contends that *velayat-e faqih* was merely one jurisprudential ruling issued by a single *mojtahed* i.e. Khomeini, and upon which no consensus exists, but "had obtained political legitimacy with the people's votes".⁶⁵⁵ Again, he conveniently forgets that Khomeini and his clerical disciples (of which he was one) were decisive to the transformation of *velayat-e faqih* from a view advocated by a lone *mojtahed*, into an institutionalised feature of the new constitutional order. The tensions within his political outlook are immediately evident. At once calling for the acknowledgement of individual political and civil rights as codified in the Islamic Republic's constitution, while at the same time pointing to the tenuousness of *velayat-e faqih* as merely one juristic opinion amongst others, which nevertheless also happened to be enshrined within the very same founding document of the post-revolutionary state. Shabestari does manage to theoretically resolve this tension to some extent as will be seen below. The practical resolution of this contradiction would prove to be quite a different matter however, and he would have few words of advice on this pressing concern.

⁶⁵⁴ Mojtahed-Shabestari, "'Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?,"p30

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.,p31

According to Shabestari, the defenders of *Islam-e feqahati* contend that the theory of *velayat-e faqih* is beyond criticism. The proponents of the official reading also believe the use of violence is permissible against those whom oppose their political programme and pose a threat to its continued rule. In short, it “theorises violence” in the name of Islam.⁶⁵⁶ According to Shabestari, this reading is facing a crisis because it has divested Islam of any “spiritual message” and argued that the people have no legitimate role in determining their political destiny. This reading has also sought to appropriate the legacy of the revolution for its own purposes, claiming that it occurred for the sole end of establishing an “eternal” and “unchangeable” political regime predicated on Islamic law.⁶⁵⁷

One of the main targets in this critique is Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, who by the late 1990s had emerged as one of the most radical supporters of Guardian Jurist Khamenei’s ‘absolute guardianship’. Ironically, Mesbah-Yazdi is not primarily known for being a jurist, but a teacher of Islamic philosophy, in particular Avicenna and Mulla Sadra.⁶⁵⁸ By the time of the publication of Shabestari’s essay, however, he had been framed by the Islamic *chap* as the ‘theoretician of violence’ and accused of issuing fatwas legitimising the extra-judicial assassination of secular writers, journalists and political activists. For Shabestari, the bankruptcy of this view and its recourse to violence are two sides of the same coin. In the view of Mesbah-Yazdi and his allies, popular elections are irrelevant to the legitimacy of the *vali-ye faqih*. The people’s votes cannot bestow legitimacy

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.,p31

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.,p32

⁶⁵⁸ For more details see, **Chapter 6**.

(*mashru'iyat*) upon the *vali*.⁶⁵⁹ The people can merely demonstrate their acceptance of him, since the only genuine source of legitimacy is divine in nature, and essentially negates the notion of popular sovereignty altogether.⁶⁶⁰ Shabestari does not mince his words in calling such a view a “violation of the constitution”.

Much like Bazargan he also laments the division of the national polity into “insiders” and “outsiders”, where depending on your membership or lack thereof, you either receive or are deprived of certain privileges.⁶⁶¹ Islam has been instrumentalised by the proponents of the “official reading”, who identify their policies and actions with Islam *in toto* and thus claim any criticism of them beyond the pale.⁶⁶² It also adopts the task of remaking cultural practices in its own Procrustean image and imposing its values on the public sphere. Shabestari resolutely states that this is not the role of the state, and that it ultimately destroys any chance of democracy’s blossoming.⁶⁶³ The state should rather ensure that it coordinates its policies with the values and sentiments of “public culture” (*farhang-e 'omumi*), and should never partake in such cultural reconstruction (*farhang-sazi*). This position taken by Shabestari is not merely a repudiation of “traditionalist jurisprudence”, but goes much deeper, rejecting any role for the state in promoting a specific identity or way of life. It is an assertive rejection of paternalism, arguing that the values and policies adopted by the state must be

⁶⁵⁹ Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, *Negahi-ye gozara beh nazariyeh-ye velayat-e faqih* (Qom: Entesharat-e mo'asseseh-ye amuzeshi va pazuheshi-ye Imam Khomeini, 1388), p69

⁶⁶⁰ Mojtabeh-Shabestari, "'Qara'at-e rasmi az din" *cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?*," p32

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p32

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, p33

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, p33

determined democratically from the bottom-up. Following Khatami's election as president he contended very much in line with the former's political platform that if cultural activities are to be undertaken, they must be done by non-governmental organisations which occupy civil society, existing independently of the state.⁶⁶⁴

In light of his scepticism towards the state's role in *farhang-sazi* he further claims that it shouldn't be assumed that the state has responsibility to conflate a religious transgression or "sin" (*gonah*) committed by the private individual with a "crime" (*jorm*) or breach of the law. So that, even if refusal to don the hijab is considered a "sin", and for Shabestari it is by no means obvious that it constitutes one, the state has no role in criminalising such a refusal.⁶⁶⁵ 'Sins' or religious transgressions are privatised and precluded from the scope of state authority, which would imply that the role of the state as enforcer of the *shari'a* and public morality so indispensable for at least two of the Islamist ideologues reviewed in **Chapter 2** has lost its rationale.

Velayat-e faqih, One View of Many

As was mentioned above, Shabestari is eager to emphasise that the theory of *velayat-e faqih* is only one amongst many others. He adds that the chief reason it received support and was enshrined in the constitution of the Islamic Republic was the popularity of Ayatollah Khomeini. "The extraordinary trust of the people of Iran in the leadership of Imam Khomeini during the course of

⁶⁶⁴ "Bazgasht beh keramat-e ensani," in *Jame'eh-ye madani, Dovvom-e Khordad, va Khatami: goftoguha'i ba andishmandan-e mo'aser-e Iran*, ed. Ma'sud Razavi (Tehran: Farzan-e ruz, 1379 [2000]), p54

⁶⁶⁵ "Mosalmanan bayad hoquq-e bashar ra bepazirand." p204

the revolution and after its victory resulted in a relationship between a large segment of the people and the clergy taking shape, which here we interpret as “political *taqlid*”.”⁶⁶⁶

Rather than emphasising Khomeini’s position as a *marja'*, Shabestari takes care to stress the exceptional conditions of the revolution itself and Khomeini’s charismatic political leadership. He thereby attempts to diminish *velayat-e faqih*’s religious-scriptural basis, and bind and intertwine the theory and institution of *vali-ye faqih* with the specific person of Khomeini and the exceptional circumstances of the revolution.⁶⁶⁷ *Velayat-e faqih*’s legitimacy derived from popular backing and the people’s assent to the charismatic leadership of Khomeini. The “official reading” has sought to eternalise and sanctify the principle of *velayat-e faqih* in and of itself. Perhaps the most notorious example being that of Ayatollah Ahmad Azari-Qomi, who from Khomeini’s death in June 1989 until the winter of 1994 was one of the most senior diehard supporters of the ‘absolute guardianship of the Islamic jurist’ and Khomeini’s newfound authority as leader. Prior to his death Azari-Qomi would have a radical change of heart, but during the aforementioned period he went as far as to even assert that “the *vali-ye faqih* can temporarily suspend monotheism” (*towhid*).⁶⁶⁸ Shabestari argues conversely that it was in fact exceptional circumstances which brought about the emergence of *velayat-e faqih* as a particular form of governance. Soroush in a similar vein has called *velayat-e faqih* an “accidental” in

⁶⁶⁶ ""Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?." ,p34

⁶⁶⁷ Abdolkarim Soroush, "Essentials and Accidentals in Religion," in *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion*, ed. Forough Jahanbakhsh (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009).,p81

Originally published in *Kiyan* in Persian. 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Velayat-e bateni va velayat-e siyasi," *Kiyan*, no. 44 (Mehr-Aban 1377 [September-October 1998]).

⁶⁶⁸ Mohsen Kadivar, "Zekr-e mosibat-e Ayatollah Azari-Qomi," *Rah-e Sabz: JARAS* 27 Esfand 1391 [17 March 2013].

contradistinction to an “essential” feature of religion, emphasising the institution’s contingency and historicity.⁶⁶⁹

The original act of *taqlid* or ‘imitation’ which had made *velayat-e faqih* a political reality had ceased to be a viable source of political legitimacy, and had given way to the principle of political participation, where the people determine their political destiny through the ballot-box and civic activism.⁶⁷⁰ For Shabestari this transition from imitation to participation is indicative of a deeper sea-change in the nature of political legitimacy in Iranian society; “a state of transition from political legitimacy based on religious beliefs and feelings (political *taqlid*) to political legitimacy predicated on political rationality with the method of trial and error and correction”.⁶⁷¹ In Shabestari’s depiction of the profound transformation unfolding within the depths of the Iranian polity there is a clearly defined shift from passivity to activity, from unreasoned imitation to rational agency, object becoming subject. Shabestari does not restrict his critique to the political domain, and concludes that “political *taqlid* is no different from *taqlid* in the ordinances of religion”.⁶⁷² For him both species of *taqlid* rise and fall together. A number of years later he would reaffirm this conclusion stating, “Obedience (*ta'abod*) and political *taqlid* can only find meaning in elementary (*ebteda'i*) societies of the past without scientific (*'elmi*) goals and planning”.⁶⁷³ I will put this issue to one side for the moment,

⁶⁶⁹ Mojtahed-Shabestari, “Qara'at-e rasmi az din” *cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?*, p36

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p35

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p35

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, p36

⁶⁷³ “Siyasat va ta'abod,” in *Ta'amolati dar qara'at-e ensani az din* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1383 [2004]), p209

since the next chapter will deal with the issue of political participation in greater depth. Instead I will return to Shabestari's other arguments as to why the "official reading" is outmoded and in crisis.

Shabestari enumerates the reasons for the crisis thus:

- 1) The "official reading" subjugates all other disciplines and bodies of knowledge to 'religious knowledge'. It establishes a hierarchy in which the humanities and natural sciences must conform to its standards and values. Along similar lines, it cannot accept that there are other sources of knowledge, which are independent of the religious domain.
- 2) The "official reading" has an ahistorical and asocial approach to language.
- 3) It adheres to the belief that one view or philosophy of history is possible, and that history is rationally ordered (*nezammand*). This point seems somewhat misplaced since both the 18th century Enlightenment *philosophes* and German Idealist tradition, of which G.W.F. Hegel was the foremost exemplar, argued in their respective ways that history had a direction and progressed towards the consummation of reason and rational thought. 'Reason in history' and/or 'order in history' are thus not merely the convictions of traditionalist religion and its variegated forms, which in reality often rejected any such pretence.
- 4) It is convinced that the meanings of religious texts are directly accessible without mediation, and that they harbour a single meaning. The "official reading" is oblivious to new developments in textual hermeneutics. According to Shabestari, these are some of the presuppositions and pre-understandings (*pishfahmha*) which lead to the erroneous interpretation of the Quran and hadith, and belief that a determinate religious, economic, and legal order can be extracted from scriptural sources. The proponents of the "official reading" approach the sources with the various

preconceptions, prejudices and conclusions they wish to extract from them. In other words, their reading is pre-determined by the socio-political order they wish to justify.⁶⁷⁴ The reception and interpretation of texts is contingent upon the reader's horizon of understanding and expectations. Under the influence of German hermeneutics, above all Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*,⁶⁷⁵ Shabestari contends the reader's pre-understanding of both the world in which he or she is situated, and his or her existential comportment toward the Quran and hadith are elided by the "official reading". These are issues which he addressed in detail in his *Hermenutik, ketab va sonnat* (Hermeneutics, the Book, and Tradition) where he focused on the historicity of scriptural exegesis and its relationship with the time, space, and pre-understandings of the reader engaging the text.⁶⁷⁶ For Shabestari the notion of "the only possible interpretation (*tafsir*)" is meaningless" and in fundamental contradiction with the plurality of pre-understandings and life-worlds, which condition exegetes' varied approaches to scripture.⁶⁷⁷ It is thus not merely a question of the "official reading's" misapprehension of the content of the Quran and prophetic tradition as earlier modernist critics of

⁶⁷⁴ ""Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?,"p40

⁶⁷⁵ Mojtabeh-Shabestari's acquaintance with the German language preceded the revolution when he replaced Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, the Islamic Republic's first Chief Justice, as director of the Islamic Centre in Hamburg from 1970-1978.

⁶⁷⁶ Mohammad Mojtabeh-Shabestari, *Hermenutik, ketab va sonnat: farayand-e tafsir-e vahy* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1375 [1996]),p163

⁶⁷⁷ ""Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?,"p37

Shabestari's approach shares certain similarities with the approach of the late Egyptian scholar of Arab literature and Islamic studies, Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd. Mojtabeh-Shabestari and Mostafa Malekian both played a part in the translation of Abu Zayd's *Mafhum al-nass: dirasah fi ulum al-Qur'an*. Morteza Karimi-Nia translated the text and Malekian was one of its editors. Mojtabeh-Shabestari acted as an intermediary between Abu Zayd and Karimi-Nia. Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd, *Ma'na-ye matn: pazhuheshi dar 'olum-e qor'an*, trans. Morteza Karimi-Nia (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1380 [2001]).

theocracy such as the Egyptian scholar of the Al-Azhar University, Ali 'Abd al-Raziq in his volume *Islam and the Foundations of Governance* (1925) had contended when he dismissed wholesale the religious basis of government,⁶⁷⁸ but also a methodological one pertaining to the very impossibility of deriving a singular and definitive reading from scriptural sources.

- 5) The presupposition that it is possible by means of “rational proof” (*esbat-e borhani*) to demonstrate “a truth” without recourse or reference to philosophical ideas and issues.
- 6) Contravention (*'odul*) of the methods of philosophers and mystics pertaining to the subject of monotheism (*towhid*).

Both Shabestari and Soroush, along with several other religious intellectuals, have argued that believers' expectations vis-à-vis Islam, or any religion for that matter, ought to be minimal.⁶⁷⁹ The “official reading” in stark contrast is based upon a ‘maximal’ conception of religion which penetrates all aspects of social life. Their introduction of historicity into the practice of reading and scriptural exegesis thus has indubitable social and political implications. Shabestari forcefully argues that the traditionalist or “official reading” is fundamentally flawed, ignores contemporary developments in

⁶⁷⁸ 'Abd al-Raziq's argument was taken to be directed against the caliphate, but it was phrased and argued in more general terms targeting Islamic government as a whole. 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, "Message Not Government, Religion Not State," in *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York; Oxford Oxford University Press, 1998), p36

⁶⁷⁹ Soroush, "Maximalist Religion, Minimalist Religion." p117

Originally published in *Kiyan* in Persian. 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Din-e aqali va aksari," *Kiyan* 8, no. 41 (Farvardin-Ordibehesht [March-April 1998]).

both theology and the humanities, and is inadequate to the demands and challenges which face believers towards the close of the 20th century.

'Democratic Religious Government' and Rights-Centred Discourse

In **Chapter 5** I will address Mohammad Khatami's philosophical and political world-view and his conception of 'religious democracy'. Before doing so however, it is very important to touch upon the debates regarding the nature of 'democratic religious government' (*hokumat-e demokratik-e dini*) which first began to emerge in the early 1990s and pioneered by above all 'Abdolkarim Soroush in a number of lectures, most of which were reprinted in *Kiyan*. Some of these articles are deserving of analysis, and provoked a number of significant debates within the *Kiyan* circle itself. Two of the more prominent interlocutors on both the issues of religious government and also ideology were Akbar Ganji and Sa'id Hajjarian, both of whom wrote under the pseudonyms of Hamid Paidar and Jahangir Salehpur, respectively.⁶⁸⁰

One of the more notable articles penned by Soroush on the issue of 'religious government' was first published in *Kiyan* in March-April 1993 and entitled *Hokumat-e demokratik-e dini?* (Religious Democratic Government?)⁶⁸¹ In this essay Soroush lays out the "problem of religious democratic

⁶⁸⁰ Under their chosen pseudonyms they often took up more radical positions than they were prepared to do publicly.

⁶⁸¹ It should be noted that the article itself is a combination of two speeches. The first was delivered in the course of a seminar on human rights held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1991 (1370) and the second speech was delivered during a seminar in the Middle East Institute based in Hamburg, Germany, in 1992 (1371). 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Hokumat-e demokratik-e dini?," *Kiyan* 11(Farvardin-Ordibehesht 1372 [March-April 1993]). The English translation of the essay has been published in, 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "The Idea of Democratic Religious Government," in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of 'Abdolkarim Soroush*, ed. Ahmad Sadri and Mahmoud Sadri (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). While I have used the above translation

governments” and states the dilemma they face in ruling to be threefold: “to reconcile people’s satisfaction with God’s approval; to strike a balance between the religious and the nonreligious; and to do right by both the people and by God, acknowledging at once the integrity of human beings and of religion”. This essay, and a further one which will be analysed below, were Soroush’s attempt to rhetorically distinguish ‘liberalism’ from ‘democracy’, and defend a democratic model of governance, which he believed compatible with what he then termed “religious society”.⁶⁸² Soroush takes his point of departure from the assumption that the society from which a religious democratic government springs is itself “religious”, and thus that the government is a “reflection of a religious society”.⁶⁸³ He further states that whether a religious government is democratic depends on two conditions. The first condition is the extent to which the government in question benefits from “collective reason” (*‘aql-e jam’i*). The second is the extent to which human rights are respected.⁶⁸⁴ Moreover, on account of what Soroush has called his neo-Muta’zilitism,⁶⁸⁵ which holds that reason, in particular the realm of normativity and moral values, are independent of revelation, he argues that many of the values

I have cross referenced it with the Persian original as printed in *Farbehtar az id’iolozhi* and modified it where deemed appropriate.

⁶⁸² "Tolerance and Governance: A Discourse on Religion and Democracy ",p138

⁶⁸³ "The Idea of Democratic Religious Government.",p126

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*,p126

⁶⁸⁵ Abdolkarim Soroush and Matin Ghaffarian, "I’m a Neo-Mu’tazilite: An interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-Neo-Mutazilite_July2008.html.

Soroush’s conception of revelation-independent reason seems to owe much to Popper and the late 20th century advocates of critical rationalism in Anglo-American philosophical circles, as well as elements of historical Muta’zilitism. Abrahamov for example has argued that an autonomous conception of reason or purely rationalist theology does not exist in classical Islamic theology, and “rational tendencies” evident in the latter only pertain to certain theological issues. Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998),p32

integral to good governance and statecraft, such as securing the public interest and justice, comprise part of non-religious political systems as well. Values such as justice are not derived from religion, but rather are themselves the criterion for determining the “truth” of religion:⁶⁸⁶ “They are inherently (*zatan*) non-religious”.⁶⁸⁷ According to Soroush, religions work in the service of values and truth, and merely play a role in convincing “the people”. “When the common people receive these values from religion, they better believe and use them. The majority of people rely less on their rational judgements”.⁶⁸⁸ However, at the same time, he regards it as necessary that the extra-religious nature of values be recognised so religious understanding can be harmonised with them.⁶⁸⁹ The agents of such harmonisation are none other than the elite and enlightened religious intellectual class itself.

Rights *contra* Duties

It is important to elucidate that in *Hokumat-e demokratik-e dini?* another important objective was to stress that if Islam is to be relevant with respect to the modern world, it must come to terms with

⁶⁸⁶ 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini [Originally published in *Kiyan*, 32 Shahrivar-Mehr 1375]," in *Modara va modiriyat* (Tehran: Serat, 1387 [2008]), p364

It should be added that *'aql* is itself held to be a source (a potential source by some) of Shi'i jurisprudence, and there is a principle which states that whatever is dictated by reason is dictated by religion. It is important to also note that Aristotelian deduction with reference to the Quran and hadith was one of the main modes of legal reasoning. Hossein Modarressi Tabataba'i, *An Introduction to Shi'i Law: A Bibliographical Study* (London: Ithaca Press, 1984), p3-4,29

⁶⁸⁷ Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini," p364; "Bavar-e dini va davar-e dini: mosahebeh ba doktor 'Abdolkarim Soroush," *Ehya*, no. 5 (1370 [1991]), p21

⁶⁸⁸ "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini," p364

⁶⁸⁹ 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Tolerance and Governance: A Discourse on Religion and Democracy " in *Reason, Freedom, & Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of 'Abdolkarim Soroush*, ed. Ahmad Sadri and Mahmoud Sadri (Oxford; New York Oxford University Press, 2000), p132

human rights. He does not seek Quranic justification for this statement, or repeat the anachronistic gesture of many previous Islamic modernists, who have held that modern rights and constitutionalism were in fact first formulated and supported in the age of the Prophet Mohammad. Soroush is fully prepared to accept that human rights in their modern guise are the product of Enlightenment thought, which was not merely unsympathetic to religion, but may well have been outright hostile toward it.⁶⁹⁰ Whether this is entirely accurate or not he unambiguously states, “we cannot evade rational, moral, and extra-religious principles and reasoning about human rights, myopically focusing on nothing but the primary texts and maxims of religion in formulating our jurisprudential edicts”.⁶⁹¹ Soroush proceeds negatively, and argues that while religion is not the source of human rights and numerous other values, neither is it inherently hostile towards them. In a similar vein, he argues that the faithful cannot afford to concede that ‘liberalism’ is the sole defender of human rights. ‘Islam’ must not only come to terms with human rights, but must rethink its disproportionate emphasis on duties. As Soroush is fond of saying, “the language of religion is the language of duty (*taklif*)”.⁶⁹² Religious doctrine, he insists, has traditionally shown very little interest in the issue of rights, and has instead been steadfast in underscoring human beings duties to God and his law. A shift of priorities and emphasis are demanded by the present. While the *shari'a* might discuss the laws of inheritance and certain entitlements which accrue to individual persons under specific conditions, they remain a far cry from the modern conception of human rights.

⁶⁹⁰ Soroush, "The Idea of Democratic Religious Government.",p129

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.,p128

⁶⁹² Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini.",p362

Sorush doesn't hold modern human rights to be merely a matter of social or cultural convention, but claims them to be "natural" and "innate".⁶⁹³ In this sense, he follows in the footsteps of western natural rights theorists such as Hugo Grotius and John Locke. He states emphatically that rights are not bestowed upon humanity by any religion. It would thus seem that despite his invocation of 'semantic holism' in *Qabz va bast*, he simply takes rights to be God-given and then uncovered by reason.⁶⁹⁴

As we have already seen, Sorush's political outlook in the early to mid-1990s continued to labour under the sway of his appropriation of Popper's political thought. Popper's liberalism, however, advocated a form of negative utilitarianism and the firm conviction that government's duty lay in the alleviation of suffering, rather than the guarantee of the greatest happiness. In line with the prejudices of the preceding decade, Sorush often equates liberalism with a permissive form of relativism, when in reality one of Western liberal thought's founding fathers, John Locke, was anything but a permissive relativist. In his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), Locke postulated a political "law of nature" along with man's "perfect freedom" and equality in the pre-political state of nature.⁶⁹⁵ It does not seem that Sorush's argument for 'natural rights' and Popper's brand of

⁶⁹³ Ibid.,p362

⁶⁹⁴ It doesn't seem that such a position can be squared with Popper's views either. Anthony Quinton, "Karl Popper: Politics Without Essences," in *Contemporary Political Philosophers*, ed. Anthony de Crespigny and Kenneth Minogue (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1975),p150. Sorush had actually read this essay as a student in London during the late 1970s.

⁶⁹⁵ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988),p323

For a pertinent discussion and analysis of John Locke on the nature of toleration within the context of Muslim majority societies, see Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (Oxford; New York Oxford University Press, 2009),Chapter 2

utilitarianism can be easily squared. Popper himself certainly did not attempt to justify rights deontologically and rejects the idea that rights can be intellectually intuited, even if he did not reject the autonomy of the normative sources of morality.⁶⁹⁶ For this reason Soroush's arguments are in several ways closer to Locke's natural law approach. As far as 'democracy' is concerned, Soroush seems more concerned with demonstrating that it is not the harbinger of atheism or scientism, and that 'democracy' and 'religion' can peacefully cohabit.

It is in an essay published a number of years later, *Tahlil-e mafhum-e "hokumat-e dini"* (Analysis of the Concept of "Religious Government", 1996), where Soroush appears to have further honed his views on the issue of religious government. This essay and another one published two years previous, *Modara va modiriyat-e mo'menan: sokhani dar nesbat-e din va demokrasi* (Toleration & Administration of the Pious: A Talk on the Relation Between Religion & Democracy, 1994),⁶⁹⁷ also published in *Kiyan* are amongst his most important political essays of the 1990s. They address his vision for a distinct political order, surpassing the present constitutional setup in Iran. In both of these essays he had also more clearly outlined the ultimate and unsurprising target of his critique, in a word, *feqh*; especially, when it is endowed with executive authority to impose its edicts and rulings on individuals in the context of the modern nation-state. In these essays Soroush also seems to have taken further steps

⁶⁹⁶ Popper expresses his proximity to Kant with respect to questions of morality in the interview he gave to *Kiyan* in 1992. Karl R. Popper and Hossein Kamaly, "Goftogu-ye "Kiyan" ba Karl Popper," *Kiyan*, no. 10 (Azar 1371 [November-December 1992]), p6

⁶⁹⁷ 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Modara va modiriyat-e mo'menan: sokhani dar nesbat-e din va demokrasi," *ibid.* 21 (Shahrivar-Mehr 1373 [September-October 1994]).

This article has been reprinted in the following volume. "Modara va modiriyat: sokhani dar nesbat-e din va demokrasi," in *Modara va modiriyat* (Tehran: Serat 1380 [2001]). It has also been translated into English in the above collection, Soroush, "Tolerance and Governance: A Discourse on Religion and Democracy".

towards propounding his own brand of 'Islamic humanism', which proves itself fundamentally unwilling to discriminate amongst individual citizens on the basis of their religious creed or affiliation. He acknowledges that society is composed of both "pious" and "non-pious" citizens⁶⁹⁸ and rights are not assigned in virtue of their religiosity, but rather in their being human.⁶⁹⁹ This would seem to vitiate the need to refer to any such arrangement as a 'religious democracy'; the by-product of either a lack of clarity or strategic obfuscation.

While Shabestari's views on human rights are comparable, he has his own distinct approach to the issue. The state, according to Shabestari, is only a source of power (*qodrat*), and not a source of culture.⁷⁰⁰ This binary i.e. state = power vs. society = culture, appears to be largely the product of his antipathy toward the particular interpretation of Islam he believes to have been in political ascendancy since the beginning of the 1990s. In seeking to evacuate the state or its policies of any cultural foundation or grounding, he articulates a facile conception of power and the state.⁷⁰¹ A conception, which his ideological opponents would wholly reject, since they were well aware of the immense power of culture and cultural practices, and thus the necessity of ensuring the state be empowered to combat the 'cultural onslaught' (*tahajom-e farhangi*) embodied in such 'subversive' ideas and their carriers. Indeed, as Mesbah-Yazdi would declare in a volume of the same name, "Amongst the methods of imperialism and imperiousness, that which is most dangerous, but most

⁶⁹⁸ Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini.",p356

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.,p360

⁷⁰⁰ Mojtabeh-Shabestari, "'Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?.",p34

⁷⁰¹ This conception slides between being normative and descriptive.

hidden, is cultural domination".⁷⁰² Shabestari, by contrast, is keen to negate any cultural role for the state. It might initially appear as though Shabestari believes much in the style of classical liberalism that the state is expected to act merely as an adjudicator in those instances where the rights of individuals have been infringed by fellow citizens, essentially an enforcer of J.S. Mill's 'harm principle'. Shabestari fulminates that "culture in the hands of the government means the execution (*e'dam*) of culture",⁷⁰³ but ignores the fact that neither the state, nor civil society are intrinsically proponents of 'progressive' or 'rational' practices and that states also have the capacity to promote 'liberal' as well as 'illiberal' policies.

In another article he paradoxically claims a "realistic" approach towards the question of human rights in Muslim societies would entail the "actual freedoms" found in Western and Muslim societies continue to be distinct.⁷⁰⁴ In seeming contradiction with what he has said elsewhere he claims that those freedoms which are not compatible with "Islamic culture" can be limited on the premise that doing such is "devoid of political malevolence" and harbours "useful effects".⁷⁰⁵ He cites gay rights as just one example, claiming that this is not an issue of contention between "democrats and autocrats"

⁷⁰² The notion of *gharb-zadegi* (Westoxification) initially propounded by Ahmad Fardid, and elaborated upon most famously by Al-e Ahmad in his tract of the same name, which was subsequently adapted by Khomeini and upheld as an affirmation of his own deep-rooted xenophobia, was further theorised by Mesbah-Yazdi and various other ideologues in the 1990s. This discourse was integral to the latter's struggle against secular intellectuals, the so-called *digar-andishan*, but also religious intellectuals who were seen as having fallen foul of the seductive arguments of a decadent West, which was destined to collapse as a result of its intellectual and moral degeneration. Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, *Tahajom-e farhangi* (Qom: Entesharat-e mo'asseseh-ye amuzeshi va pazhuheshi-e Imam Khomeini, 1389 [2010]), p43

⁷⁰³ Mojtahed-Shabestari, "'Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?," p34

⁷⁰⁴ "Mosalmanan bayad hoquq-e bashar ra bepazirand.", p206

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p207

inside Iran.⁷⁰⁶ Shabestari then moves to assure his readers that “liberty” and “licentiousness” are not one and the same, appearing to equate gay rights with the latter.⁷⁰⁷ Shabestari is careful to stipulate that irrespective of the issue of ‘compatibility with Islamic culture’ certain basic rights such as freedom of expression, association, political participation, and religion, ought not to be violated. He does not consider that gay rights might also be inseparable from basic rights such as freedom of expression and association. His argument contends rather, that “the boundaries of legal freedoms” ought to evolve as cultural-religious norms are critiqued and reconstructed.⁷⁰⁸ He thus offers a gradualist and selective approach from the subject-position of a believer within a Muslim-majority society, which is not without its problems. Nevertheless, his views result in some provocative conclusions given the context in which he was writing.

Quintessential Piety and Free Faith

Both Soroush and Shabestari contend that religious duties are not duties which the state should take upon itself to enforce. They are “non-governmental” (*gheir-e hokumati*) in nature, and pious individuals must take it upon themselves to perform them.⁷⁰⁹ They are thus freely self-imposed *qua* religious obligations, and their performance is the outcome of the believer’s autonomous and uncoerced choice. By this time, the notion of freely choosing to be religious had become crucial for

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.,p207

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.,p207

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.,p206

⁷⁰⁹ Locke made a similar argument in his much feted, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983),p26-27

Sorush, since much like Mojtabeh-Shabestari, he argues that “faith” cannot be imposed by force of law or threat of sanction.⁷¹⁰

As was seen in the case of two of the Islamist ideologues examined in **Chapter 2**, ‘faith’ and its cultivation were secondary considerations, if they appeared at all. The overriding ambition was rather the capture of the state to the end of executing the *shari'a*. By the mid-1990s both Sorush and Mojtabeh-Shabestari began to publicly decry the very impossibility of such a venture, and regard it as doomed to failure. For example, Mojtabeh-Shabestari in his essay *Iman, siyaset va hokumat* (Faith, Politics and Government, 1376 [1997]), insists that it is “faith” which compels the religious to seek out political and social regimes in which they are “better able to consciously and freely cultivate faith”,⁷¹¹ and that it is “a choice with all one’s being”.⁷¹² Their favoured political order is not only anti-paternalist and thus contrary to one of the main threads running through Khomeini’s political thought. It also constitutes a rupture with classical Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi, who believed “felicity can be forced on human beings”.⁷¹³ Farabi’s elevation of the philosopher-imam and the derivation of his right to rule, were in turn heavily influenced by Plato’s *The Republic* and the notion of the Philosopher-King. Khomeini was certainly familiar with Farabi’s thought, and his own

⁷¹⁰ Mojtabeh-Shabestari, "Mosalmanan bayad hoquq-e bashar ra bepazirand.", p281

⁷¹¹ "Iman, siyaset va hokumat," in *Iman va azadi* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1376 [1997]), p79

⁷¹² Ibid., p76

⁷¹³ Lenn E. Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p9

The famous distinction drawn by Isaiah Berlin in his essay, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ liberty, is also relevant since Sorush was certainly aware of it. He actually mentions the distinction in a speech he gave at Shahid Beheshti University in 1990. Sorush, "Aql va azadi.", p236

In the later essays pertaining to the nature of religious government, Sorush holds the middle ground. While highly critical of paternalism, he holds the conviction that individuals’ basic needs such as security, shelter, sustenance, must be guaranteed by the state, and are indeed a precondition for intellectual pursuits.

theological orientation had been influenced by both Farabi and Ibn 'Arabi and their confidence that man's philosophical-rational and mystical ascension to sainthood and perfectibility were not only desirable, but possible.⁷¹⁴

Both Mojtabeh-Shabestari and Soroush, on the contrary, make a case that the government's only role is to provide conditions whereby individuals can freely pursue the decision to be religious. It appears that both Soroush and Mojtabeh-Shabestari are trying to navigate between what they regard as two extremes. One is embodied by the political regime of *velayat-e faqih*, which holds clerical rule and supervision are necessary for the implementation of the *shari'a* in the absence of the Hidden Imam, and the other is manifested in regimes which impose secularism autocratically and are inherently hostile towards the influence of religious institutions and religious appurtenances in public-political space, often referred to in Persian as *nezamha-ye la'ic*, originating in the French term, *laïcité*. Regularly adduced examples of such a regime are the authoritarian and modernising states of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Reza Shah in Turkey and Iran respectively.⁷¹⁵ The latter, in particular, had been a repeated target of derision because of his sartorial reforms and banning of the veil,⁷¹⁶ which has since been depicted as the obverse of compulsory veiling under the Islamic Republic.

***Feqh* vs Faith**

⁷¹⁴ Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, p34

⁷¹⁵ Soroush, "Three Cultures.", p160

⁷¹⁶ See, **Chapter 2.**

For Soroush, “rational criteria” and harmony between reason (*'aql*) and the *shari'a* are of primary importance. He states clearly that the “disregard of rational criteria and of the necessity for the harmony of religious understanding and rational findings is a breach of religious responsibility”.⁷¹⁷ In this way, religion (*din*) merely confirms or corroborates the norms and principles which govern statecraft and ethics, which are discovered by rational inquiry. He makes it abundantly clear that neither ‘religion’, nor ‘revelation’ (*vahy*) are the sources of such norms and principles. Here Soroush breaks with the views of Khomeini and the standard *Usuli* position more generally, since he does not take *ejtehad* to be the exclusive province of any specific group or valid merely as a method in the armoury of Islamic jurisprudence.

Just as he had done with ‘ideology’, Soroush differentiates ‘religion’ and *feqh* in emphatic and stark terms. He contends that a non-religious society could implement a governmental system in accordance with the precepts of orthodox Islamic jurisprudence, on the premise that such a regime could hypothetically yield greater social utility. Such a policy would not, however, qualify the society in question as a ‘religious’ one. This is because according to Soroush, *feqh* is merely a technique or craft (*fan*).⁷¹⁸ *Feqh* does not touch on issues of belief and faith, which are addressed by theology and mysticism, merely external behaviours. *Feqh* focuses on practical religious obligations and religious government cannot ultimately rest on such a foundation. Its foundation must be predicated on individually chosen and autonomously self-imposed faith. In this respect the argument is

⁷¹⁷ Soroush, "The Idea of Democratic Religious Government.",p127

⁷¹⁸ Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini.",p355

homologous to that of Kant's description of the self-imposed character of rational-normative maxims cum universalisable laws in the form of the categorical imperative. Soroush thus concludes that "religious government is other than jurisprudential government...religious government in the respect that it is religious, in principle, is a government of faith, which means a government which the faithful establish because they are human beings, righteous and pious".⁷¹⁹ "Faith" (*iman*) can only be defined as such when it is freely chosen; it is by definition antithetical to heteronomy. This point has been argued for by virtually all members of the post-revolutionary *rowshanfekri-ye dini* collective and had been forcefully defended by Bazargan from at least the mid-1960s.⁷²⁰ In the history of Western political and religious thought it was perhaps most famously argued for by Locke in his *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) where he associated "faith" with "inward sincerity".⁷²¹ Soroush holds this position for much the same reason,

"religion is a species of love...faith cannot enter the hearts of human beings with force. If we accept this, in that case, religious government will be a government commensurate with the people's free faith and its duty will consist in guarding the people's free faith...meaning, that the societal climate will be one favourable to the conscious and free choice of religion".⁷²²

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*,p355

⁷²⁰ Bazargan, *Be'sat va idi'olozhi.*,p122-127

⁷²¹ Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration.*,p38

⁷²² Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini.",p356

Soroush alludes to the famous ayah of the Quran in the surah *The Cow*, which states "there is no compulsion in religion". *The Qur'an*, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004),p29; 2:256

In this way Soroush creates a hierarchy of value with “faith” at its apogee;⁷²³ “ethics” (*akhlaq*) and then ones deeds (*a'mal*) follow.⁷²⁴ It is on this basis that Soroush concludes “hypocrisy” (*riyakari*) is far worse and “anti-religion” than either drinking wine or gambling. *Feqh*, he contends, is incapable of distinguishing between “external action” and “the habits of the heart”.⁷²⁵ *Feqh* is of no use for identifying “hypocrisy”, it can only categorise and regard actions as lawful, unlawful, permissible or objectionable. In addition, as soon as the “jurisprudential outlook” (*binesh-e feqhi*) acquires the reins of power it immediately strives to impose a legalistic structure upon society, in the form of mandatory veiling or religiously sanctioned blood money for crimes committed.⁷²⁶

Shabestari similarly argues that the equation of religion and *feqh* is fundamentally destructive to “the spirit of religion”, and “brittles the roots” of feeling and experience, in his estimation, so crucial to the faith perspective.⁷²⁷ Shabestari contends that religion’s main purpose is to facilitate the attainment of meaning for believers: “the bestowal of meaning is the primary function (*karkerd*) of religion”.⁷²⁸ This bestowal of meaning emerges in the process by which the existential questions posed by the individual, receive intelligible answers and explanations.⁷²⁹ Religion has the capacity to open new horizons of meaning, and humankind is effectively engaged in the perpetual interpretation

⁷²³ Shabestari similarly states “faith is the crux of being a Muslim”. Mojtahed-Shabestari, "Mosalmanan bayad hoquq-e bashar ra bepazirand.",p281

⁷²⁴ Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini.",p357

⁷²⁵ Ibid.,p357

⁷²⁶ Ibid.,p357

⁷²⁷ Mojtahed-Shabestari, ""Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?.",p50

⁷²⁸ Ibid.,p50

⁷²⁹ Ibid.,p51

of the manifold incarnations of the deity.⁷³⁰ This is not an instrumental relationship, but one that is genuinely preoccupied with a human impulse for spiritual transcendence.⁷³¹ Only insofar as it fulfils such a function in the modern world can it be assured longevity going into the future.⁷³² Only thus can 'tradition' undergo expansion and new horizons be opened. It is here that Shabestari can be clearly seen as borrowing from Gadamer and the latter's notion of a dialogical relationship with 'tradition'.⁷³³ In the aftermath of the collapse of theological authority,⁷³⁴ only a dynamic and innovative relationship with tradition can provide faith with an anchored set of coordinates and orientation out of which to speak.⁷³⁵ Acceptance of religion for Shabestari does not occur by means of critical rationality, but through its speaking to an existential and practical desire for transcendence and meaning in the world. In this respect his approach to faith is not a deistic one. Critical rationality is not dispensed with, however. It plays an essential role insofar as it staves off the possibility of a final or ultimate interpretation of transcendence. Instrumental rationality's only role is one of ordering and managing worldly affairs. Neither critical, nor instrumental rationality effect the acceptance of a particular spiritual way of life and its accompanying values. It is instead the result

⁷³⁰ Ibid.,p52

⁷³¹ Ibid.,p52

⁷³² Ibid.,p52-53

⁷³³ Ibid.,p53

⁷³⁴ "Life does not have a framework and yet someone must impart a framework to it. Under such conditions all the authorities upon which man has depended have collapsed". "Seh guneh-ye qara'at az sonnat dar 'asr-e moderniteh," in *Sonnat va sekularism: goftarha'i az 'Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari, Mostafa Malekian, Mohsen Kadivar* (Tehran: Serat, 1381 [2002]),p217

⁷³⁵ Ibid.,p219

of what Shabestari calls an “existential harmony” (*hamahangi-ye vojudi*), which is itself assayed in experience.⁷³⁶

Sorush, by contrast, rehashes the timeworn metaphysical distinction between the individual’s soul/heart and body/external appearance. This distinction has had many different manifestations in the Islamic tradition, the best-known of which is the distinction between *zاهر* and *باطن*, and has a long and rich history in Islamic philosophy and literature. For Sorush, because of the real possibility of incommensurability between one’s apparent and public disposition and behaviour (*zاهر*) and inner nature (*باطن*), and *فقه*’s sole preoccupation with the former, a jurisprudential government is able to commit a far more heinous ‘sin’ than any individual transgression. In short, it can produce a plentiful supply of ‘hypocrites’, whom have not come to a position of faith through their own volition, but have rather been compelled to live in accordance with a set of imposed norms which structure their behaviour in public space under threat of sanction.

Traditionally, external observance and inner sincerity were viewed as being intertwined and indissociable. External observance and abidance by the precepts of the *shari’a* were held as a necessary, if not sufficient condition for spiritual ascendance and mindfulness of the godhead. However, Sorush insists that *فقه* is purely a “worldly” (*donyavi*) concern, and can do little for the lot of the faithful in the afterlife. He is also anxious to make clear, “jurisprudential Islam (*eslam-e feqhi*) is not necessarily real Islam (*eslam-e vaqe’i*)”.⁷³⁷ Only “heartfelt faith” (*iman-e qalbi*) can address

⁷³⁶ ""Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?,"p52-53

⁷³⁷ Sorush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini,"p368

humanity's fate in the hereafter. In this highly anti-nomocratic stance, the relationship between an individual's actions in the mundane world and the hereafter are refined, though not severed, but external affectations of piety, if not ritual altogether, become irrelevant to soteriological questions.⁷³⁸

How to Govern in lieu of the Right to Govern

While procedurally speaking i.e. how citizens elect their representatives, the regime envisioned by Soroush can be termed democratic, it harbours a basic difference with regimes which espouse laicism: “The society of the religious (*dindaran*) choose their leaders and they have the right to demand from rulers that they continuously keep the space of religious experience and the free cultivation of faith, in society and observe the rights of the religious”.⁷³⁹ ‘Religious democracies’ unlike their laicist counterparts are obliged to furnish conditions amenable for freely chosen religiosity. What this would entail in actual policy terms is left characteristically vague, and Soroush does not entertain or give much thought to the possibility that individually religious members of Iranian society might elect a government because of its economic policies e.g. greater wealth distribution or lower rates of income taxation, as opposed to the promotion of conditions amenable to “heartfelt faith”.

This is not a mere piece of abstract theorising, however. Soroush speaks explicitly of the Islamic Republic's institutions, but sets the scene by first recalling the classical question of political theory asked by Plato in *The Republic*: “who has the right to rule?” Soroush, without explicitly citing Popper,

⁷³⁸ In this respect Soroush's views at this point bear a strong resemblance to the later ideas of Mehdi Bazargan. See, Bazargan, *Akherat va khoda: hadaf-e resalat-e anbia'*, p37

⁷³⁹ Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini.", p357

replaces the question of who has the right to rule with the question, "how must one rule?"⁷⁴⁰ Unlike Plato who posited the ideal of the Philosopher-King or Khomeini who similarly argued on behalf of the right of the just *faqih* to rule, Soroush, closely following Popper, is concerned with the procedural question, "how must one rule?"⁷⁴¹ Popper was primarily preoccupied with procedural questions of how political power can be limited and the possibility of dictatorship and wayward authority thwarted. As a result, democracy in Popper's estimation was first and foremost a matter of ensuring people could defend themselves against the threat of dictatorship.⁷⁴² For Popper, it was the ability to depose a leader or government without bloodshed that was the crux of democratic governance.⁷⁴³

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.,p358

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.,p358

⁷⁴² Kadivar also affirms this position in, Mohsen Kadivar, "Azadi dar hokumat-e dini," in *Daghdaghehha-ye hokumat-e dini* (Tehran: Nashr-e nei, 1379 [2000]),p420

This article was a speech delivered at the Economics Faculty at the University of Tehran on 12 November 1996 (22 Aban 1375). It was subsequently published in *Salam*, amongst other publications, in three parts on 2,12,19 Dei 1375 [Dec-Jan 1996-1997].

Mojtahed-Shabestari also takes a comparable position, albeit some years later. Mojtahed-Shabestari, "Demokrasi va dindari.",p108

In this essay, which was first published in the Tehran municipality's newspaper, several years after Soroush's well-known essays on religious democracy, Mojtahed-Shabestari speaks of democracy's importance as a form of government which permits the people to peacefully remove those in authority from political power and replace them with another government.

⁷⁴³ Karl R. Popper, *The Lesson of This Century: With Two Talks on Freedom and the Democratic State*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London and New York: Routledge 1997),p70-71

This very same volume by Popper was translated into Persian and Mohammad Khatami suggested that his cabinet read it upon taking office. 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Critical Rationalism and Religious and Political Reform in Iran " in *Sir Karl Popper Memorial Lecture, London School of Economic and Political Science* (15 March 2012).

Soroush's comments in this particular essay, however, appear to largely rely on Popper's debate with Herbert Marcuse, whose publication long preceded *The Lesson of This Century* in both English and Persian. See, Herbert Marcuse and Karl R. Popper, *Revolution or Reform? A Confrontation* trans. Michael Aylward and A.T. Ferguson (Chicago: Precedent Publishing; New University Press, 1976),p78

The latter had been translated into Persian prior to the revolution. 'Ali Paya and Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, "The Philosopher and the Revolutionary State: How Karl Popper's Ideas Shaped the Views of Iranian Intellectuals," *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 20, no. 2 (July 2006),p186

Pursuing this line of thought, Soroush refers to the role of the Assembly of Experts (*Majles-e khebregan*) in the Islamic Republic's political system and constitution, and states that its responsibility is to depose the leader (*rahbar*) if he ceases to fulfil the criteria of a just leader.⁷⁴⁴ The criteria of "just" isn't specified, but given his aforementioned positions, it could not be determined by the methods of Islamic jurisprudence. He continues, surmising that by means of the Assembly of Experts we observe "indirect supervision of the state by the people".⁷⁴⁵ Curiously, a couple of years previously, the Guardian Council had vetoed numerous clerical members of the Khomeinist left from running for the second election of the Assembly of Experts held on 8 October 1990 (16 Mehr 1369).⁷⁴⁶ Soroush does not mention this episode and instead focuses on the human fallibility of the ruler (*hakem*) because "the temptation of power and wealth...is not a small temptation and can cause anyone to err";⁷⁴⁷ arguably another instance of Soroush's embrace of Popper's epistemological fallibilism.⁷⁴⁸ Popper himself did not regard 'objectivity' to be the property of an individual or specific class, but rather a 'social product', more specifically, the product of critical discussion.⁷⁴⁹ Therefore no single individual could ultimately claim to be in possession of the truth to the exclusion of others. For Popper, but also Soroush, this is an a priori impossibility. Continuing this line of argument, Soroush comments that if all the state's institutions ultimately receive legitimacy from the *vali-ye faqih*, as some apparatchiks in

⁷⁴⁴ Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini.",p359

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.,p359

⁷⁴⁶ See, **Chapter 3**.

⁷⁴⁷ Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini.",p359

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.,p359

⁷⁴⁹ Jeremy Shearmur, *The Political Thought of Karl Popper* (London; New York Routledge, 1996),p111

the Islamic Republic claim, then the Assembly of Experts' supervisory role is effectively nullified. Legitimacy cannot be bestowed entirely from on high, but must come from an alternative source; in this instance, popular election. If the people are endowed with the right of indirect supervision of the leader, Soroush concludes that they are also entitled to rule. Following Popper to the letter, he argues, "the right of deposition takes precedence over the right of appointment".⁷⁵⁰

Conclusion

For many of the *rowshanfekran-e dini* the question of 'governance' was synonymous with the absence of politics, and to this extent fitted well with the broader political context of the 1990s and the outlook of the Kargozaran, which attempted to amplify the idea that governance was ultimately a "technical" and "scientific" question.⁷⁵¹ 'Non-ideological' technical and scientific know-how, as well as trial and error, were the best means of governing. 'Ideology' was dangerous and *feqh* could not offer any solutions to the questions facing the modern state.⁷⁵² While it does not entirely coincide, indeed Rafsanjani showed little interest in taking the advice of the religious intellectuals and their allies calling for political development,⁷⁵³ or the harassment they received at the hands of vigilante 'pressure groups', the conviction that governance was first and foremost a technical question under

⁷⁵⁰ Soroush, "Tahlil-e mafhum-e hokumat-e dini.",p361

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.,p363

⁷⁵² Mojtabeh-Shabestari, "'Qara'at-e rasmi az din" cheguneh peida shod va cheguneh dochar-e bohran gardid?.",p36

⁷⁵³ Hajjarian and Khojasteh-Rahimi, "Eslahatchi, cheriki nemishavad.",p45

the purview of numerous experts with a specified division of labour who engineer the domains under their jurisdiction was broadly accepted in principle, even if it was not reflected in practice; nepotism, bribery and other forms of corruption continued to afflict the country in all manner of ways. On a deeper level however, it is undeniable that the *rowshanfekran-e dini* were mounting a concerted assault on the ideological underpinnings of the Islamic state and proposing an alternative vision in its stead.

Furthermore, the great emphasis Popper had laid on piecemeal social engineering in contradistinction to revolutionary transformation was imbibed by several *rowshanfekran-e dini*. In many instances they creatively entertained this paradigm even though Popper certainly never had anything like a constitutionalist hierocracy in mind when he first penned his theory. Nevertheless, distinct forms of *epistemological fallibilism* and demands for *gradualist social change* found themselves theoretically married in the thought of Soroush, Mojtabeh-Shabestari, Ganji, Kadivar and many others who would openly advocate incremental political reform after the electoral victory of Mohammad Khatami.

By the mid-nineties, Soroush and Mojtabeh-Shabestari, through their various critiques of jurisprudential Islam were not only undermining the theocratic bulwark of the Islamic Republic, but the *raison d'être* of the clergy itself. These views were not uniformly shared by either religious intellectuals or members of the Islamic left, a number of whom theorised in more overtly practical terms and were better apprised of the institutional and constitutional challenges facing political action. In the following chapter I hope to highlight some of the divisions within the so-called 'reformist camp', as it would develop post-1997 and how they pertained to their advocates' respective

subject-positions in the political field, despite the often parlous 'overlapping consensus' which allowed them to find a common basis for their interventions and activism.

Chapter 5: Religious Intellectualism, the 2nd Khordad Front and the Quest for Political Development

Will Khatami compromise?

And Khatami went to the Majles to defend his policies.

One group believed: Khatami mustn't compromise.

Another group believed: Khatami must compromise.

The third group were saying: But didn't Khatami compromise?

The fourth group were saying: But Khatami compromised?

Khatami once again defended the politics which he supported and all of which he had cast aside in 2000 (1379).

The people were saying: now that nothing will be done, the least we can do is talk about it.⁷⁵⁴

Ebrahim Nabavi, *Dar sal 79 etefaq oftad* (In the year 2000 something happened)

'[T]he subaltern classes always suffer the initiative of the dominant class, even when they rebel'.⁷⁵⁵

Antonio Gramsci

Introduction

The first two years of Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Khatami's tenure were ones of hope and vibrancy, not merely on the country's intellectual scene, but also for journalism. While many of the discursive keywords of the reformist lexicon had been coined and theorised prior to Khatami's electoral victory, following the 1997 presidential election which brought the 'Smiling Seyyed' to office they managed to reach a far broader audience than they had previously. While newspapers

⁷⁵⁴ Ebrahim Nabavi and Nikahang Kowsar, *Dar sal-e 79 etefaq oftad* (Tehran: Rowzaneh, 1380 [2001]), p216

⁷⁵⁵ Massimo Modonesi, *Subalternity, Antagonism, Autonomy: Constructing the Political Subject* trans. Adriana V. Rendon Garrido and Philip Roberts, Kindle ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2014), Loc-535-of-4286

such as *Salam* headed by Hojjat al-Islam Musavi-Kho'ei had been active since February 1991 and had acted as the most important media podium of the Khomeinist left during the 1990s, after the election, a whole raft of new newspapers were set up by various members of the Islamic left, and those sympathetic to Khatami's electoral platform. At various points during Khatami's first term, allies of the president and stalwart members of the Islamic *chap*, along with those linked to religious intellectual circles saw the media as one of the chief avenues through which they might consolidate their capture of the executive and thereby disseminate their ideas to a wider public. In accord with this ambition several newspapers became associated with both prominent members of the Islamic left and their intellectual cadres; thus, Hamid-Reza Jala'ipour and Mohsen Sazgara founded *Jame'eh* (Society) with Masha'allah Shamsolva'ezin as editor in February 1998, which from the outset was firmly committed to Khatami's political programme,⁷⁵⁶ announcing itself "the first newspaper of Iranian civil society".⁷⁵⁷ In billing it thus they sought to distinguish themselves from official and state-owned news outlets. They tacitly pledged to offer an alternative narrative to that of the latter, while at the same time receiving encouragement from the Khatami administration and Ministry of Culture in particular.⁷⁵⁸ Prior to its publication, Soroush was also intimately involved in the details of the newspaper's founding in May-June 1997 and even advised Shamsolva'ezin, who regarded himself as the former's student, to accept editorship in the new venture.⁷⁵⁹ The theoretical journal *Kiyan* was

⁷⁵⁶ Shamsolva'ezin, "Osul-e 10 ganeh-ye *Jame'eh* ", p105

⁷⁵⁷ "Amadeh'im ke shoma ra bokoshim," *Payam-e emruz*, no. 25., p7

⁷⁵⁸ "Halqeh-ye *Kiyan* mokhalef bud: goftogu ba Ma'shallah Shamsolva'ezin," *Mehrnameh*, no. 27 (Bahman 1391 [Jan-Feb 2013]), p197

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p195-6

still active publishing during this time under the guidance of Ebrahim Soltani and Reza Tehrani, but was regarded as largely restricted to a small and well-educated middle-class audience.⁷⁶⁰ “It seemed Dr. Soroush wished to reproduce the success of *Kiyan* on a larger scale”, recalled Shamsolvaezin in a retrospective interview published in early 2013. With *Jame'eh*, “Religious intellectualism possessed a far-reaching media-outlet”, and its initial daily circulation exceeded *Kiyan*'s bimonthly print-run five-fold.⁷⁶¹ Shamsolvaezin and Sazgara had even conceived founding a party which bore the name of ‘religious intellectualism’ in a bid to capitalise on the opportunity afforded by the Khomeinist left’s unexpected victory.⁷⁶² The whole of the *Kiyan* circle did not endorse the move as others believed their role was best served in an exclusively theoretical capacity. The idea was, however, stillborn when the Ministry of the Interior refused to provide the group with a licence to undertake political activities.⁷⁶³

The Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of Iran’s (SMEEI) journal *'Asr-e ma* also continued to be active and was perhaps the main outlet for Sa'id Hajjarian’s strategic-political analyses until it was banned in the spring of 2002, while its editor, Mohsen Armin would enter the Sixth Majles and become a deputy speaker. Also during this initial flurry of activity the writings of none other than Akbar Ganji came to typify a new chapter in engaged journalism.⁷⁶⁴ In addition to exposing the many misdeeds of the Islamic Republic’s intelligence services he edited the fortnightly

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.,p195-6

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.,p196

⁷⁶² Mohsen Sazgara and Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Mohsen Sazgara," (13 May 2013).

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁴ The most famous example is of course, Akbar Ganji, *'Alijenab-e sorkhpush va 'alijenab-e khakestari: asibshenasi-ye gozar be dowlat-e demokratik-e towse'eh-gara* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1378 [1999]).

periodical, *Rah-e now* (New Way), which emerged as another prodigious outlet for religious intellectuals and the more theoretically-disposed elements of the Islamic left. Meanwhile, Sa'id Hajjarian began publication of *Sobh-e emruz* (This Morning) edited by his one-time colleague at the Presidential Strategic Research Centre, Ali-Reza 'Alavi-Tabar; Hojjat al-Islam 'Abdollah Nuri of the Assembly of Combatant Clergy (MRM) founded *Khordad* edited by Ali Hekmat; and a one-time seminarian, IRGC member, and religious reformist intellectual, Emadeddin Baqi, emerged as a controversial editor of *Fath* (Victory) newspaper.⁷⁶⁵ All in all, these activities were indicative of the very real impact of the religious intellectual discourse amongst the Islamic left elite and their desire to propagate it in a more public and accessible format.

Morteza Mardiha, an erstwhile Islamist student activist turned academic, who was a participant in the Kiyān circle and also a prominent commentator for the newspaper *'Asr-e azadegan* (Age of the Free-Thinkers, which was later edited by Shamsolva'ezin) pointedly stated in one of his articles on the cusp of the Sixth Majles election that “the press is the epitome and essence (*'osareh*) of 2nd of Khordad (23 May 1996, the date of Khatami's election) and it is for this reason that a legion of outstanding intellectual, cultural, and political elements gathered together in this domain”. Mardiha compared the burgeoning reformist press corps to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the first years of the revolution stating,

⁷⁶⁵ It was largely in *Fath* that Baqi, like Ganji (who was also on the editorial board of the paper) worked tirelessly to expose the murder of secular intellectuals and dissidents by 'rogue elements' in the intelligence services. See, Emadeddin Baqi, *Terazhedi-ye demokrasi dar Iran: bazkhani-ye qatlha-ye zanjireh'i*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran Nashr-e nei, 1378 [1999]).

“at that time a considerable part of the educated and cognoscenti entered the Revolutionary Guards because the activities and institutions of the revolution and country had not yet been split apart and in their absence the Revolutionary Guards were considered the essence (*'osareh*) of the revolution”.⁷⁶⁶

While certainly a rose-tinted and skewed account of the IRGC at the outset of the revolution, it was nevertheless suggestive given that Jala'ipur, Sazgara, Baqi and 'Alavi-Tabar had all served in the paramilitary force during the Iran-Iraq war, and 'Abdollah Nuri had briefly served as Khomeini's representative to the organization. Many would, furthermore, begin to pursue graduate studies, often state sponsored, at both home and abroad, following the war. In any case, this group of individuals bound by their robust opposition to Khomeini's challengers and rivals and the protracted brutality of the conflict with Saddam Hussein's Iraq had gradually come to adopt a very different outlook to the one which they had previously so staunchly advocated.⁷⁶⁷ Instead of conducting hot wars they now preferred to spar with the traditional right in print and the lecture hall.

As the prominent journalist and writer Mas'ud Behnud observed, “following the 2nd Khordad the role and share of the Iranian media in the civic movement became clear”,⁷⁶⁸ and in many instances it would be members of the loose, sprawling network of the Islamic left, religious intellectuals and their associates who would be leading the charge. The press was touted as the “fourth pillar” (*rokn-e*

⁷⁶⁶ Morteza Mardiha, "Andishehha-ye now dar 'arseh-ye entekhabat-e shishom," in *Amniyat dar eghma: negahi beh jelvehha-ye surrealism-ye siyasi dar Iran* (Tehran: Naqsh va negar, 1379 [2000]), p21

⁷⁶⁷ I prefer not to use Gramsci's term 'war of position' because the Khomeinist left are not a subaltern group contesting 'common sense' or a hegemonic discourse, they are rather an elite group set on contesting and re-appropriating the latter, by insisting on their greater fidelity to the hegemonic discourse. Gramsci's focus in this regard, by contrast, is for the most part Italy's subaltern classes. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, p52-53

⁷⁶⁸ Mas'ud Behnud, "Dow Dovvom-e Khordad, yek goru va yek matbu'at," in *Goluleh bad ast: maqalat-e Jame'eh, Tus, Neshat va Adineh* (Tehran: 'Elm, 1378 [1999]), p307

chahrom) of democratic society and similarly a free, critical press, was thought indispensable for unmasking the abuses of political power and the propagation of a critical consciousness throughout the country.⁷⁶⁹

This chapter will not and cannot offer a panoramic view of the Khatami era.⁷⁷⁰ Instead **Part I** will provide an exposition of Mohammad Khatami's political and religious world-view on the basis of his politico-ideological writings of the early 1990s, and thereafter his speeches delivered in the course of his first term in office, and thereby try to situate him in relation to other post-revolutionary religious intellectual currents. It will examine in particular his views and conceptualisation of 'law', 'guardianship' and 'legitimacy'. **Part II** will focus on the writings of Sa'id Hajjarian, the so-called 'brain of reform', elucidating his positions on the issues of 'sovereignty' and 'political development' and how they pertained to 'reformist' strategy in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It is in this way that I hope to glean some of the Islamic left's and religious intellectualism's unresolved theoretical and political differences.

Part I: Khatami and the 2nd Khordad Front: Legality and Political Development

It should be stated first of all that the relationship between the political thought of Khatami and other well-known religious intellectuals such as Soroush, Mojtabeh-Shabestari and Kadivar is by no means straightforward. **Chapter 3** detailed how prior to Khatami's electoral victory he had

⁷⁶⁹ Shamsolva'ezin uses this very term in *Jame'eh's* ten-point manifesto. Shamsolva'ezin, "Osul-e 10 ganeh-ye *Jame'eh* ",p106; Emadeddin Baqi, "Matbu'at va towse'eh-ye siyasi," in *Bahar-e rokn-e chaharom: moruri bar jonbesh-e matbu'at-e eslah talab (1376-1379)* (Tehran: Nashr-e sara'i, 1381 [2002]),p76-77

⁷⁷⁰ The best and most comprehensive work on the period is, Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*.

emphasized the necessity for cultural development, while several other centres of intellectual ferment with ties to the political elite, steadily began to emphasize the imperative of 'political development' and their own ideological and moral leadership, predicting that Rafsanjani's satisfaction with 'economic development' would ultimately lead down a veritable cul-de-sac.

Khatami's discourse by all accounts offered a refreshing alternative to his conservative rival and incumbent Parliamentary Speaker Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri, and was in two quite obvious and uncontroversial respects under the sway of 1990s-era religious intellectualism and its accompanying network. 1) Khatami's acceptance of multiple *qara'atha* or readings of religion in concert with the insistence on mutual toleration was unmistakably influenced by the work of Shabestari, Soroush and others, even if he still remained considerably more conservative in his conclusions than the latter.⁷⁷¹

2) At the same time, his insistence on electoral participation as a vehicle for political development was inspired by his colleagues in the A'in circle, which included his younger brother Mohammad-Reza, and also members of the SMEEI, whom had had good relations with Khatami throughout the 1990s.⁷⁷² Feizollah 'Arabsorkhi an SMEEI central committee member, for instance, had essentially acted as Khatami's 'right hand man' while the former Culture Minister headed the National Library.

The influence of these channels of communication and formal and informal networks of individuals,

⁷⁷¹ His lecture "The Official Reading of Islam" delivered on 22 June 1998 which I will analyse in greater detail below is one such example. Though it's not clear whether Khatami is alluding to Shabestari's critique of the 'official reading of religion', it echoes in a simplified fashion many of the tropes and ideas found in the latter's oeuvre. It is also worth noting that Khatami and Shabestari share the same publisher. Mohammad Khatami, "Tafsir-e rasmi az Islam (1/4/1377 [22/6/1998])," in *Islam, rowhaniyat va enqelab-e eslami* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]).

⁷⁷² See, **Chapter 3**.

reading groups, research centres and publications cannot be underestimated in terms of their impact upon Khatami's public platform, as well as many of the policies he would propound in the course of his tenure. This does not mean that upon reaching office, however, that Khatami was always able or even willing to actualise all the objectives of this influential school of intellectuals and politicians as we shall see in due course. In fact, it was his at times seeming impotence and ineffectuality while in office, which not only emboldened the conservative establishment, but also led more radical reformists to increasingly slide into apathy and declare that they had 'surpassed Khatami' and left his limited aspirations and objectives behind.⁷⁷³

I will now attempt to analyse some of the chief characteristics of Khatami's own world-view and the keywords around which his discourse revolved, both prior to, and in the years following his ascendance to head of the executive. It has been assumed on occasion that Khatami came to the presidency with a programme of sweeping reform as an Iranian Gorbachev in the making.⁷⁷⁴ Apart from the obvious differences between their respective offices' standing and powers within the

⁷⁷³ In a collection of essays which was entitled "Passing Khatami", perhaps more accurately translated "Surpassing Khatami", Hossein Bashiriyeh, who was by no means a member of the Khomeinist left even if he had had a significant impact on several of its prominent members was most frank in plainly stating that almost four years later the 'reformist project' was flagging and had lost much of its initial impetus. Hossein Bashiriyeh, "Payan-e yek perozheh," in *'Obur az Khatami*, ed. Amir-Reza Sotudeh (Tehran: Zekr, 1379 [2000]), p40

Publicly enunciated disillusion with the reformist project under Khatami's leadership was more brusquely enunciated by those who were prepared to largely break with elite political circles in the Islamic Republic. This usually occurred after formerly committed intellectuals of the Islamic *chap* directly experienced brutalisation, torture and imprisonment. The best example is undoubtedly Akbar Ganji and his *Republican Manifesto* which he smuggled out of Evin prison for publication in 2002. *Akbar Ganji, Manifest-e jomhuri-khahi: jomhuri-khahi dar barabar-e mashruteh khahi, modeli baraye khoruj az bonbast-e siyasi* (PDF published online, 1381 [2002]).

⁷⁷⁴ Zhand Shakibi has given an excellent dissection of this problematic analogy which often obscures more than it enlightens. See, Zhand Shakibi, *Khatami and Gorbachev: Politics of Change in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the USSR* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), esp. Chapter 6

hierarchy of the state power structure e.g. the Iranian president isn't the highest ranking official in the country, the reality proved far more complicated. Antagonists of the Islamic left such as long-time Foreign Minister Ali-Akbar Velayati (1981-1997) and Khatami's defeated rival, Hojjat al-Islam Nateq-Nuri, polemically sought to draw a comparison between Khatami and Gorbachev, and thereby depict him as an existential threat to the *nezam* and slippery slope on the road to disintegration and eventual collapse.⁷⁷⁵ All the while partisans such as Akbar Ganji with equal vigour repudiated the analogy, despite at several other junctures borrowing heavily from the rhetoric of Soviet and Eastern bloc reformers:⁷⁷⁶ "Khatami is not the Iranian Gorbachev. Khatami is the symbol of compassionate and humane Islam. Khatami is the man of security, law and civil society".⁷⁷⁷

Khatami was not the first choice of the Islamic left, the chief groups of which were the Coalition of the Imam's Line, the Hezbollah Association of Combatant Clerics in the Majles, the Office for Strengthening Unity, and the Association of Combatant Clerics which following the Fourth Majles

⁷⁷⁵ Ganji, "Din-e ensani, sowsialism-e ensani: negahi beh tajrobeh-ye Nagi, Dubchek, Gorbachof va Khatami.",p324-325

⁷⁷⁶ In a lecture delivered at Sharif University in December 1998, Ganji explicitly addresses Soviet and Eastern bloc reformers such as Nikita Khrushchev and the process of "de-Stalinization" he initiated, Hungary's Imre Nagy, Czechoslovakia's Alexander Dubček, and the last General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. In the lecture he attempts to show how their respective experiences might illuminate the dilemmas preoccupying Iran's *eslahtalaban*. Also, noteworthy, as evidenced by Ganji's own footnotes, is that a great deal of literature authored by Soviet and Eastern bloc reformers had been translated into Persian including Gorbachev's *Perestroika*, Khrushchev's memoirs and Dubček's autobiography, *Hope Dies Last*. Somewhat ironically, Ganji deploys this literature to vindicate a position he attributes to Friedrich Hayek, claiming that those schools of thought promising "social justice" and an end to "exploitation" (*estesmar*) in practice have merely ensured "the road to serfdom" (*rah-e bardegi*) and a gulag packed out with intellectuals. Ibid.,p325

⁷⁷⁷ "Idi'iolozhi-ye khoshunat va bohran-e mashru'iyat.",p262

elections had suspended all electoral activism. The initial preference of these groups and the SMEEI,⁷⁷⁸ lobbying for which gained pace in the autumn of 1996, was Mir-Hossein Musavi, Prime Minister from 1981 to 1989.⁷⁷⁹ Musavi's stellar revolutionary credentials as Khomeini's Prime Minister of eight years and prominent role in the course of the Iran-Iraq war made him an ideal candidate for the Islamic *chap* and their hopes to regain a foothold in the regime's power structure. Only after Musavi categorically declared that he would not stand on 28 October 1996 [7 Aban 1375] and a number of other prospective candidates also refused was Khatami's candidacy finally resolved upon.

The Islamic left's strategy behind the proposed candidate was also telling. Following Khatami's agreement to stand it was widely held that he would not win but would be able to garner a respectable number of votes in the region of 4-5 million.⁷⁸⁰ This would expedite the Khomeinist left's full-blown return to the political fray and act as the opening salvo in a longer-term strategy to build their support-base for the next round of electoral contestation. Khatami's decisive victory over the 'traditional' and more 'radical' elements of the right, came as a surprise not only to the latter, but to the Islamic *chap* itself, with even the president's brother admitting that "we did not have a programme for matters like decreasing tensions (*tanesh-zoda'i*) [i.e. internationally], which is a simple matter and only broached as an idea, let alone issues like limiting *velayat-e faqih* or the role of religion

⁷⁷⁸ Shadlu, *Jostari-ye tarikhi piramun-e takasor-gara'i dar jaryan-e eslami*.,p387

⁷⁷⁹ Mohammad-Javad Gholam-Reza Kashi, *Jadu-ye goftar: zehniyat-e farhangi va nezam-e ma'ni dar entekhabat Dovvom Khordad* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye farhangi-ye ayandeh-ye puya, 1379 [2000]),p89-90

⁷⁸⁰ Emadeddin Baqi, "Mavane'-e asli-ye jonbesh-e eslahat [Originally published in *Asharq Alawsat*, 5 August 2000]," in *Jonbesh-e eslahat-e demokratik-e Iran: enqelab ya eslah* (Tehran: Sara'i, 1382 [2003]),p324

in politics which are very complicated".⁷⁸¹ Indeed, Mohammad-Reza Khatami was so sure that his elder brother would not be named the victor that he left for a conference in Australia even before the results had been announced.⁷⁸² If electoral victory was unimaginable, this held *a fortiori* for the margin of the victory and the 20 million votes, some 70% of the popular vote, Khatami in fact received.⁷⁸³

The Islamic left's initial ambivalence vis-à-vis Khatami's candidacy in concert with unresolved differences of intellectual and political outlook distinguishing the latter from more critically-minded religious-reformist intellectuals and intellectually engaged members of the Islamic left meant that despite the euphoria which followed his victory, the risk of misplaced expectations on all sides was high. Rather than focus on the alleged 'failure' of the reform movement or its lack of success in achieving its political objectives as a number of scholars have already,⁷⁸⁴ I will turn my attention to the political-theological theorising of two ideological-political personages who held prominent positions within the elite organisational organs of the movement, so as to convey the elusive nature of a consensus on the 2nd Khordad Front's ultimate objectives and even the means it ought to deploy in its political activism.

⁷⁸¹Khatami and Salimi, "Tasavor-e piruzi nemikardim.",p47

⁷⁸² Ibid.,p47

⁷⁸³ The reformists were not the only ones surprised by the result. Rafsanjani is also on record stating that the final tally was unexpected. Seifollah Bani-Asadi, "Naqdi bar maqaleh-ye "Jebheh-ye mosharekat, chap-ravi va Hashemi-Rafsanjani" neveshteh-ye Sadeq Ziba-Kalam [Originally published, 'Asr-e azadegan, no. 45, 10 Azar 1378 (1 December 1999)]," in *Hashemi va Dovvom-e Khordad* (Tehran: Rowzaneh, 1380 [2001]),p47

⁷⁸⁴ See for example, Kazem Alamdari, *Chera eslahat shekast khord: naqdi bar 'amalkard-e hasht saleh-ye eslah-talaban dar Iran, 1376-1384* (Woodland Hills, California: Sayeh, 1387 [2008]).

In naming it thus the 2nd Khordad Front sought to equate Khatami's election with the revitalisation of the national will and thereby emplot that fateful day as a watershed moment in the nation's transhistorical quest for self-determination. The Front was putatively conceived as an umbrella under which disparate political organisations and personalities that accepted the framework of the IRI constitution and Khatami's leadership, might partake in political and civic activism. This endeavour was largely managed or overseen from above by members of the Islamic left-elite, but even so intra-factional differences and disputes continued to make themselves felt. The main point to grasp is that despite the new sense of hope and unity of purpose following Khatami's surprise win, a fair amount of variety regarding the lexicon and semantics of reform quickly began to emerge. The following pages are intended to illustrate this phenomenon by means of an examination of some of the key intellectual and political theorists of the reform movement and the tensions between their various conceptions of their broader mission.

Kalam-e Jadid and Religious Intellectualism

Prior to 1997, as both Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance and head of the National Library, Khatami came into regular contact with religious intellectuals and a section of the broader intelligentsia and artistic community. During this time, particularly after setting aside his ministerial portfolio, he authored a number of articles and books, perhaps the best known of which was *Bim-e mowj* (Fear of the Wave) published in 1993. This collection of articles is essential for understanding Khatami's world-view between his exit from the Rafsanjani cabinet and election as president. Khatami makes it clear that he sees himself as following in the footsteps of Ayatollahs Motahhari and

Khomeini and their theological and political legacies. Accordingly, he sees himself as an exponent of *kalam-e jadid* or the new theology which emphasises the dynamic relationship between reason and revelation and theology's necessary engagement with modern ideologies and scientific disciplines.⁷⁸⁵

It is also worth drawing the reader's attention to Khatami's self-professed proximity to Motahhari, rather than Shari'ati, since it was the former who was most strident in his efforts to refute not only Marxism and materialism, but more importantly, the so-called *elteqati* or "eclectic" thought of the People's Mojahedin, which in the early years of the revolution commonly came to be referred to as the *monafeqin* (hypocrites) by IRI officialdom.⁷⁸⁶ In the early 1990s Khatami credited Motahhari with exposing the People's Mojahedin's "inner apostasy (*baten-e elhadi*) under the pretence of Islam".⁷⁸⁷

Despite having cordial ties with several members of the People's Mojahedin, Shari'ati remained a source of great inspiration for young men and women who would later consider themselves amongst

⁷⁸⁵ Mohammad Khatami, *Bim-e mowj* (Tehran: Sima-ye javan, Bahar 1372 [Spring 1993]), p80

⁷⁸⁶ Khomeini used the term *monafeqin* (though he had used it prior to this date) interchangeably to designate the People's Mojahedin following the Revolutionary Guards' full-blown war against the organisation beginning on 19 June 1981 (30 Khordad 1360). In a speech two days prior to the bloody repression of the Mojahedin on the 30 Khordad, Khomeini launched into a scathing attack against the organisation which he simply referred to as the *monafeqin*, in addition to the National Front and the National Democratic Front, calling on the Revolutionary Guards and Basij to counter any and all 'threats' to the revolution. Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, 21 vols., vol. 14 (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1378 [1999]), p475

The term is regularly deployed in the Quran to refer to individuals who pretend to be Muslim, while in reality they are insincere in their belief in Islam and the prophethood of Mohammad. Al-Munafiqun is a Medinan surah and the 63rd in the Quran and it is certainly worthwhile citing since it demonstrates the real weight and severity of the term, and the seriousness of Khomeini's deployment of it against a political rival: "God knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars – they use their oaths as a cover and so bar others from God's way: what they have been doing is truly evil – because they professed faith and then rejected it...God will not forgive them: God does not guide such treacherous people". *The Qur'an*, p374

⁷⁸⁷ Khatami, *Bim-e mowj*, p81

Khomeini's most impassioned devotees. Motahhari's increasingly embittered and hostile relationship with Shari'ati from around 1970 until the latter's death, however, made it difficult for clergymen on the left to be overzealous in their praise of the unorthodox Islamic ideologue.⁷⁸⁸ In recent decades this has been assuaged somewhat by Khamenei's personal friendship with Shari'ati prior to the revolution and his sporadic interventions in Shari'ati's favour regarding the dispute with Motahhari.⁷⁸⁹ Nevertheless, a certain ambivalence regarding his legacy and positions on the clergy continued to linger, especially as regards two of his formulas: 'Islam minus the clergy' and 'Islamic Protestantism'.⁷⁹⁰ Many clergymen understood full well the implications of this aspect of Shari'ati's thought and responded accordingly. Islamist laymen and women, including members of the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line and the reconstituted Organisation of the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, who had admired Shari'ati in their youth, but as a result of their encounters with

⁷⁸⁸ Regarding the reasons and beginnings of disagreements between Motahhari and Shari'ati see, Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*.,p252-253

Khatami actually quotes a passage from Motahhari in which he alludes derisively to Shari'ati's text, *Religion against Religion (Mazhab 'alaiheh mazhab)*, even though this particular section of *Bim-e mowj* is referring to Motahhari's refutation of "materialism" and the "eclecticism" of the *monafeqin*. Such instances do highlight how Khatami's intellectual orientation might, in certain respects differ from that of the SMEEI, for example. Khatami, *Bim-e mowj*.,p83

⁷⁸⁹ "Akharin nazarat-e rahbar-e enqelab dar bareh-ye Shari'ati: ou donbal-e farib-e rezhim bud, qezavatha-ye Shahid Motahhari mobalegheh amiz bud," *Entekhab* 29 Khordad 1390 [19 June 2011].

Khamenei claims that he was amongst the first to receive news of Shari'ati's death and personally offer his condolences to Mohammad-Taqi Shari'ati, the father of the deceased. His biographer claims that he oversaw the funeral ceremony in Mashhad as well, the city from where both men originally hailed. Hedayatollah Behbudi, *Sharh-e esm: zendegi-nameh-ye Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye motale'at va pazhuheshha-ye siyasi, 1391 [2012]).,p562

⁷⁹⁰ See, **Conclusion**.

the People's Mojahedin and its turn to Marxism in 1975 within Pahlavi era jails,⁷⁹¹ had become close adherents and defenders of the revolutionary clergy. Following the death of Khomeini who in their estimation was not merely a charismatic and exceptional leader, but unmatched within the ranks of the Shi'i clergy, a more sceptical view of the clerical institution began to emerge. Living under 'real existing hierocracy' had imbued once taboo elements of Shari'ati's oeuvre with a new lease of life and resonance for this segment of the Islamic left.

The reason for recounting such differences of intellectual filiation is that they help to explain a number of intellectual divisions and distinct subject positions within the Islamic *chap* itself, and how different actors envisaged the depth and scope of the reformist project, especially its relationship with the question of religious reform and the political duties and functions of the clergy. Both Ayatollah Motahhari and Shari'ati were seen as part of the 'religious intellectual' mission and *kalam-e jadid* and Soroush had had close ties to Motahhari both before and after the revolution until the latter's assassination in May 1979.⁷⁹² Moreover, like most laymen of the Islamic left, such as Hajjarian and Aqajari, he had also been a devotee of Shari'ati's writings, being amongst the first to visit

⁷⁹¹ I am of course thinking of the 'Statement Announcing the Change of Ideological Positions' (autumn 1975) which was largely written by central committee member Taqi Shahram, who would be executed by the Islamic regime in July 1980, apparently in revenge for Shahram's murder of Majid Sharif-Vaqefi, who had opposed the Mojahedin's turn to Marxism.

For more information see, Torab Haqshenas, "Ahzab va sazmanha-ye jonbesh-e komunisti-ye Iran," *Noqteh* 3, no. 7 (Bahar 1376 [1997]), p11-12

⁷⁹² See Soroush's interview with Motahhari in, Morteza Motahhari, "Mosahebeh-ye Doktor Soroush ba Ostad Shahid piramun-e jomhuri-ye eslami," in *Piramun-e enqelab-e eslami* (Qom: Sadra, 1362 [1983]), p126

Southampton (he was still in England at the time) following Shari'ati's premature death in June 1977.⁷⁹³

Law, *Estebdad* and *Mashrutiyat*

During his presidential campaign Khatami did not announce himself a reformist intent on overhauling the power structure of the Islamic system or rewriting its constitution, let alone an initiator of its collapse. Though like Gorbachev he believed his programme would reinvigorate and breathe new life into the political regime over which he presided,⁷⁹⁴ certain limitations on the parallels and analogies with *perestroika* (restructuring) can be discerned upon examination of Khatami's actual writings and speeches during his first term in office, and will be subject to analysis in the following sections. While such a discursive analysis cannot offer any definitive conclusions on such comparisons, it might offer food for thought for historians, journalists, activists and scholars of comparative politics who often resort to drawing parallels between the two political systems when addressing the question of political reform inside Iran. My chief objective, amongst others, in this chapter, as previously indicated is to show that the so-called 'reformist camp' was far from unified in either its methods or final objectives.

Other indications of Khatami's unwillingness to play the role of epochal reformer others had laid out for him were his explicit seeking out of the Guardian Jurist Khamenei's approval prior to

⁷⁹³ Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*.,p368

⁷⁹⁴ Zdenek Mlynar and Mikhail Gorbachev, *Conversations with Gorbachev: On Perestroika, the Prague Spring, and the Crossroads of Socialism*, trans. George Shriver, Kindle ed. (New York Columbia University Press, 2002).,p66;Loc-1473-of-4257

announcing his candidacy and sparse use of the term 'reform' in his campaign literature or in his speeches of the next couple of years following his accession to power. He would often use the term *eslah-gari* (reformism) and *ehya-gari* (revivalism) in the same breath and in reference to Ayatollah Khomeini's political-religious thought and his indispensable role in founding the Islamic Republic.⁷⁹⁵ Khomeini was held up as one of the great 'reformers' of the Islamic world and the Islamic Republic, the restorer of "dignity" (*'ezat*) to a once oppressed and subjugated people.⁷⁹⁶ Khatami, moreover, did not explicitly campaign on the basis of a call to constitutional reform. Indeed, according to the president's brother, Mohammad-Reza,

"the discourse which existed at that time [i.e. prior to the election] was not reform. All [members of the coalition backing Khatami] emphasised legality, civil society etc. The term 'reform' was aired six months to a year later. The first newspapers which came out like *Jame'eh* put reform forward. Reform (*eslahat*) was not part of Khatami's language or the forces which followed him, it wasn't on the agenda at all. The return to the implementation of the constitution and law-orientedness were primarily being discussed."⁷⁹⁷

As will be shown, Khatami's discourse was less one of constitutional reform *per se*, but rather one demanding 'law-orientedness' and 'legality'; a demand addressed to state officials and citizens alike.

Khatami used a vocabulary which was attractive and had a manner quite unlike the many drab and austere officials to which Iranians had become accustomed. Rather than 'reform' or *eslahat* the keywords of Khatami's nomenclature were 'law' (*qanun*), 'legality' or 'law-orientedness' (*qanun-*

⁷⁹⁵ Khatami, "Imam Khomeini va hokumat-e dini (11/3/1377 [1/6/1998]).", p147

Khatami speaks of Prophet Mohammad as both a reformist and revivalist in the preceding paragraph. Ibid., p146

⁷⁹⁶ "Din va siyosat (29/10/1376 [19/1/1998]).", p43

⁷⁹⁷ Khatami and Salimi, "Tasavor-e piruzi nemikardim.", p45

gara'i), 'civil society' (*jame'eh-ye madani*) and to a lesser extent 'political development' (*towse'eh-ye siyasi*), because on his view, it basically encompassed all of the above. The issues of law and legality were of especial importance and run through a great many of his speeches in the course of his initial years in office. It was not particularly novel however. The Khomeinist left's media enclave, *Salam*, in particular the editorials of 'Abbas 'Abdi, had repeatedly advocated the inextricable and profound connection between law-orientedness or legality and civil society in the years preceding Khatami's election and so as a direct result it already had some purchase in the public imagination.⁷⁹⁸

Khatami himself was well aware such an emphasis would connect him to a distinguished lineage of Iranian intellectuals, statesman and movements, both preceding and since the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), in which the issue of law was regarded as paramount. It was envisaged as an almost magical panacea and the source of European progress, with its absence *ipso facto* the reason behind the Islamic world's 'backwardness' and otherwise inexplicable decline.⁷⁹⁹ Perhaps the two best examples which influenced Iranian constitutionalists in the first decade of the 20th century, and many more since, are Mirza Yusef Khan Mostashar al-Dowleh Tabrizi's *Yek kalameh* (One Word), the one word being nothing other than 'law' and Mirza Malkam Khan's call for the rule of law and the need to restrain the seemingly unbridled personalised power of the monarch in the pages of his London-

⁷⁹⁸ 'Abbas 'Abdi, "Beh kodam jahat mi-ravim, qanunmandi ya khodmadari (*Salam*, 7/6/1374 [29/08/1995])," in *Qanun, qodrat, farhang: yaddashtha-ye siyasi-ye ruznameh-ye Salam* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]), p71

⁷⁹⁹ Mirza Yusuf Khan Mustashar ad-Dowla Tabrizi, *One Word - Yak Kaleme: 19th-Century Persian Treatise Introducing Western Codified Law*, with an introduction and annotated translation by A.A. Seyed-Gohrab and S. McGlinn ed. (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010), p9

based periodical *Qanun*.⁸⁰⁰ Khatami's vocabulary would thus be immediately recognisable to the historically informed and educated members of his audience. As will now be shown, while Khatami's own thinking borrows much from what I will henceforth refer to as the Iranian 'legalist' tradition, it also has its own set of peculiarities in combining elements of Khomeini's legacy and the political-theological heritage of the clerical wing of the constitutional movement.

Like his forebears in this tradition, Khatami's vision sought to remedy a longstanding lack of reciprocity between rulers and ruled. He held that the 1979 Revolution, which he invariably refers to as the 'Islamic Revolution', had actually sought to rectify this dire problem and also argued that Khomeini's legacy offered the requisite nostrums for ending the cycle of despotism and chaos which had long afflicted Iranian history. It wasn't Khomeini's political philosophy or the constitution that was at fault, but rather disregard or misapplication of constitutional precepts. As Khatami declared in a speech on 23 September 1997 before clergymen in Ardebil province, "Now, the law is both popular (*mardomi*) and religious".⁸⁰¹ It was on this score Khatami insisted that the Islamic Republic had succeeded where other Iranian regimes have failed. Much like the nativist discourse he was steeped in as a young seminarian,⁸⁰² Khatami diagnoses one of the key deficiencies and shortfalls of the Pahlavi monarchy to have been its blind imitation of Western-style modernisation and dismissal of religion and spirituality.⁸⁰³ This led the *ancien régime* down not only an undemocratic path, but also

⁸⁰⁰ See, Mirza Malkum Khan, "The Law," in *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p114

⁸⁰¹ Khatami, "Rowhaniyat va hal-e mo'zelat-e jame'eh (1/7/1376 [23/9/1997]).", p107

⁸⁰² See, **Chapter 3**.

⁸⁰³ Khatami cites Shari'ati and Al-e Ahmad explicitly. Khatami, *Bim-e mowj*, p200

left it alienated and uncomprehending of Iranians' religious beliefs and attachments. The great strength of the Islamic Republic was its 'religious democracy' (*mardom salari-ye dini*), with its "beautiful and novel combination" of *eslamiyat* (Islamicness) and *jomhuriyat* (republicanism).⁸⁰⁴ It was the balance of these two elements that was crucial to the Islamic Republic's identity and superiority over its ideological rivals, both domestically and internationally. Any attempt to weaken either element was "contrary to the road chosen by the Imam [Khomeini]".⁸⁰⁵ It goes without saying that Khatami does not categorise the political order of the Islamic Republic as either an 'electoral authoritarian' or 'competitive authoritarian' one as contemporary political science literature might be inclined.⁸⁰⁶ Instead, he offers a picture of the Islamic Republic's constitutional order as a harmonious marriage between the supposedly two most salient features of the revolution of 1979 i.e. Islam and republicanism.

Clerical Constitutionalism(s)

Prior to the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, constitutional era clerics such as the radical preacher Seyyed Jamaledin Esfahani had argued law abidance was part and parcel of

⁸⁰⁴ Khatami, "Imam Khomeini va hokumat-e dini (11/3/1377 [1/6/1998].",p150

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid.,p150

⁸⁰⁶ See, Andreas Schedler, "The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism," in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, ed. Andreas Schedler (Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner 2006),.p3

I would however dispute that the Islamic Republic even reaches the 'procedural minimum' of a competitive authoritarian state. The Islamic Republic more readily approximates an electoral authoritarian than a competitive authoritarian state for several reasons which due to limitations of space cannot be addressed here. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010),p12

religious observance.⁸⁰⁷ Even more prominently at the time, leading clergymen of the *'atabat* such as the pre-eminent *marja' al-taqlid* Akhund Molla Mohammad-Kazem Khorasani and his student Mirza Mohammad-Hosseini Na'ini not only defended a particular conception of constitutionalism on religious grounds, but actively lobbied for the movement's success.⁸⁰⁸ Khatami in a different vein not only focuses on law abidance, even if it is one of his chief pre-occupations, but also its popular basis, which stems from the revolution and resulting regime's legacy of populism and mass mobilisation. His conviction that the overwhelming majority of Iranians are deeply religious and therefore entitled to a religious regime with religious law is also implicit in a great many of his statements.

Khatami was essentially trying to both manage and balance a number of distinct priorities. He wanted to engender and encourage respect and reverence for the law, while admitting that it has at least two alternative sources of legitimacy enshrined and institutionalised within the constitutional order and the state structure i.e. 'popular' and 'religious'. Thus, while the constitution does safeguard certain civil liberties such as freedom of association (article 26) and freedom of assembly (article 27), they are not interpreted as unconditional or inviolable rights, but legitimate only insofar as the action in question is not determined to be a threat to the basic principles of Islam.⁸⁰⁹ In this way, what

⁸⁰⁷ "Observing religion means law, religion means law, Islam, the Qur'an, mean God's law...the ruler is law alone, and no one's rule is valid but that of law". Seyyed Jamal al-Din Esfahani quoted in Homa Katouzian, "European Liberalisms and Modern Concepts of Liberty," in *Iranian History and Politics: The Dialectic of State and Society* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), p85

⁸⁰⁸ See, Mohsen Kadivar, *Siyasat-nameh-ye Khorasani: qata'at-e siyasi dar asar-e Akhund Molla Mohammad Kazem Khorasani* (Tehran: Ghazal, 1385 [2006]), Introduction

⁸⁰⁹ Article 4 of the constitution holds that all laws must be based on Islamic criteria.

is held up as a violation of the bounds of acceptability becomes a matter of contentious interpretation, whose final arbiters lack sound or cut and dried criteria.

The dilemma of balancing rival sources of legitimacy was also prominent in the debate between the 'ulama of the constitutional era, even if the primary objective of the constitutionalists was to end arbitrary and despotic rule. Furthermore, while the issue of popular representation was an important consideration, the chief aim was limiting government by conditioning it with law.⁸¹⁰ Nonetheless, the diremption between the popular and sacred sources of law was already acutely felt by some leading clergymen during this turbulent period. Even between the constitutionalist forces there were notable differences of opinion. The *mojtaheds* of the National or Popular Party, the most prominent of which were Seyyed 'Abdollah Behbahani and Seyyed Mohammad Tabataba'i, predicated their support on the assurance that the laws passed by the Majles would be consonant with Islamic law and the preservation of their judicial prerogatives.⁸¹¹ By contrast, Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh, a prominent member of the Democratic Party had initially held that the law should apply to all in equal measure

⁸¹⁰ Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2009), p180; Said Amir Arjomand, "Ideological Revolution in Shi'ism," in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), p178-179

⁸¹¹ More recent scholarship also supports this fairly robust distinction between the clerical and lay wings of the constitutional movement (p336). The clerics initial call for a House of Justice still did not entail constitutionalism i.e. limiting the Shah's power, by the summer of 1906 (p342). The House of Justice simply embodied the demand for the redress of grievances and injustices against wayward officials. Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran* (Cambridge; New York Cambridge University Press, 2011).

i.e. the law applies equally to Muslims and non-Muslims.⁸¹² Ultimately, it was the clerical view that carried the day.

On the other side of the constitutionalist battle, the anti-constitutionalist *mojtahed*, Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri was depicted as justifying royal absolutism with an Islamic veneer,⁸¹³ especially following Mohammad-Ali Shah Qajar's bombardment of the Majles in July 1908.⁸¹⁴ The reality was in fact more complex, as Nuri was also antagonistic towards parliamentary democracy and judicial reform because of the perceived threat they posed to the clergy's monopoly over the interpretation of the *shari'a*.⁸¹⁵ Besides the pivotal issue of whether the ruler could legitimately claim absolute and unfettered authority, another difference separating the pro- and anti-constitutionalist clergy was the issue of whether the political order could be religiously legitimate in the absence of the Hidden Imam. The answer of pro-constitutionalist clerics was a resounding 'no',⁸¹⁶ though as deputies of the Hidden Imam,⁸¹⁷ they believed they were designated with the responsibility of supervising matters related to

⁸¹² Edward Granville Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p146-147; Vanessa Martin, "Shaikh Fazlallah Nuri and the Iranian Revolution 1905-09," *Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 1 (Jan., 1987), p43

Curiously, Soroush does at one point in his writings actually mention Nuri's repudiation of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, contending that those constitutionalists in favour of legal equality were "the children of the school of liberalism". Soroush, "Mabani-ye te'orik-e liberalism," p132

⁸¹³ Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909*, p242

⁸¹⁴ Martin, "Shaikh Fazlallah Nuri and the Iranian Revolution 1905-09," p46

⁸¹⁵ Arjomand, "Ideological Revolution in Shi'ism," p181; Vanessa Martin, "The Anti-Constitutionalist Arguments of Shaikh Fazlallah Nuri," *Middle Eastern Studies* 22(Apr., 1986), p183

⁸¹⁶ Masha'allah Ajudani, *Mashruteh-ye Irani* (Tehran: Akhtaran, 1382 [2003]), p36

⁸¹⁷ It should be noted that not all clergymen of the constitutional era accepted that the 'deputyship of the Hidden Imam' during his absence devolved to the clergy. Sheikh Asadollah Mamaqani, for instance, held that matters which concerned *hisbah* devolved upon "the just believers" and not the clergy. Of even greater significance was that one of the most pre-eminent clerics of the 19th century, Sheikh Morteza Ansari (d. 1864),

hisbah, or the public moral order.⁸¹⁸ A further issue relating to the necessity of conditioning the ruler's power was the pro-constitutionalists' belief that a "conditioned monarchy" (*saltanat-e moqayyad* or *saltanat-e mashruteh*) would by definition be less prone to corruption and oppression than an "absolute monarchy" (*saltanat-e motlaq*)⁸¹⁹ and that a constitutional regime would be less susceptible to dependence upon foreign non-Muslim powers.⁸²⁰ There was in fact little serious disagreement over the pre-eminence of Islamic law, even if there were notable differences over the extent of clerical guardianship.⁸²¹ The primary area of disagreement resided in the central and divisive issue of whether monarchical rule ought to be 'conditioned' or not.⁸²² Akhund Khorasani certainly held that it should be, while continuing to reserve clerical oversight in the legislative domain.⁸²³ Khatami's own position is in certain respects comparable, but it also has its own peculiarities in virtue of his acceptance of the executive-political role of *velayat-e faqih*, which is quite alien to the legacy of Khorasani.

argued that the basis of the clergy's 'general deputyship' (*niyat-e 'am*) was not based on the sturdiest of foundations. Arjomand, "Ideological Revolution in Shi'ism.",p184

Another interesting stance held by Ansari was his disapproval of Friday prayer congregations during the absence of the Hidden Imam. Seeking to broach a compromise with the *Usuli* position he said that Friday prayers could be held if they obtained the ruler's approval. Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism.*,p167

⁸¹⁸ This was also Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Abolqasem Kho'i's view, which Kadivar sought to bring to public attention within Iran. Abolqasem Kho'i, "Barressi-ye velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih," in *Daghdaghehha-ye hokumat-e dini*, ed. Mohsen Kadivar (Tehran Nashr-e nei, 1376 [1997]),p103

⁸¹⁹ Ajudani, *Mashruteh-ye Irani.*,p36

⁸²⁰ Amirhassan Boozari, *Shi'i Jurisprudence and Constitution: Revolution in Iran*, Kindle ed. (New York Palgrave Macmillan, 2011),Loc-1797-of-9145

⁸²¹ Said Amir Arjomand, "The Ulama's Traditionalist Opposition to Parliamentarianism: 1907-1909," *Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 2 (Apr., 1981),p180; Mohsen Kadivar, "The Innovative Political Ideas and Influence of Mulla Muhammad Kazim Khurasani," Kadivar.com.

⁸²² Also see, *Siyasat-nameh-ye Khorasani.*,p13

⁸²³ "The Innovative Political Ideas and Influence of Mulla Muhammad Kazim Khurasani".

Constitutionalist Guardians of the *Shari'a*?

The reason for the preceding sketch of the debate between the constitutional era 'ulama in the context of an exposition of Khatami's political thought was the desire to demonstrate that the intellectual tensions and contradictions in which Khatami's thinking was embroiled while not new, had become far more acute with the founding of the constitutional order of the Islamic Republic. This is because two mutually exclusive poles of legality derived from holy writ and positive law, the latter at least in principle underwritten by a popularly-elected assembly, have been institutionalised and politicised in such a way as to jeopardise the meaningfulness of the regime's institutions which claim to rest on a popular basis. Whereas Soroush theoretically resolved this contradiction, by siding with popular legitimacy i.e. religious government and its legitimacy first and foremost emanate from the ballot box, Khatami's vision and practice of government continued to be split between Islamic law and popular legitimacy. His proffered solution is recourse to the constitution, but this only goes to temporarily defer conflict because of how rival sources of legitimacy are built into the constitution itself and subsequently give rise to querulous and politicised interpretations of key articles subject to dispute between and within the executive, Majles, Guardian Council, judiciary etc.⁸²⁴ In the eyes of

⁸²⁴ Long after Khatami left the presidential palace in 2012, in exile Soroush would lay the blame for prevailing injustices at the door of the Islamic Republic's lack of a 'strong', 'independent' judiciary. He basically repeats a number of the basic themes of the Iranian 'legalist' discourse laid out above, without acknowledging this longstanding tradition. Only an independent judiciary is viewed as capable of protecting citizens' rights and enforcing the law, free from political interference and therefore checking arbitrary rule. He does go one step further, no doubt influenced by his time in exile, by suggesting that judicial officials might be elected. See, 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "The Crust and the Core of Rule by the People " www.dr.soroush.com, http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/By_DrSoroush/E-CMB-20111201-The%20Crust%20and%20the%20Core%20of%20Rule%20by%20the%20People.html.

the conflicting parties the two alternate sources of legitimacy regularly proved irreducible to one another, and the mechanism for resolving their conflict time and again was shown to be inadequate to the task. I will now try and show further how these two sources of legitimacy were embodied in Khatami's world-view and public pronouncements.

Khatami, following his aforementioned predecessors, presented 'law' and 'chaos' (*harj-o-marj*) as antithetical to one another.⁸²⁵ Freedom without law was held to be a recipe for licence.⁸²⁶ 'Freedom' was not libertinism, but must be bounded by law. As had already been intimated, Khatami's approach was similar to that of the pro-constitutionalist clergy insofar as he contended that law ought to have a religious basis or at the very least not contravene Islamic law. His views are also comparable in that he supported clerical supervision of the legislative process in the form of the Guardian Council (*Shura-ye negahban*).⁸²⁷ In the course of a speech at another clerical gathering on 23 September 1997 in Khuzestan he plainly stated, "in our regime juridical matters (*amr-e qaza*) must be Islamic and a judge must be a *mojtahed*".⁸²⁸ A key difference distinguishing Khatami from the pro-constitutionalist clerics of the first decades of the 20th century was his Khomeinist inheritance which held that government was a fundamental principle of the Islamic religion. As was detailed in **Chapter 2**,

⁸²⁵ Khatami, "Rowhaniyat, bayadha va nabayadha (1/7/1376 [23/9/1997]).",p143; "Qanun va eqtedar (6/10/1376 [27/10/1997])," in *Gozideh-ye sokhanraniha-ye ra'is-e jomhur dar bareh-ye towse'eh-ye siyasi, towse'eh-ye eqtesadi va amniyat* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]),p57

⁸²⁶ It should be added that this idea is also one common to ancient and modern Western political theory. Perhaps the best known modern example is the social contract theory of Thomas Hobbes. Immanuel Kant would internalise this notion and define freedom as acting in accordance with the moral law. In short, 'freedom' was firmly distinguished from 'licence' or licentiousness by Hobbes, Locke, and 19th century Iranian statesmen-intellectuals such as Malkam Khan or Mostashar al-Dowleh.

⁸²⁷ Khatami, "Rowhaniyat, bayadha va nabayadha (1/7/1376 [23/9/1997]).",p143

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*,p138

Khomeini broke with Shi'ite orthodoxy when he arrogated executive authority for the 'ulama's 'guardianship', thereby claiming hierocratic government not merely desirable, but necessary in the absence of the Hidden Imam. Khatami accepted this premise wholesale as will be shown further in the following sections. However, he does elaborate his own vision of its implications for the Islamic state in a language heavily influenced by the discourse of religious intellectualism.

For Khatami the constraint on freedom and source of law is the Islamic Republic's constitution. Many of his statements upon election in 1997 also indicate that he not only wholeheartedly accepted the constitution, but also the place and status of the six *foqaha* appointed to the Guardian Council by the *vali-ye faqih*, whose role it was to determine the compatibility of the laws passed by the Majles with the *shari'a* and interpret the constitution in accordance with the same criteria. "We are defenders of order in the framework of the law...The law is assessed and goes to the Guardian Council. Six grandees (*bozorgan*) sit and vote on the compliance of this law with the *shar*".⁸²⁹ Freedom bound by law, specifically Islamic law is integral to Khatami's outlook, and of course extends to freedom of speech: "In our regime the limits of freedom of speech are insofar as they are not contrary to the principles (*mabani*) of Islam". Similarly he fully recognised the prerogative of the Guardian Council to veto legislation in the Majles,⁸³⁰ a power that would itself come to haunt Khatami's administration

⁸²⁹ Ibid.,p143

⁸³⁰ "In our regime, bills of the Majles are not implementable unless six Islamic jurists (*faqihan*), who are the appointees of the Leader, announce the compatibility of these bills with the *shari'a*". Ibid.,p137-138

time and again. It's also a subject which perhaps more than any other provoked the ire of politicians and public intellectuals associated with the Khomeinist left.⁸³¹

This issue returns to a more fundamental one, which sets Khatami apart from several prominent religious intellectuals, to wit, Soroush, Shabestari and Malekian, and even politicians of the Islamic left such as 'Abdollah Nuri or Mostafa Tajzadeh, who might in accordance with the definition first popularised by Asef Bayat, be described as 'post-Islamist'. Bayat defines post-Islamism thus,

“Neither anti-Islamic nor secular, but spearheaded by pious Muslims, post-Islamism attempts to undo Islamism as a political project by fusing faith and freedom, a secular democratic state and a religious society. It wants to marry Islam with individual choice and liberties, with democracy and modernity, to generate what some have called an “alternative modernity.”⁸³² As we saw in the previous chapter neither Soroush nor Shabestari held that the political order or even the moral-ethical values underwriting it were exclusive to Islam or derived from holy writ. After his impeachment at the hands of the conservative-dominated Fifth Majles, 'Abdollah Nuri was also willing to go so far as to claim that the Guardian Council was emblematic of the spectre of paternalism (*pedar salari*), which had haunted Iranian society for hundreds of years. The order of the electoral and legislative process as supervised by the Guardian Council subjugated the independence and autonomy of “the people” to an omniscient father figure who was the only one equipped to identify the people's best

⁸³¹ 'Abdollah Nuri and Akbar Ganji, *Naqdi baraye tamam-e fosul: goftogu-ye Akbar Ganji ba 'Abdollah Nuri* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1378 [1999]),p89

⁸³² Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010),p16

interests.⁸³³ This was not Khatami's publicly stated view, however; quite far from it. Bayat attributes post-Islamism to the Khatami government itself. It should however start to become clear that such an attribution is at best pre-mature.⁸³⁴ For example, Khatami plainly insisted in a speech at Khomeini's mausoleum on 19 January 1998, "Religion and politics are linked together...If you refer to the Quran you see that most of the social ordinances (*ahkam*) and even individual ordinances are not executable without the existence of a social order compatible with the teachings of the Quran. If it is intended to make use of these ordinances, we must have a religious government, religious society and religious politics and if not a considerable amount of the lessons of the Quran remain inactive".⁸³⁵ The responsibility of the clergy is made even more onerous by the fact that the fate of the clergy is inextricable from the fate of the revolution,⁸³⁶ and that the "success" of the Islamic Republic is held to be the "biggest propaganda boon" (*bozorgtarin tabligh*) there can be for religion.⁸³⁷

Though Khatami cannot be viewed straightforwardly as post-Islamist his emphasis on law and rights set him apart from many of his clerical peers in both state institutions and the seminaries. His talk of rights, for example, indicates that he had taken up Khomeini's own statement of *feqh-e puya* with the utmost seriousness, but also combined it with the well-known discourse of legal-orientedness by averring rights' existence independent of the will of any single individual.⁸³⁸ In other

⁸³³ Nuri and Ganji, *Naqdi baraye tamam-e fosul*, p88-89

⁸³⁴ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, p16

⁸³⁵ Khatami, "Din va siyasat (29/10/1376 [19/1/1998]).", p36

⁸³⁶ "Rowhaniyat va jahan-e jadid (1/8/1376 [23/10/1997]).", p113

⁸³⁷ "Rowhaniyat va nezam-e jomhuri-ye eslami (13/4/1377 [4/7/1998]).", p167

⁸³⁸ It should be noted that constitutionalist era clerics had already set such a precedent and had also distinguished between the "changeable ordinances" (*ahkam-e motaghayer*) and "unchangeable ordinances" (*ahkam-e sabet*) of the *shari'a*. While the latter could not be changed, the prominent constitutionalist Mirza

words, it applies to and binds all citizens. Also, the fact that he speaks of *qanun* instead of simply the *shari'a* implies a much broader understanding of the multivalent nature of law and its numerous sources. In this way he attempts to advocate an escape from the perennial malady of arbitrary rule which had so often marred Iranian political life. He does not cite the classical hadith collections when he argues that human beings are endowed with the right to determine their own destiny, but rather the advent of contemporary times.⁸³⁹ *Feqh* had long sought to balance its ability to straddle contemporary exigencies and historical precedent, but now the state had to take the lead in tilting the balance in favour of acknowledging the former and the trials faced by the modern state at the end of the 20th century. This is why Khatami often insisted that the clergy must become familiar with the times (*zamanshenas*) in which they live. Finally, while warning the clergy against losing themselves in arcane and anachronistic marginalia, Khatami also sought to disabuse the Iranian public that executive positions in the state were the exclusive monopoly of the clergy.⁸⁴⁰

The Semantic Ambivalence of *Velayat* & *Vekalat*

As has been mentioned, Khatami follows Khomeini, accepting the latter's challenge to traditional Usulism which had accepted that clerical guardianship ought to be restricted to *hisbah* i.e. essentially covering those matters falling under the purview of the *shari'a*, including the rather sweeping maxim

Mohammad Hossein Na'ini contended that "changeable ordinances" were subject to temporal exigencies and the interests of the country and could therefore be changed when and if necessary. Muhammad-Hossein Na'ini, *Tanbih al-ommeh va tanzih al-melleh* (Qom: Bustan-e ketab, 1382 [2003]), p137-138

⁸³⁹ Khatami, "Haq va taklif (14/12/1376 [3/3/1998]).", p85

⁸⁴⁰ "Vizheh-nameh-ye *Salam*: farda-ye behtar baraye Iran-e eslami," *Salam* (Farvardin 1376 [March-April 1997]), p7

of forbidding evil and enjoining the good, but not executive-governmental authority *per se*.⁸⁴¹ In this tradition, the 'ulama's 'guardianship' had been conceived as first and foremost legal and juridical in nature, and a de facto division of labour between the sphere of Islamic law and custom (*'orf*) overseen by the mundane authority determined the terms of coexistence and reciprocity between the clergy and the latter. Khomeini overturned this tacit age-old agreement between the clergy and mundane rulers by claiming government to be a fundamental precept or primary ordinance of the Islamic faith. Khatami unsurprisingly follows suit and asserts that government (*hokumat*) is a principle of religion (*osul-e din*), as would be expected given that it is not only a basic premise of Khomeini's seminal *Hokumat-e eslami*, but of the Islamic Republic's constitution. Moreover, within that system "the centrality (*mehvuriyat*) of *velayat-e faqih* and the leadership (*rahbari*)"⁸⁴² is also legally-binding since its enshrinement in law has ceased to be the mere opinion of one jurist amongst others.⁸⁴³

"The pivot and axis of our regime is *velayat-e faqih*. *Velayat-e faqih* is the theory of his Excellency Imam [Khomeini]. Of course it is possible that jurists and clergymen may not agree with this theory of the Imam, but when this theory enters the constitution it ceases to be one jurisprudential theory amongst others. Disagreement with it is not disagreement with one jurisprudential theory, but is disagreement with the principle (*osul*) and basis (*asas*) of the regime. It is clear that no regime permits attacks on its principle and foundation. Of course this point is

⁸⁴¹ Though Nuri is often portrayed as a pre-cursor to Khomeini, Nuri was far more conventional and restrictive in his delineation of the clergy's powers. In his 'Book of Admonition to the Heedless and Guidance for the Ignorant' (*Ketab-e tazakorat al-qafel va ershad al-jahel*), Nuri goes so far as to claim that it is beyond the scope of the authority of the *maraje'* to bind their *moqalledin* to endorse constitutionalism, because it illegitimately interferes with the dominion of the ruler. Fadl Allah Nuri and 'Abd al-'Azim 'Imad al-'Ulama' Khalkhali, "Two Clerical Tracts on Constitutionalism," in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), p360-361

Also see, Boozari, *Shi'i Jurisprudence and Constitution*, Loc-1956-of-9145

⁸⁴² Khatami, "Rowhaniyat, bayadha va nabayadha (1/7/1376 [23/9/1997]).", p137

⁸⁴³ Compare this with Mojtabeh-Shabestari's position expounded in **Chapter 4**, where he argues that Khomeini's understanding of *velayat-e faqih* might be considered as one theory and opinion amongst others.

not tantamount to a prohibition of scientific debates in their own place. God willing, all of us will coordinate our desires and tastes with the law".⁸⁴⁴

In this way, early in his tenure Khatami had already placed fundamental political objections to the principle of *velayat-e faqih* beyond the pale.⁸⁴⁵ Also while limited pluralism would be accepted, ultimately "the regime was above tendencies and tastes...all tastes (*saliqehha*) and tendencies (*gerayeshha*) must struggle for the preservation and strengthening of the regime and the preservation of the sanctity (*hormat*) of the leadership and the preservation of the pillars of the regime".⁸⁴⁶ It is with reference to pertinent statements such as these made in Khatami's first years in office that clear differences between the discourses and political objectives articulated within the Islamic *chap* / reformist camp can be espied. The differences will become more apparent in the second half of this chapter. For now it will suffice to state once again that Khatami's chief priorities were stability and ensuring the poly-cephalous state would act within the bounds of the law and thus not without coordination or in an arbitrary fashion.

There was also arguably a deeper scheme at work, since while the discourse of legalism certainly had an 'Islamic-jurisprudential' complexion and basis, it was also thought that if the exhortation to law-abidance gained traction that the much feted notion of 'civil society' would also finally be able to take root and allow for an associational space not dominated by the state or para-statal

⁸⁴⁴ Khatami, "Rowhaniyat va nezam-e jomhuri-ye eslami (13/4/1377 [4/7/1998]).", p170

⁸⁴⁵ In a special issue produced by *Salam* following the announcement of his candidacy in a section specifically addressing the question of *velayat-e faqih*, Khatami refers to it as a "fundamental pillar of the Islamic Republic". The interview was conducted prior to his electoral victory. He continues, however, that the doctrine must be interpreted in such a way that it gains the assent of the majority of citizens, not only Shi'i, but also Sunnis and other religious minorities. "Vizheh-nameh-ye *Salam*: farda-ye behtar baraye Iran-e eslami.", p12

⁸⁴⁶ "Rowhaniyat va nezam-e jomhuri-ye eslami (13/4/1377 [4/7/1998]).", p167

organisations.⁸⁴⁷ This might then in turn be capitalised upon to make further limited gains, but primarily the issue was one of decreasing the waywardness of official and quasi-official bodies not under executive control, rather than opening up the political system to be contested by unfamiliar political and social forces.

Underwriting and providing guarantees for legally sanctioned public spaces in which citizens might congregate appealed to Khatami's electoral base replete with newly-eligible voters, students, women, religious and ethnic minorities. Such spaces would permit the varied elements of this electoral base to engage in civic activism and create a regular pattern of interpersonal interactions by means of which they could articulate their demands and relay them via institutionalised channels to government.⁸⁴⁸ By 1996-1997 the demographic reality of 1.2 million students in higher education with their hopes and aspirations for advancement and prosperity, for instance, could not help but make itself felt.⁸⁴⁹ Khatami was certainly aware of the problems facing modern Iranian society and they weighed heavily on his mind. Legality and abidance by the constitution were again held up as

⁸⁴⁷ "Payamha va payamadha-ye Dovvom-e Khordad (2/3/1377 [23/5/1998])," in *Gozideh-ye sokhanraniha-ye ra'is-e jomhur dar bareh-ye towse'esh-ye siyasi, towse'eh-ye eqtesadi va amniyat* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]), p117

⁸⁴⁸ Individuals come together in what are known as 'voluntary associations' and are a staple of the civil society and democratisation literature. Alexander Tocqueville praised such associations in *Democracy in America* exactly because he saw them as evidence of citizens defending and attempting to procure their interests instead of the state taking on the role. The Iranian system is still to provide strong guarantees for the right of voluntary associations to assemble and express themselves. They nevertheless do continue to exist and remain active, albeit in a zone of insecurity. Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p96-96

Khatami was clear in his acknowledgement of the support he received from students and educated quarters of Iranian society. Khatami, "Payamha va payamadha-ye Dovvom-e Khordad (2/3/1377 [23/5/1998])." p113

⁸⁴⁹ Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors*, Kindle ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Loc-1292-of-6438

the only way forward for the cultivation of civil society and eschewal of the parlous estrangement between *dowlat* and *mellat*:⁸⁵⁰ “the most important condition for the establishment of civil society is acceptance of the constitution (*qanun-e asasi*)”.⁸⁵¹ Khatami appears to reject the crass paternalism of certain political interpretations of clerical guardianship which effectively reduce the population to the status of the mentally-challenged and orphans.⁸⁵² ‘Despotism’ (*estebdad*) or ‘arbitrary rule’ has merely only ever thought of human beings as duty-bound subjects.⁸⁵³ In such an equation they do not possess anything which might be thought of as inviolable rights or the ability to determine their own destinies.

While Soroush held that religion had typically been articulated in the language of duties, Khatami was keen to argue that the dearth of attention to rights was not the fault of religion *per se*, but rather the fault of political systems acting in the name of religion and the dark chapter in the history of Islam which began with the Umayyad dynasty following the assassination of Imam Ali.⁸⁵⁴ In Khatami’s mind this was an aberration, despite casting a shadow over the majority of Islamic history: “Islamic government has no conflict with [the right of human beings to determine their destiny]”.⁸⁵⁵ These

⁸⁵⁰ The profound influence of the work of Homa Katouzian should be noted. In particular his early volume, Mohammad-Ali Homayoun Katouzian, *Eqtesad-e siyasi-ye Iran: az mashrutiyat ta payan-e selseleh-ye Pahlavi*, trans. Mohammad Reza Nafisi and Kambiz Azizi (Tehran: Nashr-e markaz, 1366, 1367 [1987, 1988]; 14th printing 1387 [2008]).

Ali-Reza Alavi-Tabar has acknowledged explicitly the impact of Katouzian’s work on members of the Islamic left based at the Presidential Strategic Research Centre during the 1990s. Alavi-Tabar and Mirsepassi, "Alireza Alavi-Tabar and Political Change.", p132

⁸⁵¹ Khatami, "Payamha va payamadha-ye Dovvom-e Khordad (2/3/1377 [23/5/1998]).", p119

⁸⁵² Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism.*, p190

⁸⁵³ Khatami, "Haq va taklif (14/12/1376 [3/3/1998]).", p86

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p86

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p87

systems of arbitrary rule came to power through force of arms and enforced hereditary kingships which continued to regard people as subservient subjects rather than persons with rights and legitimate expectations of government.

Though the president is directly elected, Khatami argued that the *vali-ye faqih* was also decided by popular election, albeit indirectly by means of the election of the Assembly of Experts, a clerical body with approximately 86 members.⁸⁵⁶ For Khatami both institutions are in different ways embodiments of the popular will. In stark contrast to other prominent members of the Islamic *chap*, neither prior to, nor in the immediate years following his election did Khatami publicly object to the Guardian Council's arrogated powers to veto candidates deemed inappropriate for high office. Nonetheless, even on such an understanding of *velayat-e faqih* there is still some difficulty presented by the fact that the notion of political representation is not well-established in Shi'i *feqh*. The concept of *vekalat* does have historic precedent even if it was totally disconnected from modern notions of representation and popular will advocated by social contract theory and later notions of representative parliamentary democracy,⁸⁵⁷ and might be thought of as a kind of advocacy or agency. With the Constitutional Revolution the term acquired greater currency and was used when referring to the function of parliamentarians and the assembly of which they were members. It was also argued at the time by the prominent cleric Mirza Mohammad-Hosseini Na'ini, whose pro-constitutional tract,

⁸⁵⁶ The number of *foqaha* has varied since the body was first constituted.

⁸⁵⁷ When the Shi'i Imams were still alive a *vakil* was an agent of the Imam who would collect alms from members of the Imami community on his behalf. This role, along with its authority and scope developed in the course of both the Lesser and Greater Occultation as the Imami community found itself forced to address the very real absence of the Imam. Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam* (Muhammadi Trust 1982), Chapter 4

Tanbih al-ommeh va tanzih al-melleh (1909), made the case that *vekalat* was not intrinsically religious in nature and could be applied in the context of a constitutional assembly.⁸⁵⁸

The notion of *velayat*, by contrast, designated 'guardianship' which almost by definition harboured paternalistic implications and was exclusive to the clergy.⁸⁵⁹ The distinction and the muddying of waters between the semantics of *vekalat* and *velayat* in the post-revolutionary constitutional order have posed and continue to pose a dilemma to 'religious democracy' as defined by Khatami and like-minded allies. The preponderance of the dichotomy between 'representation' (very loosely speaking, *vekalat*) and 'guardianship' is exacerbated by the lack of justification with respect to how the people's *vokala* or representatives can legislate on a national scale and on matters pertaining to the *shari'a* without a clerical body whose mandate doesn't derive from democratic election, but from their religious status as deputies of the Hidden Imam.⁸⁶⁰ It is this issue which by Khatami's own admission necessitates a body along the lines of the Guardian Council.

In the constitutional era the much vaunted article 2 of the Fundamental Laws, proposed in its initial form by Fazlollah Nuri,⁸⁶¹ stipulated that a council of five *mojtaheds* should ensure that all legislation remain concordant with the *shari'a* and thus in one important respect sought to perform

⁸⁵⁸ Na'ini, *Tanbih al-ommeh va tanzih al-melleh*, p114-115

⁸⁵⁹ This was insofar as it extended the presupposition that those over whom it was granted guardianship were *saghir* or minors who had yet to reach puberty. This conclusion is also recognised and criticised by Kadivar. Mohsen Kadivar, "Mosahebeh ba ruznameh-ye Khordad," in *Baha-ye azadi: defa'iyat-e Mohsen Kadivar dar dadgah-e vizheh-ye rowhaniyat*, ed. Zahra Rudi Kadivar (Tehran: Nashr-e nei, 1378 [1999]), p160

⁸⁶⁰ For the dispute between Na'ini and Nuri on this score see, Martin, "The Anti-Constitutionalist Arguments of Shaikh Fazlallah Nuri," p191

⁸⁶¹ Article 2 was modified and was not codified into the constitution how Nuri had envisaged. Also, see **Chapter 2**.

a comparable function.⁸⁶² This issue simply remains unresolved in Khatami's thought and writings and its problematic status was manifest in his two terms as president. Even while Khatami sought to imbue *velayat-e faqih* with democratic overtones by stressing the Supreme Leader's indirect election, he simply never confronted the issue of whether in the final analysis majority vote could trump the sacred precepts delineated by clerics whose legitimacy resided in their role as deputies of the Hidden Imam. In a similar vein, he never sought to fashion an argument making the case that *velayat* might be bestowed solely by recourse to a democratic vote, since a precondition of consideration was that the candidate in question be a *mojtahed* and thus endowed with the authority accompanying 'general deputyship'. In short, he lacked a theory where perhaps he needed one the most, and instead preferred to remain ambiguous to the defenders of both theocracy and democracy and keep them guessing as to where he actually stood.

Khatami's Readings (*qara'atha*) & the Pedagogy of Tolerance

But it is perhaps of equal importance to ask what Khatami's objectives were in forging a religious society and politics? His stated objective at several junctures is that of fashioning a "Quranic human" (*ensan-e qur'ani*) whose "ethics, thought, manners, behaviour, sentiments and reason are formed on the basis of the criteria that God communicated in the Quran".⁸⁶³ In certain respects this positive conception set on actualising its model or archetypal citizen might be thought to warrant comparison

⁸⁶² Unlike the Guardian Council, however, this 5 member council didn't have the power to interpret the constitution as it saw fit or veto electoral candidates on the basis of such interpretations.

⁸⁶³ Khatami, "Din va siyasat (29/10/1376 [19/1/1998]).", p36

with the German notion of *Bildung*, meaning ‘education’ or ‘cultivation’, most prominently developed by the Jena Romantics in the early 19th century.⁸⁶⁴ *Bildung* could be meant in terms of both *process* and *result*, to form, to shape, to fashion and finally, to cultivate.⁸⁶⁵ An important dimension of its meaning was first captured by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Emile or On Education* (1762), the proto-typical Bildungsroman which laid the template of an educational system, which aimed to fashion the ideal citizen unscathed by worldly corruption. Without desiring to wantonly overextend this comparison it should also be acknowledged that in his earlier work, *Discourse on Political Economy* (1755), Rousseau insisted that both legislators and citizens alike should feel themselves duty-bound by the law. Furthermore, this sense of duty ought to emanate from a sense of respect and reverence for the law inculcated by means of public education.⁸⁶⁶ We might say that Khatami by way of his speeches and public appearances sought to compensate for the constraints on his office by embarking on an elite-led process of education and counsel (*nasihat*), which spoke of the virtues of law and legality and rights and mutual toleration.

There is however a further dimension to this issue of public education and cultivation which is perhaps the crux of his unsevered continuity with the revolutionary Islamism of 1979 and the 1980s. Insofar as Khatami remains firmly within the ideological school which aspired with the revolution to forge or at least engender the conditions for the formation and cultivation of the “Quranic human”,

⁸⁶⁴ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p53

⁸⁶⁵ Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p68

⁸⁶⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract*, trans. Christopher Betts (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p23

two conceptions of freedom emerge which uneasily co-exist alongside one another. One is bound by law, more specifically the Islamic Republic's constitution and the other 'positive' conception demands the fashioning of the "Quranic human", the latter appearing to be along similar lines to Ibn 'Arabi's own *ensan-e kamel*, to which Khomeini also subscribed.⁸⁶⁷ A third possibility is that the normative content of the law is supposed to produce "Quranic human beings", though he never directly enunciates such a view.

Where the gamut of the Kiyani circle had quite clearly devolved religiosity to the level of the abstract subject and an individualised act of volition in their efforts to echo an admixture of Kant and Luther, Khatami continued to adamantly believe that government must be 'religious' and play a constructive role in the religious and ethical formation of its citizenry. This unresolved dichotomy is evident at a deeper level of Khatami's thought, for while he does acknowledge man's "autonomy" and "will",⁸⁶⁸ it must coexist with "slavery to God" (*bandegi-ye khoda*) just as it had in the ideal Islamic community under the auspices of the Prophet Mohammad.⁸⁶⁹ While asserting the perfect co-existence of 'autonomy' and 'obedience' to God, Khatami applauds Khomeini's revolt against humanism and the belief which began to steadily gain ascendance from the Renaissance that man is the measure of all things.⁸⁷⁰ He does not accept that a repudiation of humanism entails the denigration of man, and quite typical of religious apologetics associates a raft of empty signifiers e.g.

⁸⁶⁷ Khatami, "Din va siyasat (29/10/1376 [19/1/1998]).", p35

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p35

⁸⁶⁹ "Imam Khomeini va hokumat-e dini (11/3/1377 [1/6/1998]).", p146

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p147

humane, compassionate, upright, enlightening, justice, freedom etc. with ‘Islam’ or ‘monotheism’, while dismissing any failures to measure up to such criteria as ‘deviations’.⁸⁷¹ “Independence, freedom, progress, reconstruction (*sazandegi*) exist in the heart of monotheism and prepare the ground for the growth of all humans and justice”.⁸⁷² In this way, Khatami identifies the keywords of the Islamic Republic’s rhetorical arsenal and perhaps even the preceding Rafsanjani administration (*sazandegi*) with the kernel of monotheism itself.

Nevertheless, in keeping with his public exercise in pedagogy as reflected in his homiletic style, the theologian-president holds that Iranian culture has proven to be historically hostile toward the law (*qanun-setiz*).⁸⁷³ The problem of antipathy to the law or insufficient reverence for the law is thus deemed to be a long-established feature of Iranian political culture. The arbitrary state does not stand alone and isolated in polar opposition to a beleaguered society, but rather finds its provenance in a society beholden to entrenched practices of *qanun-setizi*. It is Khatami’s desire, but also that of the very same society which endorsed his election, to elevate law-orientedness to the status of a “national and religious value”.⁸⁷⁴

⁸⁷¹ "Tafsir-e rasmi az Islam (1/4/1377 [22/6/1998]).",p80

Houchang E. Chehabi when analysing the thought of the NAI refers to its approach as that of the “rhetoric of apologetic thought” (p73). Islamic modernism not only dismisses alternatives in order to argue that ‘Islam’ is the superior system, but also often misrepresents the objects of its criticism such as comparing an ‘historical’ Christianity with an ‘idealised’ Islam (p80). I have slightly adapted Chehabi’s description, but it certainly holds for Khatami’s discourse. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism*.

⁸⁷² Khatami, "Tafsir-e rasmi az Islam (1/4/1377 [22/6/1998]).",p81

⁸⁷³ "Rowhaniyat va hal-e mo'zelat-e jame'eh (1/7/1376 [23/9/1997]).",p107

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,p107

There was more to Khatami's homiletics than his call for law-bound citizenry, however. They also entailed a genuine effort to augment respect for pluralism and toleration not only within the polity at large, but within the political elite itself, including even the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC). While his idea of pluralism was constrained by the bounds of the constitution which has several discriminatory regulations and directives embedded within it, Khatami attempted in a speech entitled "The Official Interpretation of Islam" delivered before members of the IRGC on 23 September 1997 to draw upon the travails of the Shi'i and their history of marginalisation as a minority within the Islamic world, and thereby valorise respect for the meek and heterodox.

In accordance with the narrative of orthodox Shi'i historiography the Imams were said to have toiled in the shadow of gruesome and unjust caliphs during both the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. According to this traditional narrative the Imams were not only disempowered and deprived of their legitimate claim to the Prophet's mantle, but were also systematically persecuted, each meeting with a dark and grisly demise. Behind such familiar sermonising would have been a desire to spell out for his audience that the most sacred personages of the Shi'i faith, not only suffered injustices, but their *ahadis* which are taken for granted as the epitome of truth, righteousness and piety, were scorned and disdained in their own time by the ruling estate. In stating that "alongside official Islam [the Imams] introduced another Islam",⁸⁷⁵ the implication was hard to miss. Thus, "alongside the official Islam which holds power, there is another Islam which has another view of the world and

⁸⁷⁵ "Tafsir-e rasmi az Islam (1/4/1377 [22/6/1998]).", p78

humanity”.⁸⁷⁶ This recognition of the possibility for rectitude in the subaltern and ostracised is again part and parcel of what might be called Khatami’s pedagogy of tolerance. This entails not only the acknowledgement that the deity created abundance and variety in the world and that diversity and abundance accord with the ‘natural’ order, but that power and righteousness are basically distinct and not to be conflated. Moreover, like other religious intellectuals Khatami links tolerance to fallibility. Because of our perpetual capacity to err we must act conscientiously in our judgements and accept differences within the bounds of the law. Beyond this point also lies an epistemological one, again pertaining to the issue of fallibility, which contends that truth potentially lies with the marginalised and not the state’s imprimatur; by all accounts, a significant admission. The infallible Imams were the first “truthful” interpreters of the Quran and over the course of several generations “taught us the correct understanding and interpretation of revelation”.⁸⁷⁷ As seen above, it was paradoxically through invoking the example of the infallible Imams that Khatami embraced the centrality of fallibilism to post-revolutionary religious thought, which grew from strength to strength from the late 1980s onwards: “Don’t forget that we are in an era when an infallible is not amongst us and error and mistakes can be made by all of us”.⁸⁷⁸ In this way, the ‘official Islam’ and ‘righteous Islam’ fall apart at the seams and discerning rectitude and piety becomes an exercise in patience and forbearance.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid.,p78

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.,p77

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid.,p83

Just as Khomeini had exalted the supremely ‘innocent’ and ‘tyrannised’ (*mazlumiyyat*) Imam Hossein and his destruction at the hands of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid so as to tap into the stream of Iranian cultural memory and thereby galvanise resistance to the rule of the Pahlavi regime, Khatami sought to engender a sense of empathy for those readings and narratives excluded by the *tafsir-e rasmi*,⁸⁷⁹ which by definition harbours the power to draw the boundary between the orthodox and heterodox. Whether it has the power to enforce and maintain such a manufactured boundary is another issue. As Khatami says, even the Safavid era philosopher Mulla Sadra Shirazi (d. c. 1635) was persecuted in his own time and excommunicated.⁸⁸⁰ This point should be considered in light of the fact that Khomeini, but also a raft of leading 'ulama such as Allameh Tabataba'i, Mesbah-Yazdi and Ja'far Sobhani had either written marginalia, furnished exegeses or taught Mulla Sadra's *Asfar al-arba'eh*, and Sadrian philosophy prior to the establishment of the Islamic Republic and it's in part as a result of their efforts that it has since emerged as the dominant philosophical school in the Qom seminary.⁸⁸¹ Khatami thus presents another example of the historicity of orthodoxy and thereby how dominant and officially sanctioned doxa fall prey to the vicissitudes of history and chance.

⁸⁷⁹ The critique of ‘official’ interpretations of religion was also a key theme in Soroush’s well-known essay on pluralism. 'Abdolkarim Soroush, "Seratha-ye mostaqim: sokhani dar poluralism-e dini; mosbat va manfi," in *Seratha-ye mostaqim* (Tehran: Serat, 1378 [1999]),p6

Other intellectually disposed politicians like Tajzadeh would also regularly echo the notion of “official Islam” delineated by Mojtahed-Shabestari, Soroush and Khatami to describe their conservative rivals. See Mostafa Tajzadeh, "Gofteman-e rasmi, gofteman-e mardomi [Originally published in *Nowruz*, 28/12/1380 (19 March 2002)]," in *Siyasat, kakh va zendan* (Tehran: Zekr, 1381 [2002]),p208

⁸⁸⁰ Khatami, "Rowhaniyat, bayadha va nabayadha (1/7/1376 [23/9/1997]).",p141

⁸⁸¹ Sajjad H. Rizvi, "'Only the Imam Knows Best'" The Maktab-e Tafkik's Attack on the Legitimacy of Philosophy in Iran," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22, no. 3-4 (October 2012),p487

Because of the many unelected and unaccountable institutions and organisations which operate under the imprimatur of the state, not to mention the myriad informal clerical patron-client networks, and the impotence of the executive in controlling or even bringing them to account, it was not so much Khatami's acknowledgement of a plurality of multiple readings of Islam and its sacred texts that was important, as was his effort to cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect and empathy whereby the proponents of different religious interpretations within the Iranian polity might come to recognise and respect the existence of one another. If such an atmosphere could take root then the groups and institutions Khatami most likely had in mind e.g. the *Ansar-e Hezbollah* vigilantes and their ilk, might eschew taking it upon themselves to extra-legally impose their perceptions of orthodoxy on others.⁸⁸²

In the mid-1990s the head of the Guardian Council, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, during Friday prayers had even quoted Khomeini's last will and testament in support of a form of vigilantism, asserting that the Imam's will takes precedence over the law.⁸⁸³ In that document Khomeini had spoken of the necessity of thwarting "destructive freedoms" (*azadiha-ye mokhareb*) which are "forbidden by the Islamic law" and "contrary to the dignity of the Islamic Republic". It continues, "if the people and *Hezbollahi* youth are confronted with the aforesaid issue, refer to the relevant institutions and if they lack the wherewithal, [the people and *Hezbollahi* youth] are obliged to thwart [such destructive

⁸⁸² An account of the *modus operandi* of such groups has been provided in the following slim volume. Michael Rubin, *Into the Shadows: Radical Vigilantes in Khatami's Iran* (Washington: The Washinton Institute for Near East Policy 2001), esp. Chapter 3

⁸⁸³ 'Abdi, "Beh kodam jahat mi ravim.", p72

freedoms] themselves".⁸⁸⁴ Despite Khomeini's *Hokumat-e eslami* delineating a juridical Leviathan in which all authority would be unified in the single institution of *velayat-e faqih*, the reality of the state-building process and the Imam's own final political will and testament went to ensure the preponderance of a war of attrition between various state bodies, and quasi-official and unofficial organisations. The upshot was that Khomeini's sundry epigones would constantly move to obstruct and combat one another on the basis of their perception of the state's best interests and the sacred law.

Given the plurality of readings and the weakness of the executive in enforcing the law, let alone a single interpretation of the faith, a condition of arbitrariness and disorder continued to afflict the polity. Vigilantes, epitomised by groups such as the *Ansar-e Hezbollah*, took it upon themselves to act in accordance with their religious understanding rather than obey the writ of the law (which was often sufficiently opaque in any case).⁸⁸⁵ It is under such circumstances that Khatami insisted that "we should accept that God created human beings differently and we must tolerate one another".⁸⁸⁶ In his earlier work, *Bim-e mowj*, he rejects radical forms of religious pluralism that would accept multiple interpretations of the Godhead as equally 'real' or 'valid', what Soroush following John Hick

⁸⁸⁴ Ruhollah Khomeini, "Matn-e kamel-e vasiyatnameh-ye elahi-ye siyasi-ye Imam Khomeini," (farsi.khamenei.ir, 5 June 1989 [15 Khordad 1367]). Accessed 11/08/2013

Khatami also says that "we do not regard the [Western] conception of freedom as complete, nor an instance of freedom which bestows happiness". Khatami, *Bim-e mowj*, p191

⁸⁸⁵ This is 'Abdi's own conclusion, since as he realised, if members of such groups were given free rein by senior Ayatollahs, in this particular instance Guardian Council chairman, Ahmad Jannati, to take it upon themselves to obstruct or attack anything or anyone they might deem an affront to the *nezam*, then the outcome would be "chaos" or *harj-o-marj*. It was therefore crucial for all to submit to the law and institutionalised legal channels. 'Abdi, "Beh kodam jahat mi ravim.", p73

⁸⁸⁶ Khatami, "Rowhaniyat, bayadha va nabayadha (1/7/1376 [23/9/1997]).", p142

calls ‘positive’ pluralism. At most he accepts a form of ‘negative’ pluralism, acknowledging diverse interpretations of the divine reality as manifold views on a single transcendent reality.⁸⁸⁷ Khatami’s comments are perhaps best thought of as serving the political objective of mutual co-existence given the social fact of pluralism in Iranian society, rather than an ontological proposition attesting to the veracity of multiple incommensurable divine realities or even a particular strand of Perennialism. As has been mentioned, Khatami’s chief objective with such speeches and their dissemination was strengthening both the government’s hand by appealing to as broad and variegated a constituency as possible i.e. as inclusive as feasible within the bounds of the elite-defined, albeit contested cultural-political order, and the public’s respect for lawfulness and security despite plurality and diversity. While at times speaking in withering terms vis-à-vis secular intellectuals, in *Bim-e mowj*, for instance, going so far as to call them an “insidious and destructive pain” throughout the course of modern Iranian history,⁸⁸⁸ he not only acknowledged their existence, but also their “right to disagree” so long as such expressions of disagreement fall within the bounds of the law: “Even an infidel that is not a combatant⁸⁸⁹ (*mohareb*) falls within the domain of Islam”.⁸⁹⁰ While certainly not a flattering description, such a statement was intended to afford secular intellectuals and critics some space to express their views under the enveloping shadow of the Islamic state without fear of violent

⁸⁸⁷ Khatami, *Bim-e mowj*, p184; Soroush, "Seratha-ye mostaqim.", p14

⁸⁸⁸ Khatami, *Bim-e mowj*, p197

⁸⁸⁹ *Mohareb* can have various meanings depending on context. It is often translated as “crusader against God” or “combatant against the state”. Historically the *Mohareb* tribe were hostile toward the Prophet Mohammad and his self-proclaimed prophetic mission. There were a number of raids and counter-raids between the *Mohareb* and the Muslim forces following Mohammad’s relocation to Medina known as the hijra. G. Levi Della Vida, "Muḥārib," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, et al. (Brill Online).

⁸⁹⁰ Khatami, "Rowhaniyat va nezam-e jomhuri-ye eslami (13/4/1377 [4/7/1998]).", p167

reprisals.⁸⁹¹ These efforts to open up a limited space in which subaltern groups could speak in the open, also boosted the Khatami administration's attempts to consolidate a hegemonic front and a broader base and claim to representation.

But once again it proved to be the polycephalous nature of the Iranian state which in large part prevented Khatami from actually executing such a policy, most vividly illustrated by the infamous 'chain murders', that saw the extra-judicial murder by 'rogue elements' within the Ministry of Intelligence of several 'non-insider' secular intellectuals and political activists such as Ali-Akbar Sa'idi-Sirjani, Majid Sharif, Mohammad-Ja'far Puyandeh, Mohammad Mokhtari, Dariush Foruhar and his wife Parvaneh Eskandari. It was with the help of key insiders such as Hajjarian that the murders' alleged source was exposed to the media,⁸⁹² perhaps most forcefully in *Sobh-e emruz* of which he was the managing director and *Asr-e ayandegan* edited by Shamsolva'ezin, and the president himself.⁸⁹³

⁸⁹¹ It should be made clear that in an earlier work, *Bim-e mowj*, Khatami makes comments vis-à-vis secular intellectuals which are in most respects indistinguishable from the incendiary rhetoric of the traditional or radical right: "Irreligious intellectuals whether they want to or not and whether they know or not, provide fodder for the enemy, an enemy which is against our independence...they are a channel into society for the penetration of [the enemy]." In this way, one might conclude that Khatami was himself complicit in creating an atmosphere in which state violence against secular intellectuals had become the norm. Khatami, *Bim-e mowj*, p200

⁸⁹² Ali-Asghar Ramezanzpur and Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Ali-Asghar Ramezanzpur, former Deputy Minister for Culture in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2000-2003; former editor at *Sobh-e emruz* and former editor-in-chief of *Aftab-e emruz* newspapers," (8 April 2012).

⁸⁹³ See, Ganji, *'Alijenab-e sorkhpush*.

Part 2: Sa'id Hajjarian: From *Etela'ati* to *Eslahtalabi*

“The fate of our times is characterised by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’.⁸⁹⁴ – Max Weber, *Science as a Vocation*

This section will focus on a pre-eminent layman of the Khomeinist left, Sa'id Hajjarian, who contributed much to a basic rethinking of the IRI's political theology, but also emerged as one of, if not *the* grand strategist of the reform movement in the second half of the 1990s. I will focus in particular on his theorizing of concepts such as ‘political development’, ‘legitimacy’ and ‘sovereignty’. In light of previous sections which examined the political thought of Khatami, it is hoped the following will convey some of the intellectual and political fault lines as well as commonalities which defined the Khomeinist left at the end of the 20th century. In this way I will try and highlight some of the more notable ideological debates amongst a marginalised wing of the IRI political and ideological-intellectual elite, who later managed to clinch the executive, legislature and overwhelming majority of local councils in the space of three years.

As was touched upon in **Chapter 3**, Hajjarian had an important role in the founding of the Intelligence Ministry during the course of the First Majles in 1984 (1363).⁸⁹⁵ Prior to the ministry's establishment he had worked in the intelligence office for counter-espionage and research under Prime Minister Mohammad-Ali Raja'i. Like many other members of the Khomeinist left he hailed

⁸⁹⁴ Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Cornwall: Routledge, 1991), p155

⁸⁹⁵ Hajjarian and Baqi, "Goftogu ba Sa'id Hajjarian.", p20

from the less privileged neighbourhoods of southern Tehran, and after achieving impressive results in the standardised national examinations, the so-called *konkur*, he was admitted to study electrical engineering at the University of Tehran in 1972 [1351]. As a youth he had been an avid reader of Shari'ati and attended the latter's classes at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad.⁸⁹⁶ By the early 1990s and a number of years after having left the Intelligence Ministry, Hajjarian had also been a participant in the Kiyan and A'in circles. The latter, as relayed in **Chapter 3**, focused on issues in political theory and development. More importantly he was appointed head of the political bureau within the newly established Presidential Strategic Research Centre (PSRC) in 1989 at the outset of the Rafsanjani presidency.

The PSRC was headed by Hojjat al-Islam Musavi-Kho'einiha, who had left his position as chief prosecutor and was perhaps equally notorious for his role as mentor to the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line who had taken the US embassy staff hostage for 444 days in November 1979.⁸⁹⁷ Musavi-Kho'einiha, Hajjarian, 'Abbas 'Abdi and Behzad Nabavi, amongst others, all began working at the Centre at the same time with Hajjarian effectively acting as Kho'einiha's deputy. It was during this time that Hajjarian left the science of engineering behind him once and for all and began formal studies in political science at the University of Tehran; and it was from this institution that he obtained both a Master's degree and later his PhD under the supervision of the UK-trained academic Hossein Bashiriyeh, arguably Iran's pre-eminent political scientist at the time. Bashiriyeh's own

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*,p53-55

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*,p45

writings have focused on a large range of issues, but his work on political transitions to democracy and authoritarian regimes had a considerable impact within academic and non-academic circles inside the country.⁸⁹⁸ As mentioned above, Hajjarian headed the political section at the Centre and this is where he first began to elaborate the notion of ‘political development’ (*towse'eh-ye siyasi*),⁸⁹⁹ that would in due course become one of the Islamic *chap*'s favourite buzz-words. Hajjarian's political bureau had an additional five sub-divisions: the “Islamic revolution group”, “the government group”, which worked on the nature of government in Iran, the political behaviour group, political culture group, and finally the political renewal group.⁹⁰⁰

Hajjarian and Kho'einiha met with Rafsanjani during his presidency and explained the notion of political development to the self-styled Amir Kabir of the Islamic Republic whom was widely reputed to have put much stock in the prospects of economic development and reintegrating Iran into the global economy, as well as strengthening relations with the American-dominated network of global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.⁹⁰¹ In the course of the meeting a bemused Rafsanjani admitted to never having previously encountered the term ‘political development’ and initially supposed that it was Hajjarian's own coinage and adaptation of

⁸⁹⁸ Bashiriyeh and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Professor Hossein Bashiriyeh."

⁸⁹⁹ Hajjarian, "Tallaqi-ye akademik az towse'eh-ye siyasi.", p39-41

⁹⁰⁰ See, Hajjarian and Khojasteh-Rahimi, "Eslahatchi, cheriki nemishavad.", p44. It seems that the remit of the research groups changed upon Rowhani's assuming charge at the Centre for Strategic Research. "Mo'arefi-ye markaz-e tahqiqat-e esteratezhik.", p230-232

⁹⁰¹ For an interesting essay on the beginnings of neoliberalisation under Rafsanjani, and specifically the establishment of economic free zones in his home province of Kerman see, Marina Forti, "Arg-e Jadid: A California Oasis in the Iranian Desert," in *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*, ed. Mike Davis and David Bertrand Monk (New York; London: The New Press, 2007).

the concept of 'economic development'. When, however, Hajjarian outlined the meaning of the term and contended that it should be postulated as one of the preconditions of Rafsanjani's own programme of economic liberalisation "he didn't really welcome this project".⁹⁰²

After Khatami's election, Hajjarian increasingly came to be known as the architect or chief strategist of the reform movement. He was credited in particular with the landslide victory of the Islamic left in the council elections of 1999 and Sixth Majles election of 2000. In an interview in May 1999 after being elected with the second highest number of votes to the Tehran City Council, at the height of his powers he forthrightly criticised both Rafsanjani and former Tehran mayor, Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, for their "elitist tendencies", adding that they were "not particularly concerned with the public and the masses".⁹⁰³ In another important extended interview published in 2005, Hajjarian would go so far as to claim that "[Rafsanjani] doesn't believe in politics and democracy in the slightest [*ou yek shahi beh siyosat va demokrasi e'teqad nadarad*]"⁹⁰⁴ a widely held view amongst the younger, lay elements of the Islamic left prior to 2005.⁹⁰⁵

⁹⁰² Hajjarian and Baqi, "Goftogu ba Sa'id Hajjarian.",p46

Ansari summarises many of the key principles which would guide the reformists after 1997 and many if not all of them can be traced in the writings of Hajjarian in '*Asr-e ma*. This is not to suggest that he was the sole architect of the reformist project by any means. If anything it should be clear that it was on the whole a collective endeavour. Hajjarian's role as both a theorist and organiser however cannot be underestimated. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*.,p114-116

⁹⁰³ Sa'id Hajjarian and Kaveh Ehsani, "'Existing Political Vessels Cannot Contain the Reform Movement": A Conversation with Sa'id Hajjarian," *Middle East Report*, no. 212 (Autumn, 1999),p42

⁹⁰⁴ Hajjarian and Salimi, "Suteh delan gerd-e ham amadand.",p66

⁹⁰⁵ Akbar Ganji, "Rowshanfekran va gofteman-e 'alijenab [Originally published in '*Asr-e azadegan*, no. 92, 9 Bahman 1378 (29/01/2000)]," in *Hashemi-Rafsanjani va Dovvom-e Khordad* (Tehran: Rowzaneh, 1380 [2001]),p59

With Khatami's election Hajjarian became the focus of ire and anger by hard-line forces and elements of the intelligence services who accused him of engaging in "psychological warfare" during the course of the first presidential campaign,⁹⁰⁶ so much so that he was the target of an assassination attempt which left him paralysed in March 2000. Baqi described the assassination attempt as nothing less than "an excuse to dissolve the Khatami government and eliminate the 2nd Khordad and reform front".⁹⁰⁷ Ganji also held the desire to eliminate "the brain of reform" (*maghz-e eslahat*) to be "the most important event after the Sixth Majles election", demonstrating rightist forces within the elite were prepared to resort to violence to forestall their eclipse from power through legally sanctioned elections.⁹⁰⁸ The following pages will attempt to analyse a number of key themes and ideas found in Hajjarian's writings through the 1990s and early 2000s, which were regularly featured in the leading publications of the Khomeinist left and 'religious intellectualism', namely, the SMEEI's *'Asr-e ma, Kiyān, A'in* and *Mosharekat*. Unlike prominent religious intellectuals such as Soroush who have gone through a number of seemingly incompatible periods, Hajjarian's analyses and theoretical outlook for the most part possess a fair amount of consistency. First I will set the context by examining some of Hajjarian's pre-2nd Khordad writings which were first published in *Kiyān* under the pseudonym of

⁹⁰⁶ Mohammad Hossein Ravanbakhsh and Ahmad Madadi-Ta'emeh, *Andisheh va aqayan-e khoshunat* (Tehran: Mo'alefan, 1379 [2000]), p31

⁹⁰⁷ Emadeddin Baqi, "Hadaf-e tarahan-e terur barchidan-e dowlat-e Khatami va hazf-e jebbeh-ye Dovvom-e Khordad bud [*Aftab-e emruz*, 16 Farvardin 1379 (04/04/2000)]," in *Baraye tarikh: goftogu ba Sa'id Hajjarian* (Tehran: Nashr-e nei, 1379 [2000]), p113

⁹⁰⁸ Akbar Ganji and et al., "Matn-e sokhanraniha-ye ruz-e avval," in *Konforans-e Berlin; khedmat ya khiyanat*, ed. Mohammad 'Ali Zakaria'i (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]), p73

Jahangir Salehpur. I will then proceed to explore his conception of political development in greater depth and its relationship with the Khatami government's political strategy.

Disenchanted Sovereignty

As is often the case in revolutionary states with charismatic founders, long after their passing a contested legacy remains over which successors scramble to acquire legitimacy for their political visions and policies. Hajjarian's reading of Khomeini's political thought is certainly one of the more innovative and radical of the Islamic *chap* and sheds light on his own aspirations for political reform within the Islamic Republic. His analysis is also significantly more dynamic and prone to thinking in terms of social and historical processes, a trait so often absent from the work of other religious intellectuals who tend to have an idealistic i.e. that ideas determine the nature of historical transformations, and Whiggish view of Western history i.e. that modernity was the progressive unfurling of critical rationality, humanism and enlightenment, which they then use as a benchmark to appraise Iran's own historical development. This is not to deny their acknowledgement of historicity which both Soroush and Shabestari invoke in ironically abstract ways, but their propensity to disaggregate the historical nature of texts and ideas from broader social, political and economic transformations. On a related note, there is also a strong tendency amongst the Islamic left to have a Whiggish view of its own historical trajectory and efface not only the highly authoritarian and paternalistic strands running through Khomeini's views on political authority and rule, but also their very real complicity in the bloody internal battles and repression which followed the revolution.

While Hajjarian is by no means free of such issues, he is easily the most sophisticated and theoretically-adept of the Islamic left.

In an essay entitled, 'The Process of Shi'i Jurisprudence's Secularisation' (*Farayand-e 'orfi shodan-e feqh-e Shi'eh*), first published in *Kiyan* in April-May 1995, instead of proclaiming *feqh* mere artifice produced by a mundane-historical institution i.e. the clergy, he takes the view that Khomeini had in fact secularized Shi'i *feqh* by sacrificing it on the altar of the prerogatives and exigencies of the nation-state.⁹⁰⁹ He argued that because the Guardian Jurist (*vali-ye faqih*) had been endowed by Khomeini with "absolute guardianship" which conferred the powers of the Prophet and Imams as regards the power to legislate (*amr-e tashri'*), and pass laws at the state and national level, such legislation must be recognized by the 'ulama as a whole.⁹¹⁰ The age-old problem in which temporal authority was deemed religiously illegitimate, usurping the rightful place of the Hidden Imam, had dissolved and religious authority's rivalry and difficult co-existence with temporal power i.e. the state, neutralized. More fundamentally, the long-established and basic dichotomy of customary law (*'orf*) and the sacred law (*shari'a*) had effectively been obliterated. On this reading Khomeini had succeeded where kings since the Safavids had failed as he was able to unify the two distinct spheres of legislative legitimacy under the imprimatur of the nation-state which as it happened was indistinguishable from the fittingly vague "interests of Islam".⁹¹¹ While Khomeini's political thought had an undeniable

⁹⁰⁹ Sa'id Hajjarian, "Farayand-e 'orfi shodan-e feqh-e Shi'eh [Originally published in *Kiyan*, no. 24, Farvardin-Ordibehesht 1374 (April-May 1995)]," in *Az shahed-e qodsi ta shahed-e bazari : 'orfi shodan-e din dar sepehr-e siyasat* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1380 [2001]), p84

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p83

⁹¹¹ Hajjarian is quoting Khomeini's historic fatwa of January 1988. *Ibid.*, p83

internationalist bent, with the founding of the Islamic Republic it has been irrevocably localised in the Iranian nation-state. Khomeini's famous fatwa of January 1988 which decreed it permissible for the state to even suspend matters of ritual practice (*'ebadat*) was an invasive step that no previous Iranian leader had dared take, and to some extent even derived directly from Iran's numerous disputes with the Saudi kingdom, in addition to the many challenges facing the new state.⁹¹²

Despite Hajjarian's originally formulated hypothesis, traditional authority, as he would acknowledge himself, had proven to be far more resilient than he had anticipated. Upon Seyyed Ali Khamenei's taking up of the office of the Guardian Jurist it had been deemed necessary to promote his transformation from a mid-ranking Hojjat al-Islam to the rank of Ayatollah overnight. This step was taken, at least in part to placate the traditionalist clergy and *marja'iyat* and was recognition of the fact that political acumen alone wouldn't suffice to lend the institution credibility to perform the role of Leviathan, both Khomeini and Hajjarian, in their distinct ways, envisaged. Ever since his appointment by the Assembly of Experts in June 1989, Khamenei's office has repeatedly campaigned to promote his status as a *marja'-e taqlid*; a claim which has riled the feathers of many senior 'ulama and been met with a cacophony of dissenting voices, the most truculent of which was an initially staunch defender of Khamenei's 'absolute' authority as *vali-ye faqih*, Ayatollah Azari-Qomi.⁹¹³ Despite Hajjarian's positive spin on the unforeseen consequences of the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist, it can and has been interpreted in a manner directly antithetical to Hajjarian's reading, namely, as a

⁹¹² See, **Chapter 2**.

⁹¹³ Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2000), p52-53

justification of theocratic absolutism and a negation of the popular basis of sovereignty. Even if he conveniently omits that Khomeini had predominantly spoken of ‘the expediency of the regime’ (*maslahat-e nezam*), Hajjarian had hoped the political credo of ‘expediency’ *qua* public good would take centre stage and be understood by the Islamic state as identical with the interests of the nation (*mellat*). It was on such a basis that he consequently made the leap to assert that because of the centrality of the public good, the *faqih*’s power and authority derived from the social compact he had concluded with the people. Just as Hobbes replaced the divine covenant with the social contract, thereby establishing modern politics and the nation-state on the basis of human volition,⁹¹⁴ Hajjarian follows suit in his efforts to read the very same transition into the political and theological revolutions enacted by Khomeini. The *faqih*’s legitimacy was thus thought to derive from below, with him contracted as a representative of the popular will.⁹¹⁵

Hajjarian saw Khomeini as a “*faqih of transition*” capable of devolving the prerogative to identify the public interest from the jurist to the nation-state with its foundation in popular republicanism.⁹¹⁶ In this regard he casts Khomeini as a *force majeure* of raw and unmediated populist energy, corroding the grip of traditionalist jurisprudence while new forms of authority and legitimacy gained verve and appeal. Unsurprisingly Hajjarian’s professed theoretical sources of inspiration were Thomas Hobbes

⁹¹⁴ Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York Columbia University Press, 2011), p1

⁹¹⁵ It is questionable whether this is in fact the case following the constitutional revisions of July 1988, since the stipulation in article 5 of the constitution which stated that “the majority of the people recognise and accept [the *vali-ye faqih*] as leader” was scratched. Shams, *Qanun-e asasi: az farman-e mashrutiyat ta emruz*, p105

⁹¹⁶ Sa'id Hajjarian, "Imam Khomeini, *faqih-ye dowran-e gozar: az feqh-e javaheri ta feqh al-maslahat* [Originally published in *Kiyan*, no. 46, Farvardin-Ordibehesht 1378 (March-April 1999)]," in *'Orfi shodan-e din dar sepehr-e siyosat* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1380 [2001]), p92

and Jean Bodin, with their advocacy of centralised and indivisible authority in the locus of the state Leviathan.⁹¹⁷ “The *vali-ye faqih* is the representative and symbol of “national sovereignty” (*hakemiyat-e melli*) and is bound to defend the “public interest” and “national interest””.⁹¹⁸ He is “the *vakil* of a people who in accord with a “compact” elected him to this position” and “his legitimacy is a consequence of the rights of the nation”.⁹¹⁹

After vanquishing traditional religious authority and the establishment of the public interest’s primacy as determined by the republic, the state’s religious basis was supposed to steadily slip away into obscurity and segue into the civilianisation of political power. The supervision and security of civil transactions (*mo'amelat*) would be underwritten by the state and not the clergy, while the domain of religion and the authority of the traditional institutions of organized religion would withdraw into the private sphere in the form of religious worship (*'ebadat*). Rituals address the immutable dimension of religion, but also have the ability to contribute to social stability. The role of *feqh* insofar as it has one would be restricted to *'ebadat*, while public issues of jurisprudence are regulated by the state which is their sole guarantor.⁹²⁰ “In the same way that today Muslims as a result of the progress of knowledge have cast aside immense volumes of texts (*nosus*) relating to the jurisprudence of medical practice, they may accordingly secularise the jurisprudence of commerce, inheritance and the

⁹¹⁷ "Farayand-e 'orfi shodan-e feqh-e Shi'eh.",p84-85

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.,p84

⁹¹⁹ Ibid.,p85

He claims that his reading is supported by article 56 of the constitution.

⁹²⁰ Ibid.,p88

judiciary".⁹²¹ All of these juridical spheres, which have been the traditional prerogative of the *shari'a* and thus the 'ulama would be subsumed under the remit of state law and change will subsequently find itself initiated by the state and its organs as the times demand. Playing on Max Weber's famous account of the process of 'disenchantment' which had been irrevocably instigated with the inception of the European Enlightenment,⁹²² Hajjarian argues that the subordination of religious injunctions to the state by Khomeini may well have provoked the "re-enchantment" (*baz-afsuni*) of the political order in the short-term, but that ultimately this act had and will spur the process of Shi'i *feqh's* secularisation onwards.⁹²³ His conclusions are thus very different from those of Khatami who held that without an Islamic state many important religious ordinances would remain in abeyance. For Khatami the Islamic state in concert with the clergy retain their mandate and must jointly continue as guarantors of the *shari'a* and its implementation.

While reason (*'aql*) is an established source of law in Shi'i *feqh*, Hajjarian argues the Shi'i juristic conception of reason differs from its modern counterpart in a number of important ways.⁹²⁴ As one of the four sources by means of which religious ordinances are derived, alongside consensus (*ejma'*), the Quran and Traditions, 'reason' came to be understood, for all intents and purposes, as the mere sum of practical rules for the derivation of such rulings. These practical rules include 'presuming the continuance of the *status quo*' (*esteshab*), 'exemption' (*bara'at*) and 'option' (*takhyir*) and have

⁹²¹ *Ibid.*,p82

⁹²² Weber, "Science as a Vocation.",p155

⁹²³ Hajjarian, "Farayand-e 'orfi shodan-e feqh-e Shi'eh; *ibid.*,p83

⁹²⁴ *Ibid.*,p94

historically set the parameters of legal reasoning (*ejtehad*) in Shi'i jurisprudence.⁹²⁵ Hajjarian also claims that 'reason', as a source of religious rulings, came to be practically overshadowed by the other three sources of Shi'i jurisprudence, namely, consensus, the Quran and the Traditions. The prohibition on *qiyas* or reasoning by analogy, in stark contrast to the Sunni schools of jurisprudence, he argues, was another reason for the intellectual torpor plaguing the legal methodology of the guardians of the *shari'a*. It was for these reasons in his view that only a revolutionary transformation and the charismatic appeal of Khomeini could have overcome such obstacles on the road to modern forms of reasoning and institution-building and subsequently propel *maslahat* to the forefront of the process of law-making in the Shi'i state.⁹²⁶ The obvious question as already implied above is why this should have continued to hold following the charismatic leader's death and the subsiding of revolutionary fervour and thereby prevent legal parallelism e.g. the dichotomy between traditional and rational-legal state authority, resurfacing in another form? The reader is not provided with a clear answer.

While Khatami in a number of respects continued to cede ground to the longstanding distinction between the *shari'a* and positive law manifest in the *modus operandi* of the Guardian Council and the Majles, Hajjarian highlights the Council for the Discernment of Regime Expediency (*Majma'-e tashkhis-e maslahat-e nezam*), established by Khomeini in February 1988 to mediate thorny disagreements between the Guardian Council and Majles. Given Khomeini's emphasis on the "preservation of the

⁹²⁵ Ibid.,p94

For more details see, Modarressi Tabataba'i, *An Introduction to Shi'i Law*,p10

⁹²⁶ Hajjarian, "Farayand-e 'orfi shodan-e feqh-e Shi'eh.",p94

regime” (*hefz-e nezam*) as the obligation which supersedes all others (*owjab-e vajebat*) he contended that in principle the institution harboured the potential for ushering in a new era of popular sovereignty.⁹²⁷ Another argument made by Hajjarian,⁹²⁸ was that Islamic government’s entwinement with the everyday preoccupations of running the affairs of a modern state and overseeing a civilian bureaucracy in keeping with the imperatives of means-end or goal-oriented rationality (*'aqlaniyat-e hadaf-vasileh*), progressively eroded the ideological dogmas once held to be unassailable and sacrosanct, as the mundane exigencies of state administration take priority.⁹²⁹

Re-imagining the Sultan

Arguably what hadn’t been adequately thought out by Hajjarian was the prospect that the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurisconsult would refuse to discard its pretence to sanctity and religiosity and instead locate the very fount of its legitimacy in a divinely bestowed mandate without intermediary (*mashru'iyat-e elahi-ye bela-vaseteh*). On this reading, in the final analysis, “legitimacy” (*mashru'iyat*) derives not from the will of the people, but from God. It would be left to clergymen on the far right of the ruling ideological spectrum to elaborate and theorize the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist

⁹²⁷ Ibid.,p85

Interestingly enough, in May 1993 a controversy between the Guardian Council and Expediency Council would see the former attempt to restrict the powers of the latter, and circumscribe its powers within the limits of the secondary injunctions, as opposed to the primary injunctions of the *shari'a*, as had been previously assumed on the basis of Khomeini’s famous decree analysed above. See, Yasuyuki Matsunaga, "The Secularization of a Faqih-Headed Revolutionary Islamic State of Iran: Its Mechanisms, Processes, and Prospects," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, no. 3 (2009),p477

⁹²⁸ Mohsen Kadivar also repeats this argument verbatim in his interview with *Khordad*. The interview was amongst the chief reasons for his arrest and conviction by the Special Court for Clerics. Kadivar, "Mosahebeh ba ruznameh-ye Khordad.",p162

⁹²⁹ Hajjarian, "Farayand-e 'orfi shodan-e feqh-e Shi'eh.",p95

in a way that was conducive to something approximating pure theocracy. Mesbah-Yazdi, for example, substituted popular legitimacy with the notion of acceptability (*maqbuliyat*) i.e. the regime should be acceptable to the people, but they cannot furnish it with any legitimacy, which is the prerogative of God alone. Needless to say, this position was rejected by Hajjarian.⁹³⁰ The logic of the inversion of Hajjarian's thesis meant that instead of the secularisation of religious authority and its subsumption in the democratic process, the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist turned into the equation of the interests of the ruling regime and the person of the Guardian Jurist with the Divine Will itself. In the eyes of a number of right-wing ideologues, defiance of the regime (*nezam*) and its helmsman, the Guardian Jurist, was tantamount to defiance of God himself. Additionally, one ought not to forget the crucial material resources and institutional leverage at the disposal of the *vali-ye faqih's* office, which apart from directly appointing six of the Guardian Council's twelve members, also appoints the Chief Justice, the full thirty-one members of the Expediency Council, the Head of State Radio and Television, Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Commander of the Regular Military, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, and the Commander of the Law Enforcement

⁹³⁰ See, Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, "Hokumat va mashru'iyat," *Ketab-e naqd* 2, no. 7 (1377 [1998]), p.52; Reza San'ati, *Gofteman-e Mesbah: gozareshi az zendegani va mavaze'-e 'elmi-siyasi-ye Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 1387 [2008]), p.539-593

Sa'id Hajjarian, "Falsafeh-ye entekhabat [Originally published in '*Asr-e ma*, no. 90, 1376/12/06 (25/02/1998)]," in *Jomhuriyat; afsun zoda'i az qodrat* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1389 [2000]), p.539

He wrote an explicit critique of Mesbah-Yazdi in '*Asr-e ma* in August 1998 referring to him as "Hojjat al-Islam" (p.640), and not Ayatollah. He compares Mesbah's political thought unfavourably with that of Motahhari and Beheshti, depicting him as a retrograde apologist for absolutism and even slavery (p.643). "Mesbah-Yazdi dar kakh-e zojaji [Originally published in '*Asr-e ma*, no. 101, 21/05/1377 (12/08/1998)]," in *Jomhuriyat; afsun zoda'i az qodrat* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1379 [2000]).

Forces.⁹³¹ There are also a myriad of quasi-official channels whereby the Guardian Jurist can exert influence upon the political and economic fate of persons and events, such as the Revolutionary Foundations (*bonyadha*).

It was on this point that Hajjarian and later Ganji would draw on Weber's theory of sultanism as laid out in the latter's magnum opus *Economy and Society*.⁹³² There Weber defined sultanism as an "extreme case" of patrimonialism, where "traditional domination develops an administration and military force which are purely personal instruments of the master...Where domination is primarily traditional, even though it is exercised by virtue of the ruler's personal autonomy, it will be called *patrimonial authority*; where indeed it operates primarily on the basis of discretion, it will be called *sultanism*".⁹³³ While Hajjarian was often cautious in his deployment of the term, he not only played a

⁹³¹ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, p8

⁹³² Hajjarian was amongst the earliest to introduce the theory which then became fodder for many future analyses of the Iranian political system. Sa'id Hajjarian, "Sakht-e eqtedar-e soltani, asibpazirha va badilha," *Etela'at-e siyasi-eqtisadi*, no. 2 (1374 [1995]).

⁹³³ Weber quoted in H. E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, "A Theory of Sultanism 1: A Type of Nondemocratic Rule," in *Sultanistic Regimes*, ed. Juan J. Linz and H. E. Chehabi (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p4

It still is not clear to what extent this is really an accurate analogy as far as Khamenei's style of statecraft is concerned simply because we still do not have an accurate picture of the *modus operandi* of the *beit's* bureaucracy, much of which has been predicated on hearsay transmitted to the foreign based Farsi-language press. There are occasional indications as to its *modus operandi* in the domestic press as a result of leaks in the midst of factional infighting. One such instance was Karrubi's open letter to Khamenei, alleging that the latter's son, Mojtaba, had openly interfered in the 2005 presidential race and backed a rival candidate, namely Ahmadinejad, though he is not mentioned by name. Mehdi Karrubi, "Matn-e kamel-e nameh-ye Mehdi Karrubi beh rahbar-e jomhuri-ye eslami," BBC Persian, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/06/050619_karoubi-objection.shtml.

A further glimpse into the economic power which undergirds the *beit* has recently been provided by a Reuters special report on the financial operations of an organisation called the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam (*Setad-e ejra'i-ye farman-e hazrat-e Imam*), which is not only under the ultimate control of Khamenei's office, but devoid of parliamentary scrutiny, and has been estimated to control assets in the region of \$95 billion, much of which has been accumulated as a result of asset seizures. Steve Stecklow, Babak

vital part in introducing the theory to Iranian audiences in the mid-1990s, but also on many occasions held that elements of the theory such as the personalisation of power were serious obstacles confronting both the Islamic *chap* and the future of political development.⁹³⁴ Even after the failed assassination attempt, Hajjarian was hardly reticent arguing that “after the death of Imam [Khomeini] we have gradually returned to the previous governmental structure [i.e. the Pahlavi monarchy]”.⁹³⁵ Ganji would be even less circumspect in later years and insisted in numerous articles published in Persian and English that the Islamic Republic was a full-blown sultanistic system.⁹³⁶

Dehghanpisheh, and Yeganeh Torbati, "Khamenei controls massive financial empire built on property seizures," *Reuters* 11 November 2013.

Though the analyses provided by the Islamic left in this regard can prove insightful and accurate in part, they all completely ignore the personalised clerical and familial networks which informed Khomeini's style of rule. Though Khomeini no doubt exhibited several characteristics of the Weberian archetype of the 'charismatic leader', empirical reality rarely, if ever fully approximates such idealisations. The role of Khomeini's *beit* or household and of his son, Ahmad, in particular and how they defined his style of statecraft demand further research; there is of course no doubt that during Khamenei's time as Leader that the *beit* has massively expanded and on some accounts become a state within a state. Nevertheless, the role of personalised, familial and clerical networks under Khomeini is undeniable. Mehdi Ha'eri-Yazdi in his memoir quite clearly says that it was nearly impossible to speak to Khomeini directly without going through Ahmad or in Ahmad's presence. Hairi-Yazdi and Sedghi, "Mehdi Hairi-Yazdi.", Tape 4;p18

⁹³⁴ In this essay first published in '*Asr-e ma*, Hajjarian highlights both the personalisation of power and its transformation into a matter of proximity and familial ties to the 'sultan'. Hajjarian, "Nahveh-ye baz towlid-e saltanat dar andisheh-ye khelafat va velayat [First published in '*Asr-e ma*, no. 95, 30/02/1377 (20/05/1998)].", p581-583

⁹³⁵ "Mashruteh-talabi," in *Eslahat dar barabar-e eslahat: goftogu'i-ye enteqadi* (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1382 [2003]), p123

⁹³⁶ Several years later in exile in the United States Ganji undertook a frontal assault against Khamenei and what he saw as the former's personalisation of political rule. In this article Ganji proclaims, "Formally or not, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government all operate under the absolute sovereignty of the supreme leader; Khamenei is the head of state, the commander in chief, and the top ideologue" (p45). He was also adamant that Khamenei "has secured a complete stranglehold on power in Iran" (p49). Akbar Ganji, "The Latter-Day Sultan: Power and Politics in Iran," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2008), p45

A much earlier comment by Kadivar which provoked the ire of the Special Court for Clerics was when he averred, "in the method and nature of some it is observed that their interpretation of Islamic government bears no difference with a monarchical regime". Kadivar, "Mosahebeh ba ruznameh-ye Khordad.", p157

While there was certainly some truth to the analogy given the Leader's office's control of a vast network of institutions, appointments and endowments, in the Islamic *chap*'s lexicon it performed the role of a polemical catchword used by them and their sympathisers to undermine the agents and persons they held to be the chief obstacle to their contestation of popular institutions. A straightforward sultanistic system predicated on traditional forms of authority and familial ties is quite clearly not an accurate representation of the IRI's political system in its entirety for numerous reasons, but more importantly it stood in an uneasy relationship to the 2nd Khordad Front's own claim to stand as the embodiment of the national will. The more cautious amongst them were thus careful not to overextend the metaphor in too unqualified or crude a fashion, since they recognised that several other institutional mechanisms of control and forms of authority were simultaneously at work. The discourse of sultanism did however serve the purpose of personalising and focusing the disparate origins of their frustrations in a single individual. The portrayal of a decrepit sultanistic system also fed into the Islamic *chap*'s narrative of degeneration, which contended that following the loss of the incomparably charismatic leader, the republic had regressed into a traditionalist, wayward and personal fiefdom in which they had only limited room to manoeuvre.⁹³⁷

⁹³⁷ In 2009 following the controversial re-election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad, a wheel-chair-ridden Hajjarian was hauled before the Islamic Revolutionary Court, so as to repudiate (allegedly under duress) the theory of sultanism and stated that it bore no relation to the doctrine and political order of *velayat-e faqih*. He also resigned from the Mosharekat Party in what many reputable observers have compared to 'Stalinist-style show trials'. In the course of his 'confession' he was quoted as stating that the works of Max Weber, Jürgen Habermas and Talcott Parsons were responsible for jeopardising the country's national security. "Hajjarian: bekhatere enherafat va khesaratha'i ke beh mardom zadim az hezb-e Mosharekat este'fa mikonam," *Fars News Agency* 03/06/1388 [25 Aug 2009].

Hajjarian's 'confession' is symptomatic of a deep-seated hostility to the humanities and in particular critical social theory, which dates back at least to the early nineties when the programme *Hoviyat* (Identity) was

In keeping with such an outlook, Hajjarian was sure to emphasize that Khatami's victory was the convergence of the chief objectives of the Constitutional Revolution (*mashrutiyat*) and the 1979 Revolution (*jomhuriyat*).⁹³⁸ *Mashrutiyat* of course stood for the limitation of state power, namely the personal power of the shah, while *jomhuriyat* was the embodiment of the people's will in popular institutions; "the people are not the property or children of the government...the government is a product of [the people's] will and it does not have an identity independent of them".⁹³⁹ Hajjarian was thus eager to claim that the election of Khatami symbolised an essentially political movement with a political set of demands; it was "a completely political phenomenon", he contended.⁹⁴⁰ At the same time he argued that "we are going through a phase of patrimonialism, where no polity yet exists, and where politics is interpreted as a purely personal matter".⁹⁴¹ In his eyes, somewhat paradoxically it was necessary for a political act to limit the *vali-ye faqih's* power by law so that a polity might be forged. This in turn would lead to what he calls the rationalisation and depersonalisation of politics as established bureaucratic, impersonal and meritocratic (*shayesteh-salar*) procedures incrementally permeated the country's political institutions.⁹⁴² In this way the IRI in Weberian terminology, which

broadcast on national television and systematically attempted to depict secular and even some religious intellectuals who drew on critical methods in the social sciences as subversive and dangerous. The program even used material originating in confessions extracted under duress when political prisoners such as 'Ezatollah Sahabi had been imprisoned years previously. Sahabi claims he was interrogated by Hossein Shari'atmadari, the incumbent editor of *Keyhan* newspaper, while the latter was still working in the service of the Ministry of Intelligence. 'Ezatollah Sahabi, *Nim-e qarn-e khatereh va tajrobeh: khaterat-e mohandes 'Ezatollah Sahabi; salha-ye 1357 ta 1379* (Paris: Khavaran, 2013), p209-212

⁹³⁸ Hajjarian, "Dovvom-e Khordad.", p17

⁹³⁹ "Falsafeh-ye entekhabat.", p538

⁹⁴⁰ "Dovvom-e Khordad.", p17

⁹⁴¹ Hajjarian and Ehsani, "A Conversation with Sa'id Hajjarian.", p41

⁹⁴² Hajjarian, "Falsafeh-ye entekhabat.", p539

is Hajjarian's most important point of reference, would have traversed the phases of charismatic authority and unmediated populism (Khomeini) to patrimonialism (Khamenei) transitioning into popular-democratic legitimacy and rational-legal bureaucratic authority and management (Hajjarian and the Mosharekat Front's avowed political objective).⁹⁴³ The Islamic *chap's* victory on the 2nd Khordad had been an initial step in this direction and had introduced what Hajjarian would term "dual sovereignty" (*hakemiyat-e dowganeh*), whereby patrimonialism would govern alongside institutions predicated on elections and popular sovereignty,⁹⁴⁴ even if the latter continued to harbour numerous deficiencies. Hajjarian observes that the clergy itself proved incapable of bringing about "dual sovereignty" in the form of patrimonialism in parallel with a form of "clerical aristocracy". Following the death of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Golpayegani in 1993, the last to pass of the four most prominent Iranian *maraje'* at the time of Khomeini's return from exile, the clergy instead found itself incorporated within the state bureaucracy.⁹⁴⁵

Managed Participation Confronts Entrenched Unaccountability

While Hajjarian had always been practical-minded and capable in administrative and managerial tasks, Khatami's victory provided impetus to think through how the political agendas of the executive and Islamic left might in fact be realised given the many constitutional and institutional obstructions with which it was confronted. Two key issues occupied him during Khatami's first term, both of which

⁹⁴³ "'Velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih" va "qanun-e asasi" (1) [Originally published in '*Asr-e ma*, no. 61, 1375/11/19 (07/02/1997)].",p265

⁹⁴⁴ "Mashruteh-talabi.",p126

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,p123

were in limited fashion addressed by the incumbent administration. The first which I will briefly touch upon was restraining the Guardian Council and its ability not only to strike down legislation, which it regarded as violating Islamic law, but also veto prospective electoral candidates for the presidency, parliament and Assembly of Experts. The second was the problem of increasing and ensuring high levels of political participation through institutionalised electoral channels, since it was held that high participation would by default lead to the victory of the Islamic *chap*, while a low turnout as a result of apathy would be to their detriment.

Returning to the first issue, Hajjarian came up with some interesting arguments on how to introduce a constitutional court (*dadgah-e qanun-e asasi*) which might perform the role of judicial review and thus act as a body to which citizens could lodge complaints if they felt their rights had been infringed or violated by other organs of the state. In this way, their rights would be independently protected and not have to rely upon the caprice of the executive or judicial branch alone. It would also re-establish a *de facto* separation of powers, by which the GC could be checked since this principle had been “tarnished” according to Hajjarian.⁹⁴⁶ This body would also examine those instances whereby laws passed by the Majles or Expediency Council were held to have infringed upon individual citizens’ rights. The content of such rights would not be determined in terms of their consonance with a traditionalist conception of the *shari'a*,⁹⁴⁷ and can be interpreted as an important

⁹⁴⁶ "Pasdari az qanun-e asasi.",p483

⁹⁴⁷ The issue of the Guardian Jurist’s power of ‘executive order’ or *hokm-e hokumati* which could putatively override the *shari'a* in the name of the ‘preservation of the Islamic regime’, acted as an effective veto on unwelcome legislation and was used on occasion by Khamenei, most notably against a proposed press law in August 2000, seems still not to have presented itself as a serious problem.

dividend of the religious intellectuals' efforts to justify rights independently of either *feqh* or scriptural authority. Such basic entitlements were the rightful endowment of citizens independent of the rulings or purview of Islamic jurists. Moreover, candidates disqualified by the GC would hypothetically possess a body to which they could turn and potentially overturn the rulings of the GC.

“The Guardian Council is not answerable to any authority regarding its decisions (the rejection of laws approved by the Majles, interpretation of the Constitution and the determination of the competency of candidates) and complaints against them go unheard. Perhaps the duty of a constitutional court could be the scrutiny of complaints against the Guardian Council”.⁹⁴⁸

This proposal was also linked for Hajjarian to the question of keeping electoral participation high since if reformist candidates were not permitted to stand for elected bodies in the first place, there would be little chance of inducing significant turnouts and governments with popular mandates for substantive change. This innovative proposal, first aired in *Asr-e ma* in December 1997, was never realised, but putatively intended to follow on from Khatami's appointment of a Commission for the Implementation and Supervision of the Constitution at the end of November.⁹⁴⁹ With the appointment of this commission consisting of five jurists Khatami invoked the relevant presidential prerogative as stipulated in article 113 of the constitution, which Hajjarian mentions explicitly.⁹⁵⁰ It was also thought by invoking article 13 of the 1986 Law of Delimitation of the Functions, Powers, and

⁹⁴⁸ Hajjarian, "Pasdari az qanun-e asasi.",p485

⁹⁴⁹ Hossein Mehrpur, *Ra'is-e jomhur va ma'suliyat-e ejra'i-ye qanun-e asasi*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Etela'at, 2001),p13-15

⁹⁵⁰ More on this issue below. Hajjarian, "Pasdari az qanun-e asasi.",p479

Responsibilities of the President, that Khatami would be empowered to rebuke branches of government in the instance of a constitutional violation.⁹⁵¹ Hajjarian spotting the obvious weaknesses of article 13 of the 1986 Law tried to call for something like an independent judicial review with real teeth. The proposition however never managed to get off the ground.

Another maxim the reformist camp took up with alacrity was that of “realising the hidden capacity (*zarfiyat*)”⁹⁵² of the constitution and implementing those constitutional articles which “have not reached the stage of actuality (*fe'liyat*) in practice”.⁹⁵³ The main constitutional articles that he had in mind and saw as pivotal to increasing the leverage of popular institutions against appointed ones were article 113, which gave the president responsibility for supervising the implementation of the constitution, and articles 100-106, elaborating the functions and responsibilities of directly elected city, township and village councils. As mentioned above, Khatami actually appointed a Commission for the Implementation and Supervision of the Constitution, citing article 113, in the hope that it might permit the president to counter the prerogative of the Guardian Council to interpret the constitution as stipulated in article 98. In his own analysis Hajjarian neglects to mention the second clause of article 113 which permits the president to undertake the constitution’s execution “except in matters directly concerned with the office of the Leadership”. This would make the issue a lot more

⁹⁵¹ Arjomand, *After Khomeini*, Loc-2055-of-6438

⁹⁵² Sa'id Hajjarian, "Sharhi bar maramnameh-ye jebbeh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami," *Mosharekat*, no. 27 (18 Shahrivar 1378 [9 September 1999]).

⁹⁵³ "Pasdari az qanun-e asasi.", p479

nebulous than Hajjarian had arguably been prepared to admit, especially given the same article also states that the president is second to the Leader in the regime power structure.

On a related note, article 57 of the constitution which stipulated the Leader's "supervision" (*nezarat*) of the three branches of government (the actual wording of the article is *zir-e nazar-e velayat-e motlaqeh-ye amr*, under the view of the Absolute Mandate to Rule) was another point of contention between Hajjarian and Khatami. Hajjarian sought to interpret it merely at the level of the Leader's being informed (*etela'i*), whereas since at least 1992 article 57 had predominantly been interpreted as "approbatory" (*estesvabi*).⁹⁵⁴ This second reading which had been in the ascent after Khomeini's death was one of the bases of the judiciary's and the GC's ability to stonewall the executive.⁹⁵⁵

Khomeini's massive popular following had allowed him to simply override the GC if he sensed its views were out-of-step with the popular mood and revolutionary atmosphere, without any significant consequences; and in several instances where this occurred, the Imam had ruled in favour of the Khomeinist left. In his absence they could no longer beseech the awe-inspiring patriarch to intervene on their behalf and so were compelled to hem in the GC by an alternative reading of the revised constitution. As should be clear from the above exposition of Khatami's pronouncements on the issue, the president was unable to make the leap, which had been made by the more radical wing of the Islamic *chap* and it is because of the failure to clarify his position on article 57 that Khatami's relationship with Hajjarian began to suffer.⁹⁵⁶ Without getting into the details, the debates

⁹⁵⁴ Also see, **Chapter 3**.

⁹⁵⁵ Hajjarian and Salimi, "Suteh delan gerd-e ham amadand.", p64

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p65

surrounding articles 113 and 99 drove Khatami's introduction of the so-called 'Twin Bills' (*layeh-ye dowganeh*) in September 2002, to both expand his own powers and limit the GC's approbatory supervision of elections. Their predictable rejection at the hands of the GC and their humiliating withdrawal by Khatami in April 2004 at the end of his second-term was made all the more inevitable by the president's failure to clarify his position in just the way demanded by Hajjarian.

The founding of the Participation Front for Islamic Iran (*Hezb-e jebheh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami*) in 1998, a year after Mohammad Khatami's electoral victory, was largely the outcome of the efforts of those individuals and groups which prior to the 2nd Khordad had reached the conclusion that the fate of 'political development' was intertwined with that of 'political participation'.⁹⁵⁷ Mosharekat's (Participation) official stance in keeping with the arguments of both Hajjarian and Bashiriyeh was to see "political participation" (*mosharekat-e siyasi*) as a cornerstone of their political programme. In line with a significant current in Anglo-American political science which had since been picked up by Iranian academics it was held that the greater the levels of political participation, the "more developed" the political order.⁹⁵⁸ In a number of respects the Participation Front was an experiment to realise this principle in practice, since participation was considered a necessary, if not sufficient condition for democratic development. Theories and ideas are rarely put into practice as their originators had intended and the Participation Front preoccupied itself with harnessing socio-

⁹⁵⁷ Hossein Bashiriyeh's writings on this score were an important point of departure, and the fact that he acted as a doctoral supervisor to some of Iran's main 'reformist' strategists e.g. Sa'id Hajjarian and Mostafa Tajzadeh, is by no means a coincidence. See, Hossein Bashiriyeh, "Mosharekat-e siyasi, reqabat-e siyasi va towse'eh-ye siyasi," in *'Aql dar siyasat* (Tehran: Negah-e mo'aser, 1382 [2003]), p581

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p581

political forces which could encompass and mobilize a broader cross-section of Iranian society, reaching out to women, ethnic and religious minorities, many of whom had had an ambivalent relationship to political activism and civic engagement following the revolution. This effort was epitomised in the Front's slogan "Iran for all Iranians", emitting a seductive aura of inclusivity.⁹⁵⁹

The party's first chairman was President Khatami's brother, Mohammad-Reza Khatami (1998-2005), a physician by training, who had himself been amongst the students that seized the U.S. embassy in November 1979. Other prominent members like Hajjarian held mass participation in elections crucial to expanding the democratic capacity of the Islamic Republic's political system and had also collaborated with Khatami in the intellectual networks of the early 1990s (see, **Chapter 3**). These included Mohsen Mirdamadi, Sa'id Hajjarian, Mostafa Tajzadeh, Rajab-Ali Mazru'i, Hadi Khaniki, 'Abbas 'Abdi and Ali-Reza 'Alavi-Tabar. This group of individuals while undoubtedly comprising part of the Khomeinist left were younger laypersons, and to a large extent were more radically disposed towards restructuring state power than their clerical allies in the Association for Combatant Clerics. Despite their best efforts the older Khatami refused to join the party and expressly told Hajjarian that he did not want to be a leader of the opposition, but of the country as a whole, quickly casting aside any hope that he might become "the leader of a social movement".⁹⁶⁰

⁹⁵⁹ This effort to appeal to a broader demographic can also be seen in Mosharekat's use of the nationalist anthem *Ey Iran* or the selective invocation and recollection of the memory of the nationalist PM Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq. See, Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*, p206

⁹⁶⁰ Hajjarian and Salimi, "Suteh delan gerd-e ham amadand.", p65

The Front's charter opened thus, "the epic of the 2nd of Khordad was another manifestation of the 22nd of Bahman [i.e. the day the *ancien régime* fell], which added to the clarity (*shafafiyat*) of the revolution's values and hastened the people's movement towards a just and wise society. The 2nd of Khordad was another manifestation of the unity and alliance between the enlightened clergy and pious intellectuals".⁹⁶¹ After acknowledging the role of religious intellectuals the charter goes on to incorporate a welter of tropes from the canon of post-revolutionary religious intellectualism such as respect for disparate interpretations of religion, opposition to 'ideology',⁹⁶² rational and peaceful dialogue, religious democracy, rational governance, respect for enshrined legal rights, incremental change and the benefits of accumulated experience,⁹⁶³ acknowledgement of political and religious pluralism within the framework of the constitution, and lastly political development.⁹⁶⁴ Quixotic as it might sound, in his analysis of Mosharekat's charter in the eponymously-named party organ, Hajjarian insisted that political parties with an ideology normally reflect "dogmas" (*jazmiyat*) in their public manifestos. This is something he claims Mosharekat had sought to avoid. Such statements can best be explained by taking into consideration the backlash against anything which smacked of the idiosyncratic conception of 'ideology' advocated by religious intellectuals, foremost Soroush,⁹⁶⁵ from the early 1990s and their aggrandisement of putatively 'apolitical' technocratic standards and values.

⁹⁶¹ Shadlu, "Hezb-e jebbeh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami.",p370

⁹⁶² Hajjarian, "Sharhi bar maramnameh-ye jebbeh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami."

⁹⁶³ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁴ Shadlu, "Hezb-e jebbeh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami.",p380

⁹⁶⁵ See, **Chapter 4.**

Such pretence sat uneasily with the Front's bolder political stances on constitutional politics, the Khatami government, and the future of the Iranian economy.

Hajjarian argued that it was imperative to use Mosharekat as a party vehicle for the transference of an identity and bounded set of experiences to a new generation of Iranian youth which had not directly experienced the revolution.⁹⁶⁶ It's in this way that the Islamic *chap* sought to impart their views and narrative of the revolution and its aftermath, in short, their ideology, to succeeding generations and thus expand their social base while carefully regulating newly inducted cadres. In other words, it would have to be a controlled process of harnessing a broader range of social forces, which were not already themselves in possession of an organisation and hierarchical political structure of their own. By speaking in putatively universal terms, namely the discourse of abstract rights and equality before the law, this elite group could conserve and possibly extend the active consent of subaltern groups to their leadership, exercise a considerable degree of control over them and finally mobilise subaltern classes against their political rivals. In the final years of the Khatami government Hajjarian too was prepared to admit the ultimately "elitist" nature of the Islamic *chap*'s reform agenda.⁹⁶⁷ He was also to a large extent unapologetic and patronising, in particular of Iranian youth who were for their part expected to stand by and deferentially heed the exhortations of elder statesmen, who continued to excuse their own youthful indiscretions: "the youth mustn't be allowed to head in the direction of an alternative [i.e. to Islamic *chap*-led reform]. [We] must propagate (*tabliq*)

⁹⁶⁶ Hajjarian, "Sharhi bar maramnameh-ye jebbeh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami."

⁹⁶⁷ Hajjarian and Salimi, "Suteh delan gerd-e ham amadand.", p63

against other paths. The difference between our young friends and others is that the younger they are the more revolutionary they become".⁹⁶⁸ In making this statement the brutally repressed student protests of July 1999 and their aftermath couldn't have been far from Hajjarian's mind.

Despite such rhetoric the Islamic *chap* struggled to form a genuine front which could incorporate social forces beyond its own inner sanctum. Even amongst 'insiders' Mosharekat and the more established SMEEI found it difficult to engage in constructive collaboration and fully succeed in the process of *kadr-sazi* or cadre-building they had envisaged.⁹⁶⁹ This was even though Mosharekat had members who were also prominent figures in the latter organisation. Hajjarian for instance has recounted how Front members had concluded that a mass party was necessary if the programme of political development was to be realised. To this end, Hajjarian and the other founders of Mosharekat had decided to explore the prospect of joining the SMEEI. In response Mohammad Salamati, the party's chairman stated that it would take a year until its charter could be changed, permitting new members to join the organisation. As a result, Hajjarian later described the Mojahedin as "a minibus and it did not have room".⁹⁷⁰ Ultimately, it did not even prove feasible to incorporate the 120 founding signatories of the Mosharekat Party, let alone a mass party with a countrywide membership penetrating the provinces.⁹⁷¹

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid.,p66

⁹⁶⁹ This term is explicitly used by Hajjarian vis-à-vis Mosharekat. Hajjarian, "Sharhi bar maramnameh-ye jebbeh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami."

Aqajari says that the SMEEI was also explicitly founded as a political "cadre" and not intended to be a mass political organisation. Aqajari, Khojasteh-Rahimi, and Bala'i, "Sharh-e zendegi-ye yek enqelabi-ye naaram.",p42

⁹⁷⁰ Sa'id Hajjarian and Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi, "Eslahatchi, cheriki nemishavad: sharh-e yek zendegi-ye siyasi-fekri," *ibid.*(Tir-Mordad 1391 [July-August 2012]),.p45

⁹⁷¹ *Ibid.*,p45

The elections for provincial councils held in February 1999 were part and parcel of the desire to boost and maintain high electoral turnout while ensuring the seemingly amorphous populism which had been characteristic of the revolution's first decade would be channelled and regulated through an electoral process bestowing some form of popular legitimacy.⁹⁷² The municipal and village councils were an especially fortuitous forum to test-run the principles of mass participation and popular mobilisation, given that there was no stipulation in the constitution investing the GC with the power to veto prospective candidates, not to mention the sheer number of them. Mostafa Tajzadeh as Deputy Interior Minister was responsible for organising the council elections and thereby extending electoral participation to villages throughout the country. Over half a million candidates competed for seats in 900 municipal councils and 35,000 villages and saw reformists win 80% of the popular vote.⁹⁷³ Participation was prioritised above increasing political pluralism and the broader competitiveness of elections, since in the Islamic *chap*'s estimation it was naturally the first priority that their own candidates get past the GC and be permitted to stand.⁹⁷⁴ As Hajjarian would state in his analysis of the Mosharekat's charter, "we thought that with the establishment of the Islamic Iran Participation Front we could draw on our own share to create variety and plurality and lawful and institutionalised competition".⁹⁷⁵ The chief objective for Hajjarian was to establish the precedent of electoral competition in which "at least two "firms"" would accept elections, and not extra-legal

⁹⁷² Hajjarian, "Falsafeh-ye entekhabat.",p539

⁹⁷³ Arjomand, *After Khomeini.*,Loc-2035-of-6438

⁹⁷⁴ Hajjarian, "Sharhi bar maramnameh-ye jebbeh-ye mosharekat-e Iran-e eslami."

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid.

means and violence, as the only legitimate basis of political contention.⁹⁷⁶ Candidates of the Freedom Movement which had long been considered the 'loyal opposition'⁹⁷⁷ despite having had its candidates systematically disqualified since at least the Third Majles in 1988, was next on the list, but hardly a high priority. No other groups were ever seriously considered. This was in contrast to academic political scientists who had directly impacted Hajjarian, Tajzadeh and other members of Mosharekat, but whose professional lives and ideological-orientation were extraneous to the *nezam*, of which Bashiriyeh is the most prominent example. In the case of the latter, ideological competition and the rotation of elites were held as central for political development to prosper and remain viable.⁹⁷⁸ To be fair to Hajjarian he did indeed acknowledge this deficiency, but such acknowledgements were a rare occurrence.⁹⁷⁹ Such an objective did not seem practicable or even desirable to either Mosharekat or any other groups of the Khomeinist left at the time, since they were hard-pressed staying in the race themselves.

Conclusion

While previously revolutionary clerics had been preoccupied with ensuring mass-mobilisation in order to support a programme that was, in the final analysis, orchestrated by a small elite circle, Hajjarian and the other members of Mosharekat had hoped that by increasing the number of regular elections, not only would the Islamic *chap's* democratic legitimacy be consolidated, but that the

⁹⁷⁶ Hajjarian and Ehsani, "A Conversation with Sa'id Hajjarian.",p41

⁹⁷⁷ See, Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism*.,Chapter 8

⁹⁷⁸ Bashiriyeh, "Mosharekat-e siyasi, reqabat-e siyasi va towse'eh-ye siyasi.",p587

⁹⁷⁹ I have come across one such instance thus far in my reading of Hajjarian's voluminous writings. Sa'id Hajjarian, "Bohran-e dowganegi dar qodrat," in '*Obur az Khatami*, ed. Amir Reza Sotudeh (Tehran: Zekr, 1379 [2000]),,p108

results would better reflect citizens' actual political and ideological preferences. The articulation of political preferences had previously been allowed insofar as they were given vent and expression in the street rally or Friday prayer sermon in support of the clerical leadership and against a much cursed Other. But by holding more elections with the robust presence of the Islamic *chap* it was conjectured that even those individuals who didn't necessarily view the reformist candidate as their ideal representative would nevertheless vote for the candidate which they perceived as most proximate to them on the political spectrum.⁹⁸⁰

Finally it was participation that would help realise Hajjarian's mantra of "pressure from below, bargaining from above", because he held political development impeded by "political obstructions" (*ensedadha-ye siyasi*) could only be overcome on the basis of a dialectic between the two great revolutions which had transformed Iranian society in their own distinct ways. Hajjarian believed that while the 1979 Revolution was one of unadulterated popular mobilisation which culminated in a revolutionary outcome because of the Shah's unyielding absolutism, the Constitutional Revolution had been one primarily of strategic bargaining within the political elite.⁹⁸¹ If the Islamic Republic was to avoid the catastrophic fate of the Pahlavi monarchy, the unaccountable organs of the state would have to incrementally come to terms with certain constraints on the exercise of their power. It would, however, be naïve to think that such groups and institutions would willingly concede their

⁹⁸⁰ Hajjarian and Ehsani, "A Conversation with Sa'id Hajjarian.",p41

⁹⁸¹ Hajjarian and Baqi, "Goftogu ba Sa'id Hajjarian.",p25

accumulated privileges without concerted pressure.⁹⁸² Participation and popular mobilisation through legally sanctioned elections in concert with voluntary and pro-active organisations in civil society were essential to leveraging unaccountable state organs into bowing to the policies pursued by the Khatami government and later reformist dominated Sixth Majles. Though Khatami had called for an enlivened civil society and social life independent of the state, he was wary, if not timorous vis-à-vis actually mobilizing his supporters behind his policies. He instead preferred to rely on persuasion and cajoling his opponents out of the public eye. There was no mention or thought about seriously drawing on organised or unionised labour (which had a meagre existence in any case) and despite Mosharekat's pretence to extend throughout the reaches of the country, the party hierarchy and upper echelons were dominated by well-known figures of the Khomeinist left and their extended families. Hajjarian in later years would be frank in his criticism, "the elite thought that they could solve all their problems in closed circles (*halqehha*), bargaining (*chaneh-zani*) without pressure and the support of their social base".⁹⁸³ This glaring weakness and elitism was perhaps best illustrated when preceding the 7th Majles elections in early 2004, 131 sitting reformist MPs went on strike after 80 of their number had been disqualified by the GC and there was little by way of popular reaction.

Ironically, the extensive social mobilisation envisioned by Hajjarian would only emerge on the streets of several Iranian cities in the summer of 2009 when the Islamic *chap* were no longer in power, but rather vying for it in the presidential run-off between the incumbent Mahmud Ahmadinejad and

⁹⁸² Pressure would initially come from "public opinion", which would be least likely to provoke a backlash. Ibid.,p26

⁹⁸³ Hajjarian and Salimi, "Suteh delan gerd-e ham amadand.",p63

the former Prime Minister and veteran of the Khomeinist left, Mir-Hossein Musavi. In this unforeseen event even though mass protests materialised in the aftermath of a disputed election, intra-elite bargaining was incapable of convincing the Leadership or GC to reach a strategic compromise. For that to come to pass the reformists arguably had to wait until the 2013 presidential election and back a compromise candidate, Hassan Rowhani, who had ironically shut down the political development project at the Presidential Strategic Research Centre in the first half of the 1990s.⁹⁸⁴

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*,p61

Chapter 6: Mostafa Malekian: Spirituality, *Siyasat-zadegi* and (A)political Self-Improvement

“I am not fearful for tradition, nor for the modern, not fearful for civilization, nor culture; not any abstract proposition of this sort. I am concerned for the flesh and blood (*gusht va khundari*) of humanity, who enter [this world], suffer, and leave [it]. We endeavour that firstly: the more human beings are confronted with truth, the more they attain truth. Secondly, that they suffer as little as possible. Thirdly, [human beings] embrace the maximum of goodness and good deeds. For the realisation of these three goals, [human beings] can benefit from whatever proves useful; from religion, to science, philosophy, art, literature and all the other achievements of humanity.”⁹⁸⁵

Mostafa Malekian

“*Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering.*”⁹⁸⁶

Karl Marx

Introduction

Mostafa Malekian has yet to receive much attention in Western academic literature pertaining to Iranian intellectual life, but inside Iran he has emerged as a popular public intellectual; seen as both a culmination *of* and rupture *with* the project of ‘religious intellectualism’. Rather than offer a revolutionary and politically engaged vision of Islam, or a ‘reformist’ or ‘democratic’ interpretation of Shi’ism, his project seeks to integrate what he calls “rationality” (*aqlaniyat*) and “spirituality” (*ma’naviyat*). As Malekian’s project has developed it has broken in a number of important respects

⁹⁸⁵ Mostafa Malekian, "Howzeh va donya-ye jadid: qedaset, 'aqlaniyat, 'elmaniyat," in *Moshtaqi va mahjuri: goftogu dar bab-e farhang va siyasat* (Tehran: Negah-e mo'aser, 1385 [2006]), p119

⁹⁸⁶ Karl Marx, "Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* ed. David McLellan (Oxford University Press, 2000), p72

with mainstream Islam as practiced in Iran, the religious reformist project and even the very notion of organized religion as a whole.

The reason for addressing him at length in this chapter is fourfold. 1) The dearth of literature on Malekian needs to be redressed, because it can help shed light on the historical development and trajectory of 'religious intellectualism' in the 2000s. 2) His project signifies the ambivalent status of religious intellectualism as an intellectual field in post-revolutionary Iran following the very tangible ideologico-political impact of the Kiyān circle amongst others. As a result of the work of the latter, 'religious intellectualism' had managed to shorn much of the image of being a mere ideologico-religious response to Marxism in its many guises; by the late 1990s it had become more confident in its own bounds, with its own series of problems and questions, which were less immediately bound-up with the political struggles of the day and historical trajectory of the Islamic left. Though Malekian shares many of the preoccupations and solutions proffered by the preceding 'religious intellectuals' analysed in this study, and instigated debate amongst them and their reading publics, he also claimed to have surpassed the project of 'religious intellectualism' and thus provoked questions whether the latter had in fact reached a dead-end and was ultimately destined to subsumption within several, better established academic disciplines. 3) Malekian's own project can be interpreted as an acknowledgement and theorisation of the spread of individualism and the rights and needs of the individual over the more traditional demands of family, culture and religion. While the individual and individual rights had certainly received elaboration hitherto,⁹⁸⁷ Malekian makes them a central

⁹⁸⁷ See, **Chapter 4**.

issue of his philosophical anthropology. 4) While Malekian's project is by no means reducible to the political apathy which pervaded certain quarters in the course of Khatami's second term and exit from office and the perceived 'failure' of the reformist project, it can be read as possessing deep affinities with a pervasive fatigue vis-à-vis collective projects of political emancipation and even politics *tout court*. As a result, he has gained a sympathetic ear and considerable following amongst Iranian youth in particular. Malekian's thought thus reflects, at least in part, the broader socio-political world and intellectual milieu in which it resonated.

His main preoccupation over the years has been the conditions under which human beings might attain "inner contentment" (*rezayat-e bateni*), and the alleviation of pain and suffering (*dard va ranj*). Its alleviation is only ever possible since the eradication of pain and suffering is something Malekian rules out *a priori*, thereby continuing the anti-utopian trajectory of other post-revolutionary religious intellectuals such as Soroush and Mojtaba Shabestari.⁹⁸⁸ In addition to professing the ineliminable nature of suffering his vision has a tragic edge to it,⁹⁸⁹ because while he refrains from going so far as to repudiate the notion of an afterlife, for all intents and purposes its possible existence plays no part in his philosophical outlook. Due to the emphasis on suffering Malekian's writings on occasion exhibit Buddhist overtones, and he is clearly familiar with the basic tenets of the Buddhist religion, while not offering anything like a systematic theology of his own.

⁹⁸⁸ See, **Chapter 4**.

⁹⁸⁹ Mostafa Malekian, "Porseshha'i piramun-e ma'naviyat," in *Sonnat va sekularism* (Tehran: Serat, 1381 [2002]), p375

Malekian's personal journey and history are interesting in and of themselves and depict a man who by his own admission was at one time an Islamic "fundamentalist" (*bonyad-gara*),⁹⁹⁰ but went through several periods of intellectual development until he reached his current penchant for 'spirituality', which might be termed broadly speaking as rationalist and humanist. He is not concerned with *homo islamicus*, or *homo iranicus*, as many of his Islamist and nationalist predecessors had been previously, but humanity at large, and thus issues which are first and foremost 'universal' in scope. In short, one can make the case that Malekian subscribes to a more cosmopolitan ideal and is as likely to quote the Quran, or Imam Ali, as he is the Buddha, St. Anselm or Aquinas to illustrate an ethical, philosophical or anthropological argument.

According to the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah 'cosmopolitanism' has two chief strands: first, is the idea that human beings have obligations with respect to one another, which go beyond the "ties of kith and kind". Second is that the value, not merely of human life, but "particular human lives" be taken seriously, and the practices and beliefs, which lend them significance also be considered.⁹⁹¹ These two strands appear in the oeuvre of Malekian, as will be seen, but like more robust cosmopolitans of the Kantian variety, Malekian often takes philosophical positions which approach that of the conventional moral and ethical universalist. Cosmopolitans believe that there is sufficient overlap between our respective vocabularies of value to partake in conversation, whereas Malekian often appears to come close to the universalist position that agreement is ultimately

⁹⁹⁰ Samina Rastegari, "Ruh-e naaram-e yek rowshanfekr: sharh-e yek zendegi-ye fekri: goftogu ba Mostafa Malekian," *Andisheh-ye puya Ordibehesht va Khordad* 1391 [May-June 2012], p26

⁹⁹¹ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Penguin, 2006), xiii

possible under the aegis of a single and unifying vocabulary.⁹⁹² At other times, however, he does seem to admit that the limitations of human beings' cognitive faculties, specifically the inability to proffer definitive reasons, compels them to make tragic decisions between two distinct vocabularies, that of 'truth' and the reduction of suffering,⁹⁹³ since he admits that knowledge of the truth can be as painful as it can be liberating.⁹⁹⁴

Malekian's project is in many ways more abstract and less immediately connected up with the political and theoretical preoccupations of the 1979 Revolution and Islamic state, though this doesn't lead him to repudiate its political and social relevance and applicability.⁹⁹⁵ Instead he attempts to highlight both psychological and spiritual anxieties which trouble modern humanity, and possible ways to address them. Unlike Soroush, Kadivar or Khatami, where the sources of oppression and pain and suffering are generally articulated with reference to tangible and concrete causes e.g. 'ideology', 'despotism', 'arbitrary rule' (*estebdad*), the failure of the rule of law etc., in the case of Malekian, pain and suffering are often, though not always, disentangled if not altogether disembedded from their concrete socio-political context and conditions. He more commonly speaks of existential *Angst* or psychological restiveness, concerns which are not specific to Iran or even the Muslim majority world

⁹⁹² *Ibid.*,p57

⁹⁹³ Mostafa Malekian, "Taqrir-e haqiqat va taqlil-e mararat: vajah-e akhlaqi va terazhik-e zendegi-ye rowshanfekri," in *Rahi beh raha'i* (Tehran: Negah-e mo'aser, 1380 [2001]),p33

⁹⁹⁴ Malekian seems to follow William David Ross up to a point here (addressed further below), but while Ross argued for the pluralism of the good, he also wanted to avoid just such a tragic pathos, since, according to Ross's theory, when a person abjures one *prima facie* duty for another, it is on the basis of the weight of one's moral reasons and not merely spurning one duty for another. See, William David Ross, *The Right and the Good*, New Edition ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002),xxxviii, 141

⁹⁹⁵ Rastegari, "Ruh-e naaram-e yek rowshanfekr.",p24

per se, but stake claim on humanity in its entirety. While he doesn't negate the worldly causes of pain and suffering he does have a tendency to see 'pain and suffering' as an ontological reality unto itself, the cause as much as the corollary of other factors.

The structure of this chapter will be as follows: First it will provide a biographical sketch of Malekian and some details of his intellectual background to show how the latter is in certain respects distinct from that of the overwhelming majority of those intellectuals who have been the subject of this thesis. Next, it will proceed to exposit several of his key ideas, in particular his conceptions of modernity, rationality, spirituality, the intellectual, authenticity and reform.

Intellectual Background

The details of Mostafa Malekian's biography are fairly sparse and hard to come by, but we are able to construct an elementary picture of his life thus far. Malekian was born in Shahreza in Isfahan province in 1956 and began his studies in mechanical engineering in 1973 at the University of Tabriz, but eventually gave up on engineering to pursue philosophy.⁹⁹⁶ After the Iranian Revolution of 1979 he obtained a degree in philosophy, but on the eve of defending his Masters' thesis in Islamic philosophy abandoned his studies at the University of Tehran.⁹⁹⁷ The exact reasons for his deciding not to complete his studies are unknown. But after leaving his university studies, Malekian went to the religious seminaries of Qom where he studied under some of the most prestigious teachers of Islamic philosophy at the time. During this period he was a student at the In the Path of Truth

⁹⁹⁶ "Zendegi nameh-ye Mostafa Malekian," *Hamshahri* 1 Bahman 1387 [20 January 2009].

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Institute (*Mo'asseseh-ye dar rah-e haqq*) and taught at both The Cultural Foundation of Baqer ol-'Olum (*Bonyad-e farhangi-ye Baqer ol-'Olum* [an allusion to the fifth Imam, Splitter of the Sciences], est. late 1980s) and the Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute (*Mo'asseseh-ye amuzeshi va pazhuheshi-ye Imam Khomeini*, est. 1995), all headed by Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi,⁹⁹⁸ who in the second half of the 1990s emerged as one of the most important ideological antagonists of the Islamic left and religious intellectualist current in Iran.⁹⁹⁹

While in Qom, Malekian also studied Islamic jurisprudence (*feqh*), Islamic philosophy (*hekmat*), and mysticism (*'erfan*) with Ayatollahs Javadi-Amoli, Hassan-Zadeh Amoli, Ansari-Shirazi, and Baha ol-dini. Malekian himself points out that he studied specifically the *al-Asfar al-arba'eh* of Mulla Sadra and *Kitab al-shifa'* of Avicenna with Mesbah-Yazdi.¹⁰⁰⁰ He also worked alongside Mesbah-Yazdi in various other capacities and helped prepare many of the cleric's works for publication, including his *Jame'eh va tarikh* (Society and History).¹⁰⁰¹ The working relationship described by Malekian himself went thus: Mesbah-Yazdi would hold a series of lectures, and Malekian would refine and correct the transcribed lectures. This is standard practice in the *howzeh* and a task often undertaken by an '*alem*'s more senior and respected students. Malekian would then locate and furnish the relevant references in a modern academic format so they could then be published.¹⁰⁰²

⁹⁹⁸ The last institute was funded directly by the Leader's office, though Mesbah-Yazdi states that the land for the institute had already been procured on the order of Khomeini prior to his death. For information on these various institutes and foundations see, San'ati, *Gofteman-e Mesbah*, p189-192

⁹⁹⁹ "Zendegi nameh-ye Mostafa Malekian."; Abolqasem Fana'i and Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Abolqasem Fana'i," (06/08/2012).

¹⁰⁰⁰ Rastegari, "Ruh-e naaram-e yek rowshanfekr.", p26

¹⁰⁰¹ "Zendegi nameh-ye Mostafa Malekian."

¹⁰⁰² "Ruh-e naaram-e yek rowshanfekr.", p26

In a 2012 interview with the reformist-leaning periodical, *Andisheh-ye puya* (Dynamic Thought),

Malekian states that,

“there was not any traumatic (*zarbeh zanandeh*) event which all of a sudden caused me to change the path of my thinking. It happened very gradually, and incidentally was not a transition from traditional to modern thought. I [first] put several phases of thinking behind me. The understanding of religion I had in the days of my youth...was a fundamentalist understanding of religion, although to be fair, without the violence that exists in fundamentalism. Anyone familiar with my personality knows I cannot be violent. After a time I found myself attracted to the traditionalist reading of religion.”¹⁰⁰³

Unlike many members of the Islamic left whose critical disposition and theoretical musings were often bound up with the rise and fall of their political fortunes, Malekian’s gradual transformation not only emanated from his own personal experiences of the post-revolutionary political order, but a bona fide journey of intellectual self-discovery and transformation. During this period Malekian read the works of well-known ‘Traditionalists’ and ‘Perennialists’ such as Rene Guenon, Martin Lings, Hossein Nasr and Frithjof Schuon, and encouraged his students to translate their works. He also edited collections of their essays and writings himself,¹⁰⁰⁴ and since that time has written a number of well-received critiques of the Traditionalist school and traditionalism.¹⁰⁰⁵

In the early nineties Malekian worked as an advisor to the Qom-based theology journal, *Naqd va nazar* (Critique and Theory).¹⁰⁰⁶ Despite the healthy rivalry that would develop between *Kiyan*, the

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid.,p26

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid.,p26

¹⁰⁰⁵ Mostafa Malekian, "Sonnat-garayan," in *Rahi beh raha'i* (Nashr-e negah-e mo'aser, 1380 [2001]), p381-417; originally published in *Naqd va nazar*, No. 15-16,p6-65, in particular p392-394; & "Naqd-e Schuon bar falsafehha-ye jadid," *ibid.* (Negah-e mo'aser),p419-445

¹⁰⁰⁶ *Nazar* can also mean look, opinion and view.

flagship journal of the 2nd of Khordad intellectual class, *Naqd va nazar*, according to one former contributor and student of Malekian, was a vehicle for making the new methodological and philosophical approaches presented in *Kiyan* palatable to the Qom seminary. The journal thus aspired to communicate novel developments in western epistemology, metaphysics, hermeneutics and theology in a language that would be accessible to a clerical audience.¹⁰⁰⁷ *Naqd va nazar*, unlike *Kiyan* was consciously apolitical, and sought to eschew ruffling feathers amongst the more conservative climes of Qom. The first editor-in-chief and later managing director of *Naqd va nazar* was Mohammad-Mehdi Faqih, a cleric and deputy director of the Office for Islamic Propagation, Qom Theological Seminary (*Daftar-e tabliqat-e eslami-ye howzeh-ye elmiyeh-ye Qom*), which had been seized from the possession of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad-Kazem Shari'atmadari following his brief arrest, interrogation and vilification for allegedly being party to the failed *Nowzheh* coup of July 1980.¹⁰⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰⁷ Fana'i and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Interview with Abolqasem Fana'i."

Mohammad-Mansur Hashemi states *Naqd va nazar* was known as the *Kiyan* of Qom. Mohammad Mansur Hashemi, *Din andishan-e motajaded: rowshanfekri-ye dini az Shari'ati ta Malekian* (Tehran: Kavir, 1387 [2008]), p262

¹⁰⁰⁸ For an account which retells the official narrative, which needless to say should be broached with extreme caution, surrounding Shari'atmadari's alleged involvement see, PSRI, *Kudeta-ye nowzheh* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye motale'at va pazhuheshha-ye siyasi, 1387 [2008]), p52-53, 150-5

For a scholarly if rather minimal description see, Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The Nuzhih Plot and Iranian Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 4 (2002), p653

Many key figures on the Islamic left such as Hojjat al-Islam Musavi-Kho'einiha were involved in instigating Shari'atmadari's vilification and persecution in the early 1980s. On 29 April 1982, for example, Musavi-Kho'einiha, then Deputy Speaker of the Majles, claimed that he had obtained documents from the overrun American embassy in Tehran 'proving' the *marja' al-taqlid's* relations with the latter and the CIA. Mohammad Reyshahri, *Khaterehha*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 1383 [2004]), p279-280

Shari'atmadari's contacts with American representatives (see, *Asnad-e laneh-ye jasusi-ye Amrika*, vol. 55 (Tehran: Daneshjuyan-e mosalman-e peirow-ye khatt-e Imam, 1364 [1985]), p9) were deployed against him to the obvious end of marginalising one of the only genuine rivals to Khomeini, in terms of religious standing and authority, not to mention a considerable political following in Azerbaijan. As detailed by Mark J. Gasiorowski, numerous high-ranking politicians, including one of Khomeini's most senior disciples, Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, met with American officials, including a representative of the CIA prior to November

Faqihi had served as an advisor to the incumbent Guardian Jurist Seyyed Ali Khamenei (1989 - to present), while he was president, and knew the latter from Mashhad, when both men were engaged in political activism against the Pahlavi regime.¹⁰⁰⁹

Malekian explains that he eventually found the traditionalist world view wanting and due to his dissatisfaction turned to modernist approaches to religion. In this period he read the works of Mojtabeh-Shabestari and other Muslim modernist thinkers, many of whose writings would be published in *Naqd va nazar*. As mentioned above, Malekian was an advisor to *Naqd va nazar* from the second issue, and continued in this role until Qanbari left as editor of the journal.¹⁰¹⁰ During this time, Malekian himself translated essays by Houston Smith, John Rawls, Alasdair MacIntyre, Robert Nozick and John Hick amongst various other Western theologians and philosophers of diverse intellectual schools and pedigrees.

But according to his own biographical sketch cited above, Malekian insists that after a time, he also ceased to be satisfied with the project of 'religious intellectualism' in Iran, and hastened his search for new approaches to the question of religion and the dilemmas of religiosity in the modern world. It is at this point that Malekian's original contribution began to emerge. Conservative and even moderate religious figures have shown themselves wary of Malekian's thought and philosophy,

1979. Such meetings, if uncovered by the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line, may well have been quietly brushed under the carpet. They certainly weren't aired on the Majles floor. Mark J. Gasiorowski, "US Intelligence Assistance to Iran, May–October 1979," *Middle East Journal* 66, no. 4 (2012), p619

¹⁰⁰⁹ Faqih was also chief of the *Daftar-e siyasi*, or political office of *Daftar-e tabliqat-e eslami*.

¹⁰¹⁰ Akbar Qanbari, "Rowshanfekran ba ma ehsas-e biganegi nemikardand: goftogu ba Akbar Qanbari dar bareh-fasl nameh 'Naqd va nazar'," *Mehrnameh* 20(1391 [2012]), p36

which has increasingly become devoid of anything which might be deemed exoterically 'Islamic', let alone identifiably Shi'i.

Much like his turn away from Traditionalism, Malekian describes his dissatisfaction with 'religious intellectualism'. In its stead he offers, what he calls, "spiritual intellectualism" (*rowshanfekri-ye ma'navi*). Rather than a theology or hermeneutic of revelation, Malekian insists that his "main issue of concern is the pain and suffering of the people, and because of this I'm overcast and expanding my horizons...My preoccupation with the people's pain and suffering is without limit. I have no political presence and I'm happy I never had one, but I have a real concern for the people".¹⁰¹¹ So seemingly despite himself and despite insisting on being a non-political personality, Malekian without holding any express political office, unlike a number of other religious intellectuals we have examined, found himself teaching and working at a research and education institute funded directly by the Leader's office and founded and directed by one of the most radically-inclined theocratic ideologues of the state affiliated clergy; Mesbah-Yazdi, who stands accused of being a "theoretician of violence",¹⁰¹² and stalwart enemy of the Islamic left. Throughout this time, while no doubt immersed in Islamic philosophy and in his youth supportive of the Islamic regime, Malekian did not take on any political office or publicly visible role as a public ideologue or defender of the political *status quo* or a specific interpretation of *velayat-e faqih*.¹⁰¹³

¹⁰¹¹ Rastegari, "Ruh-e naaram-e yek rowshanfekr.",p26

¹⁰¹² San'ati, *Gofteman-e Mesbah*.,p343

¹⁰¹³ The fact that Malekian is at least ten years younger than Soroush, Mojtahed-Shabestari etc., and was only in his early twenties when the revolution occurred, should also be taken into consideration.

In any case, with his increasingly ambivalent relationship towards religious intellectualism came the official inception of his project of *'aqlaniyat va ma'naviyat* or “rationality and spirituality”, which he himself has claimed emerged from “the text and womb of the project of religious intellectualism”.¹⁰¹⁴ With the translation of a massive swathe of popular American self-help literature, Malekian has provided a far more sophisticated accompaniment to this genre, which focuses on the individual’s existential compulsion to imbue meaning into his or her life, maximise pleasure,¹⁰¹⁵ and alleviate angst and anguish, while at the same time, insisting on the normative value of rationality and universalism, which were arguably amongst religious intellectualism’s most important dividends.

Though beyond the remit of this thesis, it is worth noting since the 2009 presidential election Malekian has continued to speak and lecture and even celebrated the tenth anniversary of the inception of his philosophical project of *'aqlaniyat va ma'naviyat* on 18 May 2010, at the University of Tehran.¹⁰¹⁶ His writings have also appeared regularly on *Jaras: Rah-e sabz*, an exiled website affiliated to the Green Movement headed by Mohsen Kadivar’s sister and MP during the Sixth Majles, Jamileh Kadivar, who is also the wife of Khatami’s former Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 'Ataollah Mohajerani. Similarly while claiming to spurn political activities in May 2012, Malekian expressed his readiness to publicly debate three highly political, though also reputable personages in Islamic philosophy, whom can best be framed as state, or quasi-official defenders of the values and

¹⁰¹⁴ Mostafa Malekian, "Dar jostoju-ye aqlaniyat va ma'anaviyat," *Mehrnameh Khordad* no. 3 (1389 [2010]).

¹⁰¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹⁶ *Ibid.*

ideological worldview of the conservative-wing of the Islamic Republic's clerical ruling elite: Hojjat al-Islam Sadeq Larijani, the incumbent Chief Justice, and two of his former teachers, Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli and Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi. The subject of the debate was the "Islamicization of the country's universities".¹⁰¹⁷ It is worth acknowledging that Soroush had either engaged or offered to publicly debate the very same clerics in the course of the 1990s.¹⁰¹⁸

Ethics and the Intellectual

Ethics and individual self-improvement have been amongst the prime focuses of Malekian's writings since his first sole authored book, *Rahi beh raha'i* (The Path to Liberation), was published in 2000. While Malekian addresses issues in keeping with the religious intellectuals who dominated the first two decades since the 1979 Revolution, such as 'ideology' and the Islamicization of the humanities, the role of 'tradition', pluralism and the meaning of toleration, he might also be considered amongst the key figures and progenitors of the 'ethical turn' which since the 2000s has become increasingly salient in the religious intellectual discourse, and can be seen in the work of Malekian's former student and colleague Abolqasem Fana'i and Soroush's student, Arash Naraqi, both

¹⁰¹⁷ "E'lām-e movafeqat-e Malekian baraye monazereh ba Mesbah-Yazdi, Javadi-Amoli, va Larijani," *Rah-e sabz* 27 Ordibehesht 1391 [16 May 2012].

¹⁰¹⁸ One account claims that it was Soroush who eschewed acceptance of Mesbah-Yazdi's invitation for a televised debate regarding "the expansion and contraction of the *shari'a*", not the other way round. A healthy dose of scepticism would be warranted all-round. San'ati, *Gofteman-e Mesbah*, p531

On a side note, in December 1985 Soroush deferentially interviewed Javadi-Amoli for *Keyhan-e farhangi* (see, 'Abdolkarim Soroush and Reza Ostadi, "Ayatollah Ostad Abdollah Javadi-Amoli, faqih va shareh-ye hekmat-e mota'alieh," *Keyhan-e farhangi*, no. 21 (Azar 1364 [November-December 1985]))., and as was noted in **Chapter 3**, also debated alongside Mesbah-Yazdi against the Tudeh Party's Ehsan Tabari and OIPFG's (Majority faction) Farokh Negahdar in the spring of 1981.

of whom currently reside and teach outside of Iran, though they both continue to publish in Persian. Unlike Soroush or Shabestari, Malekian rarely addresses epistemological or hermeneutical issues in any serious depth. He certainly doesn't offer a distinctive theory in these areas.

Arguably Malekian's most important essay, and one which sets out his central problematic most clearly is the opening essay of *Rahi beh raha'i, Taqrir-e haqiqat va taqlil-e mararat: vajh-e akhlaqi va terazhik-e zendegi-ye rowshanfekri* (The Expression of Truth and Diminution of Suffering: On the Ethical and Tragic Aspects of Intellectual Life). In this essay Malekian begins by referring to the ethical writings of William David Ross (1877-1971), a British philosopher from the first half of the 20th century and exponent of the ethical doctrine of intuitionism. Ross along with H.A. Pritchard was one of the key figures of the philosophical school of British Intuitionism. Though Ross's writings were out of fashion upon his death, they have received something of a revival in recent years with his most important work, *The Right and the Good* (1930), being taken up afresh by contemporary academics in Anglo-American philosophy.

According to Ross human beings have *prima facie* ethical duties. These duties while not absolute are considered to be 'moral facts'. They include a duty of fidelity to keep our promises, a duty of reparation, to right a wrong previously committed, a duty of gratitude, a duty to maximize the aggregate good, and finally a duty of non-maleficence, or to not do harm.¹⁰¹⁹ Malekian states that such duties, providing they are not in conflict with another *prima facie* duty, must be performed without qualification. He likens them to Immanuel Kant's 'categorical imperative' which emphasised the

¹⁰¹⁹ Ross, *The Right and the Good*, p19-20

universalizability of ethical maxims, which oblige the subject to act on such maxims absolutely and without condition.¹⁰²⁰ When there is no contradiction with another *prima facie* duty, on Malekian's reading of Ross, this duty becomes an 'actual' or 'practical' duty, which must be actualised. If there is a conflict of two *prima facie* duties then the one with weightier moral reasons in its favour takes precedence.

Claiming to follow Ross, Malekian distinguishes between "past-looking" (*gozashteh negar*) duties i.e. duties which arise as a result of the agent's actions, or the actions of others, and "future looking" (*ayandeh negar*) duties i.e. duties which induce positive consequences as a result of their performance. Forward-looking duties are of four types: 1) performing good deeds (*nikukari*). 2) refraining from harming others. 3) justice (*dadgari*) and 4) self-improvement.¹⁰²¹ As will be seen below, Malekian often attributes a tacit priority to 4) and elaborates upon it at length in much of his work, due to his palpable debt to existentialist thought.

Intellectuals, very much in the classical vein, play a crucial part in disseminating "truer" (*dorosttar*) beliefs, and it is their responsibility to "close the gap" between their own "discovery of truth" (*kashf-e haqiqat*) and the public sphere and domain (*sahat*) of the ordinary citizen.¹⁰²² It is in this way that Malekian holds the chief obligations of the intellectual to be the "expression of truth" (*taqrir-e haqiqat*), and secondarily, the "diminution of suffering" (*taqlil-e mararat*).¹⁰²³ In step with this basic

¹⁰²⁰ Malekian, "Taqrir-e haqiqat va taqlil-e mararat.",p10

¹⁰²¹ Ross, *The Right and the Good*.,p21

¹⁰²² Malekian, "Taqrir-e haqiqat va taqlil-e mararat.",p13

¹⁰²³ Ibid.,p15

orientation and comportment, politics is to be made subject to the ethical duties demanding the reduction of suffering and the public inscription of truth. We will also return to his conception of the intellectual, which is bound up with the entirety of his philosophical outlook. What is important to grasp is how the latter is grounded in two important *prima facie* duties i.e. the “statement of truth” and “diminution of suffering”, inspired, at least in part, by the philosophy of William David Ross.

The Crux of Modernity: Discursive Rationality

One of Malekian’s most controversial statements, and one of the main points at which he diverges from other religious intellectuals, or rather one might say the point upon which Malekian was deemed to have left the religious intellectual fold, was his repeated contention that religious belief and rationality were ultimately irreconcilable. This is a conclusion he has reached despite having once considered himself an adherent and advocate of the religious intellectual project. He argues religious belief is ultimately a matter of “obedience” (*ta’abod*) and cannot be rationally grounded. Moreover, because it cannot be rationally grounded, in the final analysis, it cannot be considered “modern” either. This section will outline and evaluate his arguments on this score.

For Malekian, Iranians, and humanity at large, whether they like it or not, are in the epochal phase of “modernity”.¹⁰²⁴ It is thus for Malekian, at least in this respect, very much a lived period of human history, and one which has come to encompass Iran and the Muslim-majority world, in addition to

¹⁰²⁴ "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).", p266

the West where it is held to have first emerged in its contemporary incarnation. The more murky question of *how* modernity first came to envelop Iran, or much else of the developing world is left untouched; the fact that we are *in* modernity is taken as simply given and inescapable.

One can only presume that when Malekian speaks of ‘modernity’, it is the very same modernity, which is conventionally taken to have begun during the Renaissance and exemplified in the Enlightenment’s advocacy of rational justification and scientific inquiry, which remain with us till this day.¹⁰²⁵ Despite viewing modernity as a concrete period of human history, his overall conception is not particularly historically informed, and is not concerned with its manifold lineages as a socio-historical reality or even idea. His conception very much goes against the grain of Walter Benjamin’s important statement in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* that, “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism”.¹⁰²⁶ An idea which fundamentally challenges the notion of ‘progress’ as somehow pristine and untainted by the historical “tragedy”, “wreckage” and “debris” which have preceded it. Malekian can thus be seen in certain respects as perpetuating the same Whiggish view of Western European history evinced in the writings of Soroush and others. But in order to better grasp Malekian’s conception, it must be understood that in addition to viewing modernity as a slice of human history, he attempts to define it in normative and philosophical terms. In fact, it becomes clear that Malekian is almost entirely concerned with an ideal

¹⁰²⁵ Andrew Edgar, *Habermas: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2006), p96

¹⁰²⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 2007), p256

typical conception of modernity, which acts as a criterion for the assessment of other world-views and ways of thinking.

It is not clear whether Malekian distinguishes between these various understandings of ‘modernity’ and instead prefers to view it as the rational culmination of human civilization. Because of the lack of historical flesh on the bones of Malekian’s notion of modernity, the question often arises whether one can find an instantiation of such a conception anywhere at all. For this reason it is best to regard it as an ideal type or normative and regulative idea, against which the present can be found wanting and critiqued. To this extent, Malekian can be said to have a comparable, though considerably more naïve and less historically-mindful approach to the question of modernity than German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, who famously described it as an ‘incomplete project’.

For Malekian modernity is multi-layered and gradated. For instance, he speaks of “incomplete modernity” (*moderniteh-ye naqes*) and “complete modernity” (*moderniteh-ye kamel*) and comparatively speaking, one can be more modern (*moderntar*) or less so.¹⁰²⁷ At another point he suggests thinking of “modernity” as a “pattern” or “model” (*olgu*), and a model which has yet to be realised or reach completion anywhere. Nevertheless, one is left with the feeling that Malekian uncritically endorses what Dipesh Chakrabarty has called “the waiting-room version of history” whereby ‘development’ and ‘maturity’ are plotted along a predetermined trajectory already decided in Europe long ago and to which the postcolonial state is expected to conform.¹⁰²⁸ Like a great many Iranian intellectuals,

¹⁰²⁷ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).", p267

¹⁰²⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Kindle ed. (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p9; Loc-523-of-6849

Malekian is preoccupied with the apparent dichotomies and paradoxes of the ‘tradition’ vs. ‘modernity’ debate. A debate which has become somewhat staid over the years, but has continued to preoccupy Iranian thinkers, because it still poses a genuine predicament for many members of Iranian society, as well as the intellectual class. Instead of speaking explicitly about ‘tradition’, Malekian’s speaks of how Iranians might try to reconcile ‘piety’ (*tadayyon*) and ‘modernity’. When framed in this manner, ‘piety’ proves to be not merely an Iranian or Muslim concern, but one which, according to Malekian, applies to the overwhelming majority of people. Like modernity, ‘piety’ is also a multi-faceted phenomenon, which requires due care. Taking this into consideration Malekian asks, “firstly, was the reconciliation of piety and modernity in human beings a paradoxical reconciliation? Do we act consistently when we are both modern and pious? Secondly, fundamentally in today’s modern world in which we are modern and moving on the way to becoming more modern, can we have any [possible] conception (*tallaqi*) of religion?” Malekian’s answer to these questions in the first years of the new millennium was a resounding “no”.¹⁰²⁹ Modern man cannot accept religion as his forefathers once had. According to Malekian, if someone wishes to be “rational” and preserve his consistency he has two options:

“1) Completely abandon religion, and thereby lose the advantageous aspects of religion, because religion is in possession of positive functions for the inner life of human beings (*darun-e adami*)...and if someone leaves religion he will be afflicted by a kind of internal vacuum (*khala'-e daruni*); or 2) accept religion in a new form. You can call this new understanding of religion, spirituality – I call it spirituality because “religion”, in all languages, in addition to its positive connotations, brings about negative associations in people’s minds...But in any case, I personally believe in this same new understanding of religion, not the one offered by the

¹⁰²⁹ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).", p267

traditional understanding. The traditional understanding in its own time possessed positive functions, but today it is not defensible from a realist position, or from a pragmatic one. In short, if today you are only concerned with the issue of truth, the traditional understanding of religion is not defensible (realist view); and if there is the concern to save [religion] (pragmatic view) that too is not defensible. I accept the positive functions of religion, and under such circumstances I believe that we must not abandon religion. I emphasize the belief that today we have a need for spirituality, not the traditional understanding of historic religion.”¹⁰³⁰

Malekian’s views on spirituality are not always entirely clear. What does come through is its stark difference with ‘traditional’ and historically organized forms of religion.¹⁰³¹ On occasion, and during the early 2000s he was prepared to identify spirituality as the “kernel” (*lob*), “essence” (*gohar*) or “distillate” (*chekideh*) of religion.¹⁰³² Moreover, just like Soroush before him, Malekian relied on the metaphor of the external skin (*pusteh*) of religion, and its core (*hasteh*).¹⁰³³ The *pusteh* was effectively the historical detritus which has accumulated over the centuries and ossified under the name of ‘religion’; often to the extent that it envelops and elides the *hasteh*, which in the eyes of the Malekian of this period, appears to be unmediated by either time or history.¹⁰³⁴ The institutions through which religion is propagated and practised are similarly associated with the historical ‘skin’ of religion. He reproduces the elitism of his predecessors when stating, “the people of the street and market hold dear the skin, whereas the spiritual of any religion, instead of the skin, possess the core”.¹⁰³⁵

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid.,p269

¹⁰³¹ "Ma'naviyat va mohabat chekideh-ye hameh-ye adiyān ast.",p277

¹⁰³² "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).", p270 ; "Ma'naviyat va mohabat chekideh-ye hameh-ye adiyān ast.",p277

¹⁰³³ "Ma'naviyat va mohabat chekideh-ye hameh-ye adiyān ast.",p277

¹⁰³⁴ See, **Chapter 4** for Soroush’s comparable positions on the issue.

¹⁰³⁵ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat va mohabat chekideh-ye hameh-ye adiyān ast.",p278

The reason why the ‘traditional’ conception of religion is no longer relevant or appropriate to the modern world, according to Malekian, is because modernity embodies certain constituent elements, some of which are avoidable, and others which are not. For example, while the concept of “progress” is something which features in a great deal of modern Continental thought e.g. Hegel, Marx, the French *philosophes*, one can remain modern and yet eschew subscribing to a form of meliorism.¹⁰³⁶ Avoidable elements of modernity are themselves divided into “right” and “wrong” or “good” and “bad”. The “good” elements should be accepted,¹⁰³⁷ while the “bad” ones can be combatted through argument.¹⁰³⁸ “Rationality” (*aqlaniyat*) for Malekian by contrast is an inescapable component of modernity.

According to Malekian, the necessity of ‘spirituality’ is realised when a subject feels 1) a need for religion and 2) concludes that the traditional understanding of organised religion is incompatible with both the unavoidable elements of modernity, and the “true” or “correct”, albeit unnecessary elements of modernity. But the key question here for Malekian is that religion, interestingly he rarely speaks of ‘Islam’ *per se*, be compatible with the unavoidable (*ejtenab-napazir*) elements of modernity and thus it’s crucial for him that first and foremost, religion be compatible with ‘reason’. In this sense he argues that spirituality is a form of “rational religion” (*din-e 'aqlani*).¹⁰³⁹

Elsewhere Malekian states the matter even more plainly, “spirituality didn’t appear in the form of piety, and is not conceivable for the masses of people”. “Goftogu dar bareh-ye hakemiyat-e dini,” in *Moshtaqi va mahjuri: goftogu dar bab-e farhang va siyasat* (Tehran: Negah-e mo'aser, 1385 [2006]),p347

¹⁰³⁶ "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).",p270

¹⁰³⁷ The question does arise why it is regarded as, in the final analysis, avoidable and yet must be accepted. No answer is forthcoming.

¹⁰³⁸ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).",p272

¹⁰³⁹ Ibid.,p273

Rational Religion and Spirituality

On the one hand, Malekian insists “rational religion” is an individual endeavour, something which the persons desiring modern spirituality must themselves strive toward, which one could argue is itself a ‘modern’ presupposition on his part. On the other hand, he argues in all seriousness that it would be desirable if academic institutions could oversee this transition toward “rational religion”. This rehashes a conviction of the classical Enlightenment, endorsing the idea that a rational and enlightened elite has the ability to shed illumination on the darker corners of superstition and irrationality, and dissolve them by means of their devising rational and enlightened institutions.¹⁰⁴⁰ But he also adds, people should not wait for these academic institutions to begin this process, but rather, that they should take the onus upon themselves, indicating his adherence to one of the more egalitarian and leveller beliefs of the Enlightenment heritage, namely, that every human being in virtue of being human is endowed with the faculty of reason and the ability to wield it freely and independently to reach his own conclusions.¹⁰⁴¹ Malekian argues that this process of rationalising one’s beliefs not only remains an issue of mere theory, but requires “internal preparation”, whereby one can be faithful to a “rational religion”, or in Malekian’s preferred lexicon, be “spiritual”.¹⁰⁴²

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid.,p273

¹⁰⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary Gregor, Introduction by Christine M. Korsgaard ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998),p23

¹⁰⁴² Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).",p274

Malekian is thus very much a 'logo-centrist', placing discursive reason at the centre of his philosophical description of modernity. This is why he insists the "submissive" understanding of traditional religion which is above all predicated on "obedience" (*ta'abod*) is incompatible with modernity. Malekian defines *ta'abod* as essentially taking something to be true on the authority of another: "*ta'abod* means I state 'a is b' and you ask, how do you know a is b? I reply, because s says a is b." He then goes one step further and adds that "when you are modern as long as the questioner demands a reason, you must remain toe-to-toe with him".¹⁰⁴³ According to Malekian, when the modern person is asked a question to which he cannot proffer a reason, if he is to preserve his fidelity to 'modernity', he must remain silent rather than simply cite an authority.¹⁰⁴⁴ This is why Malekian claims *ma'naviyat* adheres to what he idiosyncratically calls "evidentialism", which demands that the individual has a satisfactory reason for his beliefs.¹⁰⁴⁵ The intellectual is accordingly enjoined "to doubt everything".¹⁰⁴⁶

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid.,p274

¹⁰⁴⁴ This point is not the same as the concluding line of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* where he contends, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence". Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus*, ed. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, introduction by Bertrand Russell ed. (London: Routledge, 1961).,p89.

Though Malekian does endorse this Wittgensteinian trope and claim it to be proximate to his own line of thinking, there is little evidence that he has really absorbed much of Wittgenstein. Mostafa Malekian, "Goftogu sevvom: ta'amoli dar rowshanfekri-ye dini," in *Din, ma'naviyat va rowshanfekri-ye dini: seh goftogu ba Mostafa Malekian* (Tehran: Nashr-e payan, [1389] 2010).,p81

¹⁰⁴⁵ "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyani (1).",p333

¹⁰⁴⁶ "Taqrir-e haqiqat va taqlil-e mararat.",p20

Malekian considers the proffering of reasons for one's beliefs and actions the quintessential condition for being considered "modern".¹⁰⁴⁷ He does not address how one might distinguish "good" from "bad", or "valid" from "invalid" reasons.¹⁰⁴⁸ In any case, even if Malekian does not explicitly state such, as previously suggested, it might be best to consider his articulation of "modernity" an ideal type, or regulative idea, since on the basis of the uncompromising criteria he presents, its realization might be considered a well-nigh impossible feat. Most, if not all persons in both the developed and developing worlds, would find themselves coming up short and overcast by the shadow of 'tradition', if they were expected to provide self-determined reasons for all of their actions and beliefs, without equivocation or reference to any external authority. Nonetheless, Malekian tells his readers, to be a spiritual individual one must be free of all obedience in the sphere of religion.

The Search for Meaning

Malekian's ideal of rational and moral autonomy bears obvious parallels with that of Immanuel Kant as laid out in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, but he actually cites the German Protestant theologian Paul Tillich as his source of inspiration, when he distinguishes between autonomous and heteronomous acceptance of religion. Autonomy of course meaning here, much as

¹⁰⁴⁷ Elsewhere Malekian states, "As Paul Tillich said, 'an unasked question will not be answered'. In my mind, in the world of culture a question must be asked until it is answered". "Bohran-e akhlaq va ma'naviyat.",p241

¹⁰⁴⁸ Malekian does actually acknowledge this distinction, but it remains unclear which conception of truth he in fact supports, e.g. correspondence, coherentist, pragmatic etc. He appears to advocate different conceptions of truth at different times and on a variety of disparate issues. He does seem to advocate a version of the correspondence theory of truth *vis-à-vis* our knowledge of the natural world. "Din va 'aqlaniyat.",p269

Kant had meant it, self-legislation in accordance with reason. Elsewhere, Malekian contends that individuals must bestow meaning to their own lives, rather than derive it from elsewhere.¹⁰⁴⁹ Their rational will ought to be self-sufficient or self-foundational (*khod-bonyadi*), legislating for itself rather than deriving from caprice or some other source.¹⁰⁵⁰ Everyone can ask themselves the meaning of their lives, and situate the role it plays within a larger context. In order to ascertain meaning, according to Malekian, one must ask the author of one's life i.e. the subject himself, what the goal (*hadaf*) was in bringing it into existence.¹⁰⁵¹ At one point, Malekian even cites inspiration from the existentialists, specifically Sartre and Camus, for whom life was conceptualised as a project, without inherent or intrinsic meaning, a project which only obtains meaning through human freedom, and the value we impart to our deeds and ways of life in virtue of their being chosen by us freely.¹⁰⁵²

By postulating goals for one's life and envisaging it as a project, the agent is able to propel himself forward and bestow meaning to his life.¹⁰⁵³ Malekian here cites the influence of Viktor E. Frankl, the famed psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor whose book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, was an international bestseller. Frankl invented the therapeutic technique of logotherapy, which is explicitly invoked by Malekian. According to Frankl, in contrast to the Freudian focus on "the pleasure principle" and the Adlerian preoccupation (adapted from Nietzsche) with the "will to power", logotherapy "focuses on the meaning of existence as well as one man's search for such a meaning...this striving to find a

¹⁰⁴⁹ "Harkas khod bayad beh zendegi-ye khish ma'na bebakhshad.",p209

¹⁰⁵⁰ Ibid.,p211

¹⁰⁵¹ Ibid.,p220

¹⁰⁵² Ibid.,p225

¹⁰⁵³ Ibid.,p227

meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man. That is why I speak of a *will to meaning*".¹⁰⁵⁴ Moreover, through "re-orientation toward the meaning of his life" the analysand must be made aware of this meaning, and this helps him to overcome his neurosis.

Because Malekian is focused upon recovering meaning in what he holds to be a post-traditionalist age, and similarly desires to avoid the precipice of nihilism, he would concur with Frankl's view that, "Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone";¹⁰⁵⁵ but as Malekian remarks, paraphrasing Frankl, "the whole of life is a struggle with unavoidable pain and sufferings".¹⁰⁵⁶ Each person has their own goal which structures their life, and has the capacity to endow it with meaning, thus one cannot speak of *the* meaning of life, but rather of individual meanings contingent on the various goals people adopt for themselves.¹⁰⁵⁷

Traditionalists and Religious Intellectualism

Because of this emphasis on unimpinged 'autonomy' Malekian even criticizes the standard term used to refer to Iran's post-revolutionary religious intellectuals i.e. *rowshanfekran-e dini*, which he argues is paradoxical.¹⁰⁵⁸ I will now try and explain why, since it provides some insight into how

¹⁰⁵⁴ Victor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: The Classic Tribute to Hope from the Holocaust*, trans. Ilse Lasch (London: Random House, 1959), p104

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p105

¹⁰⁵⁶ Malekian, "Harkas khod bayad beh zendegi-ye khish ma'na bebakhshad.", p227

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p234

¹⁰⁵⁸ "Howzeh va donya-ye jadid.", p111

Malekian sees himself as having broken in some important respects with the Traditionalists and Iran's post-revolutionary religious intellectuals. The real extent of the break is subject to debate.

Traditionalists such as Lings, Nasr, and Guenon, distinguished between two distinct kinds of reason i.e. discursive rationality and intuitive rationality or intellection.¹⁰⁵⁹ The latter is not held to be in any tension with religion, but rather a means of metaphysical ascension and unmediated discernment of the Real.¹⁰⁶⁰ Much of Malekian's comments and ideas, particularly his later ones, can be read as a direct challenge to the traditional school of which he was formerly an adherent. In any case, Malekian argues that the Enlightenment *philosophes* saw religion as little more than "superstition" (*khorafeh*), and a key condition of being counted amongst their midst was freedom from religion's grip and reliance solely on one's reason.¹⁰⁶¹ Iran's *rowshanfekran-e dini*, by contrast, according to Malekian, are obliged to defend the basic tenets of Islam, and think them anew. This is the reason why, like the late 'Ezatollah Sahabi, he prefers the terms new religious thinking (*now-andishi-e dini*) or 'revisionism' (*tajdidnazar-talabi*).¹⁰⁶² It is also a reason why Malekian contends that ethics (*akhlaq*) and not religious philosophy is "the science of the meaning of life,"¹⁰⁶³ and is determined solely by means of rational deliberation.¹⁰⁶⁴ While he can accept that religions have the capacity to lend meaning to people's lives,

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid., p111; "Sonnat-garayan.",p396

¹⁰⁶⁰ Harry Oldmeadow, *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2010),p55-56

¹⁰⁶¹ Malekian, "Howzeh va donya-ye jadid.",p113

¹⁰⁶² Ibid.,p114

¹⁰⁶³ "Harkas khod bayad beh zendegi-ye khish ma'na bebakhshad.",p227

¹⁰⁶⁴ "Bohran-e akhlaq va ma'naviyat.",p241

which is part of their psychological appeal, he does not accept that “giving meaning” (*ma'na bakhshidan*) is the kernel or essence of religions.

The Superfluity of History

Another important element of modernity, for Malekian, is lack of certainty or scepticism towards what he calls ‘history’. He thus does away with the ‘sanctity of history’ to which he insists many religions, including Islam, are beholden. He argues in line with what might be considered the commonsensical approach to history i.e. the greater number of sources and narrations verifying a particular event or series of events drawn from the utmost diversity of contemporaneous witnesses and accounts, the more one is able to trust in the veracity of a reconstructed historical narrative. In this respect, much like reason, history and historical narrative are collective endeavours which ought to unfurl through inter-subjective dialogue, argument and critique.

The upshot of Malekian’s point is the contention that religion should minimise its dependence on history and historical narrative. This is of course highly significant in the Iranian context where the narratives retold in manifold *ahadis* and histories relating to the Imams and the Prophet, and also their theatrical re-enactment (*ta'zieh*) and mourning (*nowzeh*, *rowzeh-khani*) are so central to the reproduction of Iranian Shi'i collective identity and memory. “The religion of spirituality is that which has the least possible dependence on historical events. For spirituality, historical events are

not a pillar of religious thought or the religious path (*soluk*).¹⁰⁶⁵ Malekian goes a step further than Soroush's thesis on the 'expansion of Prophetic experience', which held that Quranic revelation was not 'revealed' directly by God to the Prophet, but rather a post-hoc transcription of Mohammad's mystical experiences and inspiration articulated in the Arabic language.¹⁰⁶⁶ Malekian simply dismisses the importance of any single historical event to the pertinence and value of *ma'naviyat*. This would include the succession of events in which the Quran was revealed to (or inspired within) the Prophet Mohammad.¹⁰⁶⁷ In other words, spirituality, for Malekian, is to be conceived as independent of any historically revealed scripture or cast of characters.

This-Worldliness and the Psychologisation of Ritual

The third element of modernity according to Malekian is "the here and now" (*inja'i-aknuni*), which he claims is also integral to secularism. He adds that we must be able to test any solution or idea which is offered to us here-and-now, in this world. In other words, the effects of any solution offered to a particular concrete problem (*moshkel*) must be discoverable in this world, and not hinge on promises of salvation and heavenly glories in the afterlife.¹⁰⁶⁸ For the modern individual the exhortation to perform actions on the basis of otherworldly reward is "meaningless" (*bi-ma'na*).¹⁰⁶⁹

¹⁰⁶⁵ "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).",p278

¹⁰⁶⁶ See, Soroush, "Bast-e tajrobeh-ye nabavi."

¹⁰⁶⁷ Malekian, "Goftari dar bab-e kalam-e jadid.",p195

¹⁰⁶⁸ "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).",p278

This proposition possesses certain similarities with the Popperian notion of piecemeal social engineering drawn upon by Soroush and discussed above in **Chapter 4**.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ibid.,p278-279

This is not to deny the existence of an afterlife *per se*, on this he appears agnostic, but rather to say if someone decides to accept a specific action or solution in response to a problem in the here-and-now, he must comprehend its efficacy in this world. “Now, if there is an afterlife, I see and grasp the logical continuity [of the action in question]; if there turned out not to be [an afterlife], I didn’t lose this life...The otherworldliness of religions and the viewpoints which religions have towards the afterlife are incompatible with secularism.”¹⁰⁷⁰

Malekian links this issue directly to that of ritual, something few if any other religious intellectuals have done. Religious modernists often posit ritual as a practice which is not sacred in and of itself, but rather, to use al-Ghazali’s phrase, harbours ‘inner dimensions’ i.e. it symbolizes something deeper, and more profound, such as submission and discipline before the will of the Almighty. Malekian by contrast citing prayer, hajj and fasting specifically casts to one side their significance for securing otherworldly felicity and the pleasure of God. Instead he prefers to emphasize the personal feeling of peace, joy, hope, and internal contentment imparted in the here-and-now as a result of their performance.¹⁰⁷¹ He doesn’t countenance that such peace and contentment might derive from the conviction that its performance will secure the practitioner eternal bliss post-mortem. He contrasts his own approach with the traditional one in which it is envisioned God has a record of every one of our actions and deeds, while his final ruling on our lives remains unknown until the Day of Judgement. Modern man, according to Malekian, insists that religion must provide him with peace

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ibid.,p279

¹⁰⁷¹ Ibid.,p279

(*aramesh*), joy (*shadi*), hope (*omid*), internal contentment (*rezayat-e bateni*), and meaning for his life.¹⁰⁷²

Thus, and in accordance with this logic, ritual practice must have edifying psychological effects (*asar-e ruhi*) upon one's spiritual and mental well-being. To this end, and in certain respects reminiscent of William James' own pragmatist approach to religiosity,¹⁰⁷³ Malekian views "spirituality" as a kind of "empirically-oriented religion" (*tajrobeh-gara'i-ye dini*), which expects to feel the effects of religious practice in the here-and-now:¹⁰⁷⁴ "rituals and rites and worship...all [of them] are in the service of the psychological aspect (*vajh-e ravanshenakhti*)".¹⁰⁷⁵ Perhaps in order to lessen the gravity of his effective psychologisation of religious ritual, Malekian claims that such a view was not alien to many Islamic mystics who insisted, "if my eyes in this world are not open, they will not open anywhere else [i.e. in the hereafter]".¹⁰⁷⁶

At one point Malekian does assert that while popular religion is based on obedience (*ta'abod*), spirituality is founded on "faith" (*iman*). This, however, comes across as something of an unpersuasive concession to religious intellectualism and he fails to offer any satisfactory arguments why 'faith' should be seen as 'rational', or not another surrender of reason, and why, by contrast, popular religiosity and 'traditional religion' are written off as *ta'abod*. In the same line of thinking, he claims *ta'abod* should be considered as acceptance without reason, but then excludes servitude to God.¹⁰⁷⁷

¹⁰⁷² Ibid.,p280

¹⁰⁷³ William James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings* ed. Giles Gunn, Kindle ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000),p126;Loc-2581-of-606

¹⁰⁷⁴ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).",p280

¹⁰⁷⁵ "Porseshha'i piramun-e ma'naviyat.",p379

¹⁰⁷⁶ "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).",p280

¹⁰⁷⁷ Ibid.,p339

The surmise that Malekian is trying to have his cake and eat it too is further reinforced when elsewhere he explicitly says, “faith means belief in something and belief in it creates positive psychological results in the believer”.¹⁰⁷⁸ The question also arises in connection with the preceding point of how ‘servitude’ of any description can be meaningful in the absence of institutions, texts, historical narratives and practices, which either mediate or embody the divine will and how ‘faith’ or ‘obedience’ might be expressed and understood in their absence.

Deflating Metaphysics

Another important rupture of modernity with the past is the break with traditional metaphysics. According to Malekian, traditional religions are bloated with metaphysical baggage, and by counting oneself amongst their adherents, one implicitly subscribes to a raft of concomitant beliefs as well, all to the end of assuring salvation (*nejat yaftan*). The Buddha is regarded by him as perhaps one of few exceptions, which Malekian cites as a rare example of a religion’s acknowledgement of the philosophical principle of fallibilism, the idea that human beings, including the sacred and prophetic personages could be wrong about their beliefs and understanding of the world: “Buddha said, you

In an early essay Malekian does define the minimal characteristics of ‘faith’ which he says is irreconcilable with ‘doubt’ (*shak*). It is thus questionable whether he can later claim it to be qualitatively distinct from *ta'abod*. It does not seem he can advocate ‘faith’ in some form and in accordance with his own minimal characterisation and yet remain consistent. See "Iman," in *Rahi be raha'i* (Tehran: Nashr-e negah-e mo'aser, 1380 [2001]), p160

¹⁰⁷⁸ "Porseshha'i piramun-e ma'naviyat.", p399

must test what I say; if it was correct do it...I am not infallible; I don't think of myself as infallible, you also should not think of me as infallible".¹⁰⁷⁹

Malekian sympathises with the early sayings of the Buddha for their simplicity and lack of metaphysical system. He echoes this in his explication of *ma'naviyat* by stating that it is a form of religion in which metaphysical baggage has been minimalized. So for example, the practice of meditation as a form of spiritual remedy, according to Malekian, has very little metaphysical baggage, insofar as the practitioner can see for himself whether it provides the spiritual-psychological alleviation its exponents claim for it. He claims that much like a doctor's medical prescription, it does not require a prior belief in a metaphysical system. The tangible effects can be seen by the practitioner who is able to judge for himself whether meditation abets the realisation of spiritual and psychological well-being or not.

The fifth crucial feature of modernity, which is intimately related to the above, is "desacralisation" (*qedasat-zoda'i*), specifically the desacralisation of persons.¹⁰⁸⁰ Other religious intellectuals, above all, Sa'id Hajjarian, have focused on this idea largely toiling under the shadow of the German sociologist Max Weber and his seminal thoughts vis-à-vis the 'disenchantment of the world'.¹⁰⁸¹ In this spirit, Malekian argues that "egalitarianism" (*barabari-talabi*) is an additional aspect of modernity, and is similarly linked to the issue of critical rationality, in that the exhortations and arguments of 'sacred' personages cease to be taken as true or valid merely because of the 'sacred' identity of their

¹⁰⁷⁹ "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).", p282

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ibid., p283

¹⁰⁸¹ See, **Chapter 5, Part II.**

enunciator, but rather because they provide reasons, whose validity can be tested and verified.¹⁰⁸² In short, and as mentioned above, Malekian is an earnest believer in the idea that reason is a great leveller, allowing individuals irrespective of power and position to question those who claim authority.¹⁰⁸³ So again, while he does not directly state such, this process of desacralisation would clearly extend to the Prophet Mohammad and the thirteen other infallible personages of Shi'i Islam, and the Guardian Jurisprudents (*owlia'-ye faqih*) who have headed the Islamic Republic and more than occasionally been deemed by their followers as verging on infallibility.¹⁰⁸⁴ Similarly, like other religious intellectuals such as Kadivar,¹⁰⁸⁵ Malekian contends that none of the founders of the main world religions placed themselves beyond questioning. Rather, he argues, it was the disciples and followers of these religions' founding fathers, who subsequently deified these figures, in violation of their original intentions.¹⁰⁸⁶ For Malekian the same questioning of authority extends to the master-disciple (*morshed-morid*) nexus, found amongst many Sufi orders, and the metaphysical hierarchy accompanying it. Thus once again, he paraphrases the Buddha, to insist that a spiritual teacher's (*ostad*) exhortations must be tried and tested, rather than uncritically accepted because of claims to sanctity or mystical intuition.¹⁰⁸⁷

¹⁰⁸² Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).", p283

¹⁰⁸³ "Defa' 'aqlāni az din," in *Rahi beh rah'i* (Tehran: Nashr-e negah-e mo'aser, 1380 [2001]), p253

¹⁰⁸⁴ Akbar Ganji, "Moqaddas sazi-ye Ayatollah Khamenei," *Radio farda* 25 June 2012. [Date Accessed: 27 June 2012]

¹⁰⁸⁵ Mohsen Kadivar, "Bazkhani imamat dar parto-e nehzat-e Hosseini; sokhanrani-ye shab-e 'ashura Hosseinieh-ye Ershad," *Kadivar.com* 19/11/1384 [8 February 2006]. [Date Accessed: 27/06/2012]

¹⁰⁸⁶ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).", p284

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p285

Historical Accident and the Universal

The sixth feature of modernity is the recognition that religions emerged out of a concrete and local historical context.¹⁰⁸⁸ So for instance, he argues, the prevalence of the elephant in Hindu and Buddhist allegories is because of these religions' birth in India and essentially the accidents of geography. Likewise, in the Quran when the young virgin girls of the heavens (*huriyan*) are said to have large and black eyes, it is due to the Arab aesthetics of the seventh-century.¹⁰⁸⁹ He continues, "[i]f the religion of Islam did not appear in Arabia, they would not have said that in heaven there is no sun (*shams*). The Arabs afflicted by the sun associated it with burning and heat. But if you tell an Englishman there is no sun in heaven, he will say so it is just like our very own England!"¹⁰⁹⁰ Behind this facetious point, lies a more serious one; one with which virtually all religious reformers and radicals have been privy.¹⁰⁹¹ The purging of parochialism in the name of the universal: "to reach spirituality we must put local concerns aside, in the sense that by means of them we reach universal matters".¹⁰⁹² In Malekian's spirituality, religions' local colours, textures, idioms and idiosyncrasies fall away. The question of course arises whether it's these very same local idiosyncrasies and webs of significance which are the source of 'inner contentment' and comfort religions provide to people; the lived texture of religious

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ibid.,p285

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid.,p285

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ibid.,p287

¹⁰⁹¹ Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (London: Hurst & Company, 2005),p114

¹⁰⁹² Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyani (1).",p287

practice as opposed to abstract and often sterile universal notions and ideals? Malekian simply doesn't ask this question.

The local, according to Malekian, is of secondary importance, and stands in clear subservience to the universal. This is because he thinks that the local elements of religions, which he also takes to include their many anachronisms, often hinder their ability to respond appositely to contemporary dilemmas. This however, is not the case with the universal concerns religion aspires to address, which are trans-historical and cut across geographical boundaries. Furthermore, because Malekian's spirituality prioritises the well-being of the psyche (*ruh*), and sees itself as essentially humanist in demeanour, it is determined that "religion came to serve us. Religion is in the service of humanity" and not vice-versa.¹⁰⁹³ He declares in a fashion almost reminiscent of Auguste Comte's (d. 1857) notorious 'religion of humanity': "the meaning of spirituality is such that we do not believe in anything higher than humanity. We say everything is in the service of humanity; although in the more precise sense of 'in service of humanity' and not only humanity's material concerns".¹⁰⁹⁴ Malekian dispenses with the theocentric and nomocratic world-view seen in the writings of Khomeini, but also his former teachers Mesbah-Yazdi and Javadi-Amoli, one in which man was created solely in order to obey God's law. Not merely the *shari'a*, but 'Islam' and all other religions for that matter are deemed effective only insofar as they contribute to the human condition and provide discernible edification in the here-and-now. Even "heaven" (*behesht*) "is nothing but the realisation

¹⁰⁹³ Ibid.,p286

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid.,p287

of peace right here".¹⁰⁹⁵ Malekian, however, doesn't quite fit the paradigm of the Enlightenment as outlined in Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* in which the *cogito* rampantly subjugates, manipulates and consumes nature for the sake of its own utility.¹⁰⁹⁶ Malekian insists that humanity's spiritual lot and non-material preoccupations shouldn't be ignored and that merely focusing on the satisfaction of men's material desires and needs is one of the major flaws of Western civilization.¹⁰⁹⁷

For Malekian the original cause of humanity's problems (*'elat ol-'elal-e moshkelat-e bashariyat*), is nothing other than "pain and suffering" (*dard va ranj*). It is of the utmost importance that all religions have a response to this "problem". Moreover, the response must entail practical solutions, because salvation (*nejat*) is only the alleviation of pain and suffering in this world.¹⁰⁹⁸ Of key importance for Malekian is that "rationality" and "spirituality" be reconciled, "so we don't become like civilisations that sacrificed rationality to spirituality, or spirituality to rationality...For example, in ancient Indian civilisation spirituality took the place of rationality and led to its decline. In Western modernity rationality has prevailed over spirituality, and for that reason it will not succeed (*rahi beh ja'i nakhahad bord*).¹⁰⁹⁹ Here Malekian not only reproduces the timeworn binary depicting the 'rational' and

¹⁰⁹⁵ "Goftogu-ye dovvom: ma'naviyat va 'aqlaniyat," in *Din, ma'naviyat va rowshanfekri-ye dini: seh goftogu ba Mostafa Malekian* (Tehran: Nashr-e payan, 1389 [2010]),p41; also see, "Entezar-e bashar az din.",p297

¹⁰⁹⁶ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002),p149

¹⁰⁹⁷ It is here that we discern one of the important vestiges of the Traditionalist outlook in Malekian's world-view, since the former's criticisms of Western civilisation are very much along similar lines, except that Malekian psychologises the 'positive benefits' of religion for human beings, something he believes Western civilisation has undervalued.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (1).",p289

¹⁰⁹⁹ *Ibid.*,p289

disenchanted West in contradistinction to the 'occult' and mystical East, but makes a very similar argument to that of Ahmad Kasravi (d. 1946), who advocated his very own self-styled rational-religious creed in the 1940s.¹¹⁰⁰

Authenticity and the *Causa Sui*

Malekian's criticisms of traditional understandings of religion and their role in the world are often far clearer than his exposition of spirituality (*ma'naviyat*), but he does provide an outline of its constituent elements and its intimate link with the aforementioned idea of *rezayat-e bateni* or 'inner contentment'. Inner contentment has three components: 1) peace or calm (*aramesh*) 2) joy (*shadi*) and 3) hope (*omid*). No religion has a special claim on these constituent elements, and one can attain them with the aid of any religion.¹¹⁰¹ Religions can also be indifferent to these states and thereby pose an obstacle to the realization of inner contentment.

Malekian makes the argument that scientific knowledge, but perhaps more questionably, the social system (*nezam-e ejtema'i*) has no definitive role in providing human beings with peace, joy and hope. His argument for the latter is that people who have attained 'inner contentment' have done so living under many different socio-political regimes. But this is an unconvincing argument, replete with unpacked assumptions. Malekian's ahistorical and disembodied view of calm, joy and hope raises a number of questions, since it can be argued that these psychological states have meant distinct things to different people at innumerable times and places. In other words, he shows meagre

¹¹⁰⁰ See quotation of Kasravi's tract *A'in* (Creed) in, Katouzian, *The Persians*.,p294

¹¹⁰¹ Mostafa Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (2)," in *Sonnat va sekularism* (Tehran: Serat 1381 [2002]),,p309

consideration for the phenomenology of such emotions and compartments and how they're concretely and corporally experienced by subjects in the world. There is also the question of Malekian's lack of criteria for determining the extent to which an individual might be in possession of any one of the postulated psychological states. He often seems to take their empirical quantification as self-evident.

This is also a point at which one can see Malekian's anti-politics and all too often ahistorical approach to the question of humanity's pain and suffering come to the fore. His efforts to mitigate,¹¹⁰² and virtually remain indifferent to the relevance of socio-political systems to individuals' well-being, and inner contentment, curiously resonates in an intellectual climate which preceding the 1979 Revolution had been saturated with the rhetoric of political commitment (*ta'ahod*);¹¹⁰³ an intellectual climate that had moreover, viewed the notion of political organization and overhaul as inseparable from the betterment of humanity's lot as a whole.¹¹⁰⁴ Malekian does at times state explicitly that his intention is to break with the *siyasat-zadeqi* or "political intoxication" of the past,¹¹⁰⁵ but in doing such, it seems he might have overshot, and as a result emptied his ruminations of due consideration of socio-political context and how it factors into the immiseration and more tangible sufferings of human beings.

¹¹⁰² This does not mean that he denies their impact in principle, but the reality is that in his own writings and theorising, consideration of their effects and impact plays a negligible role at best. "Dar jostoju-ye aqlaniyat va ma'anaviyat."

¹¹⁰³ See, Negin Nabavi, "The Discourse of "Authentic Culture" in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s," in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth Century Iran: A Critical Survey*, ed. Negin Nabavi (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), p91-108

¹¹⁰⁴ For the Islamist face of this intellectual current, see **Chapter 2**.

¹¹⁰⁵ Malekian, "Goftogu dar bareh-ye hakemiyat-e dini." p349

Putting our criticisms temporarily to one side, Malekian moves on to probe the question of how people from disparate cultures and different times have reached states of inner contentment, despite multifarious circumstances and belief-systems. Not surprisingly the shared features of humanity fall under the heading of spirituality. As we have seen, he is keen to insist that spirituality is both necessary and desirable in the modern world, since the traditional interpretation of organized religion has ceased to be either.¹¹⁰⁶ At a number of points, he emphasizes “institutionalised religion” (*din-e nahadineh*) and not “the kernel of religion” (*lob-e adiyān*), which is putatively compatible with the core features of *ma'naviyat*. But again, we ought to be dubious of this claim since it does not square with several of his other statements which pay virtually no attention to the centrality the Abrahamic faiths attribute to a singular transcendent deity, preferring instead to focus on the psychological effects of ritual and “religious experience”.¹¹⁰⁷ The spiritual individual does not pursue promises of salvation but is in search of calm in the now, joy in the now, hope in the now, and inner contentment in the now; first and foremost, he is in pursuit of meaning for his life in the now.¹¹⁰⁸ The issue the ‘spiritual individual’ faces however, is not the pursuit of ‘meaning’, but actually deriving ‘meaning’ and imbuing it into his daily life. This predicament is further complicated when the ‘spiritual individual’ is also well apprised by his critical rational faculties of religion’s inability to achieve much besides act as a stopgap measure warding off meaning’s potential total disintegration i.e. nihilism.

¹¹⁰⁶ "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (2).",p316

¹¹⁰⁷ “I can say that religious experience brings into existence a very profound form of inner contentment in the person in possession of the [religious] experience”. "Tajrobeh-ye dini.",p329

¹¹⁰⁸ "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (2).",p316-17

In a series of lectures Malekian delivered alongside Soroush, Mojtabah-Shabestari and Kadivar, and later published under the title of *Tradition and Secularism* (2002), he contends that the most important question which exists for the spiritual individual is “what should I do?” Malekian’s posing of this question, quite unlike Ali Shari’ati’s similar sounding one i.e. ‘what is to be done?’,¹¹⁰⁹ is entirely emptied of its political content. In fact, he consciously avoids phrasing the question along the Leninist lines, which so influenced Shari’ati’s own formulation.¹¹¹⁰ Instead he attempts to elaborate the nature of human beings’ personal and individual quest for meaning and authenticity, albeit stripped of its social and political dimensions. Malekian also contends that ontological and soteriological questions of “where we came from?” and “where will we go?”, are not primordial or the questions upon which we ought to focus. It is of course no coincidence that reams of religious scripture and myth have sought to answer these very same questions.

Even though it might not always seem to be the case, Malekian is keen to stress that what we believe affects the way we act. He contends that if one believes in God, it will affect how one behaves, than if one believed otherwise.¹¹¹¹ To this end Malekian returns to the question of authenticity, or more specifically, the “authentic life” (*zendegi-ye asil*). He is not, however, returning to the identitarian or nativist discourse of his forebears, which sought to reclaim, and mythologise a primordial Iranian, Shi’i Islamic identity. Malekian does not have an axe to grind against Western imperialism, global capitalism and the alleged plague of Westoxification, which so preoccupied the

¹¹⁰⁹ See, **Chapter 2**.

¹¹¹⁰ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (2).", p319

¹¹¹¹ This of course merely begs the question, which God, or rather which conception of God?

likes of Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Shari'ati and the Islamist founders of the revolutionary state. For Malekian the spiritual human being is the only one capable of “authenticity”. Other people, by contrast, are ensconced within “borrowed” or “vicarious” (*'ariyati*) lives.¹¹¹²

Very loosely drawing on the account of “inauthenticity” in German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s landmark *Being and Time*, Malekian delineates the features of the inauthentic life: 1) chatter and blathering (*yaveh-gu'i*) 2) a furtive peeping and inquisitive prying (*sarak keshidan*), whereby our attention is constantly flitting from one sighting to another 3) giddiness, bewilderment (*giji*) and aimless wandering (*sargardani*). Though it is not entirely clear why he chooses to enumerate these elements for reasons other than their alleged derivation from Heidegger, nor does he elaborate on them in a very illuminating fashion. What all three features of the inauthentic life amount to for Malekian is their ability to deflect and distract people from careful and measured reflection and assessment of the reasons for their actions. This was not Heidegger’s response at all. In fact he took fundamental issue with the Cartesian subject-object dualism, preferring a phenomenologico-hermeneutical approach which spoke of Da-sein, or being-there, as thrown and immersed in the world; a world towards which Da-sein possessed disparate compartments and moods. It was not rational reflection which allowed for authenticity, according to the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, but rather a decisive being-towards-death in which Da-sein came face-to-face with the ultimate horizon of its being i.e. its finitude.¹¹¹³

¹¹¹² Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (2).",p323

¹¹¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein and Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1996).,p357

In stark contrast, Malekian views the 'authentic life' as one in which the subject's actions are predicated on his own understanding and not the understanding of another.¹¹¹⁴ Malekian's conception is thus individualistic and Cartesian through and through and possesses none of the communal or collective dimensions which occupied the minds' of his pre-revolutionary predecessors. A question which Malekian does not answer is how the agent can ever be certain that he has reached a certain belief or conclusion as a result of his own understanding?¹¹¹⁵ How can he be sure his actions, even when consciously chosen, are not the product of upbringing, acculturation, class or the unconscious? Leaving this issue to one side, of far more importance is Malekian's methodological individualism and his view of an agent's socio-cultural embeddedness in broadly negative terms. An individual's 'identity' (*hoviyat*) does not depend on their culture, class, nationality or language, but rather on their authenticity (*esalat*), which in turn is grasped through self-understanding and practical reason. This seems not only inaccurate as a description of how social agents think about their identities, but also arguably an impoverished way of thinking about identity-formation, since it is difficult to imagine how practical reason and self-reflection by themselves can yield an identity-conception in a vacuum. Without *esalat*, according to Malekian, the individual is devoid of identity, and comparable to a cinema screen which only reflects that which an external projector shines on it from the outside.¹¹¹⁶

¹¹¹⁴ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (2).", p329

¹¹¹⁵ It is worth noting that the Persian *ou* used by Malekian is gender-neutral.

¹¹¹⁶ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (2).", p325

To return to the above question, how does Malekian view the process of human decision-making and when does he consider a decision to be inauthentic, or not deriving from the author's own judgement? Like virtually all the religious reformist intellectuals we have seen thus far, and the lion's share of Muslim reformers more generally, *taqlid*, is treated with disapprobation. In Malekian's case this is because *taqlid* is identified with obedience to another,¹¹¹⁷ just as he associates the traditionalist understanding of religion with blind, unthinking obedience (*ta'abod*). Notions of immanent and internal criticism within a particular tradition escape his consideration, as he invariably tends to see *taqlid* and tradition as completely antithetical to rationality and autonomy.

Moreover, our initial question remains unanswered, for it can simply be rephrased as "how can the agent be sure when he is not performing *taqlid* of some description?" and that his reasons for action are in fact *his* reasons?; a classic dilemma of the free will versus determinism debate in moral philosophy and one which has become increasingly sophisticated with the advent of neuroscience. In his quest for the pure enlightenment ideal, which Kant had to salvage with recourse to a noumenal world, the phenomenal world being determined by the Newtonian laws of physics and the principle of causality, Malekian is forced to postulate a questionable position, which just recycles the Kantian one in a different garb. For an action to be truly authentic and eschew the heteronomy to which he is so loathe, agents must take decisions as if they were "in a vacuum" (*dar khala' tasmim migirand*).

"We normally behave in such a way because public opinion approves, or because others have behaved in a similar way, or someone told us to...But mystics did not submit their lives to the vicarious (*ariyati*).¹¹¹⁸ They judged everything in

¹¹¹⁷ Ibid.,p330

¹¹¹⁸ "Vicarious" is Malekian's own translation of "*ariyati*".

accordance with their own understanding and it is as if they decided in a vacuum; a vacuum in which only their own beliefs, feelings, sentiments, and will exists...An authentic act is based on a will, which is the child of our own beliefs, feelings, and sentiments".¹¹¹⁹

This depiction of mystics is debatable, insofar as their traditional object of yearning has been for dissolution in the deity, and it seems Malekian is far closer to Kant, who spoke of the need to think of the subject's will as a *causa sui*, or self-cause. Only in this way are autonomous moral actions which break the chain of causality, achievable. Malekian believes 'authenticity' crucial in another respect as well, because in its rejection, while the individual might provide satisfaction for others, he will come to loathe himself. This is because, so he argues, being authentic is tantamount to fidelity to oneself, turning inauthenticity into a species of self-betrayal.¹¹²⁰ The spiritual individual does not seek out the acceptance of others, but rather like a thermometer (*damasanj*) changes his views in accordance with what he takes from the world, and refuses to be weighed down by the choices of his past.

***Siyasat-zadegi* and Cultural Reform**

While much of Malekian's thought does give the impression that he has abandoned politics and political thinking altogether, he does in parts of his corpus outline his preferred social order. Though rather general and broad in scope, it is fair to say his political outlook can be categorised as generically 'liberal' and in step with many of the views proposed by other Iranian religious

¹¹¹⁹ Malekian, "Ma'naviyat: gohar-e adiyān (2).", p331

¹¹²⁰ Ibid., p332-333

intellectuals. On this score Malekian has little if anything original to say, advocating a ‘negative’ liberalism, whereby no single way of life or ethic is promoted at the expense of others. Nonetheless, a brief sketch is in order for a comprehensive picture of his thought.

Like some of his fellow *rowshanfekran-e dini*, he admits that “religious rule” (*hakemiyat-e dini*) in Iran, or rather a particular reading (*qara'at*) of religion, has had a considerable impact on the dynamism of religious thought.¹¹²¹ However, an Islamic state also suffers from certain deficiencies; insofar as “government is one particular reading of religion; different readings of religion are not possible in that unity”. Moreover, “gradually, and irrespective of intention, that single reading of religion appears as the best possible reading or the only desirable one, and prevents other readings from emerging”.¹¹²²

Malekian contends that the “vote of the people” (*ra'i-ye mardom*) must be accepted without condition. Unlike Soroush,¹¹²³ he does not think that a religious state, even a seemingly ‘religious democracy’ can fulfil this demand since he argues no religious state which has historically emerged has been able to completely submit to the will of the people. Much like Malekian’s idealised picture of Western modernity, his image of ‘Western liberal democracy’ is similarly idealised, since there isn’t a single polity in the world which completely “submits to the will of the people”, or even the majority without condition. The model ‘direct democracy’ found in ancient Athens cannot be found in a single modern state, and as the unseemly demise of Socrates testifies, even the ancient polis had its own

¹¹²¹ "Goftogu dar bareh-ye hakemiyat-e dini.",p341

¹¹²² Ibid.,p342

¹¹²³ See, **Chapter 4.**

inviolable list of sanctities. It is because of this that the dangers of majoritarianism and mob rule have been carefully guarded against in various strands of liberal political thought for well over a century, perhaps most famously in J.S. Mill's *On Liberty*. Without elaborating, Malekian claims a common attribute for 'reformists' (*eslahtalaban*) i.e. their commitment to human rights, which thereby allays fears over majoritarianism as a result of his assertion of the necessary submission to the people's vote without condition.¹¹²⁴

In the realisation of this political order, Malekian stresses the pivotal role to be played by new religious intellectuals as educators of the public. In plain contradiction to his central argument that piety, in the final analysis, is reducible to a species of obedience, he contends that the *now-andishan-e dini* are essential for elucidating the relationship between rational deliberation and religion, and that a believer can advocate both without contradiction.¹¹²⁵ But in insisting such he unwittingly acknowledges this intellectual class's political and hegemonic mission since he is essentially making a political argument in light of the current balance of ideologico-political forces, and not one consonant with his own philosophical conclusions. If 'spirituality' is first and foremost a humanist creed not beholden to any single religion, then why should the *rowshanfekran-e dini* be designated a privileged position in Iranian intellectual life? Not to mention the fact that many of them might not even recognise their own *weltanschauung* in Malekian's thought. He bemoans that many young

¹¹²⁴ Malekian, "Goftogu dar bareh-ye hakemiyat-e dini.",p359

¹¹²⁵ Ibid.,p347

Iranians have turned to irreligion due to their experience of living under theocracy,¹¹²⁶ and consequently argues that the spread of irreligion is itself symptomatic of “psychological” (*ravanshenasi*) as opposed to “logical” (*manteqi*) factors.¹¹²⁷ But it is hard to fathom why, given his various assertions and arguments, this is at all objectionable. In like fashion Malekian argues that religious intellectuals can and have been of considerable importance in alleviating what he deems the primarily “emotional” and “sentimental” response of believers, particularly the youth, whose experience of life under theocracy, has led to disenchantment and cynicism *vis-à-vis* the religion of their forebears.¹¹²⁸ This is despite the fact that his own clarion call had repeatedly demanded just such scepticism and the abandonment of conceptions of religion and religiosity wedded to the past. Nevertheless, in 2006 he still very much regarded the *rowshanfekran-e dini* as vital to the continued legitimacy (*mashru'iyat*) of the Islamic Republic itself,¹¹²⁹ and that “the survival of the regime resides in the legitimacy of [religious intellectuals]”.¹¹³⁰ On this score one can only conclude that he has subordinated the implications of his own philosophy to a more mundane political calculus, especially since he plainly states the clergy to be the primary competitor and challenger to the dominance of religious intellectuals.¹¹³¹

¹¹²⁶ "Goriz-e ma'navi: din-gorizi va din-gara'i-ye ensan-e mo'aser: dar goftogu ba Mostafa Malekian," (2012),p9 [unpublished manuscript obtained from author]

¹¹²⁷ "Goftogu dar bareh-ye hakemiyat-e dini.",p347

¹¹²⁸ Ibid.,p348

¹¹²⁹ Ibid.,p356-357

¹¹³⁰ Ibid.,p357

¹¹³¹ "Rowshanfekr-e dini va eslahat-e ejtema'i," in *Moshtaqi va mahjuri: goftoguha'i dar bab-e farhang va siyasat* (Tehran: Negah-e mo'aser, 1385 [2006]),,p285

His conception of reform is also a basic rehashing of what religious intellectuals and the Islamic left have said elsewhere. Firstly, he repeats the Popperian argument recounted in **Chapter 4**, which states that no single political act can benefit humanity, since it will inevitably result in violence. Leaving aside the point as to whether it is accurate to frame political revolutions as a single voluntaristic act, the rather banal point Malekian is attempting to make is that social change ought to be gradualist in nature. His stated antipathy to ‘ideology’ i.e. a dogmatic and Procrustean world-view,¹¹³² and his advocacy of fallibilism and the potential corruptibility of all power¹¹³³ make him a typical example ‘within’ the religious intellectual genre. Thus, one might surmise that while some of his philosophical arguments leave him highly critical with respect to religious intellectualism, politically speaking he is firmly committed.

Moreover, while conceding that religious intellectuals cannot be indifferent to their political condition, he admits that it’s an “inseparable part of religious intellectualism” (*joz'-e layanfak-e rowshanfekri-ye dini*), but does not approve of what he takes to be Iranian intellectuals “political intoxication” (*siyasat-zadegi*).¹¹³⁴ He defines *siyasat-zadegi* as the belief that the sole cause or original cause (*'elat ol-'elal*) of society’s ills is the ruling political regime.¹¹³⁵ The main issue with such a definition is that few, if any of Iran’s intellectuals, in particular the post-revolutionary religious ones,

¹¹³² Malekian argues that an intellectual cannot also be an “ideologue” (*idi'olozhi-pardaz*) since an intellectual’s ethical duty is to state truth, irrespective of whether it conforms to an ideology’s predetermined conception of the world. "Taqrir-e haqiqat va taqlil-e mararat.",p16

¹¹³³ He repeats verbatim Lord Acton’s famous dictum, “All power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Ibid.,p14

¹¹³⁴ "Rowshanfekr-e dini va eslahat-e ejtema'i.",p293

¹¹³⁵ Ibid.,p293

have ever claimed that the ruling regime is the source of all of society's problems, and thus it seems to diagnose a problem where one, at least in the form stated, does not exist.

Like other Iranian religious intellectuals, who have perhaps been more politically vociferous than Malekian, but nonetheless do not fit his definition of *siyasat-zadeh*, he argues for the importance of cultural change: "If cultural change (*taghir-e farhangi*) does not take place, the political regime can come and go a hundred times over, and still the same situation will remain [in place]."¹¹³⁶ "[R]eligious intellectuals", he insists, "must regard cultural development as prior to political or economic development".¹¹³⁷ This contention is quite distinct from the outlook of Iran's *Kargozaran-e sazandegi* (Executives of Reconstruction) who argued for top-down economic development led by competent managers and bureaucrats,¹¹³⁸ or the members of the Islamic left, formerly based at the Presidential Strategic Research Centre, whose chief concern was the advocacy of political development and the rule of law.¹¹³⁹

Malekian wants to claim greater importance for "subjective" (*anfosi*) improvement or betterment. Why this is synonymous with 'cultural development' is not entirely intelligible, but when one considers Malekian's penchant for the Danish existentialist Soren Kierkegaard one might hazard an educated conjecture.¹¹⁴⁰ Malekian's proximity to certain existentialists, in this instance Kierkegaard,

¹¹³⁶ Ibid.,p295

¹¹³⁷ Ibid.,p295

¹¹³⁸ See, **Chapter 4.**

¹¹³⁹ See, **Chapter 5, Part II.**

¹¹⁴⁰ Soren Kierkegaard and Mostafa Malekian, "Anfosi budan haqiqat ast," *Naqd va nazar* 3 & 4(1374 [1995]),p62-81

The philosopher Richard Schacht in his exposition of Kierkegaard's use of the phrase "subjectivity is truth", can help us understand how heavily Malekian has drawn on the Danish philosopher's existential conception of

explains in part why he curiously speaks about cultural and subjective development in a single breath.¹¹⁴¹ Unlike much contemporary theory which propounds a brand of social constructivism or advocates a structuralist approach to the understanding of human agency, contending agents and their relations are either interpellated or at the very least conditioned by larger structures and structural processes e.g. Marx's mode of production or economic base, Lacan's unconscious structured like a language, Durkheim's conscience collective, Weber's bureaucracy and iron cage of rationality, Foucault's archive, etc... due to his debt to Kierkegaard,¹¹⁴² amongst others, and repeated efforts to diminish the significance of socio-political and cultural factors and the historically conditioned nature of agency, he manages to think of culture a-socially and cultural reform as an exercise in voluntaristic self-improvement by transforming one's beliefs.¹¹⁴³

Self-improvement, and thus cultural development, for Malekian can only occur when inner nature or Reality (*baten*) and outer nature or Appearance (*zahir*) are congruous and the difference between

"truth": "In other words, a man is in a state of truth with reference to his essential nature qua human being (cf.: he is "truly human") when he is living in such a way that his actual condition corresponds to his essential nature - when he is in actuality as he ought (essentially) to be. Man's essential nature is conceived by Kierkegaard in terms of "existing" in the above sense. "Every man," he says, "is a spiritual being, for whom the truth consists in nothing else than the self-activity of personal appropriation". Richard Schacht, "Kierkegaard on 'Truth Is Subjectivity' and 'The Leap of Faith'," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 3 (March 1973), p300

¹¹⁴¹ Where Malekian crucially differs is that unlike Kierkegaard he does not think one can obtain proximity to God through "a leap of faith", a decidedly irrational, or at the very least a-rational gesture. Kierkegaard, as we know, actually stressed the necessity of "passion" in order to make the "leap of faith", and accepted the paradox of God's incarnation in history. Malekian is in fact much closer to Hegel in that for the most part he appears to contend that 'truth' is ultimately better procured through rationality than it is through faith.

¹¹⁴² Malekian's insistence on the importance of self-knowledge over other objects of analysis, and his invocation of Kierkegaard in support of such a view, is found elsewhere. Malekian, "Khod ra beshnas; *ibid.*, p218

¹¹⁴³ Malekian insists that the "biggest step" which can be taken toward the "unknown desired condition" is "changing a segment of beliefs" (*taqir-e pareh'i az bavarha*). "Taqrir-e haqiqat va taqlil-e mararat.", p14

them elided, and this is for him the definition of “honesty” (*sedaqat*). Such honesty is to be pioneered by the religious intellectuals themselves, who must avoid the allure of the “cult of personality” (*kish-e shakhsiyat*), have their arguments assessed in accordance with discursive reason (*estedlal-gara'i*), and minimize unthinking obedience (*ta'abodgara'i*) in favour of rational argument. As a result, Malekian states that he considers religious intellectuals to be “idol smashers” (*bot-shekanan*).¹¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Malekian's project of *ma'naviyat va 'aqlaniyat* which is an eclectic melting pot of disparate ideas encompassing, *inter alia*, Buddha, Kierkegaard and Kant, has managed to appeal to a significant constituency of largely young Iranians who lived through the reformist years of President Mohammad Khatami and his governments and the perceived political disappointments which followed in their wake. To this extent we might say Malekian's thought is born of a time of political apathy, but one in which the individual still desires to seek out calm, joy, and hope for the future. While preserving many of the positions of post-revolutionary Iranian religious intellectualism e.g. critical rationalism, fallibilism, the critique of clerical supremacy, Malekian ultimately parts ways with the majority of his former colleagues.

Instead of the collective projects for emancipation, both radical and reformist, which had characterised the work of his intellectual predecessors, both before and after the revolution,

¹¹⁴⁴ "Rowshanfekr-e dini va eslahat-e ejtema'i.", p297

Malekian's prime focus lies with the individual's 'psychological well-being' and the means of securing it. The means, however, are largely divested of socio-political or historical context, and instead made contingent upon the subject's own autonomy and voluntaristic will-to-self-improvement, as he tries to resolutely break with the past and carve out an intellectual niche for himself. Only time will tell whether Malekian's desire to focus on individual self-improvement as the basis of religious and cultural transformation is a serious contribution to post-revolutionary intellectual debate, or he is in fact missing the wood for the trees.

Conclusion

“Have the courage to use your *own* understanding!”¹¹⁴⁵

Immanuel Kant

“If one lives in the ambiguity of a deep-sea aquarium, it is difficult to distinguish substance from shadow.”¹¹⁴⁶

Arthur Koestler

Hashem Aqajari (b. 1957) was not a cleric but a longstanding member of the Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (SMEEI), who following the Iran-Iraq war took up the academic study of history. He was also a veteran of the IRGC who had served on the warfront and even lost a leg to a mine in the course of the eight-year conflict. On 19 June 2002 [29 Khordad 1381] in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Ali Shari'ati's death he delivered a lecture in the mid-western city of Hamedan entitled, “Dr. Shari'ati and the Project of Islamic Protestantism”.¹¹⁴⁷ I will now provide an exposition of this speech since it encapsulates and illustrates not only numerous insights, but the many dilemmas and quandaries of Iranian religious intellectualism at the beginning of the 21st century. In his pugnacious lecture he lamented that despite some 100 years having elapsed since the publication of Mostashar al-Dowleh's *Yek kalameh* and contemporary reformists' infatuation

¹¹⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'," in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p54

The *rowshanfekran-e dini* have often referenced this essay and insisted on its pertinence to contemporary Iran. For example, Soroush, "Mabani-ye te'orik-e liberalism.", p121

¹¹⁴⁶ Arthur Koestler, "Arthur Koestler," in *The God That Failed*, ed. Richard Crossman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001 [1950]), p41

¹¹⁴⁷ Hashem Aqajari, "Doktor Shari'ati va porozheh-ye protestantism-ye eslami," in *Aqajari* (Tehran: Jameh daran, 1382 [2003]), p13

with the buzzword of ‘the rule of law’, “law has still not come to rule”.¹¹⁴⁸ This was the least controversial of his comments, however. What would with great rapidity provoke enmity, not to mention the death sentence,¹¹⁴⁹ later commuted to a 5 year jail term,¹¹⁵⁰ was his simple, but acerbic attack on the clergy and their claims to act as intermediaries between God and the faithful.

Like most typical Islamic reformers, Aqajari distinguishes between “historical Islam” (*Islam-e tarikhi*) and “essential Islam” (*Islam-e zati*).¹¹⁵¹ The so-called “Islamic Protestants”, he instructs his audience, are only concerned with the latter, while the former is little more than an artifice manipulated to guarantee the prerogatives of a worldly caste. Just as Shari'ati had once penned searing criticism of the much revered Mohammad-Baqer Majlesi, the powerful Sheikh al-Islam of Isfahan during the Safavid dynasty,¹¹⁵² Aqajari also decried Majlesi for injecting arbitrary practices into the realm of unimpeachable sanctity e.g. wearing an agate ring on the left hand.¹¹⁵³

For Aqajari “Islamic Protestantism” and “Islamic humanism” went hand in hand, and entailed the clergy’s complete obsolescence. He attributes to Luther the credo that every man can act as his own priest,¹¹⁵⁴ and it is in the Lutheran tradition that he strove to elevate the quintessential relationship

¹¹⁴⁸ Ibid.,p18

¹¹⁴⁹ Unsurprising Mesbah-Yazdi vociferously defended the death sentence against Aqajari. San'ati, *Gofteman-e Mesbah*.,p776

¹¹⁵⁰ Nazila Fathi, "Iran: Another Death Sentence Is Lifted," *New York Times* February 15, 2003.

¹¹⁵¹ Aqajari, "Doktor Shari'ati va porozheh-ye porotestantism-ye eslami.",p28

¹¹⁵² This has become something of an Iranian religious reformist genre. For a recent scholarly, although ‘Shari'atist’ critique of Majlesi even elaborating upon many of Aqajari’s criticisms of the Safavid era cleric, see Ali Rahnema, *Superstition as Ideology in Iranian Politics: From Majlesi to Ahmadinejad* (Cambridge; New York Cambridge University Press, 2011).,p189

¹¹⁵³ Aqajari, "Doktor Shari'ati va porozheh-ye porotestantism-ye eslami.",p30

¹¹⁵⁴ Ibid.,p25

between individual conscience and scriptural interpretation to a supreme principle and thereby in collaboration with a class of likeminded intellectuals and their supporters provoke something akin to a 'Puritan revolution' in the Islamic Republic.¹¹⁵⁵ The extent to which they have proven successful in this endeavour will require both time and a serious investigation by sociologists of religion, a task far beyond the remit of this thesis.

What is crucial to note, theoretically speaking, is that in Aqajari's equation the edifice of *taqlid* and *marja'iyat* and the structure of institutionalised authority in Shi'ism since at least the latter part of the 19th century fall completely by the wayside. He also caustically mocks the clerical hierarchy and its titles of Ayatollah, Hojjat al-Islam and Seqat al-Islam since "some of their titles are so new, their lifespan doesn't exceed 50 to 60 years".¹¹⁵⁶ He fulminates that the clergy's claimed monopoly on the Quran and mastery of "101 sciences and specialisations" are baseless; the office of Friday prayer leader is an innovation, without precedent at the dawn of Islam.¹¹⁵⁷ He goes on, "Shari'ati wanted to remove such false intermediaries (*vasetehha-ye kazeb*). In Islam we did not have any clerical class (*tabaqeh-ye rowhani*); the clerical class is a new class in our history".¹¹⁵⁸ So as to make his endgame all the more unequivocal, he categorically declares, "in essential Islam there is no clergy at all".¹¹⁵⁹ Continuing his general line of argument and emphasizing a theme which also repeatedly graced the

¹¹⁵⁵ It was of course Christopher Hill who famously said that the depiction of the English Revolution as a Puritan one was a "nineteenth-century invention". Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century*, Kindle ed. (London: Pimlico, 2001), Loc-123-of-8285

¹¹⁵⁶ Aqajari, "Doktor Shari'ati va porozheh-ye porotestantism-ye eslami.", p33

¹¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p31-32

¹¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p33

¹¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p33

pages of *Kiyan*,¹¹⁶⁰ he lambasts the hierarchical relationship of master (*morad*) and disciple (*morid*) analogous to that of *marja'* and *moqalled*, asking rhetorically, “are people monkeys to imitate (*taqlid*) him? [i.e. the *morad*]”.¹¹⁶¹ Teachers of religion (*din-shenasan*), he argues, are supposed to act as educators, whereby the student learns, understands, matures and acts on the basis of his own conclusions. In principle as the student progresses he will be able to dispense with the teacher and stand alone and try to fathom and reflect upon the sacred texts.¹¹⁶² The *moqalled*, by contrast, is forever bound to unthinkingly imitate and thus deprived of the ability to think and reason for himself, manacled to a state of interminable infancy. “*Ejtehad* does not belong to a special group or class”.¹¹⁶³ These recognisable tropes of rational deliberation and autonomy are the core of Aqajari’s and fellow religious intellectuals’ call for “Islamic humanism”.¹¹⁶⁴

As mentioned above, the reason for this extended exposition of Aqajari’s speech is that both his individual political journey and transformation and his advocacy of ‘Islamic humanism’ embody and exemplify so much of the process and dynamic of ideological and political change we have sought to convey and demonstrate in the course of this thesis. He came from a religious-mercantile background in Abadan, southern Iran, and his father had been a fervent supporter of Ayatollah Khomeini from at least the early 1960s.¹¹⁶⁵ After his father’s draper’s business went bankrupt and his “petit-bourgeois”

¹¹⁶⁰ For example, Ahmad Naraqi, "Baznegari-ye rabete-h-ye morid-moradi dar 'erfan," *Kiyan*, no. 2 (Azar 1370 [November-December 1991]).

¹¹⁶¹ Aqajari, "Doktor Shari'ati va porozeh-ye porotestantism-ye eslami," p36

¹¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p36

¹¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p45

¹¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p37; Hassan Yusefi-Eshkevari, "Tarhi az "oumanism-e eslami," *Baztab-e andisheh*, no. 40 (Mordad 1382 [July-August 2003]), p64

¹¹⁶⁵ Aqajari, Khojasteh-Rahimi, and Bala'i, "Sharh-e zendegi-ye yek enqelabi-ye naaram," p37

existence was spun into disarray, Aqajari the elder left Iran for Kuwait,¹¹⁶⁶ when his first-born son, Hashem, was only nine years old. Aqajari the younger was consequently left with little choice but to help support his five brothers and sisters doing everything from selling lottery tickets, manual labour and selling fruit and vegetables on the streets of Abadan.¹¹⁶⁷ As a young teen he joined the Hojjatieh Society, an organisation founded by the Mashhadi Sheikh Mahmud Halabi, following the 1953 *coup d'état* against the Mosaddeq government, to counter Baha'i religious activism and doctrine.¹¹⁶⁸ Aqajari later left the society, unpersuaded by its apolitical demeanour and found himself spellbound by the effervescence and vitality of Shari'ati, Khomeini and the pre-1975 People's Mojahedin Organisation's revolutionary rhetoric and proclamations.¹¹⁶⁹ With the revolution, at the tender age of 21 Aqajari headed an armed intelligence-security committee in Abadan and identified "repressive agents" of the old regime for arrest.¹¹⁷⁰ Moreover, as a committed Islamist radical he had joined an organisation,

¹¹⁶⁶ Aqajari uses the term *khordah-borzhvazi* himself to describe his class-economic background up to the age of 9 years old or so, which following his father's bankruptcy "reached a level beneath the proletariat". Ibid.,p37

¹¹⁶⁷ Ibid.,p37

¹¹⁶⁸ Emadeddin Baqi, *Dar shenakht-e hezb-e qa'edin-e zaman* (Tehran: Nashr-e danesh-e eslami Esfand 1362 [February-March 1984]),p29

It is worth noting that numerous reformist intellectuals, ideologues, and politicians were either members or affiliated to the Hojjatieh. These include not merely Aqajari, but Soroush, Emadeddin Baqi, Mohammad-Taqi Banki, 'Ataollah Mohajerani, and Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, to name but a few. Its membership was not however by any means exclusive to would be Islamic leftists / reformists. Mohammad Quchani, "Farzand-e maktab-e Khorasan: pazhuheshi dar rishehha-ye fekri-ye Anjoman-e Hojjatieh: az mobarezeh ba falsafeh ta talash baraye enhelal-e hezb-e Tudeh," *Mehrnameh*, no. 25 (Mehr 1391 [September-October 2012]),p77

¹¹⁶⁹ Aqajari heard Shari'ati in person when the latter gave a speech at the Oil Academy in Abadan, after which he would devour everything Shari'ati produced (37). Moreover, as a university student he would attend classes held by Ayatollahs Beheshti and Motahhari and also became familiar with Allameh Tabataba'i's critical engagement with Marxism in his *Osul-e falsafeh va ravesh-e re'alism* (38). Aqajari, Khojasteh-Rahimi, and Bala'i, "Sharh-e zendegi-ye yek enqelabi-ye naaram."

¹¹⁷⁰ Ibid.,p39

the Mojahedin Organisation of the Islamic Revolution (SMEE), whose entire *raison d'être* was to bulwark and assure under threat of violence that Khomeini's revolutionary leadership remain unchallenged. His specific role was one of acquiring supporters and propagating against Marxist forces and the People's Mojahedin on Iran's university campuses.¹¹⁷¹ After factional disagreements came to a head within the organisation he resigned in January 1983 along with 36 others (See, **Chapter 3**), many of whom would become leading proponents of reform following the 1997 presidential election. As a member of the Revolutionary Guards he participated and witnessed first-hand one of the most brutal inter-state conflicts of the 20th century, only to see rightist clerical rivals and their supporters grab the reins of high office to the exclusion of their erstwhile, albeit ambivalent allies. Gradually he began to re-examine and critically appraise many of his most earnestly held ideological convictions and took up graduate work and research at the Presidential Strategic Research Centre as part of a quite different political trajectory to the one he had formerly envisaged as a young firebrand.¹¹⁷² Then came May 1997 and the emergence of the 2nd Khordad Front, which marked the return of the Islamic left to the forefront of Iranian high politics and the concomitant resistance from many of the same individuals with which he and his allies had long been acquainted and the institutions they now occupied. However, in Aqajari's case even his own party organisation, the SMEEI, failed to come to his aid and publicly dissociated itself from the positions he enunciated in the

¹¹⁷¹ One of the SMEE "sympathisers" under his supervision was none other than Emadeddin Baqi. Ibid.,p39

¹¹⁷² Hashem Aqajari, "Jonbesh-e eslah-talabi, chalesh-e dow farhang-e siyasi va hamelan-e an," in *Hokumat-e dini va hokumat-e demokratik* (Tehran: Zekr, 1381 [2002]),p250

Hamedan lecture.¹¹⁷³ This general template and political-ideological transformation could fit many a member of the Islamic left and their allied religious intellectuals. It is important to emphasise general, because much that is of decisive importance resides in the details.

While the semantics of 'reform' remained contested within the reformist camp itself, they emerged out of a particular historical trajectory and set of political traditions which ranged across national and temporal boundaries. Though an essentially elite-led and carefully managed process, albeit with sometimes unpredictable results and reactions, in the course of their many political and ideological skirmishes more radical religious intellectuals and members of the Islamic left took clerical guardianship and even Islamic jurisprudence itself to be the chief obstruction to not merely Iran's democratisation, but the democratisation of 'Islam' itself. This was however, by no means a universal conclusion within the Islamic left or amongst the *rowshanfekran-e dini*, but it is one which increasingly found itself with a receptive constituency. There were others who while refusing such conclusions were politically aligned and worked in step with the reform agenda for the rule of law and increased electoral participation.

Rather than either some neo-Hegelian historico-rational unfolding of the self-consciousness of freedom these individual and collective transformations and their particular form and content were forged through conflict, bloodshed, unspeakable violence, irrecoverable loss and myriad struggles to rebuild.¹¹⁷⁴ The aim of the preceding chapters was to try and problematize the depiction of 'religious

¹¹⁷³ Aqajari, Khojasteh-Rahimi, and Bala'i, "Sharh-e zendegi-ye yek enqelabi-ye naaram.", p37

¹¹⁷⁴ On this score I would say that my approach is fundamentally different from that of Farzin Vahdat's important volume. See, Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut.*, Introduction, Chapter 1: The Nature of Modernity

intellectualism' as a cosmic battle between the forces of light and darkness or reason and unreason or even the terminus of a rational-historical process, as its practitioners are often wont to claim. Nor was religious intellectualism a disembodied feat of grandiose intellection unscathed by more immediate political interests, personal and institutional rivalries and jockeying in which they were often times themselves embroiled. Nor was the praxis of religious intellectualism merely a disinterested exercise in scholarship without carefully crafted hegemonic ambitions. As we have seen they traversed a network of reading groups, periodicals, think-tanks, government ministries, university faculties and mass-circulation newspapers and consciously endeavoured to disseminate and propagate not only their critical views, but in many respects their own moral and symbolic capital. As a result, oftentimes the amorphous and internally differentiated discourse of 'religious intellectualism' came to define and shape the terms of political debate in important ways and was shaped by the balance and asymmetry of political forces in turn. The drawing of a strict line demarcating 'religious intellectuals' on one side, and the 'Islamic left' or 'reformist politicians' on the other, as has often been the case in scholarship, but more importantly the pronouncements of the actors themselves, is of limited use given the intertwinement of these two roles and forms of praxis. At many distinct junctures, members of this sprawling network have *performed* the part of intellectual/internal critic and politician/mobiliser. These conclusions are not drawn to diminish their achievements but rather exhibit why the contours of this discursive formation have taken the form they have, as well as elicit many of the presuppositions, they have taken for granted and occluded from the re-presentation of their own activities as embedded public intellectuals and

activists with informal and formal ties to the extant political order and its manifold institutions and personnel.

In **Chapter 2** we saw the immense appeal of the image of the newly-forged nation-state for Shi'i Islamism, which in important respects dispensed with the salvific millenarianism of the past, and in its stead envisioned the state as a vehicle for the construction of a paradisiacal atemporal nomocracy, free of tension, doubt or ambiguity. Both clergymen and laymen imagined this order coming into being, and both participated in a revolution awash with hopes of great transformation and definitive solutions. However, following the bloody battles and repression for control of the state, the promissory declarations of future perfection with the assumption of power came up against unforeseen constraints, both domestic and international, which instigated a reconsideration of revolutionary voluntarism and the claim to enact God's will through the enforcement of 'sacred' law. Many Iranian men and women, but for our purposes, even those deeply committed young radicals on the Islamic left such as Hashem Aqajari and Akbar Ganji, struggled to make sense of what had happened and the immensity of the rift between slogans, 'the road to Jerusalem leads through Karbala', and the reality of ignoble defeat and lethargy. The repetitious experience of ideals coming up against brute reality increasingly came to be seen as impugning not only the viability, but the veracity of those ideals.

Moreover, in reaction to their post-war and post-Khomeini political marginalisation by intra-elite competitors the “practical utility”¹¹⁷⁵ and efficacy of such discourses and signifiers as ‘the end of ideology’, enshrined God-given natural rights, constitutionalism, the critique of Oriental despotism and sultanism and the rule of law, became all the more tangible and palpable. Sometimes the strategic and selective deployment of these concepts proved effective, and at other times less so, while at the same time creating new blind-spots and dilemmas of their own. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has observed in the case of South Asia, post-colonial intellectuals have worked tirelessly translating and mistranslating Western socio-political ideas and concepts in an effort to understand their own predicament and thereby grasp where they stand in relation to ‘European Enlightenment’ and ‘modernity’.¹¹⁷⁶ Iranian intellectuals’ efforts have similarly been characterised by periodic bouts of enchantment, repulsion and confusion and the compulsion to dwell in a state of inept and more or less incongruous translations. This came about through a process of recognition and misrecognition of socio-political and religious parallels with particular images of Western political and religious development, and the selective application and misapplication of the accompanying socio-political concepts putatively mirrored in Iran’s own historical experience. Such efforts regularly fell short of capturing the distinct dynamics which confronted these men (and they have predominantly been men) and women, and it is in this way that skewed prognostications and misleading diagnoses came

¹¹⁷⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of *Subaltern Studies* " in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London; New York: Verso, 2000),.,Loc-6723-of-9100

¹¹⁷⁶ Ibid.,Loc-6630-of-9100; *Provincializing Europe*.,p7;Loc-419-of-6849

to pass. But there were also numerous moments when the strategic deployment of such concepts appeared to closely map onto the country's institutional cartography and power structure, leading them to be redeployed and replicated time and again. In the case of Iran, the religious intellectuals, and they were by no means an exception in this regard, have invoked their own specific translations, for the most part culled from Western philosophers and scholars, because of their apparent applicability and practical utility in the context of more local, concrete ideological struggles. The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, not to mention unapologetic Western triumphalism following the Reagan Revolution and later the First Gulf War (2 August 1990–28 February 1991),¹¹⁷⁷ catalysed 'the end of ideology' thesis popularised by Soroush, just as it reinforced the almost complete inattention to any serious consideration of economic domination, class politics and exploitation, which had been so important for the pre-revolutionary generation of both Iranian Islamic and secular intellectuals.

The contingent interplay of historical conjunctures, capital accumulation and the perceived verisimilitude of concepts and notions engendered the circulation and reproduction of certain nomenclatures and their keywords. In the course of this process particular critical vocabularies flourished, while others found themselves condemned to decline and disappearance. Whereas 'dependency theory' and Andre Gunder Frank had been *de rigueur* in the era of Al-e Ahmad when Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi was perceived as the quintessential US client-autocrat, it was Popper and Hayek (ironically, not on economics) with their critiques of Nazi Fascism and Soviet Communism,

¹¹⁷⁷ Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London; New York: Verso, 1998), p32,91

who were very much in vogue by the 1990s. This is merely one example of course, and doesn't claim to exhaust the post-revolutionary intellectual scene in its entirety. It does however illustrate a broader shift in paradigm and ethos which has not merely been witnessed within Iran, but elsewhere in both the so-called 'developed' and 'developing' worlds.

The *rowshanfekran-e dini* have also in the course of this process played a role in subjecting the ruling political theology of *velayat-e faqih* and clerical guardianship to sustained criticism and polemic. Thus as has been shown throughout the preceding chapters, in contradistinction to guardianship they argued for autonomy, rather than present a scriptural basis for morality and political agency they valorised extra-religious rational-normative criteria, and in opposition to the personalised rule of God's intermediary, they demanded rationalised bureaucracy, technical expertise and popular sovereignty. While their conclusions were often ambivalent and mediated by the political environment and the dominant discourses in which they were embedded, Iran's post-revolutionary religious intellectuals have sought with varying degrees of success to vernacularize, define and determine their own uneven experience of the experiment of the Islamic Republic and its relationship with an ethereal, though putatively universalisable image of 'modernity'.¹¹⁷⁸ They decided to embrace disenchantment and the 'iron cage' out of genuine conviction, but also as a gambit to challenge and transform the domestic *status quo* and balance of power without much

¹¹⁷⁸ Partha Chatterjee, "Our Modernity," in *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays* (New York Columbia University Press, 2010), p141; Loc-3060-of-7822

thought to what might follow in its aftermath.¹¹⁷⁹ Apart from the perceived inexorability of history they were convinced that the future did not belong to misplaced nostalgia or nativist revanchism.

But as Partha Chatterjee has remarked, “There is no promised land of modernity outside the network of power...one cannot be for or against modernity; one can only devise strategies for coping with it”.¹¹⁸⁰ The paradox and accompanying difficulties of trying to express agency and autonomy within the interstices of the language of Western historical development and philosophy and so many ‘invented traditions’,¹¹⁸¹ symbols, myths and customs is one with which the Islamic Republic’s intellectual and political elite and grass-roots democratic movements will continue to wrestle, albeit without any prospect of final resolution.

¹¹⁷⁹ This is of course Talcott Parson’s disputed translation of Weber’s phrase, *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, more recently translated as the “shell as hard as steel”, symbolising the rationalisation of modern life under industrialised capitalism, which finds itself increasingly encroached upon by hitherto unanticipated mechanisms of control, rational calculation and bureaucratisation. See, Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings* Kindle ed. (New York; London: Penguin Books, 2002).,p121;Loc-3722-of-9540

¹¹⁸⁰ Chatterjee, "Our Modernity.",p150;Loc-3232-of-7822

¹¹⁸¹ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions " in *The Invention of Tradition* ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).,p9;Loc-217-of-8855

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Shahrvand-e emruz
Bayan
Andisheh-ye puya
Shahed-e yaran
Ketab-e naqd
Rahbord
Mosharekat
A'in
Mehrnameh
Ehya
Madreseh
Baztab-e andisheh
'Asr-e ma
Payam-e emruz

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Baran
Noqteh
Arash

Newspapers

Nabard-e Islam
Hamshahri
Neshat
Khordad
'Asr-e azadegan
Aftab-e emruz
Jomhuri-ye Islami
Salam
Nowruz
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Interviews

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Arash Naraqi
Mohsen Sazegara
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