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Ali Shariati (1933–1977)

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Ali Shariati Mazīnānī was an Iranian sociologist, philosopher, and revolutionary. Blending left-wing Western philosophy with Shi'a Islam, creating a form of Islamic socialism, he is often cited as one of the most influential Iranian intellectuals in the twentieth century and the "ideological father" of the Iranian revolution of 1979 (Jackson 2006, p. 221). Being among the "seminal figures in the prehistory of the Islamic Revolution," his writings and lectures focused primarily on the progressive and/or revolutionary nature of Islam, especially Shi'a Islam, and how it can address the fundamental problems of the contemporary world, including Western imperialism (Algar 2001, p. 87). Shariati called for a rejuvenation of Iran through a radical yet modern embrace of its Shi'a roots in an attempt to liberate it from foreign domination as well as the Pahlavi monarchy. Although his core ideas were marginalized after the successful removal of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi Shah and the institution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, his revolutionary form of Shi'a Islam continued to influence other Third World anti-imperialist theorists, well beyond his early death in 1977. Furthermore, although Shariati died before the overthrow of the Shah, his life and work did the most to prepare Iranian youth for the Islamic revolution to come (Keddie 1981, p. 215).

According to the historian Nikki R. Keddie, Shariati became influential at a time when (1) Iran was modernizing, including the development of a higher education system that incorporated a high degree of subjects and disciplines thought to be "Western," and (2) due to the educational divide, many new social groups were forming, and such groups were confronted by "new cultural problems – accelerated urbanization, Westernization, industrialization, spectacular speculation and corruption" (Keddie 1981, p. 222). Additionally, Iran was falling for what the Iranian philosopher, Jalal Al-i Ahmad, dubbed *ġharbzadegī*, translated as "Westoxification," "Euromania," or "Occidentosis." In other words, Iranian society was suffering from a massive infatuation with all things Western, so much so that native culture was abandoned as being "backward" or even "primitive" (Ahmad 1984; Byrd 2011, pp. 88–92). These radical shifts in society were also compounded by the dominating influence of the British Empire and its Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which had established itself in Iran soon after the discovery of oil in 1908. In the absence of the British withdrawal from the Middle East post World War II, the United States would become Iran's "protectorate." In order to secure the maximum benefit of Iran's natural resources, especially its oil wealth, the United States worked closely with the Shah of Iran to maintain stability in the country, which included selling the monarch tens of millions of

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dollars' worth of weapons, which were mainly used for internal repression of opposition groups (Byrd 2011, pp. 12–13). Coupled with the Shah's "White Revolution," a series of modernizing reforms that overwhelmingly benefitted the wealthy and the Shah's family, Iranian society grew wrestles and was prepared for a messiah-like figure to deliver it from its travails. If not the return of the Shi'a Twelfth Imam from his "major occultation" (*al-ġaybat al-Kubra*), that earthly messiah-like figure would either come from a modern background or a traditional one, but he would inevitably have to be rooted in Shi'a Islam. The two men that filled that emancipatory role more so than anyone else were Sayyid Ruhollah Mūsavi Khomeini (Ayatollah Khomeini), the revolutionary Shi'a cleric, and Ali Shariati, the Shi'a intellectual dedicated to the renovation, modernization, and radicalization of Islam (Byrd 2011; Byrd and Miri 2017).

Biography

Ali Shariati was born in Mazīnān, a village near the desert in Khorâsân, into a long-standing clerical family. His father, Muhammad-Taqī Shariati Mazīnānī, studied theology at the holy city of Mashhad between 1927 and 1928, but did not finish. Although he was a scholar of Qurʾānic interpretation (*Tafsīr*), he followed a different, yet still religious, course of life; he became a teacher in the national education system and founded the Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths (*Kanun-i Nashr-i Haqa'iq-i Islami*), wherein he attempted to highlight the progressive aspects of Islam, demonstrating how they were compatible with modernity. According to his biographer, Rahnema (2008), Ali Shariati's father believed that "educated youth who would constitute the responsible citizenry of the future had to be exposed to an Islamic teaching compatible with the requirements of modern times" (p. 208). In doing so, he rejected the Western-oriented secularism that was growing in Iran as well as the petrified worldview of the Shi'a *'Ulamā'* (clerics). Although he saw certain aspects that were truthful, Mohammad-Taqī rejected the anti-religious Marxism that was prevalent among the intellectuals, especially those within the Tudeh Party (Iran's Communist Party). This reconciliation between secular leftist thought emanating from the Western philosophical tradition, and traditional Shi'a Islam, would have a lasting effect on Muhammad-Taqī's son Ali, who was continuously educated by his father throughout his childhood, as he was an active member of his father's center and fully participated in their activities. It was Ali's philosophical amalgamation of these two intellectual trends that would later make him the most important Iranian intellectual during the revolutionary period of the 1970s.

Although he was shy and a bit reclusive as an adolescent, preferring to study at home in his father's library, his intellectual capacity was never in question, as he showed interest in subject matters well beyond the traditional educational curriculum of Iran. His genius for such probing questions was augmented in the late 1940s when he began to read philosophical works, some of which were Western and anti-religious, such as Arthur Schopenhauer and Franz Kafka. According to Rahnema (2008), his study of heterodox works caused a severe crisis of faith, wherein "the thought of existence without God was so awesome, lonely and alien that life itself became a bleak and futile exercise" (p. 212). In the face of philosophical antinomies, he even contemplated suicide. It was only through his contemplation of Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī's *Masnavi* that he was pulled from the pit of despair.

In 1950, having finished the ninth grade, Shariati entered the Teacher Training College in Mashhad, graduating just 2 years later, and began teaching at a nearby high school. The existential angst that plagued him with the study of philosophy was put to rest. According to Rahnema (2008), it was Shariati's discovery of Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 652 CE), a companion to the Prophet Muhammad, which eased his anxiety about life, as it gave him an "epistemological medium [for] recognizing and defining the idea life and society" (p. 212). Often thought of as the first "Islamic socialist," Abū Dharr was an early convert to Islam in Mecca. He is remembered for his strict adherence to Islamic piety, his fierce

loyalty to the Prophet Muhammad, and his defense of 'Ali claim to succeed the prophet. After the prophet's death in 632 CE, he stood in opposition to Mu'āwiya, who later established the Umayyad dynasty of caliphs. Shariati's study of Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī was followed by the writing of two important books, *Tarikh-i Takamol-i Falsafe* (A History of the Development of Philosophy), which is commonly known as *Maktab-i Vaseteh-i Islam* (The Median School of Islam) and *Abu Zar-i Ghifari: Khoda Parast-i Sosiyalist* (Abū Dharr: The God-Worshipping Socialist). Both of these books attempted to augment Islam above other prevalent philosophical and political-economic ideologies while simultaneously interpreting their core ideas through an Islamic lens. In fact, the later book *Abu Zar-i Ghifari* explains succinctly the reconciliation of Islamic theology and socialist core of Islam that he was attempting to resurrect (Dabashi 2011, p. 53). He was especially concerned with the Islamic/Western encounter, arguing that Western colonialism weakened Islamic identity to the point that it could hardly resist Westernization. However, such Westernization had allies within Iran. By reflexively favoring all things Western, Iranian intellectuals did an enormous amount of damage to Iran's sense of self. It was the intellectuals' dependence on Western thought that drained Iran from creating its own modern identity from its own Islamic resources. This dependence on the West for its intellectual substance had to be remedied if Iran was ever to be truly independent.

Although he was critical of the West, Marxism, and other Western ideologies, these two books are an expression of Shariati's lifelong attempt to rejuvenate Islam in dialogue with Western thought. Additionally, by maintaining the importance of Islam within the context of Western modernity, globalization, and Western hegemony, his work filled a "spiritual vacuum" left by the secular Iranian intellectuals, one that was also distinct from the traditional Shi'a orthodoxy (Jackson 2006, p. 222). Because of this, his work spoke to both modernists and the religious.

Shariati's study of Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī was especially important to his life. His book was based on the radical Egyptian novelist Abu'l Hamid Jaudat al-Sahhar's Arabic text on the same subject, which the teenage Shariati had translated into Persian (Algar 2001, p. 88). In it, Shariati depicts Abū Dharr as a model for the real Muslim, one whose submission to God impels the believer to struggle against all forms of oppression, exploitation, and denigration. Rahnema writes that in Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, Shariati "creates a hero, a model and a symbol, who defied wealth, power and even religious authority to save the 'authentic' Islam of the poor, the oppressed and the socially conscious. One man against the mighty ruler of the Islamic empire" (2008, p. 213). Following the thought of Abū Dharr, Shariati believed that the success of the early Muslim empire caused the abandonment of the initial prophetic spirit of Islam. Islam became *affirmative*, in that it became worldly and invested in the status quo and in doing so relinquished its inherent *negativity*: its critique of the unjust world as it is. The division between affirmation and negation within religion would later become the dominant theme in his work *Religion* vs. *Religion.*

For Abū Dharr, the Islam of the Prophet Muhammad was constitutionally critical. Based in the central notion of *tawḥīd* (the "oneness of God"), Islam relentlessly called for justice in an unjust world; it demanded equality in an unequal society; it attempted to eradicate racism and tribalism; and it struggled against all forms of vice and corruption in governance. This was not the Islam of the Muslim ruling classes, who had become complacent in their opulent palaces since the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 CE). For Shariati, Abū Dharr followed in the footprints of the Prophet Muhammad, not as a prophet but as a revolutionary attempting to overthrow all conditions that debased humanity. As such, Abū Dharr was Islam's first "socialist" reformer – whose critique was forever the thorn in the side of the ruling class. Thus, in Abū Dharr, Shariati found a "universal revolutionary archetype" that he could personally follow (Dabashi 2011, p. 53). Abū Dharr was a socially committed Muslim who embodied all the progressive values of "authentic" Islam: "equality, fraternity, justice, and liberation" (Rahnema 2008, p. 213). Echoing the lessons his father taught him, Shariati's study of

Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī convinced him that those progressive social values that he was initially attracted to in his studies of Western Leftist philosophy were in fact constitutional values, principles, and ideals of the Islam of the prophet. These revolutionary concepts were not made in the West and imported into Iran as the secular Marxist intellectuals tended to argue but were rather central tenets of the Islamic tradition that had been buried under the weight of Shi'a conservatism, clerical quietism, and the compromise of Islam with the monarchy, capitalism, and imperialism. The task of the responsible Muslim intellectual, Shariati thought, was to resurrect and reload these prophetic ideals in an attempt to revive the religion of the Prophet Muhammad and continue the struggle against all forms of oppression. Thus, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī remained Shariati's personal model for revolutionary praxis for the rest of his life, and he continued to interpret Islam through the lenses of al-Ghifārī's radical critique of injustice. According to Rahnema, Shariati felt so close to the exemplar of Abū Dharr that he may have even believed himself to be some kind of "reincarnation" of him (2008, p. 214). Later, conservative clerics used Shariati's attachment to Abū Dharr as a source of ridicule, arguing that Abū Dharr was a "common thief" who only embraced Islam so he could share in the booty of conquest (Rahnema 2008, p. 214). Nevertheless, Abū Dharr remains today highly regarded, especially among the Shi'a.

The Mossadeq Years

While at the Teacher's Training College in Mashhad, he was a member of the God-Worshipping Socialists (*khudaparastan-i susialist*), a group of young men who espoused a modern Islamic nationalism that attempted to combine Islam with socialism and anti-imperialism. Outside of the classroom, Shariati's time in college was informative; it brought him into close contact with individuals from the lower classes, with whom he began to fully understand the real pain of poverty that was on the rise in Iran at the time. He also continued his routine of unconventional study, reading the works of both Islamic reformers, such as Sir Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, as well as other Western thinkers. The ideas of the God-Worshipping Socialists were distributed through Shariati's writings in the Mashhad daily newspaper, *Khorasan*, which called for the rejection and removal of capitalism and Iranian feudalism while rooting their critiques in teachings of Prophet Muhammad and 'Ali ibn Abū Ṭālib – the first "legitimate" successor to Muhammad according to the Shi'a. The God-Worshipping Socialists' demands for a more just society contributed to the growing unrest with the Shah's regime, which had become increasingly rigid with its own population and deferential to British oil interests.

In 1951, the Shah appointed the Iranian Nationalist Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq as Prime Minister of the *Majlis* (Parliament) in an attempt to appease the growing unrest. Shariati supported Mossadeq's reforms, which included the 1952 *Land Reform Act* and which redistributed a portion of the land from the landlords to the tenets; factory owners were forced to pay employee benefits, including unemployment, and peasants were liberated from forced labor. The most controversial reform of Mossadeq was his nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, wherein Britain lost its control of the extraction, production, and distribution of Iranian oil. Considering the oil stolen, Britain removed all its oil workers, enforced a blockade of Iranian oil exports, and pressured the United National Security Council to intervene on its behalf. With these and other measures fully implemented, Iranian oil production came to a halt, thus depriving Mossadeq of the funds he needed to continue his domestic reforms.

Having grown tired of Mossadeq's nationalism and his move toward socialism, which drew him further into the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, the British and the Americans hatched a plan to overthrow Mossadeq in a coup d'état. This was orchestrated by the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his younger brother, Allen Dulles, who was then the director of the CIA. "Operation Ajax," the plot to remove Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, was approved of by President Eisenhower and directed

in Tehran by Kermit Roosevelt, the grandson of US President Theodore Roosevelt. Conspiring with anti-Mossadeq elements of the government, conservative clerics, and the Shah, who had left Iran for the safety of Rome, Prime Minister Mossadeq was removed from office on August 19, 1953. On August 22, the Shah returned from his temporary exile and resumed power; this time he was massively supported by Britain and the United States, who in return received the near-exclusive rights to develop Iran's oil. While numerous individuals in Mossadeq's government were tortured and executed, the former Prime Minister's life was spared; he lived under house arrest in Ahmadabad until his death in 1967.

Shariati's support for Mossadeq's nationalism and socialism never waned, and his removal from power weighed heavily on him. Earlier in 1953, he had become a member of the Mossadeq's National Front and fully supported the socialist reforms that had been implemented. The coup d'état cemented in Shariati's mind the evils of the "trinity": the United States, the Pahlavi monarchy, and the conservative clerics, the latter of the two having sacrificed Islam for their own personal gain (Rahnema 2008, p. 216). Due to this interjection of imperial power and its alliance with reactionary religion, revolutionary Marxism, which condemned both imperialism and religion, continued to rise among the politicized youth. Being a part of this resistance movement, Shariati "coined and popularized" the catchphrase in Persian, *Zar-o Zoor-o Tazvir*, the "evil trinity" of "wealth, coercion and deceit" (Rahnema 2008, p. 216). This short phrase encapsulated the growing critique of the entrenched power of capitalism (wealth), the Shah, the ruling class, the imperialists (coercion), and the conservative Shi'a clerics that legitimated the unjust and tyrannical conditions (deceit) (Jackson 2006, p. 223).

As Shariati continued his engagement in political actions opposing the "evil trinity," mostly through demonstrations and writing for newspapers, he also continued his formal studies. In 1954, he passed his examination and received his diploma in literature. Soon after, he entered the University of Mashhad where he continued to study Arabic and French as well as Western thought, laying down the foundations for his progressive, modernist, and revolutionary interpretation of Islam, one that was more applicable to the turbulent events that had happened in the years prior (Abrahamian 1988, p. 291). As a member of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), he, as well as his father, was continually harassed by the Shah's government, and both were briefly arrested and imprisoned in 1957. In July of 1958, he married Pouran-i Shariat Razavi and in 1960 received his bachelor's degree in Persian literature. Seeing promise in this young scholar, Shariati was awarded a scholarship to study abroad at the Sorbonne in Paris. This began, in the words of Hamid Algar (2001), the "second formative period" in Shariati's life (p. 88).

The Paris Years (1960–1964)

Upon arrival in France, the provincial young scholar quickly suffered culture shock. Paris in the early 1960s both repelled him and fascinated him. Socially, he was appalled by the level of libertine decadence, with its sexual licentiousness, alcoholism, gambling, and devious nightlife. The secular society of Paris was a free and open society, one that was detached from any traditional moral systems closely associated with Abrahamic religions. For Shariati, conspicuous consumption and the relentless pursuit of pleasure attempted to fill the void where religion once stood, but it was a poor substitute. In his view, it made Parisians amoral, shallow, and hedonistic. Additionally, according to Rahnema (2008), Shariati saw Europe as a "pitiless iron monster," prepared to "swallow everyone despite their different cultures and identities" (p. 218). He witnessed how the great democratic amalgamation of cultures in cosmopolitan Paris led to the death of traditional beliefs and moral systems, creating a new kind of man that was neither Western nor of Eastern; he was a one-dimensional creature of Western capitalist modernity. On the other hand, Shariati found his time in Paris enlightening. He was drawn to the various world-class educational institutions, the scholars that animated them, and the dissident academic climate that filled the air in the local

coffee houses. Shariati would later write how indebted he was to his French professors for his academic enlightenment. Although he was already well-read for a young Iranian, these mainly Christian or atheist scholars challenged him to think beyond the confines of his intellectual provincialism. While remaining committed to his Shi'a convictions, Shariati began to see ever more clearly the universality of truth; if a claim was true in a Western philosophical framework, it then must also have validity within an Islamic framework, especially as it pertained to the conditions and nature of humanity. His discovery of truth both in Western thought and Shi'a Islam reinforced the education he received from his father and his work as a God-Worshipping Socialist and pro-Mossadeq activist.

While studying sociology and literature in Paris, Shariati came under the spell of a variety of social thinkers, whom he later called "idols," including the famed French Islamologist, Louis Massignon, who Shariati believed taught him the skills of inner critique or the ability to remain devoted to his Islamic faith while simultaneously being critical of it. The Christian mystic Massignon, according to Rahnema, served as Shariati's "Western substitute" for the poet and mystic Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, who was central to his spiritual formation back in Iran. Indeed, he likened his meeting to Massignon to Rūmī's meeting of his spiritual master, Shams-i-Tabrīzī, the wandering dervish that sparked Rumi's spiritual genius. Without the influence of the Catholic Massignon, Shariati believed he would have remained trapped in his "impoverished spirit, mediocre mind and stale vision" (Rahnema 2000, p. 121). From 1960 to 1962, Shariati served as Massignon's research assistant and developed a near-religious adoration of the senior scholar. According to Shariati's biographer, Ali Rahnema, the budding Iranian scholar's presence rekindled Massignon's Catholic faith, and Massignon's mystical and gnostic influence on Shariati allow him to overcome his own religious doubts (Rahnema 2000, pp. 122–123). Furthermore, Massignon's belief that all adherents to the Abrahamic religions were bonded in a fraternal unity greatly affected Shariati's views on Judaism and Christianity. Indeed, under the influence of Massignon, Shariati became religiously ecumenical. He believed that the prophet Abraham was the central axis point of the three faiths. Shariati even gave Abraham's iconoclasm a new meaning: following his example, especially when Abraham destroyed his father's idols, Shariati believed it was the role of the three Abrahamic faiths to destroy the idols of the modern world – the domination of the ruling class, social injustice, and economic inequality. The influence of Massignon, the Orientalist Catholic and spiritual guru of Shariati, can be seen throughout Shariati's later works.

After Massignon, Shariati became engrossed in the thought of George Gurvitch, a sociology professor at the Sorbonne who Shariati discovered was a Jewish-Russian émigré who fled Stalin's Soviet Union. A staunch supporter of Algerian independence, Shariati found in Gurvitch another model for being a professional intellectual and a social justice activist. Being captivated by Gurvitch's thought, in a defiant letter home to his father, Shariati even remarked that the Jewish ex-communist Gurvitch embodied the essence of Shi'ism more closely than Iran's senior clerics, who never sacrificed anything for their beliefs (Rahnema 2000, p. 123). Thus, the Jewish scholar who fought for social justice embodied the qualities of *tawḥīd* (radical monotheism), while the reactionary and "quietest" Shi'a clerics legitimized the rule of the polytheist (*shirk*) Pahlavi monarchy, thus betraying the essence of Islam. Shariati benefited greatly from Gurvitch's expansive knowledge of Marxism. It was in his time with Gurvitch that he began to understand Marx's philosophy from within, and in doing so, was able to critique Marx's deficiencies as well as appropriate those aspects of Marxism that ringed true. Many of Gurvitch's critiques of Marx, especially his materialist definition of class, would later end up in Shariati's public lectures, some of which were published by the Shah as a way of undermining Shariati's appeal to left-wing Iranian students (Algar in Shariati 1980, pp. 13–14). Nevertheless, it was during Shariati's time with Gurvitch that he studied Marxism and was able to rescue certain elements of dialectical

materialism that remained a fundamental part of his sociology of religion.

When one reads Shariati, one is often struck by the creative ways he interprets both Western and Islamic terms. Words that were once seen as the domain of conservative religion and politics are reinvented, reloaded with new symbolic meaning, and redeployed in the struggle against oppression and imperialism. Although he was always philosophically eclectic, this practice of salvaging and transforming stale concepts came from Shariati's brief engagement with the French Islamologist Jacques Berque, and his *degrée de signification* method, wherein the essential meaning of a word is identified, liberated from its formalism and traditionalism, and radically reignited. Rahnema (2000) explained this phenomenon in this way: "words could thus be transformed from passive means for idle chatter and tools of stupefaction into instruments for socio-political change. Berque had ignited something in Shariati. He took each commonly used term in the vocabulary of every Muslim and reinterpreted it until gentle lullabies became electric currents" (p. 126). Shariati became an expert in using Western philosophy to reclaim the original radical impulse of the Islamic lexicon; it was as if traditional Islamic verbiage became impregnated with a new revolutionary spirit. Many of his reclaimed words and phrases would end up linguistically defining the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979. Much of his radicalized vocabulary was appropriated and furthered by the religious leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, who, although he never publically admitted it, knew he owed much of his revolutionary rhetoric to Ali Shariati. For example, it was Shariati who transformed the otherwise somber Shi'a holiday of "*Āshūrā*," which marks the assassination of Imam Hossein ibn "Alī in *Karbalā*," Iraq, into a revolutionary slogan, propelling the masses to follow Hossein's revolutionary example and rebel against unjust authority: "Every day is 'Āshūrā', every land is Karbalā'."

While in Paris, Shariati participated and worked closely with many Algerian Independence groups and their leaders in exile and contributed numerous articles to their French language publications. In the course of these involvements, he became an avid reader of Frantz Fanon, the Martinique revolutionary psychiatrist and author of the 1952 book *Les Damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), which was a major influence throughout the Third World liberation movement. Fanon's work, especially his earlier book *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*), gave Shariati a framework for understanding the psychological alienation brought about by Western imperialism and how such alienation contributes to the domination of the West over the rest (Algar 2001, p. 89). Despite the fact that Fanon was thoroughly secular, his works pressed upon Shariati the need for colonized peoples to reject their blind mimicry of the West, embrace their own cultural resources, and create a new revolutionary identity out of the old that is both appropriate for modernity and capable of resisting the political, economic, and cultural hegemony of the colonizing nations. This task, Fanon insisted, and Shariati agreed, may include revolutionary violence (Fanon 1963, pp. 35–106). Most importantly, Shariati's engagement with the work of Fanon instilled in him the imperative for international solidarity that the colonized nations of the world, despite their cultural, religious, and linguistic differences, had to ban together in one anti-imperialist front. Along with three other Algerian sympathizers, Shariati began to translate Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* into Persian as *Mostazafin-i Zamin*. It was later published entirely under his name. Although Shariati invited Fanon to write a preface for his Persian translation of Fanon's 1959 book *L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne* (*Five Years of the Algerian War*), later published in English as *A Dying Colonialism*, such a preface never happened. However, there were three letters exchanged between the two men, wherein they discuss what is expected of an "authentic intellectual" and the role of religion in the struggle to emancipate the colonized Third World (Rahnema 2000, p. 127; Fanon 2018, pp. 667–669). After lamenting the divisiveness sectarianism brings into the global struggle against Western imperialism, Fanon writes to Shariati, "although my path diverges from, and is even opposed to, yours, I am persuaded that both paths will ultimately join up toward that

destination where humanity lives well" (Fanon 2018, p. 669). Despite their disagreements of the nature of religion and its potential to contribute to revolutionary change, both men agreed upon the ultimate destiny: the destruction of imperialism and the creation of nation-states free from foreign domination.

While finding a home in the intellectual milieu of Paris' left-wing philosophers, sociologists, and exiled revolutionaries, Shariati absorbed the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, which filled the air of the early 1960s Paris. Sartre's attempts to reconcile Marxism with existentialism greatly impressed Shariati, as it demonstrated the fruitfulness of philosophical cross-pollination, as well as the usefulness of Marx's class analysis. Sartre's philosophy, which argued that man is "condemned to be free," challenged Shariati to live an authentic life, taking full control of his destiny and full responsibility for its subsequent consequences. While he elevated Sartre's existentialism to the level of importance with socialism and Islam, he did not agree with the assumed foundations of Sartre's philosophy: materialism and atheism (Rahnema 2000, p. 127). Rather, Shariati insisted that man needed a moral and ethical guide, one that pronounced realistic absolutes. The relativism that animated Sartre's merely formal ethics would not lead to man's individual emancipation, but rather it would further his enslavement to his own desires. God, for Shariati, must ultimately determine what is right and wrong, not the "common sense" (*bon sens*) of individuals, as Sartre believed (Rahnema 2000, pp. 127–128). Nevertheless, according to the Iranian scholar Hamid Dabashi, it was through Shariati's combination of Frantz Fanon's anti-colonialism and his own interpretation of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism that he "championed the ideal of an autonomous and independent person fully in charge of history," and in doing so, became a real threat to both the "Pahlavi monarchy and the Shi'i clerical establishment" (Dabashi 2011, p. 269). Furthermore, the ongoing translation of the revolutionary ideas he acquired in Paris into Islamic concepts made him all the more a threat to the monarchical and clerical establishment, for he represented an alternative *Islamic* authority, one that reclaimed the charismatic and prophetic spark of primordial Islam, before it was routinized and institutionalized by the clerics. As such, his form of Islamic intellectualism avoided the pitfalls of the "assimilated intellectual," who knew all the latest philosophies of the West but couldn't relate to their own native culture nor the Iranian masses, and it avoided the reactionary quietism of the traditional Shi'i *'Ulamā'*. In addition to his own theoretical work, he had become convinced of the need for a revolutionary vanguard in Iran (Rahnema 2008, p. 224). Based on Régis Debray and Che Guevara's *Foco Theory*, which was born out of the guerilla experience of the Cuban Revolution on 1959, such a small cadre of highly trained revolutionaries and intellectuals would initiate and lead the nation in revolt against the corrupt regime. Understanding the threat that Shariati's call for revolution posed, the monarchy waited patiently for the prodigal son to return home.

The Revolutionary Scholar Returns Home (1964–1977)

In 1964, with his Ph.D. (in literature) in hand, Shariati was immediately arrested and imprisoned upon entering Iran for his subversive activities in France. After being detained in Azerbaijan, he was later transferred to Qezel Qal'eh prison near Tehran, in which he spent 1.5 months. For Hamid Algar (2001), Shariati was not a "dangerous opponent" of the Shah's regime for the normal reasons, but rather the monarch took notice of him "because of the role of leadership that he had exerted" and because of the "intellectual dimension" of his radical thought. Such thought, Algar states, "transcended the normal agitation and concentration on demonstrations and shouting of slogans that was current among the Iranian opposition abroad" (2001, p. 90).

Upon release, Shariati moved his family back to Mashhad in search of a university appointment (Rahnema 2008, p. 225). The first 3 years back Iran were disappointing to him; he could only find employment teaching in a variety of high schools. While he continued to develop his revolutionary

form of Shi'i Islam, he found that the audiences he had access to outside of a university setting were ill equipped to understand his analyses. Being away from Paris, the center of revolutionary intellectualism, was depressing, and he missed the stimulation of being in the center of it all. He kept himself busy translating Louis Massignon's book on Salmān al-Fārsī (Solomon the Persian), who was a compassion of Prophet Muhammad, and wrote his literary biography, *Kavīr* (*The Desert*), which spelled out his personal mission to liberate all the *wretched* of his country (Rahnema 2008, p. 227).

In 1967, Shariati was offered a position in the sociology department at the University of Mashhad (Algar 2001, p. 90). In an atmosphere of mediocrity, his genius for synthesizing both Islamic and Western ideas was on full display. His lectures were well attended, as the students were attracted to his knowledge of the West and the fact that he didn't disparage Iranian culture and Islam as so many other Western educated intellectuals did. In fact, he made it clear that his form of sociology wasn't "value-free," but rather was rooted in Islam and emancipatory thought, and was committed to reforming Iranian society (Algar 2001, p. 91). This was a formative period of Shariati's thought, as it gave him access to students who were both yearning for political change and concerned with the loss of authentic Iranian culture. Shariati stressed to his student the need for political-economic change in Iran, as well the need to return to Islam and a God-centered way of life. He argued that the young revolutionaries committed to undermining the status quo could not do so from a foreign perspective, but rather must root themselves in their own traditional Shi'i resources, as it would be through those religious resources that progress in society would occur. In other words, the "foreignness" of a Western, especially Marxian, analysis would limit an understanding of such an analysis to the intellectual class. However, to make the same analysis through Islamic terms would deliver the message to the entire Iranian population. What was needed was an "Islamization" of the analysis, and for that the students needed to return to their own culture. In this process, the quietism, conservativism, and reactionary nature of the Shi'i clerics would have to be challenged and eventually purged so that the revolutionary nature of Islam could be rescued and restored.

In pursuit of his consciousness raising goals, Shariati published one of his most important books in 1969: *Eslamshenasi* (*Islamology*). Based on his lectures at the University of Mashhad, in book Shariati first takes aim at the "assimilated intellectuals," charging them with being incapable of thought independent of their Western models, thus abandoning their Islamic, Iranian, and Shi'i roots. Based in his reading of authoritative sources of Shi'i Islam, the Qur'an, Sunnah (example) of Prophet Muhammad, the teachings of the Shi'i Imams, as well as the example of the first "four rightly guided Caliphs" (*al-Khulafā'u ar-Rāshidūn*), Shariati argued that *Eslamshenasi* served a tripartite purpose: (1) it argued for an modern Islam that paradoxically returned to its egalitarian and democratic roots; (2) it identified the barriers to reclaiming the original revolutionary spirit of Islam, including monarchy and the *'Ulamā'*, and (3) it forwarded the idea that it was an obligation of all true believers to struggle against the ills of modernity in the name of Islam's radical anti-idolatry monotheism (*Tawḥīd*) (Rahnema 2008, pp. 229–230). Furthermore, Shariati distinguished between two forms of Islam; the first is affirmative in nature, in that it is institutionalized and invested in the status quo; the second is negative in nature: it displays a dynamism that is critical of the status quo, which corresponds with the original emancipatory and liberational geist of Muhammad's religion. According to Rahnema, this recharging of Islam with its original negativity created many enemies for Shariati among the conservative Shi'i clerics (Rahnema 2008, p. 233). He cites Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Ansari as writing, "We warn the Royal government of Iran, the Iranian people and the Iranian clergy that during the past 1,000 years, the history of Islam and Shi'ite Islam has never encountered a more dangerous, dreadful and bolder enemy than Ali Shariati" (Rahnema 2008, p. 233). Islam, for Shariati, had to be wrenched away from its conservative caretakers, who used it for the purpose of social statics. He believed that it

must be returned to the people in order for it to once again be a source of social dynamics and radical change. Creating a cleavage between the conservative clerical establishment and Shi'i Islam was one of Shariati's main goals, and with the publication of *Eslamshenasi*, those clerics began to take notice of that growing cleavage.

In June of 1971, Shariati was released from his position at the University of Mashhad, and was sent to Tehran, the capital of Iran. Once there, he became a fixture at the Hosseiniyeh Ershād, a nontraditionalist religious institute that was established by the Iranian politician Nasser Minachi, and dedicated to actively changing Iran's state of affairs (Algar 2001, p. 91). Shariati believed that the Hosseiniyeh Ershād could become the spiritual center for his kind of modernist Islam. He frequently gave lectures there on a variety of topics, most of which were infused with the ideas he wrote about in *Eslamshenasi*. This was an especially formative time in Shariati's life, as his condemnation of the Shah and the clerical establishment was juxtaposed to the height of the Shah's arrogant rule. While the masses were grumbling, struggling under the weight of increased poverty, Westernization, the repression of the Shah's secret police (SAVAK), as well as the disastrous effects of the Shah's pro-Western reforms he dubbed the "White Revolution" (*Enqelāb-i Sefīd*), the Shah was being praised on the international stage for his management of Iran – the "island of stability" as the US President Jimmy Carter called it in 1977 (M.R.P. Shah 1967). Furthermore, the Shah never wasted a chance to praise the pre-Islamic Persian Empire, reminding his people that he and his regime were the inheritors of that glorious past. Iran, which had been a thoroughly Shi'i country for hundreds of years, saw little use for the legacy of the Persian Empire outside of a historical appreciation. Thus, as the Shah became more and more distant from the religious life and culture of the Iranian people, powerful forces were on the move, including Ali Shariati and his appeal to younger, disaffected, yet politically active Iranians, as well as the growing influence of the radical cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been expelled from Iran in 1964 by the Shah because of his critiques of the Pahlavi regime. It was at the Hosseiniyah Ershād that many of Shariati's most important lectures were transcribed and published in book form or disseminated by mimeograph, similar to Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches made during his exile from Iran (Keddie 1981, p. 216).

Shariati's tendency for binary thinking, which according to Hamid Algar is a by-product of his study of Marxism, appeared once again in his November, 1971, speech, "The Responsibility of being a Shi'a," wherein he distinguished between the "'Alawī Shi'a," who were the true followers of Imam 'Ali ibn Abū Ṭālib, and the "Safavid Shi'a," those who institutionalized Islam and made it into an ideology for the ruling class and an opium religion for the masses. In Shariati's time, those who followed the Shah, whom he believed to be a modern incarnation of Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya (647–683 CE), the murderer of Hossein ibn 'Ali (the prophet's grandson and third Shi'a Caliph), were the Safavid Shi'a *par excellence.* They had abandoned the true Islam of the poor, the broken, and the oppressed, for the Islam of the wealthy, the powerful, and the rulers (Rahnema 2008, p. 236; Algar 2001, p. 89; Keddie 1981, pp. 217–218). Although he had already rejected Che Guevara's *Foco Theory* of guerilla warfare as unsuitable for Iran, Shariati began to openly call for the removal of the Shah through a mass revolt of the people. Armed struggle, in the manner of 'Ali ibn Abū Ṭālib and Hossein ibn 'Ali, was the responsibility of every true believer, not just a small intellectual cadre, Shariati claimed. Martyrdom in the cause of justice was not to be rejected, but to be embraced, just as it was for the central figures in Shi'a Islam, who became the models for revolutionary Islamic praxis in Shariati's reading. Because of his open hostility toward the Shah's regime, the open calls for its removal, and the frequent street battles that Shariati's followers were involved in, the Hosseiniyah Ershād was forcibly closed down in 1972 (or 1973 depending on the source). Additionally, some of the highest ranking clerics wrote books attacking Shariati's "misleading and deceiving" interpretations of Islam (Rahnema 2008, p. 237). With the urging of these and many other senior clerics, Shariati's works were confiscated and banned, although they continued

to circulate both in Iran and abroad (Jackson 2006, p. 224; Keddie 1981, p. 223). His life being continually threatened, Shariati attempted to evade SAVAK by going into self-imposed hiding. However, after the arrests of his family members, including his father, were used as leverage against him, he eventually surrendered in September of 1973. He was imprisoned for 18 months in Komiteh prison, spending most of that time in solitary confinement.

Refusing to publically recant his anti-Shah, anticleric, and anti-imperialist positions, the Shah's regime resurrected one of Shariati's old lectures (1967) entitled *Ensan*, *Eslam*, *va Maktabha-i Maqrebzamin* (*Man*, *Islam*, *and Western Schools of Thought*), in which Shariati condemned Marxism and other revolutionary political philosophies as being incompatible with Islam and published it in the newspaper *Keyhan*, giving the impression that Shariati had rejected his radical thought while in prison (Rahnema 2008, p. 239). Although he did criticize Marxism for reducing mankind to a mere units of production, Shariati never rejected all aspects of Marxism, nor did he change his mind about the Shah while imprisoned. He remained steadfast in his demand for the overthrow of the Peacock Throne. Additionally, he did not view Marxism as a being an ideological threat to Islam, rather it was a secular competitor, since both were inherently anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist. It was *limited* due to its lack of what he thought were humanistic values, as well as its dogmatic anti-religious stance, but in its class analysis, Marxism was at its core truthful (Jackson 2006, p. 224).

From when he was released in March of 1975, to when he fled Iran in May 1977, Shariati lived a life of isolation. While the revolt against the Shah was increasingly growing, so too was the stature of Ayatollah Khomeini, who was still influencing much of the Shah's opposition from his exile in Najaf, Iraq, and in doing so becoming the unofficial leader of the coming revolution. Through his students and associates in Iran, Khomeini, who had also criticized the apolitical stance of clerical "quietism," had come into contact with Shariati's work, which later proved to be quite influential on the senior Ayatollah. Meanwhile, Shariati's influence was still growing despite the fact that he was effectively barred from participating actively in the protests and demonstrations. Nevertheless, his writings at the time reflected his isolation, as he became more introspective, examining both love and mysticism as aspects within the sociopolitical realm (Rahnema 2008, p. 241). During this time, he laid down his definitive philosophy of religion, which condemned capitalism and the bourgeois values that it exports around the world, as well as the imperial powers that impose such social arrangements of less powerful nations. In opposition to the liberal world order, he argued for a just society, an ideal society, which is defined by a form of Islamic socialism predicated on a true and devout devotion to God (Rahnema 2008, p. 242).

Exile and Death (1977)

Without the permission from the Shah's government, on May 16, 1977, Shariati fled Iran for the safety of London. Alerted of his absence, the SAVAK arrested his wife Pouran and their 6-year-old daughter Mona but allowed their two older daughters, Soosan and Sara, to fly to London unaccompanied. Shariati, wracked by fear of what the SAVAK would do to his wife and children, retrieved his two daughters at Heathrow, but could not spend much time with them: his body was found dead the next morning, June 19, 1977 (Keddie 1981, p. 216). While the official cause of death was determined to be the result of a heart attack, many believe that Shariati's mysterious and sudden death came at the hands of SAVAK, which had a long reach outside of Iran. Although the Shah denied it, very few of Shariati's closest associates believed that this committed enemy of imperialism, at the age of 43, wasn't murdered upon the order of the Shah. Because he died a believing Muslim within a just struggle against tyranny, he was bestowed the title "martyr" (*shahīd*) by the Iranian people (Algar 2001, p. 93). Nevertheless, Shariati's body was not returned home to Iran but rather was flown to Damascus, where he was buried within the

compound of Sayyīdah Zaynab Mosque, close to the tomb of Zaynab, the daughter of ʻAli and the Prophet Muhammad's granddaughter. The shrine/mosque complex is the center of Shi'a religious studies in Syria and is a pilgrimage site for Shi'i and Iranian pilgrims. Although he was removed from being an active agent in the fall of the Shah and the ousting of the United States in Iran, his works, especially the revolutionary spirit that he infused into traditional Islamic vocabulary, continued on until the overthrow of the Shah in January of 1979 (Jackson 2006, p. 226). According to Nikki R. Keddie, after the death of Shariati, his books were "sold everywhere, by the hundreds of thousands," not only in the capital of Tehran but also in the holy city of Qum, as well as Mashhad, where he spent much of his life (Keddie 1981, p. 223). Even in the small provincial villages that didn't have bookstores, one could find copies of Shariati's books, as he had grown into a "mythical figure of militant Islam," martyred for the liberation of his people (Keddie 1981, p. 223).

Major Themes of Ali Shariati's Anti-Imperialist Sociology of Religion

When one reads Shariati, one has to bear in mind that he is dedicated to two revolutions: the first is the rebirth of Shi'a Islam as a transformative force within the modern world. Second, he is dedicated to the overthrow of the Shah and removal of the imperial power of the United States in Iran's affairs. Academically, Ali Shariati is best known as a sociologist of religion. Although he was not trained in any of Iran's prestigious seminaries, some scholars, including John Esposito, believe that Shariati is best understood as an Islamic liberation theologian (Shariati 1986, p. xi). Drawing from many different sources, his theoretical analyses of various religious phenomena were eclectic, and for that he was often criticized by traditional Shi'i authorities for his use outside sources, including Sunni jurisprudence and Western philosophy. Although his work was expansive, there are a few distinct themes that run throughout Shariati's work that are key to understanding his overall sociology of religion and how it pertains to his involvement in Iran's revolution.

In a series of lectures entitled *Religion* versus *Religion* (*Mazhab ʻAlyhi Mazhab*), Shariati demonstrates the dialectical nature of the historical religions. Similar to Marx's claim about class struggle, Shariati argues that all of history is a history of religious warfare, wherein one form of religion opposes another, and in a Hegelian sense, one determinately negates (*aufhaben*) the other. In order to illustrate this claim, Shariati reminds us that the Arabic word "*kāfir*," which is generally translated as "atheist" or "non-believer," came into the Islamic lexicon in seventh-century Arabia, when there was no such thing as a non-religious society or individual; all individuals believed in some form of divinity, as atheism is a modern phenomenon. Thus, the struggle between the believers and the *kāfirūn* (disbelievers) is not between religious voices and atheists, but rather between religious voices and other religious voices; it is between the religion of *tawḥīd* (radical monotheism) against the religion of *shirk*, the Arabic term for polytheism, or what Shariati says is the "enslavement of humanity in bondage to the idols," whatever those idols may be within a given time and place (Shariati 2003, p. 30). On the face of it, it would seem that his tendency for binary thinking has pitted one religion against another. On closer look, Shariati's view is more sectarian and interreligious. He argues the following:

> Two basic religions have existed in history, two groups, two fronts. One front has been oppressive, an enemy of progress, truth, justice, the freedom of people, development and civilization. This front which has been to legitimate greed and deviated instincts and to establish its domination over the people and to abase others was itself a religion, not disbelief or non-religion. And the other front was that of the rightful religion and it was revealed to destroy the opposite front. (Shariati 2003, p. 61)

Shariati maintains that these "two basic religions" are essentially two basic forms that can be found *within* the same religion. One form is *affirmative*, in that it invests itself into the status quo; it is worldly; it rejects revolution; it is "priestly" in that it's authority is routinized; it justifies and helps maintain the social structure as it is: it is

the religion of the ruling class. In the hands of the masses, such an affirmative religion is what Marx says religion is: opium (Byrd 2018, pp. 118–120; Shariati 2003, p. 35). In their opiated condition, Shariati states that "people surrender to their abjectness, difficulties, wretchedness and ignorance, surrender to the static situation which they are obliged to have, surrender to the disgraceful fate which they and their ancestors were obliged to have and still have – an inner, ideological surrender" (Shariati 2003, p. 35). In light of this form of ruling-class religion, Shariati argues for a different kind of Islam, one with an active social conscience. In his *Eslamshenasi*, he states that

> It is not enough to say we must return to Islam. We must specify which Islam: that of Abu Zarr [Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī] or that of Marwan the Ruler. Both are called Islamic, but there is a huge difference between them. One is the Islam of the caliphate, of the palace, and of the rulers. The other is the Islam of the people, of the exploited, and of the poor. Moreover, it is not good enough to say that one should be "concerned" about the poor. The corrupt caliphs said the same. True Islam is more than "concerned." It instructs the believer to fight for justice, equality, and elimination of poverty. (Shariati in Abrahamian 1988, p. 295)

The influence of Marx's class analysis is apparent in much of Shariati's work, although he was critical of the "vulgar Marxism" pushed by the Soviet Union and adopted by many anti-religion Iranian intellectuals.

Against the affirmative polytheistic form of religion is prophetic religion, which is inherently *negative*, as it is *contra mundum* (against the world as it is); it seeks revolutionary change; it maintains the recalcitrant spirit of the prophets; it is critical of the prevailing social structure, and it opposes all forms of opiate religion. For Shariati, the role of the true believer, who follows the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), is to unveil the polytheism that hides behind the hijab of monotheism (Shariati 2003, p. 55). He writes, [the believer] "must be able to distinguish the religion of multitheism under the deceitful mask of monotheism and remove this covering of hypocrisy – whatever form it has taken – throughout the world" (Shariati 2003, p. 57). Therefore, Shariati believes that religion must be self-critical, willing to look within itself in order to purify itself of all reactionary, oppressive, and idolatrous pollutants, which he saw in the "quietest" clerics of Iran, who were unwilling to join their fellow Iranians in their struggle against the idolatrous Shah (Abrahamian 1988, pp. 295–296). For Shariati, the only way to be faithful to the emancipatory religion of Prophet Muhammad was to struggle against the modern idolatry created by reactionary clerics, capitalism, monarchy, and imperialism, which made false idols out of status, money, privilege, and power.

Debate continues as to how Shariati ultimately related to Western philosophy, especially Marxism, with some scholars, such as Hamid Algar, believing that Shariati studied Marxism ultimately to undermine it from within, whereas other scholars, such as Ervand Abrahamian, believing that Shariati "synthesiz[ed] modern socialism with traditional Shi'ism" (Abrahamian 1988, p. 289). Ali Gheissari argues that when Shariati invoked the term "Islam," he meant "Shi'ism combined with an eclectic synthesis of non-Muslim and non-Iranian ideas" (Gheissari 1998, p. 97). Despite the varying opinions, an objective reading of Shariati's work cannot fail to see the large degree of influence that Marxism, neo-Marxism, and other forms of radical left-wing thought had on his understanding of Islam and his analyses of Iran and Western imperialism. The vocabulary of Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, and Jean-Paul Sartre is ever-present in Shariati's books and speeches, although obscured by an Islamic veil. Although he deployed their concepts, he did not simply accept Western thought uncritically, but consciously discarded what he thought was untrue or was not applicable to Iran, while preserving what was truthful and applicable through a process of Islamization. According to Hamid Dabashi, Shariati "internalize[ed] and digest[ed] the revolutionary projects" of rival ideologies and in the process "Islamize[d] them" (Dabashi 2011, p. 273). In this sense, Shariati allowed the categories of Western emancipatory thought to enliven, enrich, and resurrect what he determined was the original revolutionary spirit of Islam, especially Shi'a Islam, which had gone dormant under the

domination of the apolitical clerics, corrupt Islamic empires, and Western modernity. According to Dabashi, Shariati's creative engagement with "wider emancipatory movements" rescued Shi'ism from its "sectarian cul de sac," thus giving new life to old ideas (Dabashi 2011, p. 300). It is interesting to note that Western philosophy, especially political philosophy, has since its inception determinately negated religion, wherein certain religious ideas would be translated into secular political ideas. For example, the idea of Christian charity (*caritas*) became the basis for the welfare state, and the belief that all humans are created in the "image of God" (*Imago Dei*) became the basis of universal human rights. In the case of Shariati, the determinate negation went in the other direction: secular philosophy was translated into religion, which was more appropriate for the still-religious country of Iran in the 1970s.

Shariati's attempt to revivify (*tajdīd*) Shi'a Islam distinguishes him from other Third World revolutionaries, who followed more closely Marx's arguments about religion being a barrier to political emancipation. For example, Shariati disagreed with Frantz Fanon's position that in order for a people to emancipate themselves from their colonial masters, they must abandon their religious identity, as such identity is inherently reactionary and divisive. Shariati argued that oppressed peoples must rediscover and return to their cultural roots, their cultural identities, and their inherited religions, as such authentic resources would be the basis of resistance to Western cultural, political, and economic hegemony (Abrahamian 1988, p. 291). Psychologically, they must define who they are, and regain their "sense of belonging" (*ta'assob*), or they will be defined by the West (Gheissari 1998, pp. 99–100). If they have no independent sense of self, and their identity is fractured or ill-defined, they have no capacity to resist how the West will define them according to their self-interests. Shariati was especially concerned that the Iranian intelligentsia (*rushanfekran*) return to their cultural roots, as it was the role of the intellectuals to guide the masses to their emancipation (Abrahamian 1988, p. 292; Byrd 2018). They're uncritical "assimilation" to Western standards was a precondition for a successful Western takeover of the Third World.

While Shariati's work did influence numerous Iranian intellectuals, the most important person it influenced was Ayatollah Khomeini, the radical Shi'a cleric who would eventually come to lead the Iranian revolution from his exile. While he did not discount the role that the Shi'a clerics *could* have in the Iranian revolution, he did not expect that one would become its unquestioned leader. As can be witnessed in his fiery speeches, Khomeini learned a lot from the nonclerical "liberation theologian," who was just as critical of the quietism of the clergy as Khomeini was. Not only did Khomeini resists his fellow clerics' demand that Shariati be condemned on the account that he distorted the Shi'a tradition, according to Abrahamian, Khomeini himself began to adopt the class-consciousness-infused language that Shariati had Islamized (Abrahamian 1993, p. 47; Moin 1999). Abrahamian writes that under the influence of Shariati, Khomeini

> depicted society as formed of two antagonistic classes (*tabaqat*): the oppressed (*mostazafin*) and the oppressors (*mostakberin*). In the past, Khomeini had rarely used the term mostazafin, and when he had, it had been in the Koranic sense of "the meek," "the humble," and "the weak." He now used it to mean the angry "oppressed masses," a meaning it had acquired in the early 1960s when Shariati and his disciples translated Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as *Mostazafin-e Zamin* (Abrahamian 1993, p. 47).

The clear parallels to Marx's ruling class and the proletariat are evident in this and many more of Khomeini's public announcements. A class analysis, as opposed to a sectarian analysis, saturated Khomeini's anti-Shah lectures and speeches, in which he used the precise terms that Shariati devised. However, Khomeini brought clerical authority to the language and analysis, whereas Shariati forwarded a nonclerical "reformist" type of prophetic authority. With Khomeini, Shariati's "eclectic synthesis" of Western philosophy and Shi'ism penetrated and radicalized many traditional clerics, who were willing to following Khomeini's lead against the Shah where they resisted following the layman Shariati, who, by

virtue of his religious critique, trespassed upon their territory (Byrd 2011, pp. 98–102).

Conclusion

Although Ali Shariati is not well-known in the west, as his reputation was eclipsed by the revolutionary Shi'a cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, he was nevertheless one of the most influential intellectuals of the twentieth century. His thoughts and ideas, which were born both in the *dār al-Islam* (abode of Islam) and the west, animated one of the twentieth century's most impactful revolutions. However, the form of Islamic radicalism he forwarded was, like his reputation, eclipsed by the theocratic regime that followed the 1979 Revolution. His "Islamic socialism" gave expression to those who wanted to create an Islam that was both modern and committed to maintaining the radical truths of Islam. Today, his form of Islamic radicalism has unfortunately been overshadowed by the violent extremism of terrorist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), who share very little of Ali Shariati's commitment to the Islamic values of peace (*salaam*) and justice (*'adl*). Unlike these terrorist groups, Shariati represents a future-oriented remembrance of the primordial Islam, with the practical intent to rejuvenate (*tajdīd*) the original progressivity of the Islamic tradition, especially its commitment to the poor, the oppressed, and the discarded. Thus, Shariati's gaze at the past was always in service to the future. By fusing the concept of *tawḥīd* and social justice, which included his uncompromising opposition to imperialism, he embodied the original *contra mundum* spirit of Prophet Muhammad and his mission to overturn the injustices of his time and place. Ultimately, while Shariati may not be the figure whose image adorns the walls of Iran, his influence on a generation of revolutionary Iranians cannot be diminished nor forgotten.

Cross-References

- ▶ Fanon, Frantz
- ▶ Karl Marx and Imperialism
- ▶ Middle East, Socialism, and Anti-Imperialism
- ▶ Nationalisation
- ▶ Orientalism
- ▶ Pan-Arabism and Iran

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