



# **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES**

JOURNAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

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## **Ideology in Globalized Critical Theory and its Methodologies: Presence, Utilizations, & Reflections**

Joseph Alagha and Krikor Ankeshian

### **Abstract**

The prominence of ideology cannot be overstated in modern society. In Globalized Critical Theory, ideology has multifold interpretations, centering around false consciousness that perpetuates systems domination. We trace the conceptual development of ideology, emphasizing its metamorphosis from early modernity to contemporary Critical Social Theory. In particular, we study intellectuals such as Slavoj Žižek and Louis Althusser. Throughout their magnum opuses *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and *Ideological State Apparatus*, Žižek and Althusser present nuanced interpretations of ideology and its omnipresence. In this respect, we argue for the presence of ideology in Globalized Critical Social Theory and its methodologies, alongside its impacts. In contrast to the descriptive orientation of traditional theory, critical theory has normative inclinations towards “justice” and “equality.” Sometimes, this teleological normativity seems to sacrifice rigor and misdirect pessimism towards method, viz science. We examine cases of the aforementioned, including Edward Said’s magnum opus *Orientalism*; Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and the legacies they leave on Globalized Critical Theory today. Utilizing Hans Georg Moeller’s analysis of prolificity, we construe a spirit of ideology in modern German identity. Finally, we identify what Habermas calls “performative contradictions” in Globalized Critical Social Theory, as pertaining to the following three issues: (1) methodology and objectivity; (2) identity; and (3) interests. This

can be useful in the work of critical analyses to generate a more precise and nuanced reading of human society. We propose revising the distribution of weight between accuracy and teleology, through non-static/dynamic relational thinking. It seems that regardless of the general argument, without accurate descriptions, most normative propositions are bound to be questionable.

**Keywords:** Ideology, Globalized Critical Social Theory, Identity, Methodology, Performative Contradiction

### *Introduction*

The prominence of ideology cannot be understated in modern Globalized Critical Social Theory. The interpretations of ideology in critical theory are many, centered around “false consciousness” that allows perpetuating systems of power and domination. In this paper, we trace the conceptual historical development of the concept, emphasizing its metamorphosis from early modernity, i.e., the French Enlightenment, to current Globalized Critical Social Theory. We discuss what we consider to be modern German ideology. We examine central works dealing with ideology, including Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) and the legacies they leave on Globalized Critical Theory today. In addition, we cover Marxist intellectuals such as Slavoj Žižek and Louis Althusser. Throughout their magnum opuses, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) and *Ideological State Apparatuses* (1969–70), Žižek and Althusser present nuanced interpretations of ideology, arguing for its omnipresence. In this respect, a central question emerges pertaining to the presence of ideology in Globalized Critical Social Theory, in general, and Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory, in particular, and their methodologies. Various instances present themselves throughout the discourse, vis-à-vis methodology and the social sciences. For example, (1) sacrificing rigor and misdirecting pessimism towards method, viz., scientific and social scientific method; (2) Performative contradictions vis-à-vis objectivity, identity, and interests; (3) alternative and jargon fetishism, as well as over-textualization. This can be useful in the work of critical analyses towards a more precise and balanced reading of society and its forces. We propose revising the conceptualization of methodology and the susceptibility of theory to be consumed by ideology. It is necessary to challenge ideology through a rigorous method if the field is to produce serious results.

*What is Ideology?*

As a concept of illusory breadth, it is difficult to pinpoint an exact definition of Ideology. In general, ideology is conceptualized as the beliefs or ideas held by individuals or groups in relation to various phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Ideology can be understood as social or political thought that places the practical and the theoretical on par.<sup>2</sup> It is a lens through which one can try to explain and understand the world, often based on certain presumptions. There are often differences in the theory and praxis of ideology, and between various adherents to the same ideology. The term can be credited to the French enlightenment philosopher Destutt de Tracy. Originally, the term refers to a “science of ideas,” what constitutes ideas and their interrelation.<sup>3</sup> In social science, ideology is often used normatively, i.e., to ascribe an “ought” to a particular phenomenon. According to Honderich, the normative use often includes both a “style of explanation” and a “style of criticism.”<sup>4</sup> In the former, the presence of certain values and ideas is construed in terms of their teleological utility, both for its adherents and society. This teleological role is often unrelated to truth or knowledge. The teleological end can be defined and is contingent upon the fulfillment of specific group interests or social norms that promote stability and support the status quo. The latter, i.e., criticism, puts to question prevalent values and ideas. To construe these ideas, a socio-politico-economic interest-centric approach or explanation is utilized, which is often unknown to the individuals holding these ideas.<sup>5</sup>

*Ideology in Globalized Critical Social Theory and Critique of Ideology*

In Globalized Critical Social Theory, the term “ideology” is often used and understood in its Marxist connotation. In their book, *The German Ideology* (1932), Marx and Engels conceptualize ideology as “false consciousness.”<sup>6</sup> Ideology, as the self-justification of political forces and the status quo, can be understood as representing

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<sup>1</sup> Ted Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 392-393.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Cranston, “Ideology.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ideology-society>.

<sup>3</sup> Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 392-393.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> This specific phrase can be attributed to Engels’ framing in a later letter.

the various interests of the ruling elite.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Marx and Engels radically reversed the meaning of ideology.<sup>8</sup> In the Marxist understanding of society, ideology is the superstructure to the base of the material factors and interests within the society. Marx and Engels apply this reading to societies with different modes of production, such as feudalism and capitalism. Thus, for them, ideology justifies and perpetuates the dominant mode of production.<sup>9</sup> In modern society, in tune with Marx and Engel's critique, various social and political ideologies are still utilized to justify capitalism. To capture this idea, one needs to look at Slavoj Žižek's proposition inspired by Frederic Jameson: "Nobody seriously considers possible alternatives to capitalism any longer... It seems easier to imagine the 'end of the world' than a far more modest change in the mode of production..."<sup>10</sup> This can also be seen in the push by various modern political philosophies (cf. neoliberalism, right wing libertarianism, social democracy (capitalism with regulations), etc.) towards a tendency to imagine capitalism as a reflection of human nature, viz., an ahistorical, acontextual, and atemporal concept. This naturalizes the social status quo, framing it as inevitable.<sup>11</sup> The aforementioned example is an attempt to demonstrate false consciousness, and not an inherent value judgement vis-à-vis capitalism. This is as capitalism, when analyzed dialectically — similar to any other mode of production — has its benefits and detriments vis-à-vis various needs, interests, and ends in society.

Here, Antonio Gramsci, whose *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935) are widely utilized in Globalized Social Critical Theory, is also relevant. Of a Marxist persuasion, Gramsci's "cultural hegemony" posits that dominant forces and regimes, alongside utilizing material coercion, maintain power through ideology, i.e., cultural coercion.<sup>12</sup> It is difficult to separate the social from the political, the political from the economic, and the social from the cultural. Through culture, the groups in power

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1932), 38-39, 61-62; Emmet Kennedy, "Ideology from Destutt De Tracy to Marx," *Journal of History and Ideas* 40, no. 3 (1979): 368. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2709242>

<sup>8</sup> Dominique Colas, "Ideology," *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, ed. B. Badie, (2011), 1143-1146.

<sup>9</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*.

<sup>10</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. S. Žižek (New York: Verso Books, 1994), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 392-393.

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers. 1971).

normalize their interest values into acceptable common norms, pushing the idea that their interests coincide with those of the lower classes, thus making change difficult.<sup>13</sup> When a foreign nation exercises “cultural hegemony” or force on “indigenous” inhabitants, “cultural colonialism” or “cultural imperialism” arises. Gramsci also suggested the idea of “counter hegemony,” whereby individuals belonging to lower classes, viz., the proletariat, are educated to develop, as argued by Georg Lukács,<sup>14</sup> “class consciousness.”<sup>15</sup> Here, Gramsci centralizes the educational role of the intellectuals vis-à-vis the proletariat in identifying the patterns of bourgeois ideology, thus identifying the status of mainstream cultural standards as social constructions serving the material dominion of the elite. Therefore, intellectuals are deciding factors in the outcomes of “counter hegemony,” as they influence public opinion and socio-political shifts.<sup>16</sup>

Inspired by Marx and Marxists such as Gramsci, some theorists from the Frankfurt school conceptualize ideology as a structure of communication that is coerced by interests and power relations.<sup>17</sup> Thus, ideology is a misconstruing of agents’ action relations in the real world. Jürgen Habermas, one of the most prominent social scientists of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries, proposed the concept of “ideological critique,” i.e., the interference of social structures and institutions with communication, whereby certain prevalent ideas survive due to coercion, thus disallowing open and clear discussion.<sup>18</sup> In later sections, we will further discuss conceptions of

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<sup>13</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 1971; Anne Sassoon, “Hegemony,” in *The Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. T. Bottomore, Laurence Harris, V. G. Kiernan, and R. Miliband (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 229-231.

<sup>14</sup> Although Marx laid the foundations for the concept of class consciousness, it was Lukács who articulated and developed a theory of class consciousness. This can be seen in his seminal book entitled, *History and Class Consciousness* (1968), whereby he demarcates the line between the objective situation of a given class within the socio-economic hierarchy vis-à-vis the subjective awareness of this class of their given situation.

<sup>15</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*; Luis Miguel Carolina and Carlor Ziller Camenietzki, “‘O pobre Intelectual’: Manuel Lourosa, Astronomy, and the Political Restoration of Portugal in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Cultural Hegemony in a Scientific World: Gramscian Concepts for the History of Science*, ed. M. Badino and P. D. Omodeo (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 168-174.

<sup>16</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*; Carolina and Camenietzki, “O pobre Intelectual,” 168-174.

<sup>17</sup> Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 392-393.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

ideology in the Frankfurt school through Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944).

In line with the Marxist and Frankfurt School understandings, Globalized Critical Social Theory often questions different forms of ideology within society. In the case of Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory, there is often a critique of various social-politic-economic and cultural power relations, reinforced by, and propagated by, ideology. For example, generalizing and universalizing conceptions of what an “ideal” culture, individual, or “behaviors” is/are or should be. This is related to Eurocentrism and the tendency of groups, institutions, philosophies, and media to centralize the European as the ideal on all fronts, while the non-European or the “third world” is peripheralized.<sup>19</sup> For us, it is important to emphasize these often overlooked or under-discussed problems in modern academic discourse.

However, Globalized Critical Social Theory, in general, and Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory in particular, do not escape the “specter of ideology.”

### *German Ideology Today*

Before elaborating upon our aforementioned claim, let us consider some modern examples of ideology. We will emphasize a reading by the German philosopher Hans Georg Moeller. Moeller discusses what he calls “guilt pride,” a core tenant of German identity today. Moeller traces “guilt pride” to Christianity, however, he argues that its modern secularized form is German.<sup>20</sup> This phenomenon can be seen globally, and has various political utility, i.e., central to the formation of a common political identity. Moeller traces this back to Nazism, whereby after the fall of Hitler's regime, the reputation of the country plummeted. Despite this setback, Germany managed to remedy its tarnished reputation relatively quickly. Moeller argues that alongside their economic and political utility, “guilt pride” is a crutch for the German identity that provides new national confidence.<sup>21</sup> This is as pre-unification, the Eastern German approach of “Anti-Fascism” and the Western German approach of

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<sup>19</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Garry Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2013), 43-44, 269.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Georg Moeller, “Guilt Pride: A German Vanity Project Conquering the World,” June 1, 2025, [https://youtu.be/Vy2ju\\_qPtUM?si=FEto0KsrNm63qKPT](https://youtu.be/Vy2ju_qPtUM?si=FEto0KsrNm63qKPT)

<sup>21</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

atonement, restorative justice, and overcoming the past, seemed to be insufficient.<sup>22</sup> Thus, a “culture of remembrance,” through “guilt pride,” i.e., perpetual inherited responsibility for the Nazi heritage, can be considered a “civil religion” or ideology that replaced the aforementioned approaches. For Moeller, this approach frames expressing guilt of past atrocities by previous generations as heroic.<sup>23</sup> This seems inherently good; it is necessary to acknowledge wrongdoings and enforce accountability. However, this order of accountability seems distorted in Germany, as it has shifted from taking responsibility to claiming moral “superiority” and “righteousness.” To diagnose what he calls a German “superiority complex,” Moeller emphasizes identity construction technologies, calling this new German identity “post-authentic.”<sup>24</sup>

In their research, Moeller and D’ambrosio identify three main forms of identity building technologies, “sincerity,” “authenticity,” and “proficility.”<sup>25</sup> Sincerity is the oldest of the three, whereby it is characterized by an adherence to pre-defined social norms and ascribed/designated roles. For example, in a traditional family, the woman would embrace the role of the “good wife.”<sup>26</sup> This can still be seen in modern society, although much less frequently, e.g., with athletes and professionals, or in the context of religious identity and community. On the other hand, authenticity is related to “first-order observation,” whereby one stays true to him/herself. In authenticity, identity is constellated through what one observes, and their honest and original expressions vis-à-vis these observations.<sup>27</sup> However, it is difficult to be original and authentic, as almost everything one does relies on observation and imitation, with originality itself becoming standardized or “unoriginal” if everyone tries to be original. Thus, there are difficulties with “originality,” particularly in the age of technology, internet, and social media. Thus, Moeller and D’Ambrosio propose a “profile approach” to identity, viz., proficility. Proficility

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<sup>22</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “Germany and the Holocaust.” In *The Cambridge History of The Holocaust Vol. IV: Aftermath, Outcomes, Reparations*, ed. L. Jockusch and D. O. Pendas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), 215-233. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108990172.011>

<sup>23</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>24</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>25</sup> Hans Georg Moeller and Paul D’Ambrosio, *You and Your Profile: Identity After Authenticity* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2021), 10-17.

<sup>26</sup> Moeller and D’Ambrosio, *You and Your Profile*, 10-17.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Georg Moeller and Paul D’Ambrosio, “Sincerity, Authenticity and Proficility: Notes on the Problem, a Vocabulary and a History of Identity,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 45, no. 5 (2018): 576-580. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453718799801>

or profile building is a post-authentic form of identity construction, the main tenant of which is “second-order observation.”<sup>28</sup> This is where the individual or collective utilizes their understanding of others’ perspectives and impressions of them and the world. Based on these, they build an identity that appeals to the other. In practice, this is just a portrayal and not necessarily real/authentic, i.e., a profile.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the German profile of “guilt pride” seems to be inauthentic and can be considered as showmanship and vanity. As Moeller puts it, it is institutionalized and passed down through education and media.<sup>30</sup>

Moeller points out that during the popularization of “guilt pride,” many of the participants and/or supporters of the Nazi atrocities have died, with mostly the newer generation embracing “guilt pride.” For example, the leftist novelist Martin Walsers was “cancelled” for his speech expressing discomfort with what he considered excessive display of “German disgrace.”<sup>31</sup> Walsers was framed as “insensitive” and a “Nazi sympathizer.” For Moeller, and probably also for Walsers, “guilt pride” seems tailored for individuals with no direct memory or experience of the Nazi atrocities. Thus, this “guilt pride” seems paradoxical, as guilt and pride – vis-à-vis flaunting this guilt – are felt for something one had no hand in. This is not to say that these crimes should not be acknowledged. Here we find an intriguing parallel to the biblical principle found in the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel 18:20 states:

The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.

This principle is noteworthy because the Bible itself seems to contradict it in the example of the disobedience of Adam and Eve and their banishment from the Garden of Eden. This contradicts the principle in Ezekiel, as per the Bible, the descendants of Adam and Eve inherited their sins, i.e., fallen/sinful nature and physical

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<sup>28</sup> Moeller & D’Ambrosio, *You and Your Profile* 576-580; Moeller & D’Ambrosio, *You and Your Profile*, 10-17.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>31</sup> Kathrin Schodel, “Normalizing Cultural Memory? The “Walser-Bubis Debate” and Martin Walser’s Novel *Ein springender Brunnen*,” in *Recasting German Identity: Culture, Politics and Literature in the Berlin Republic*, ed. Stuart Taberner and Frank Finlay (New York: Boydell and Brewer, 2002): 67-84; Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

mortality. In practice, this latter principle seems to hold truer than the idealistic principle from Ezekiel 18:20. For example, this can be seen in metrics like socioeconomic status, whereby one's SES and thus, quality of life during childhood is related to the success of their parents/family, and other external factors. Thus, the guilt felt by many young Germans of the time, and until today, can be a result of understanding themselves as benefactors of the Nazi atrocities.

In the case of German “guilt pride,” the sincerity of the individuals feeling third-hand guilt has to do with their worldview, philosophical inclinations, and understanding of responsibility. Thus, it might seem on the surface that value judgments vis-à-vis the sincerity of German “guilt pride” are questionable. However, as far as our assessment, in line with Moeller, actions speak louder than words. This national identity seems to be quite convenient at a time where Germany has a negative national profile.<sup>32</sup> This is further true with the recent rise of “identity politics” in the West, whereby discriminated groups are encouraged to embrace their identity in the face of dominant negative orthodoxies and stereotypes.<sup>33</sup> This is important as it allows underprivileged groups to be “authentic.” “Identity politics” can be seen on both the political right and left, political conservatism and liberalism. “Identity politics,” alongside promoting authenticity in certain cases, allows room for inauthenticity when utilized tactically. Unlike underprivileged groups expressing pride in their identity, the Germans could not take pride in recent German political heritage; instead, they had to settle for “guilt pride.”<sup>34</sup> Moeller states that every German political party from the 1990s until today promoted a culture of guilt and remembrance. For him, this is useful in reversing morality, a way to turn bad into good. Moeller links this to “Wokeism.”<sup>35</sup> In its original connotation, “woke” refers to an understanding of social inequalities and discrimination. Recently however, the term can also refer to progressive “identity politics” within the United States of America in particular, and the West in general. Moeller’s parallel between “guilt pride” and “wokeism” can be understood through what Bunyasi and Smith call “Woker than thou it is.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, it is good for one to recognize social inequalities and endeavor for justice. However, this becomes distorted and counter-

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<sup>32</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>33</sup> Cressida Heyes, “Identity Politics.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2024, ed. E. N. Zalta and U. Nodelman, <https://plato.stanford.edu/Entries/identity-politics/>

<sup>34</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>35</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>36</sup> Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith, *Stay Woke: A People's Guide to Making All Black Lives Matter* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 202.

beneficial when an individual or group try to be recognized as “woke” and compete for the status of “most woke.” This is utilized as a profile signaling virtue to attain the “moral high-ground.”

Moeller cites the *Willkommenskultur* or “welcoming culture” in 2015 as a seminal point for “guilt pride,” whereby Germany welcomed millions of refugees from the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> This was important as a seemingly tangible reinforcement of their *Willkommenskultur*. When welcoming refugees into the country, there was an understandable expectation that the refugees should become “good Germans.” Here, a problem arises, as most of the immigrants had no reason to identify in any capacity with the Nazi atrocities or German “guilt pride,” as it was not their ancestors who partook in the Nazi genocides.<sup>38</sup> Thus, we can observe a modern German ideology, i.e., the notion that embracing German “guilt pride” is a prerequisite to becoming a “good German.” Another seemingly central element to German identity and remembrance is the unwavering and unconditional support to the state of Israel. This can be seen even today on the website of the German Federal Government.<sup>39</sup> This again contradicts the identity of the refugees, as they are mostly Muslims from countries that have been at war with Israel. In addition, the refugees overwhelmingly identify with the Palestinian people and cause, which Israel has been trying to eradicate for the better part of a century.<sup>40</sup> Thus, as Moeller argues, with these dialectical contradictions, the refugees did not adapt to the expectations of German “guilt pride,” and subsequently became unwelcome. Germany seems to

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<sup>37</sup> Bernd Kasperek and Marc Speer, “Of Hope. Hungary and the Long Summer of Migration,” trans. A. Ungarne. *Bordermonitoring.eu*, accessed June 1, 2025, <http://bordermonitoring.eu/ungarn/2015/09/of-hope-en/>; Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>38</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>39</sup> The German Federal Government, “Germany Stands by Israel – and is seeking to bring about a de-escalation,” *The German Federal Government*, accessed May 15, 2025, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/germany-stands-by-israel-and-is-seeking-to-bring-about-a-de-escalation-2228294>

<sup>40</sup> Center for Constitutional Rights, “The Genocide of the Palestinian People: An International Law and Human Rights Perspective,” *Center for Constitutional Rights*, accessed May 17, 2025, <https://ccrjustice.org/sites/default/files/attach/2016/10/Back-ground%20on%20the%20term%20genocide%20in%20Israel%20Palestine%20Context.pdf>; “Amnesty International Investigation Concludes Israel is Committing Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza,” Amnesty International, accessed May 17, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/>.

be on the wrong side of history for the second time. Actual guilt manifests itself by correcting the principle and siding with the victims of genocide. Instead, German guilt seems to manifest itself in totalitarian support for what Norman Finkelstein would call “The Holocaust Industry.”<sup>41</sup> One can conceptualize this unflinching support for Israel as an exploitation of past wrongdoings for political gains. This seems to be a form of “politics of memory,” whereby the collective memory of the past is utilized by a group to further their current social and political ends through institutionalizing acceptable accounts of certain historical events.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the German support seems directed to the symbolic “core asset” of their guilt pride, i.e., the Jewish state. This seems to indicate that German “guilt pride,” claimed to be orientated for the underprivileged “other,” was actually orientated for the Germans first and foremost.<sup>43</sup> Thus, “guilt pride” seems to be wholly narcissistic, curated for the benefit of the Germans, viz., ideology.

Moeller goes further, stating that the refugees from the Middle East were tools for “cheap labor” and “rehabilitating the German image.” In other words, showing off the virtue of the German nation to themselves and to the world.<sup>44</sup> The incongruence between the identity of immigrants and the expectation of becoming a good German via ideology, seems to play a role in many Germans’ suspicious of multiculturalism and refugees, opting to retreat into various forms of nationalism. A 2020 research study, despite its relatively small sample size, seems to support the aforementioned. Although the article does not use the term “guilt pride,” an interviewee mentions the tendency, post-Auschwitz, to associate any form of nationalism or patriotism with Nazism or neo-Nazism.<sup>45</sup> These attitudes seem to still be prominent, with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) winning the German elections with 28.5 percent of the vote, and the Alt-Right *Alternativ für Deutschland* (AFD) gaining the second most votes with

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<sup>41</sup> Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (New York: Verso books, 2003), Introduction.

<sup>42</sup> Mario Rufer, “Politics of Memory.” *InterAmerican Wiki: Terms - Concepts - Critical Perspectives* (University of Bielfield, 2012), accessed May 10, 2025.

<sup>43</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>44</sup> Moeller, “Guilt Pride.”

<sup>45</sup> Friederike Windel, Arita Balaram & Krystal Perkins, “Discourses of the Willkommenskultur (Welcoming culture) in Germany,” *Critical Discourse Studies*, 19, no. 1 (2020): 93–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2020.1839921>

20.8 percent.<sup>46</sup> To conclude this section, although there seem to be layers upon layers of ideology present, the closed binary of supporting Israel or being a bad German seems most prominent.

### *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

To understand some of the most prominent ideas in Globalized Critical Social Theory, in general, and Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory, in particular, it is important to look at the contributions of the Frankfurt School. Here we examine one of the seminal texts produced by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, i.e., *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). As argued by Du Plooy, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* presents an interpretation of the relationship between the subject, nature, reason, and labor.<sup>47</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the Enlightenment and modernity involve an attempt at distinguishing subject from object, i.e., humankind and nature. This emanates from a fear of the unknown, viz., myth. The book utilizes the protagonist of the Odyssey, Odysseus, to demonstrate how humans try to overcome the “unity of inner and outer nature.”<sup>48</sup> Like many contemporary Postcolonial and Decolonial scholars (cf. Enrique Dussel), Horkheimer and Adorno reject the origin of Enlightenment as commonly accepted to be the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries in Europe. However, unlike Dussel, who traces it to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, outlining the influences of various nations and regions, Horkheimer and Adorno trace it to before the formation of subjectivity.<sup>49</sup> The main thesis developed by the book seems to suggest that myth is Enlightenment, and Enlightenment is myth, i.e., reverts back to myth in its fear-ridden attempt to escape myth. This return to myth is not conceptualized as traditional “magical thinking,”

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<sup>46</sup> CDU/CSU wins the Bundestag elections, *Deutschland.de*. Accessed on May 10, 2025, <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/politics/federal-election-2025-election-result-germany-election-government>

<sup>47</sup> Donovan Du Plooy, “Habermas’ Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment” (MPhil diss., University of Pretoria, 2015, accessed June 2, 2025, <https://repository.up.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/694d5931-62ec-4c96-a8b3-fe831aa253db/content>

<sup>48</sup> Du Plooy, “Habermas’ Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment,” 15; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: philosophical fragments*, ed. G. S. Noerr, trans. E. Jephcott (Stanford University Press. 2002), 35–62.

<sup>49</sup> Enrique Dussel, “Europe Modernity and Eurocentrism,” *Project Muse* 1, no. 3 (2000): 465–478, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/23901/summary>; Du Plooy, “Habermas’ Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment,” 25; Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 15.

manifesting in the rise and acceptance of totalitarian systems.<sup>50</sup> They attribute this problem to rationality, and specifically “instrumental reason.” For them, by disenchanting nature, the human mind can dominate nature, subsequently dominating other humans.<sup>51</sup> In other words, enlightenment serves “instrumental rationality,” which propagates the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). Here, there is a parallel between “knowledge and power” (cf. Foucault), with technology being centralized in the aforementioned process of domination.<sup>52</sup> The book conceptualizes enlightenment as a tool for standardization, similar to religion and “civil religion.” This sedates the individual through various institutions and avenues, such as the “culture industry” and consumerism. The “Culture industry” organizes leisure time in parallel with capital organizing working time. The consumption of standardized tangible (and intangible) media and goods produced by the “culture industry,” conditions the individual to be satisfied without thinking, immersing and standardizing them into a system of ideology. This creates submission *en masse*, whereby individuals accept the status quo, rendering it unlikely for one to visualize or pursue change.<sup>53</sup>

Du Plooy points out that Horkheimer and Adorno seem to have had a more optimistic view of the enlightenment and modernity than their work suggests.<sup>54</sup> For example, throughout their preface, they mention some liberating and beneficial fruits of the Enlightenment.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, they one-sidedly focus on the detriments of the Enlightenment, to an extent where the reader cannot see but its darkness. As far as our assessment, this observation most likely holds true, as there seems to be a lack of balance in their reading of the Enlightenment. Further, as observed by Du Plooy, and analyzed by Axel Honneth, there seem to be rhetorical devices that might lend the argument more strength than it yields.<sup>56</sup> These tendencies can mislead the audience, lending themselves to unidimensional interpretations of the Enlightenment. Thus, this seems to be an instance of ideology within an attempt to critique ideology. As mentioned by Du Plooy, and according to Schmidt, some of these shortcomings can be better understood with the context that Horkheimer

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<sup>50</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 35–62.

<sup>51</sup> Du Plooy, “Habermas’ Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment,” 18–21; Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1–35.

<sup>52</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1–35.

<sup>53</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94–113.

<sup>54</sup> Du Plooy, “Habermas’ Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment,” 46.

<sup>55</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Preface.

<sup>56</sup> Du Plooy, “Habermas’ Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment”; Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 59

and Adorno had originally planned to write about the benefits of the Enlightenment.<sup>57</sup> Thus, this makes the current iteration of the book incomplete. Regardless, similar tendencies of imbalance seem to be present through some highly influential works in Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory, such as Said's *Orientalism* (1978).

In order to portray different perspectives from the Frankfurt School, Habermas' reading of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* seems invaluable. As pointed out by Du Plooy, Habermas interprets Horkheimer and Adorno's reading of the Enlightenment as disallowing humans to overcome myth, with the Enlightenment inevitably leading to destruction.<sup>58</sup> In addition, Habermas observes Weberian tendencies within the book.<sup>59</sup> This stands in their reading of rationalization, i.e., modernity freeing man from myth via science. For Habermas, the original historical context of the Enlightenment has taken the back seat to a more ubiquitous and generally applicable understanding. As stated by Du Plooy, Habermas rejects Horkheimer and Adorno's claim on the monopolized dominance of "purposive rationality," seemingly finding it reductionistic and insufficient in considering the complexities of reason.<sup>60</sup> For Habermas, the dynamism of science and its ability to self-revise "outweigh" Horkheimer and Adorno's criticisms of the Enlightenment. We can infer science has neither been absorbed by "purposive rationality," nor does it only produce "technologically exploitable knowledge."<sup>61</sup> Although there are cases that might support the claims of Horkheimer and Adorno, in recent years Habermas' rebuttal

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<sup>57</sup> Du Plooy, "Habermas' Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment," 47-48; James Schmidt, "Language, Mythology, and Enlightenment: Historical Notes on Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*" (Boston University Press, 2012), 31-32, <https://open.bu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/a3f24f5a-6b26-44c6-8676-4d146afd504f/content>

<sup>58</sup> Du Plooy, "Habermas' Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment," 28-29; Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project." In *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. M. P. d'Entreves and S. Benhabib (Polity Press, 1997), 38-59.

<sup>59</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment," *New German Critique* no. 26, *Critical Theory and Modernity* (Spring-Summer 1982): 16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/488023>

<sup>60</sup> Du Plooy, "Habermas' Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment," 32-33; Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment," 17-22; Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Beacon Press, 1984), 382.

<sup>61</sup> Du Plooy, "Habermas' Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment," 31.

seems more balanced and reasonable. Although science is often exploited for destructive ends, it is questionable to privilege these instances over various public benefits produced by science. These include quality of life improvements throughout the years. In addition, concepts such as “democracy” are characteristic of modernity. It is also necessary to point out that these benefits of science are not shared equally, as “third world countries” are often sidelined, while the “center” reaps most of the benefits. As Du Ploy observes, Habermas also seems to disagree with Horkheimer and Adorno’s reading on art, emphasizing its continuing liberating potential.<sup>62</sup> He points out what seems to be a “performative contradiction” within *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. By asserting the monopoly of “purposive reason,” the rationality within the book, or any argument by Adorno and Horkheimer, are also rendered moot.<sup>63</sup> This criticism of the necessary foundations, that constitute the critique itself, seems misguided. As far as we can tell, this pattern is present throughout Critical Theory, whether it is directed towards reason in the case of Adorno and Horkheimer, or towards science and method, as can be seen in Post-colonial discourse. In our assessment, these readings of the Enlightenment, modernity, and science seem one sided, that one can argue they are more totalitarian than the systems they criticize.

### *Althusser and Žižek on Ideology*

To further understand ideology, we look at the works of Althusser and Žižek. In his magnum opus, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1969-70), Althusser distinguishes between ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and repressive state apparatuses (RSAs). Both are avenues through which the state enforces its will and power through different means. For Althusser, ideology requires the presence of a subject. He presents the notion of “interpellation,” i.e., the subject becoming a subject through indulging in a system of ideology. Thus, ideology functions without the

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<sup>62</sup> Du Plooy, “Habermas’ Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment,” 18-19; Habermas, “The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment,” 107, 111.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Jay, “The Debate over Performative Contradiction: Habermas versus the Post-structuralists,” in *Philosophical interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. A. Honneth et al. (MIT Press. 1992), 266-267; Du Plooy, “Habermas’ Critique of the Dialectic of Enlightenment,” 35-36.

individual noticing, as it is omnipresent and near impossible to interpret objectively.<sup>64</sup> Some examples of ISAs that enforce the ideology of the ruling class include the family, culture, and the educational system. ISAs are not centralized but are rather diverse. These seemingly operate in public and private domains and use ideology as their tool of domination without overt violence.<sup>65</sup> However, ISAs, in contrast to RSAs, allow for pushback by the lower classes. Althusser argues that value systems and consciousness are not free and operate within ideology. These are often rigid, disallowing any practices or thoughts beyond their scope to avoid contractions. To complicate further, he asserts that one's realization of being within a system of ideology is not enough to escape it or even understand it. Thus, the only way through would be a tailored "(social)-scientific" methodology.<sup>66</sup> As far as we can tell, this assertion holds true to this day, and should be centralized in Globalized Critical Social Theory, in general, and Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory, in particular.

In his *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), Žižek follows Althusser, reasserting the omnipresence of ideology. He brings together elements of Marx, Hegel, and Freudian/Lacanian Psychoanalysis to conceptualize ideology, and critiques the possibility of escaping it. Relying on Lacan's account of the subject, i.e., the imaginary, the real, and the symbolic, he emphasizes the idea of "fantasy" in understanding ideology. Žižek seems to look at ideology as a totalitarian lived experience, rather than a specific belief or system of values.<sup>67</sup> Žižek offers a psychoanalytic theory of desire, framing abstract, but often unquestioned, concepts as "sublime objects." These seem central to one's identity and value system and are often thought of as deeply meaningful. Žižek deems these ideological, as their meaning is derived from fantasy, and their main utility lies in their status as "objects of desire." These drive one to attain them, despite, as Žižek points out, the impossibility of attaining

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<sup>64</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation," trans. B. Bewster, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (Monthly Review Press, 1971), *The State Ideological Apparatus*, <https://www.csun.edu/~snk1966/Lous%20Althusser%20Ideology%20and%20Ideological%20State%20Apparatuses.pdf>; Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Verso Books, 2014), 76-81.

<sup>65</sup> Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, 76-81.

<sup>66</sup> Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Thesis II - ideology interpellates individuals as subject*; Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*.

<sup>67</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Verso Books, 1989), 30.

them.<sup>68</sup> For example, Žižek's proposition of a man fantasizing about his extramarital lover. Even when sleeping next to his wife, he thinks of his mistress who he sees once a month, wishing he could leave his wife and be with her every night. Žižek asserts that when a married man leaves his wife and lives with his mistress, he often ends up losing both relationships. Here, the mistress is the "object of desire" and "fantasy" that entices the man. Thus, these 'objects of desire' can be conceptualized as sublime objects of ideology.<sup>69</sup> Žižek is also skeptical of the notion that people are unaware of ideology. Rather, he believes they act in line with ideology despite realizing its existence. Thus, it is not always the belief in ideology that allows its perpetuation, but the practices that unconsciously validate it.<sup>70</sup>

### *On Social Sciences and Methodology*

#### (1) *On modernity and Coloniality*

In this respect, we study the Modernity Coloniality (MC) group from Latin America. One of their major goals is a "new epistemological project alternative to Eurocentric modernity."<sup>71</sup> Some of the notable members include Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, and Santiago Castro Gomez. The name of the group is indicative of their central paradigm, i.e., coloniality gives way to modernity and is not a product of it.<sup>72</sup> The Nigerian philosopher Olufemi Taiwo would have a bone to pick with this claim, as he demonstrates in his book, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (2010).<sup>73</sup> Taiwo argues that colonialism<sup>74</sup> seems to have prevented modernity in Africa, put-

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<sup>68</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 10-11, 133.

<sup>69</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

<sup>70</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 28-33.

<sup>71</sup> Damian Pachon Soto, "Decolonial theories: Origin, categories, and critical intents," trans. K. Y. Torres, *Analisis* 55, no. 102: (2023), 4, <https://doi.org/10.15332/21459169.8603>

<sup>72</sup> Pachon Soto, "Decolonial theories," 5; Walter Mignolo, "La colonialidad a lo largo y a lo ancho: el hemisferio occidental en el horizonte colonial de la modernidad". En E. Lander (comp.), *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas* (Clacso, 2005). We credit Mignolo (2005) based on Pachon Soto's citation.

<sup>73</sup> Olufemi Taiwo, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2010)

<sup>74</sup> Although distinct from coloniality, Pachon Soto (2023, 5-6) states the importance of this distinction for the MC group. Nevertheless, the point still stands in this case.

ting a dent in the MC group's paradigm. Taiwo emphasizes the importance of modernity and modernization in Africa, putting into question the iteration of decolonization which advocates cutting all ties with anything non-native or Western.<sup>75</sup> The MC group claims that European "universal" and "objective" social science and humanities were produced as a result of coloniality. These are deemed to be Eurocentric and sidelining other forms of knowledge and epistemologies.<sup>76</sup> We deem this terminology of "European" or "Western" social science to be questionable, as regardless of the geographical location of its production, the contributors to social science are diverse. Instead, we will use the term "disciplinary," which can be found in works such as Seyed Javad Miri's *Alternative Sociology*.<sup>77</sup> In our assessment, there seem to be attempts at delegitimizing "disciplinary" social science and legitimizing an "identity approach" to methodology that privileges criticism of the "most hegemonic power." This seems true in Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory in general, and in the aforementioned claims of the MC group in particular. To make this simpler, we will momentarily bracket the first point and focus on "power."

## (2) *On degrees of power*

We can equate power and ideology to Marx's Base and Superstructure. Here, power is primary and produces ideology, and ideology is a source of power and maintains it. Ideology seems to bend to power. These are not completely distinct but rather intertwine to reproduce each other. Thus, we propose understanding ideology and power relationally. Globalized Critical Social Theory, in general, hinges upon criticizing ideology, and Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory in particular emphasize challenging the underlying assumptions of hegemonic eurocentrism, as well as its projection onto the "peripheral other." In other words, Critical theory confronts and questions power, the ideologies it is predicated upon, and the ideologies this it produces. Here, it is important to consider Foucauldian "discourse" and "discursivity," i.e., that concept that certain ideas exist within a discourse. Keeping this in

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<sup>75</sup> Olufemi Taiwo, *Africa Must Be Modern: A Manifesto* (Indiana University Press, 2014); Olufemi Taiwo, *Against Decolonization: Taking African Agency Seriously* (Hurst and Company, 2022).

<sup>76</sup> Pachon Soto, "Decolonial theories," 4-6; Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La poscolonialidad explicada a los niños*. (Universidad del Cauca, 2005a). Again, we credit Castro-Gomez (2005a) based on Pachon Soto's citation.

<sup>77</sup> Olufemi Taiwo, *Against Decolonization: Taking African Agency Seriously* (Hurst and Company, 2022).

mind vis-à-vis the “Orient” in general, whatever that means, and the Middle East in particular, there seems to be a totalitarian tendency that traces any failure to develop and modernize solely to colonialism and neocolonialism, viz., the most hegemonic power. For us, this is reductionistic and does not acknowledge the heterogeneity of power, nor the relativity of the status of different groups, i.e., one group can be the underdog in a context and the hegemonic oppressor in another context. Thus, we observe a trend of ignoring, or at least reluctance to criticize, any form of relatively hegemonic local powers in “Oriental” countries. This is despite atrocities committed by various dictatorships within the “Orient,” particularly in the Middle East. When “reading the silences,” we see an implicit, though thoroughly contradictory, assumption under which this discourse operates.<sup>78</sup> Mainly, reducing the agency of local powers, i.e., less powerful than the West, to futility or near non-existence. This is contradictory, as it renders all of theory into “fantasy.” Without the agency of resistive powers, the core tenant or end of theory, namely the possibility of bringing change, becomes impossible.

To further understand the attitude that seems to be prevalent in Postcolonial and Decolonial criticism when treating local powers, one can look at Norman Finkelstein’s assessment on the October 7, 2023 atrocities. The crux of Finkelstein’s argument is that under extreme conditions of oppression, radical forms of resistance that under normal circumstances would be deemed excessive are the last option.<sup>79</sup> The only difference between the Palestinians and many of the aforementioned dictatorships is that the Palestinians had no choice but to fight for their lives and survival against the enemy. On the other hand, the dictatorial regimes unnecessarily abused and suppressed their local populations to maintain power. This tendency to exclusively condemn the most hegemonic powers, while simultaneously sidelining any unnecessarily detestable action by local hegemonic powers under the guise of “anti-Western resistance,” seems to be part and parcel of ideology. Žižek would call this, the “obscene underside” of ideology, i.e., preaching global resistance, while tolerating local corruption and oppression.<sup>80</sup> Further, this seeming cherry-picking of powers to criticize can have catastrophic consequences: First, it fails to present the whole picture to any avid readers of Globalized Critical Theory

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<sup>78</sup> “Reading the silences” refers to the practice of looking at what is not said, i.e., that which is taken for granted and assumed.

<sup>79</sup> Middle East Eye, “Norman Finkelstein explains why he refuses to condemn Palestinians who joined October attacks.” Youtube Video, accessed June 27, 2025, <https://youtu.be/jzjDhIXI2PA?si=gUxEea29IgMee74v>

<sup>80</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

in general, and Postcolonial and decolonial theory in particular. Second, it enables or even contributes to the bad behavior of local powers. Third, it encourages autochthonism and the rejection of all that is not native. Fourth, it can lead to a disillusion with any liberation cause, thus paradoxically, potentially leading to Orientals embracing westernization (cf. Ahmad Kasravi and Jalal Ale Ahmad).<sup>81</sup>

### (3) *On blurring the lines between identity and method*

To return to the claim we bracketed, i.e., delegitimizing “disciplinary” social science and legitimizing an “identity approach” to method, it is important to demarcate what makes a claim or an epistemology legitimate. Here, there is nuance and perspective in the matter. For us, the central component is methodology. Social science and natural science have different methodologies, however the definition of what constitutes a methodology holds consistent across both, viz., coherence with reality. In the scientific approach, valid methodology accurately measures what is intended, while reliable methodology produces consistent measurements. In our assessment, it is necessary to approach all scientific or social scientific claims with suspicion. Similarly, it is important to treat all epistemologies critically. This applies to “disciplinary” European, Western, and Eurocentric epistemologies as well as “Oriental,” Eastern, and native ones. In other words, it is important to approach all claims and epistemologies methodologically. As far as we can tell, there can be disagreements on methods and axioms, with teleological and emotive concerns being central to social science, as the subject at hand is a subject and not an object. As Seyed Javad Miri would state, it is not a corpse.<sup>82</sup> Also, there are often difficulties with separating description, evaluation, and prescription. However, the crux of our argument stands: the legitimacy of epistemologies and claims should be based on their coherence with reality. This does not imply that different epistemologies and claims cannot coexist. It is important to not misinterpret the aforementioned as implying that all epistemologies and claims are equal. Each is to be under-

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<sup>81</sup> Within Kasravi’s *Ethos* (1932) and Ale Ahmad’s *Occidentosis* (1962), we observe a trend of intellectuals selectively praising the West, which leads to ‘Europism’ and ‘Westoxification or Occidentosis’ respectively. We argue that selectively emphasizing critiques of the West and sidelining critiques of local powers can have similar results, as there is a seeming inconsistency that is not coherent with reality.

<sup>82</sup> Miri, *Alternative Sociology*, 71.

stood descriptively, then evaluated. This means their legitimacy should be independent of identity factors, including the author and the producing institution. This is not to deny certain biases of the scholars and the institutions producing the material, or at least the implications of this information. However, for us, this seems secondary vis-à-vis the content of a text. In other words, when evaluating knowledge produced by the “center” or “periphery,” the content is to be privileged over the source of production, specifically the scholar and/or institution.

To understand the MC Group’s claim to privilege certain epistemologies over others, we can look at cases of undervalued knowledge produced by the “periphery,” e.g., in the field of psychology.<sup>83</sup> There are examples of rigorous research from “third world” authors that never made it to prominent journals or got the recognition it deserved. The APA, despite being the “American” Psychological Association, was globally the most influential psychological association in the 1970s and 1980s and remains so until this day. This implies that an institution, the research of which is supposed to be limited to its context, had hegemony over contexts beyond its scope where its data is less potent. This is not to oppose local institutions conducting global research. However, the problem arises when considering the scholarship and the scholars within its journals. When looking at the volumes of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (1965–currently) published in the 1970s and 1980s, one can observe a trend of almost exclusively American and European scholars, as opposed to today’s more diverse lineup. In the context of the journal being American, the former point is acceptable. However, considering its global influence and hegemony, it seems problematic. Thus, in this instance, the Decolonial and Postcolonial critique of the MC group holds. This does not imply that the lack of diversity necessarily speaks to the quality of research conducted by “center” or “periphery” scholars.

Despite some merit to the MC Group’s claim, the orientation discussed above is often not the most emphasized. To criticize “disciplinary” methodology, they focus on critiquing colonialism, namely power rather than rigor. Thus, the framed opposition to “disciplinary” scientific or social scientific scholarship is not “third world” scholarship, but “native” or “traditional” knowledge. In our assessment, many “native” or “traditional” forms of knowledge would fall short of the modern scientific standards of rigor and accuracy, due to lacking methodological fortitude and being unsystematic. Another problem is the seeming lack of specifi-

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<sup>83</sup> Pachon Soto, “Decolonial theories,” 4–6.

cations vis-à-vis the constituents of these forms of “native” or “traditional” knowledges. These are also rarely applied to analyze phenomena for a comparative analysis to be made with “disciplinary” methods. Here we find parallels with Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Said throughout his book points out various examples of Eurocentric orientalism misrepresenting and constructing images of Oriental people. Thus, Said picks apart much of the universalization and essentialism within Orientalist scholarship.<sup>84</sup> However, like the MC group, he makes generalizations about the entire field, to the point where the term “Orientalism” almost becomes a slur. As pointed out by Sadiq Jalal Al-Azm in his “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse,” Said’s thoughts seem to have inconsistencies.<sup>85</sup> After criticizing Western essentialism, Said tends to essentialize the East, what Al-Azm calls “Orientalism in Reverse.” In addition, Al-Azm points out to an “unwarranted general anti-scientific bias”<sup>86</sup> in *Orientalism*. The aforementioned is a result of falsely equating science and colonialism, i.e., equating a method with an atrocious phenomenon. We find this equivalence as inaccurate as equating a religion with a nation, or a religion against a geographical location, i.e., Islam and Arabs (cf. Shaheen)<sup>87</sup> or Islam versus the West<sup>88</sup> (cf. Miri). Thus, as pointed out by Al-Azm, it is important to criticize European institutions and scholars falsely utilizing the good name of science to push ideology. This latter ideology can be revealed upon scrutiny by serious scholarship. However, equating the ideological product of misused scientific methodology to the method of science itself seems equally ideological. Al-Azm points out the aforementioned problem almost half a decade ago, and it is still present today within Post-colonial and Decolonial Theory in general, and the orientation of the MC Group in particular. Thus, in our assessment, traditional, non-traditional, European, native, or even Martian knowledge are to be evaluated based on its descriptive merits. Rejecting a claim based on its identity markers, i.e., “Europeanness” or “Middle Eastern-ness” seems questionable. Similarly, for teleological evaluations, the merit of a description, even if not completely divorced of its teleological implications, should at least be considered separately before emphasizing teleology. Here, culture and

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<sup>84</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin, 1978).

<sup>85</sup> Sadiq Jalal Al-Azm, “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse,” in *Orientalism: A Reader*. Ed. A. L. Macfie (New York University Press, 1981), 217-238.

<sup>86</sup> This is a direct quote on the first page (217). It is located few lines before the start of the text, where the editor Macfie describes the contents of Al Azm’s article.

<sup>87</sup> Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (Olive Branch Press, 2014)

<sup>88</sup> Miri, *Alternative Sociology*.

cultural sensitivity also play a major role vis-à-vis social scientific description, however, this topic merits a separate examination of its own.

#### (4) *On Performative contradictions*

Another major problem with inducing identity into the evaluation of description and methodology, is the problem of “performative contradictions.” Identified by Habermas within Horkheimer and Adorno’s *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, can also be seen within Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory, in general, and the MC Group’s approach, in particular. This can be divided into three performative contradictions: (1) methodology and objectivity; (2) identity, (3) interests. We will first tackle objectivity and then combine identity and interests vis-à-vis objectivity.

#### (5) *On Objectivity*

For methodology and objectivity, there are often postmodern strands of thought within Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory. For instance, Edward Said utilizes Foucauldian “discourse” in *Orientalism* (1978). Similarly, Foucault has influenced much of Mignolo’s work, whereby his approach to epistemology in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011), is similar to Foucault’s reading of knowledge and power. Finally, the MC group’s notion of “the relationship between the birth of human sciences and their correspondence with colonialism” is also influenced by postmodernism.<sup>89</sup> To address the latter example further, we can look at the works of Castro-Gomez,<sup>90</sup> or to be more accurate, sections of his work translated by Pachon Soto.<sup>91</sup> Two claims are central: first, the social sciences helped Europe prosper via colonialism, namely as “ideological apparatuses” or tools that legitimize power and subjugate the subjectivity of the “other.” Second, the social sciences are “ideological devices generated within ... the modern/colonial world system.”<sup>92</sup> Here, there seem

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<sup>89</sup> Pachon Soto, “Decolonial theories,” 16.

<sup>90</sup> Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La hybris del punto cero. Ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada 1750- 1816*. (Universidad Javeriana-Instituto Pensar, 2005b); Santiago Castro-Gómez, “Ciencias sociales, violencia epistémica y el problema de la “invención del otro””. En E. Lander (comp.), *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas*. (Clacso, 2005c).

<sup>91</sup> Pachon Soto, “Decolonial theories,” 16-18.

<sup>92</sup> Pachon Soto, “Decolonial theories,” 18.

to be some inconsistencies. First, Castro-Gomez conflates “ideological social science” with all of social science, thus, eliminating the possibility of any honest knowledge being produced by Western institutions. Second, as far as we can tell from the translations, he does not make the necessary distinctions between social science as a method, social science as an institution, and applied social science. This homogenization of social science seems misleading. In most cases, when using the term “social science,” Castro-Gomez seems to refer to “disciplinary” social science as an institution. This is as no state “created” social science, but only its institutions. However, due to a lack of specification, this is abstracted to encompass any and all productions of social science, viz., as method and application. In addition, the structural approach to the social sciences seems reductive, as it allows for decimating the agency of any scholar to be honest and produce good work.<sup>93</sup> Thus, the scholar and his production are reduced to the institution, leading to the seemingly misguided conclusion that all productions from the Western social scientific institution are “impure.” This also applies to any production that benefits the hegemonic nation in any way. This is not to downplay the tendency of states to utilize social science for soft power and hegemony. However, this observation evades the status of ideology only so long as it is not generalized.

The dominance of postmodern tendencies often seems to culminate in a general rejection of objectivity. As mentioned above, this is applied to “disciplinary” social science. By finding instances of ideology within the knowledge produced by “disciplinary” social science, its entire epistemology and methodology are generalized to be ideological. Any approach, method, or epistemology that produces thought opposing or challenging Postcolonial and Decolonial thought is framed to be colonial and Eurocentric. Challenging the objectivity of systematic social scientific method and thus positing the impossibility of establishing or maintaining objectivity, seems to disallow pursuing rigorous social science. Following this line of thought, Postcolonial and Decolonial approaches to social science are no exception. Another problem with Postcolonial and Decolonial theory’s postmodernism in treating objectivity is their Manichean approach. Within the discourse, there seems to be a dualistic understanding of objectivity, i.e., a method or claim is either objective or not. This is reductionistic. Objectivity is not black and white; rather, it sometimes dwells on the gray area. Like the purity of alloy, there are degrees of objectivity. To tackle “disciplinary,” namely Eurocentric social science, there seems to be a tendency to fallaciously equate the slightest methodological

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

inaccuracy to complete ideology. The examples are various, whether glaring or implied, in works ranging from Said's *Orientalism* to Mignolo's *Darker Side of Western Modernity*. As far as we can tell, the idea that social science cannot achieve complete objectivity is common and widely accepted. However, sidelining all of social science based on the aforementioned notion seems to be as illogical as drinking soup with a fork. This attitude can be seen in Mignolo's preface whereby he rejects the possibility of choosing only one between Decolonial and Postcolonial "options."<sup>94</sup> For him, this is a colonial tendency. In our assessment, this attitude is inefficient and dangerous, as it prohibits assessing the "options" critically. It is perfectly normal for both the Decolonial and the Postcolonial to be potential options. Nevertheless, framing the possibility to critically evaluate and choose one over the other as "colonial" seems questionable. Here, all "non-disciplinary" options are treated as having equal status and validity, seemingly based on their utility for resistance. When trying to describe and understand phenomena, the "equality of methods" falls. "Options" are neither equal, nor worth the same. In addition, different methods neither fall short of objectivity to the same degree, nor have the same descriptive or analytical powers. Even with its shortcomings, a "disciplinary option" that falls slightly short of objectivity seems preferable to an untested and unsystematic "option." To prove otherwise, which we enthusiastically encourage, it is important to systematize and battle test "traditional" and "native" approaches, to demonstrate their rigor and descriptive power. Considering an option only for its utility contra-power seems to be misguided and lacking in rigor.

#### (6) *On Alternative fetishism*

There seems to be a tendency towards "alternative fetishism" within Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory. This is in two senses: (1) the tendency to accept any alternative to what is considered the "enemy," i.e., "disciplinary" social science, often without the same standard of scrutiny or questioning. This often leads to their overvaluation without substantial evidence. In other words, this seems to be an overcorrection of the problem originally posited, i.e., undervaluation of "traditional" or "native" approaches.<sup>95</sup> (2) There is a tendency to obsessively try and find alterna-

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<sup>94</sup> Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2011), xxviii.

<sup>95</sup> Pachon Soto, "Decolonial theories," 6.

tives to the “disciplinary.” This is usually a normal part of scientific inquiry, however, in Postcolonial discourse it is often exaggerated. In addition, it seems that many attempts to find alternatives are means to combat what is considered hegemonic, rather than trying to understand social phenomena more accurately. Many Decolonial and Postcolonial ideas seem to be inspired by “disciplinary” social science, with some ideas having their direct parallels. There seem to be instances in Decolonial and Postcolonial theory addressing issues that have been previously addressed in “disciplinary” social science, with little mention of the disciplinary work on them, for example on the issue of “disenchantment” and the critique of the universality claim regarding western modernity. The notion of “disenchantment” is directly from Max Weber’s *Science as a Vocation* lecture.<sup>96</sup> The critique of universality can be seen in many contemporary works, but also in Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>97</sup> Weber understands capitalism and rationality as products of space and time, i.e., historically, and temporally, rejecting the notion of modernity as universal or natural. Further, as per Habermas, the understanding of modernity as divorced from space and time is a relatively recent development in understanding modernization.<sup>98</sup> All of this is not to undermine all of Postcolonial and Decolonial theory. Some of their claims are positive developments within “disciplinary” social science, and/or are original, and thus hold serious truth; for example, the notion that classical sociologists focused on Europe as the central contributor to modernity. This emphasis sidelined other global contributions, the combination of which culminated in the rise of modernity. There are certain exceptions that acknowledge the influence of far eastern thought and other cultures via colonialism (cf. Weber and Marx). Another “disciplinary” or classical sociological example, is W.E.B. du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction*,<sup>99</sup> whereby he discusses the contributions of black people to modernity, especially democracy, which were often understated. This is not to downplay the factors that were spatio-temporally present in Europe to allow for modernity. On the contrary, we argue that a reading of the history of

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<sup>96</sup> Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation”. From *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford University Press, 1946), 129-156, <https://sociology.sas.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/Weber-Science-as-a-Vocation.pdf>

<sup>97</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Trans. Talcott Parsons (Routledge, 1992).

<sup>98</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (MIT Press, 1987), 2.

<sup>99</sup> William Edward Burgardt Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Fold Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America* (Harcourt Brace and Company, 1935).

intellectual thought can demonstrate that most ideas and processes are not exclusive creations, but culminations of global contributions.

(7) *On Identity and interests*

Similar to the issue of objectivity, identity and interests seem central to the Post-colonial and Decolonial evaluation of “disciplinary” social science. In addition, these are intertwined with objectivity and are used to challenge the objectivity of “disciplinary” social science. To summarize: First, knowledge and power are intertwined and almost inseparable. Second, the West and its institutions were/are hegemonic via colonialism. Third, the coloniality of power suffers from the same symptoms. Thus, knowledge produced by the western academy is colonial and Eurocentric. When identity or geography are intertwined with power throughout a discourse, there seems to be a tendency to conflate them. Any piece of literature produced by the European academy becomes suspicious based exclusively on its “Europeanness” or “Western status.” Any knowledge or argument produced by the Western academy – or in some cases by nonwestern scholars from the “Orient – that positively evaluates what is deemed “Western” is considered colonial. Any proposition that benefits the West is considered colonial. Similarly, any point of view that puts into question what is “traditional” or “native” is framed as colonial. Any reading that hurts the interests of the “traditional” and “native” is understood to be colonial. Thus, “identity thinking” emerges. In this case, the European is sidelined with suspicion, and the native and/or traditional is privileged. This is problematic, as identity and interests, despite being markers that can compromise objectivity, are not unique to any scholar or institution. If the Western scholar’s reading of a foreign nation is considered to be Eurocentric and falling short of objectivity, can’t that also be applied to the local scholar? Is it not the case that the local scholar’s analysis is local-centric and thus, also falling short of objectivity? Similarly, if knowledge produced by the European institution or a European scholar’s analysis falls short of objectivity because of European interests, shouldn’t the objectivity of the analyses of a Latin American think tank or group also be put into question due to their interests? In other words, there are performative contradictions in centralizing identity and interests to evaluate a scholar or text, leading to manifestations of ideology. These metrics cannot be generalized to strike down the legitimacy of any text or scholar, but rather the content of the text is to be the determining factor. Despite the aforementioned, we hold the following three points: (1) it is important to understand that identity and interests do communicate

important details, however, they are not to be privileged over the content of a text; (2) It is crucial not to downplay the normative consequences of certain analyses; (3) It is necessary not to underestimate the relevance of perspective in these matters.

### *Jargon Fetishism and Over-textualization*

Another issue within Globalized Critical Social Theory in general, and Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory in particular, is the jargon. It is normal for every discipline to have its jargon. However, Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory has a tendency to overuse obscure jargon to the point of fetishism. In our assessment, even after being well situated within the discourse, certain texts are difficult to read and overflowing with Jargon. In addition, there is a tendency to overemphasize the world of texts and discourse. To look at some well-established critiques, relevant to the aforementioned, in his *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, Vivek Chibber criticizes the rejection of the universals of capitalism and enlightenment.<sup>100</sup> He calls for global class struggle with an emphasis on materialism, rather than a focus on cultural exceptionalism and superstructural factors, namely culture and discourse. For him, there is an overuse of poststructuralist/postmodern jargon that leads to unclarity within Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory. Both aforementioned points on materialism and over-textualization seem to also be supported by Aijaz Ahmad and his *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*.<sup>101</sup> In addition, Ahmad seems to detect a “third worldist cultural nationalism”<sup>102</sup> within theory that leads to misguided analyses vis-à-vis the real world. Similarly, Terry Eagleton in his *After Theory* argues that theory in general, and Postcolonial theory in particular, overemphasize identity and discourse. For him, there is an “inflation” of language.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to the theoretical problems of jargon fetishism and over-textualization, there are practical problems of elitism. Here a question arises for the field as a whole, viz., who is the audience you are writing for? For a field that claims to write for the common folk and the “third world” subaltern, the language and terminology used seems incompatible. Although Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” can be considered as a popular example, we believe Mignolo’s work also

<sup>100</sup> Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (Verso Books, 2013).

<sup>101</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, and Literatures* (Verso Books, 1992).

<sup>102</sup> Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, and Literatures*, 35.

<sup>103</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (Basic Books, 2003).

falls into the same category.<sup>104</sup> One needs to read a couple pages into the preface of *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* and the jargon speaks for itself.<sup>105</sup> This can be a potential way of silencing the same audience the field tries to represent and give a voice to. For us, it is necessary to avoid limiting accessibility to the discourse. This can be achieved by utilizing more accessible terminology and presenting ideas in a simpler manner.

### Conclusion

Ideology is a focal point of discussion in Globalized Critical Theory, as well as in Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory. It is important to understand its history, development, and modern manifestations, especially what we consider “Modern German Ideology.” To situate ourselves within the literature and to build an analytical framework, we studied Horkheimer and Adorno’s *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Althusser’s *Ideological State Apparatuses* (1969-1970), and Žižek’s *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989). We found out that ideology seems to be omnipresent, rearing its head within theory and its treatment of methodology and social science. There are tendencies towards shunning “disciplinary” social science, rejecting objectivity, and partaking in “alternative and jargon fetishism.” As far as we can tell, as theory indiscriminately utilizes identity and interests to chop down “disciplinary” social science, the tree falls right on the property of theory. It is important to be cognizant of these trends, as the detrimental offshoots of ideology can only be deterred through rigorous critical methodology.

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<sup>104</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. P. Williams and L. Chrisman (Columbia University Press, 1988), 66-111.

<sup>105</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.

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**Revolutionary Opium:  
On Ali Shariati's Determinate Negation of Marx's Critique of Religion**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the revolutionary thought of the Iranian sociologist and revolutionary theorist Ali Shariati through his critical engagement with Marx and Marxism, arguing that his most significant contribution lies in reconfiguring the role of religion within emancipatory politics. While often labeled a “Muslim Marxist,” Shariati departs fundamentally from Marx’s rejection of religion, instead proposing a dialectical reinterpretation of Shi’i Islam as a vehicle for social transformation. Drawing on Hegel’s concept of determinate negation (*Aufheben*), the paper demonstrates how Shariati distinguishes between the “affirmative” function of institutionalized, quietist religion and the “negative,” protest-oriented potential embedded within the primordial Islamic tradition. Through an analysis of Shariati’s intellectual formation in Iran and Paris, the study highlights the diverse influences that shaped his synthesis, including Islamic modernism, Marxist theory, existentialism, and anti-colonial thought. The paper further situates Shariati within the broader ideological landscape of pre-revolutionary Iran, contrasting his position with clerical conservatism, Soviet-style communism, and secular revolutionary movements. Under the aegis of “revolutionary opium,” it argues that Shariati reclaims religion as a mobilizing force against imperialism, class exploitation, and monarchical tyranny, offering a distinctive model of politically engaged Islamic thought in the modern world.

**Keywords:** Marxism, Religion, Opiate of the Masses, Ali Shariati, Dialects

### *Introduction*

The Iranian sociologist and revolutionary, Ali Shariati, is often describes as a “Muslim Marxist,” who advocated a synthesis of Shi’i Islam and the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx. While it is certainly true that Ali Shariati learned much from Marx and Marxism while studying in France in the 1960s, it is equally clear that he distinguished his form of revolutionary politics from Marx’s regarding the role of religion within social transformation. For Marx, religion was detrimental for the emancipation of the working class, as it instilled an eschatology that foreclosed on the possibility of a radical transformation *within* the historical process. Religion was, in Marx’s classical formula, the “opium of the masses,” a way of dulling the consciousness of the exploited masses and reconciling them to their own oppression. While Shariati agreed with Marx’s analysis as it pertained to the status quo affirming nature of Christianity within the Western class struggle, he could not consent to such anti-religious perspectives regarding Shi’i Islam within Iran. For Shariati, only the “quietist” interpretation of Shi’i Islam, closely associated with the Shi’i clerical establishment, aided in the solidification of the traditional Iranian class hierarchy. Islam, in its primordial form, as exemplified by the life of Prophet Muhammad (*Sirah*), his companions (*Sahaba*), and the Prophet’s family (*Ahl al-Bayt*), did no such thing. As such, Shariati believed that there were revolutionary and emancipatory elements still preserved deep within the Islamic tradition, despite Shi’ism’s centuries long routinization into conservative “quietist” institutions. Whereas Marx recognized that the revolutionary impulse within Christianity had long been neutralized by its reconciliation with the prevailing class systems, for Shariati, those same revolutionary elements needed only to be *revitalized* within Shi’i Islam so that religion could be enlisted into the struggle against colonialism, imperialism, and monarchical tyranny. This “revitalization,” I will argue, is firmly rooted in Shariati’s rejection of Marx’s (and other neo-Marxists’) “abstract negation” of religion in favor of a “determinate negation” (*Aufheben*) of religion, wherein the “affirmative” nature of institutional religion is negated in favor of the “negative” (or protest) nature of religion. I will demonstrate how this negative form of the Shi’i tradition stood against the affirmative conservatism of clericalism, the religious fundamentalism of Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as the Soviet inspired communist party: the Tudeh Party. In this sense, the Iranian struggle against class exploitation was best fronted by religious lay believers, as opposed to the clerical establishment

and/or forces devoid of religion, i.e., the Westernized intellectuals. As such, I claim that demonstrating the necessity of “revolutionary opium” was Shariati’s major contribution to Marxian theory in the Muslim world.

*The Early Political-Religious Education of a Shi’i Revolutionary*

Ali Shariati was born in 1933 to a deeply religious middle-class family. His father, Muhammad-Taqi, was a teacher and scholar of Islam, who founded the Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths in Mashhad. This Centre dedicated itself to an Islamic interpretation of current affairs and Iranian socio-political issues, Shi’i Islam, and the Muslim world at large.<sup>1</sup> Directed by laymen, it was outside of the cleric-dominated Shi’i establishment, as it attempted to discover a primordial Islam – beyond the ossified Shi’i clerical tradition – that would be more relevant to the contemporary world. Only eleven-years-old when it was founded, the Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths would be the genesis of Ali Shariati’s political consciousness and his modernist interpretation of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Around the same time, Shariati was exposed to a newly formed group called the Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists, who forwarded a modernist/progressive form of Shi’i Islam whose members believed was superior to both Western materialistic capitalism and atheistic communism, as it retained a theocentric worldview that spoke not only to humanity’s spiritual needs, but also to humanity’s material needs via socialism.<sup>3</sup> As such, the Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists rejected both the materialistic reductionism of Marx’s political philosophy, which they thought was nihilistic, as well as the rigid traditionalism of the Shi’i clerical hierarchy, which they thought failed to adequately address the material reality of the Iranian people. This attempt to rescue the truth of both religion and political philosophy within a socially and politically conscious form of Islam foreshadowed Shariati’s own attempt to do the same.

Shariati’s political consciousness was further augmented when he began his collegiate education at the Teacher’s Training College in Mashhad, which would become a pivotal point in his eclectic intellectual development. In Mashhad, he was exposed to Western sociology and philosophy for the first time, especially as it related to political affairs. Impressed by its depth and its analytic potential as it re-

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<sup>1</sup> Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari’ati* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 49.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-34.

lated to Iran, he would attempt to synthesize such material with the work of modernist Muslim thinkers, such as Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and ‘Allāma Muḥammad Iqbal. In Mashhad, Shariati continued to develop his natural inclination to build bridges between Western and Muslim thought. The kind of reactionary resistance to Western philosophy, which was typical of the tradition-bound clerical establishment, simply was not part of Shariati’s eclectic trajectory. On the other hand, he did not join the Western educated intellectuals, who often scorned all things Iranian and Islamic. For Shariati, truth was truth, and thus a synthetic form of Islamic thought, open to Western knowledge, seemed to him to be congruent with the spirit of the primordial Islam that his father advocated for. Shariati described his time in Mashhad as a “hurricane” that “disturbed the world’s peace.”<sup>4</sup> It was an intellectual hurricane that would eventually thrust him into world-historical events in Iran.

The 1950s was a period for both political activism and academic achievement for Shariati. He became a high school teacher in 1952; in the same year he became the founder of the Islamic Students’ Association and was arrested for participating in political demonstrations; in 1953 he joined the National Front, Mohammad Mosaddeq’s nationalist political party. In the same year, Mosaddeq, who was the democratically elected socialist prime minister of Iran, was overthrown by the CIA with the aid of forces aligned with the then defunct Iranian monarchy. In 1955, Shariati graduated from the University of Mashhad and was later arrested in 1957 for his political activities in the National Resistance Movement, which opposed the Shah.<sup>5</sup> This tumultuous period set the course for Shariati’s continued political involvement in public life. Academically, however, he was still underdeveloped. Although promising, his early work lacked philosophical depth. Although the trajectory of his theological, political, and philosophical work was already established, he was still in need of the intellectual tools to develop the emancipatory thought he would later become known for. In 1959, that opportunity presented itself: he earned a scholarship to study at the University of Paris, where he would eventually earn a Ph.D. in sociology in 1964.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 49

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 51-87.

*Education in Paris*

As it relates to his engagement with Marx and Marxism, Shariati's time in Paris was essential, as it was in the "City of Light" that he was exposed both to Marxist thought as well as liberation movements that were dominated by various strains of Marxism. In Paris, Shariati fell under the spell of numerous scholars, whom he called his "idols."<sup>6</sup> Outside of the debates and discussions he had with other students from the "Third World" in Paris cafes, Shariati studied with, and established connections to, some of the most notable scholars of the time. Shariati's biographer, Ali Rahnema, identifies five main influences on Shariati during his studies in Paris.

The first major influence was Louis Massignon, a deeply religious French Catholic who Shariati assisted in writing his extensive biography of Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and wife of Imam Ali. Ever the ecumenist, Massignon emphasized the theological unity of the Abrahamic religions as well as the importance of a religious approach to social justice issues. The fight for social justice was not just a matter of secular thought and secular movements for Massignon, but was inherently a matter of religion, for it was religion that could truly posit a vision of the world beyond the given. Later in life, Shariati would imply that his relationship with Massignon was the result of divine intervention: he was Shams-i Tabrizī to Shariati's Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī.<sup>7</sup>

The second influence was George Gurvitch, a Jewish-Russian émigré to France. An anti-monarchist revolutionary and political theorist, Gurvitch was a "comrade in arms" to Lenin and Trotsky but later found himself fleeing the Soviet Union with the rise of Stalin. For Shariati, Gurvitch was the archetype of a "scholar-activist," as Gurvitch, the radical academic, spent his entire life in a struggle against authoritarianism communism, fascism, and French colonialism, especially in Algeria.<sup>8</sup> Shariati was impressed by Gurvitch's zealous commitment to both theory and praxis, which he thought was lacking in the Shi'i clerics in Iran, who often spoke on

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<sup>6</sup> These Western "idols" would later be invoked by the clerical opponents of Shariati to argue that he was a Western intellectual who used the veneer of Islam to disguise his "foreign" philosophy.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

<sup>8</sup> Through numerous North African students in Paris, Shariati made contacts with the Algerian *Front de libération nationale* (National Liberation Front), or FLN, which from the mid-1950s to 1962, engaged in a war for independence against French colonialism. More on this matter will be discussed regarding Frantz Fanon and his relationship to Shariati.

social justice issues but failed to actively fight for it.<sup>9</sup> It was Gurvitch who introduced Shariati to the pantheon of Marxist thinkers, which beyond Marx and Engels, included Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, Vladimir Lenin, Nikolai Bukharin, György Lukács, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. According to Rahnema, much of Shariati's later critique of Marx was rooted in his appropriation of Proudhon's "moralistic conception of socialism" over the historical-materialist conception as advocated by Marx and Engels.<sup>10</sup> Through Gurvitch, Shariati came to understand Hegel's dialectical notion of *Aufheben*, or "determinate negation," which he would later deploy as he developed his own revolutionary interpretation of Shi'i Islam.

The third influence was Jacques Berque, a highly respected scholar of Islamic sociology. A *pied noir* ("black foot") born in Algeria, a devout Christian, and sometimes regarded as a Western Orientalist, Jacques Berque spent much of his career studying Islam and Muslim culture in North Africa. When Shariati arrived in Paris, Berque was already one of the most outspoken critics of French colonialism in the Maghrib. Even though Shariati obtained his Ph.D. in 1964, he continued to audit the French Islamologist's sociology courses post-graduation. According to Shariati, Berque taught him how to think systematically, to connect disparate data-points into a comprehensive system of thought. Additionally, through his *degré de signification* method, Berque taught Shariati the dialectical nature of language and the power such language potentially yields.<sup>11</sup> For Berque, semantic material can be transformed into linguistic tools to induce social/political slumber, or they can be mobilized, elevated, and transformed into means by which the masses are aroused from their socially induced somnambulant condition. The subtle but important re-interpretation of common Islamic language, by which the political-economic and socially-emancipatory elements within can be awoken and radicalized, will play an important part of Shariati's re-defining of the Shi'i tradition during the 1970s uprising against the Shah and the quietist clerical establishment.

The fourth major influence on Shariati during his Paris years came from an indirect source: Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), whom he corresponded with. The Martinique psychiatrist, political philosopher, and anti-colonial revolutionary was especially influential on Shariati's overall commitment to anti-colonial struggles, especially as it relates to the role of Marxism within those struggles. Fanon's book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, so impressed Shariati that he translated it into Farsi, and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 125

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 126.

often referred to it in his lectures once he was back in Iran.<sup>12</sup> Shariati was most impressed by Fanon's insistence that the colonized people of the earth ought to "return to self," to rediscover their own cultural heritage, history, and traditions, to embrace the "black face" behind the "white mask." This was not a wholesale rejection of the West and Western thought, as even Fanon was steeped within Hegelian and Marxist philosophy, but rather a way of creating a "new man" that transcends the colonial identity that Europeans imposed upon the colonized "wretched."<sup>13</sup> As a "post-colonial" theorist, rooted in Marx's critique of religion, Frantz Fanon was leery about Shariati's insistence that Islam could play a part in national liberation movements, especially in Iran. Nevertheless, Fanon witnessed the role that Islam had played in the Algerian war for independence and therefore could not deny that Shariati's revolutionary interpretation of Shi'i Islam had the same emancipatory goal as his Marxist-inspired secular political philosophy. Indeed, he wrote in a 1961 letter to Shariati, that "I am persuaded that both paths will ultimately join up towards that destination where humanity lives well."<sup>14</sup> Proving that Islam had the revolutionary potential to emancipate Iranians from the rule of the Shah and Western hegemony became a central concern for Shariati for the rest of his life.

The last major Parisian influence on Shariati was the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, whose existentialism, informed by Marxism and its inherent atheism, had a tremendous influence on the existentialist thought imbedded within Shariati's revolutionary Islamic philosophy. Shariati was especially eager to reconcile Sartre's concept of individual freedom, the individuals' imperative to choose, and the acceptance of responsibility for such decisions, as well as the individual's inherent right to rebel, with his renewed form of politically conscious Shi'i Islam.<sup>15</sup> While he believed that "socialism, existentialism, and Islam," were the "intellectual and cultural air in which a Muslim of the century [must] breathe," he was not especially

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<sup>12</sup> Although Shariati is most-often credited with translating the book by himself, it was originally a collective effort by him and numerous other "Third World" students in Paris. By the time it was published, it was published only with Shariati's name as the translator.

<sup>13</sup> Dustin J. Byrd, "On the Possibility of a Post-Colonial Revolutionary: Reconsidering Žižek's Universalist Reading of Frantz Fanon in the Interregnum," in *Frantz Fanon and the Emancipatory Social Theory: A View from the Wretched*, ed. Dustin J. Byrd and Seyed Javad Miri (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 80-83.

<sup>14</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Alienation and Freedom* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 669.

<sup>15</sup> Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 127.

enamored by Sartre's insistence on atheism as a foundation for metaphysical freedom.<sup>16</sup> Shariati surmised that Sartre's existentialism was superior to other Western philosophical systems, including atheistic communism, nihilism, and positivism, but it unfortunately suffered from a lack of a solid theological foundation, which would give it a concrete moral system and a positive metaphysics. Nevertheless, Sartre's existentialism established the reality of humanity's inherent freedom and therefore its right to rebel against oppression. Such existential freedom, for Shariati, could be bound to the essential dictates of Islam, for within autonomous adherence to such divine dictates one could find the truest crystallization of individual freedom.

### *Marx and Marxism in Shariati's Iran*

When Shariati returned to Iran from Paris in 1964, he landed in a situation wherein Marxism had already penetrated much of the Iranian intelligentsia as well as college students. It had not, in any meaningful way, penetrated into the Iranian masses, neither urban nor rural. Despite the Western cosmopolitanism of Tehran, where capitalism reigned supreme and Marxist intellectuals bemoaned its encroachment, the masses of Iranian peasants, bazaaris, and workers remained steeped within traditional Shi'i culture and practices. Nevertheless, the Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists, which had formed during Shariati's youth, had been replaced by groups that either adhered to Marxism and/or movements that attempted to incorporate certain elements of Marxist theory into their religious praxis. While Iran had a Soviet-style Communist Party, the Tudeh Party of Iran (*Ḥezb-e Tūde-ye Īrān*), which was often suppressed by the monarchy since its founding in the 1930s, non-Soviet-style Marxism manifested itself in the 1960s in Iran through various political parties and movements.<sup>17</sup> For example, the Mujahideen-i Khalq (*mojāhedīn-e khalq*) (MEK), or "Holy Warriors of the People," emerged from the bloody 1963 riots against the Shah. It had its roots in the Freedom Movement in Iran (*Nahzat-e āzādi-e Irān*) (FMI), a party based in the former Prime Minister Mo-

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Dustin J. Byrd, *Ayatollah Khomeini and the Anatomy of the Islamic Revolution in Iran: Toward a Theory of Prophetic Charisma* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 80-87.

hammad Mosaddeq's nationalist politics and "modernist" interpretation of Shi'i Islam but would later break away due to the latter's "gradualist" approach to social transformation. It viewed Mosaddeq's methods not only as being too slow, but also too accommodating to the monarchy and Western hegemony, especially American involvement in Iran. As such, the Mujahideen-i Khalq was inspired less by parliamentary politics and more by the revolutionary communists Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Mao Zedong, and their "Third World" liberation struggles. Theoretically, the MEK married Marx and Engels' class analyses with a revolutionary reading of Shi'i Islam, the latter being important to mankind's spiritual needs.<sup>18</sup> In the 1970s, the Mujahideen-i Khalq led guerilla attacks against the Shah's regime, which contributed to the weakening and eventual fall of the monarchy. Despite its embrace of Shi'i Islam, and even Shi'i Imamate eschatology, it did not support Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power, as his theocratic policies, especially the *velāyat-e faqīh* (guardianship of the Islamic jurist) was seen as being too conservative and overly reliant on clerical authority. Although Marxism preceded Shariati's return to Iran from Paris, many who would later join the MEK, especially radicalized middle-class youth, did so after being influenced by Shariati's Left-leaning revolutionary Shi'ism.<sup>19</sup>

While the Mujahideen-i Khalq embraced Shi'ism as an integral part of their political philosophy, their counterpart, the Fadaiyan-i Khalq (*Fadā'iān-e khalq*) (FEK), or "Popular Self-Sacrificers," were strict Marxist-Leninists who eschewed any commitment to religion. Also born out of the bloody 1963 protests against the Shah, the Fadaiyan-i Khalq pursued an anti-imperialist, anti-monarchy armed struggle, with the goal of instituting a state defined by Marxist principles. However, unlike the Soviet-friendly Tudeh Party, they rejected Stalinism as an appropriate form of communism for Iran, rather seeing "Third World" communism, such as Cuba, Vietnam, and China, as being more appropriate for the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> Comprised mainly of Western college-educated middle-class sons of Leftwing parents, the Fadaiyan-i Khalq also rejected the "gradualist" politics of Mosaddeq and followed Che Guevara's *Foco Theory* of revolutionary guerilla warfare, which argued that a vanguard of politically committed activists should spark a revolution and bring down the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 85-87.

<sup>19</sup> Siavash Saffari, *Beyond Shariati: Modernity, Cosmopolitanism, and Islam in Iranian Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 10-12.

<sup>20</sup> Byrd, *Ayatollah Khomeini*, 87.

monarchy.<sup>21</sup> Needless to say, they rejected the religiosity of both the Mujahideen-i Khalq and Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary conservatism.

Alongside Ali Shariati, there is one Western influenced intellectual that helped construct the overall rhetorical structure that defined the Iranian uprising against the Shah: Jalal Al-i Ahmad, a onetime member of the Tudeh Party. Read throughout the various classes in Iran, including the secular leftist intellectuals and their nemeses, the conservative clerics, Jalal Al-i Ahmad is most remembered for his book, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, which was originally published in 1962, just one year prior to the Shah's "White Revolution," i.e., his initiative to industrialize and Westernize Iran.<sup>22</sup> This book centers around the idea of *Gharbzadegi*, which can be translated to "Westoxification," "Occidentosis," or "West-Madness." This concept was originally theorized by the Western educated Iranian philosopher, Seyyed Ahmad Fardid (1910-1994), who, being deeply influenced by Martin Heidegger's ontological thought, believed that Greek philosophy had artificially divorced the knowing human subject from the world as known object, as opposed to uniting the subject and object as Eastern worldviews so often do. This artificial divorce, which became the dominant Western *Weltanschauung* – as it pervaded both their religious and scientific approaches to the external world – set the stage for the dysgenic conditions of modernity. For Fardid, the "unity and totality of being" that was exemplified in Eastern worldviews, theologies, and philosophies, was buckling under the weight of globalized Westernization, ushering in a "period of universal darkness."<sup>23</sup> While Jalal Al-i Ahmad appreciated Fardid's ontological analysis, in the spirit of Marx's "turning Hegel on his head," Jalal Al-i Ahmad appropriated Fardid's concept of *Gharbzadegi* and made it more concrete and less idealistic. For the Marxist-influenced Ahmed, *Gharbzadegi* was not merely a problem of modern ontology, but rather a problem of political-economy as it relates to Iran and its relationship to Western hegemony.

In the hands of Jalal Al-i Ahmad, the concept of *Gharbzadegi* became central to the question of authenticity and authenticity's role in resisting the cultural colonization of Iran. To be "struck" with the "disease" of *Gharbzadegi*, was to abandon traditional cultural identity through the blind imitation of all-things-Western. In *Occidentosis*, Jalal Al-i Ahmad wrote,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 87; Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Ahmad, Jalal Al-i Ahmed, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, ed. Hamid Algar. Translated by R. Campell (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press).

<sup>23</sup> Byrd, *Ayatollah Khomeini*, 89.

We have been unable to preserve our own historicocultural character in the face of the machine and its fateful onslaught. Rather, we have been routed. We have been unable to take a considered stand in the face of this contemporary monster. So long as we do not comprehend the real essence, basis, and philosophy of Western civilization, only aping the West outwardly and formally (by consuming its machines), we shall be like the ass going about in a lion's skin... For two hundred years we have resembled the crow mimicking the partridge (always supposing that the West is a partridge and we are a crow). So long as we remain consumers, so long as we have not built the machine, we remain occidentotic.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of Iran, all that was native to Iran and Shi'i Islam was valueless, primitive, and backward looking; all that was Western was valued, progressive, and worthy of appropriation. For Jalal Al-i Ahmad, the abandonment of Iranian culture for a simplistic imitation of the Western image was not simply about food, clothing, music, and other cultural goods; it had a much more important export: it culturally prepared Iran for its own subjugation by Western political-economic interest. In other words, the cultivation of Gharbzadegi was a subversive attempt, disguised as Western-style progress, to weaken the internal resources of Shi'i Islam and Iranian nationalism, which would otherwise serve as the oppositional forces to Western imperialist hegemony. If such "authentic" resources could be removed, or at best crippled, then Western imperialists would have less resistance as they gradually absorbed Iran into their sphere of influence, thus subjugating Iran to their interests. As such, "cultural invasion," and the alienation of a people from their own native culture, was a pretext for neo-imperialist domination. Like missionaries that prepare the way for a colonial invasion, cultural hegemony precedes political-economic hegemony.

While Jalal Al-i Ahmad saw much of Iran's public sphere succumbing to Gharbzadegi, especially among the cosmopolitan elites, he recognized one segment of society that had yet to be compromised: the Shi'i establishment. Although he found his own prayers to be hypocritical, as he was not a fervent believer in religion, he nevertheless recognized that Shi'i Islam had yet to be contaminated by Gharbzadegi and was the only national resource that was capable of resisting the

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<sup>24</sup> Ahmed, *Occidentosis*, 31.

encroachment of Western culture. No other ideology had the potential to unite the Iranians, the Shi'i, or even Muslims at large, against the onslaught of Western modernity and Western imperialism. Therefore, much like the conclusion that Shariati came to, Jalal Al-i Ahmad surmised that if Islam could be radicalized, i.e., if its inherent critique of class domination could be resurrected and enlisted into their anti-imperialist fight, it could be the most potent oppositional force against the Shah and his Western allies. This analysis not only influenced Ali Shariati's understanding of Shi'i Islam as a force resistant to Western imperialism, but it also influenced Ayatollah Khomeini, who appropriated certain aspects of Jalal Al-i Ahmad's rhetoric into his own.<sup>25</sup>

This matrix of Shi'i Islam infused by Marxist and other forms of leftist revolutionary thought, all directed against the Shah and his patrons in the West, is the cultural-political milieu into which Shariati stepped once he returned to Iran in 1964. This intellectual milieu, coupled with the growing discontent with the Shah, would catapult Shariati to the forefront of the struggle to emancipate Iran from the Shah and Western domination.

### *Essence, Alienation, and the Opium of the Masses*

In order to best understand the animating logic behind Ali Shariati's determinate negation of Shi'i Islam, it is beneficial to revisit Marx's original "abstract negation" of religion, as it played a foundational part in his overall historical materialist philosophy. By reviewing Marx's core critique of religion, the nature of Shariati's "determinate negation" (*Aufheben*) of Marx's overall political philosophy becomes apparent.

As a Young Hegelian, situated within the Left-wing politics of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, Karl Marx was an avid reader of another Young Hegelian, Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach (1804-1872 CE). A student of Hegel himself, Feuerbach published his most controversial book, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (The Essence of Christianity) in 1841, which would not only influence Marx, but also other 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century luminaries, such as Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the composer Richard Wagner.<sup>26</sup> In the spirit of materialist philosophy and science, this book would challenge the core religious beliefs that were foundational for Western

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>26</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989).

civilization. Utilizing the dialectical logic he learned from Hegel, Feuerbach reversed Christianity's concept of the *Imago Dei* (Image of God), which it had inherited from Judaism.<sup>27</sup> This concept forwarded the idea that all humans were “made in the image of God,” and thus humanity was a special creation of God, deserving of honor, unique privileges, and responsibilities above the rest of creation. For Feuerbach, the truth of this claim could only be found in its reversal: It was not humankind who was made in the image of God, but rather God who was made in the image of humanity. As such, Feuerbach argued that the “anthropological essence” of the very concept of God was rooted in humanity's psychological projections; God was not an external reality central to the existence of all existence, nor the progenitor of all that exists, but rather a projection of humanity's nature into a fictive character: God was a “chimera,” to use Feuerbach's term.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, Feuerbach believed that his “projection” theory uncovered a psychological reality that would have a political export. He wrote,

Religion is the disuniting of man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself. God is not what man is – man is not what God is. God is the infinite, man the finite being; God is perfect, man imperfect; God eternal, man temporal; God almighty, man weak; God holy, man sinful. God and man are extremes; God is the absolutely positive, the sum of all realities; man the absolutely negative, comprehending all negations.<sup>29</sup>

The more humanity projects its good and noble qualities onto a divine being conjured by its own mind, the less good and noble humanity is itself. In other words, humanity drains itself of its best qualities, including its dignity, when it assumes God to be not only the *source* of all goodness, but absolute goodness itself. Feuerbach writes, “God is the highest subjectivity of man abstracted from himself; hence man can do nothing of himself, all goodness comes from God.”<sup>30</sup> As such, the more mankind submits itself to God, its externalized subjectivity, the more it alienates itself

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<sup>27</sup> This biblical idea can be found both in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 5:1-3; Genesis 9:6) and the Christian New Testament (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:13-15; Colossians 3:10; 1 Corinthians 11:7; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4-7).

<sup>28</sup> Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 33

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

from itself. In the process, humanity becomes estranged from itself, as the externalized subjectivity takes on the delusion of divine objectivity. For Feuerbach, this projection of humanity's goodness onto a fictive divine being leaves humanity wretched, debased, and exploitable, and therefore in need of an external heavenly savior, one that will intervene into human history and redeem humanity from itself, which it cannot do for itself. Religion, as such, is a systematic interpretation of reality and orientation of action that is predicated on the idea that humankind is wholly subject to God's will, and therefore world-historical change must be brought about by the will of God, not by humanity's collective will. For Feuerbach, understanding the anthropological genesis of God, which is the "essence" of Christianity, and the subsequent alienation of humanity from itself, is the first step in emancipating humanity from the tyranny of God, i.e., the tyranny of humanity's own self-debasement and self-alienation. A state of atheism is therefore the requisite condition wherein humanity can return to self, recover his dignity, and live autonomously.

Karl Marx, being an avid disciple of Ludwig Feuerbach, assumed in his 1844 essay, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction," that Feuerbach's projection theory was not only correct but was the culmination of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's critique of Christianity. In the first paragraphs of his essay, Marx writes of Feuerbach's critique of religion in the following way:

For Germany, the criticism of religion has been largely completed; and the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism... Man, who has found in the fantastic reality of heaven, where he sought a supernatural being, only his own reflection, will no longer be tempted to find only the semblance of himself – a non-human being – where he seeks and must seek his true reality... The basis of irreligious criticism is this: *man makes religion*; religion does not make man.<sup>31</sup>

Here, Marx accepts wholeheartedly the basic thesis of Feuerbach's projection theory. He assumes that Feuerbach's unveiling of religion as being an alienated form of human subjectivity projected onto an imaginative being is essentially the last word on religion. As we'll see, Shariati will not agree.

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<sup>31</sup> The emphasis is original. Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), 53.

Although he saw no hope for the rescue of religion within modernity, Marx isn't flippantly dismissive of religion as a human phenomenon. Rather, he fully realized the alienated condition of humanity that is articulated through religious concepts, practices, and beliefs. He understood that the material conditions that bring about the pervasiveness of human misery are expressed within religious and theological semantics, and to recognize such misery within its religious form is to recognize it in its material form. This is why he writes that "religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering."<sup>32</sup> In light of this, Marx provides us with a tripartite definition of religion. He writes, "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless condition."<sup>33</sup> In this famous phrase, Marx recognizes what he believes to be the humanistic core of religion: religion is at once an encyclopedia of human suffering caused by the horror and terror of nature and history, and also a protest against the barbarity of nature and history. It is an honest record of human depravity and misery, yet distorted by theological illusions, psychological projections, and fanciful eschatologies.

Despite his recognition of the humanistic core of religion, Marx did not think religion was the proper avenue by which the heartless and soulless condition could be overcome, as the Jewish and Christian clerics taught. Rather conversely, religion, especially in modernity, is that which cements and perpetuates the heartless and soulless condition, as it reconciles the suffering masses to the very socio-political structures that cause their suffering. In other words, religion makes suffering theologically meaningful, as it creates a positive metaphysics that imbues the world-as-it-is with divine justifications and sanctifications: history is as *Deus Vult* (God wills it). Nevertheless, just as Feuerbach saw mankind alienate itself from the fullness of its humanity via its theological projections, so Marx saw mankind alienate itself from its means of historical emancipation via its theological commitments. Religion is not the means to liberations, as the institution of the Church would contend, but rather it is the "opium of the people."<sup>34</sup> For Marx and his successors, religion integrates the working masses (*Proletariat*) and their suffering into a worldview that privileges *social statics* as opposed to *social dynamics*; religion encourages the masses to suffer peacefully, quietly, with piety, for the rewards for doing so are a matter of *eschatological* emancipation, not political and/or economic

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

liberation in this life. In their longing for an eschatological solution to their suffering, religion deflects the masses' angst against the world-as-it-is into the non-threatening realm of prayer, fasting, and mediation, not the realm of revolution. As such, religion, like opium, "dulls the consciousness" of the believer, making them deaf to the calls for radical change in this world.<sup>35</sup>

The task of Feuerbach's critique was the first step in dethroning religion as a system of domination over humanity. For Marx, the emancipation of the working masses from their religious worldview would allow them to recognize their "self-alienation in its secular form," i.e., the domination of capitalism and the class structure, exploitation, and debasement of the proletariat that is the result of capitalism.<sup>36</sup> Religion for Marx was a psychological weapon in the hands of the Bourgeoisie, which had already abandoned any substantive belief in Christianity and commitments to its moralistic dictates during the Enlightenment. Only hypocritically did the ruling classes keep up their public "commitments" to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, for the masses to abandon religion was to create the secular space wherein the debased masses could finally recognize the true source of their suffering: the class structure and those who rule within it. In order to do that, the critique of religion had to be transformed into the critique of this world. As Marx wrote, "Thus the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics."<sup>37</sup>

As we can see, Marx believed religion was a force for the perpetuation of social statics, a weapon wherein the given status quo could be reified, made permanent, and undermine any attempt at radical social, political, an economic change. Opiate religion dulled the consciousness of those most in need of emancipation, so that they would never realize themselves as a force for their own liberation. Ultimately for Marx, religion, especially within in an age of scientific materialism, was

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<sup>35</sup> Marx was not the first to liken religion to opium. Philosophically, such was done by Immanuel Kant already in his 1793 book, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*), wherein he likens good religion as a religion that "sharpens" the consciousness of the believer and bad religion as that which dulls or comforts consciousness. See Immanuel Kant (2010) *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and other Writing*, Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 93.

<sup>36</sup> Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 54.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

an impediment to human flourishing, human freedom, and the actualization of humanity's potentials, as it was rooted in theological projections – rooted in man's psychological needs and not material reality, and it affirmed the world-as-it-is – a world wherein the masses work and toil, and others appropriate their surplus value. Whereas religion was once revolutionary, even communistic, in certain points in history, such as the early Christian community and the 1525 German Peasants' Revolt led by Thomas Müntzer.<sup>38</sup> (1489-1525 CE), religion was in the materialistic/scientific period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a regressive force that foreclosed on emancipatory social dynamics, revolution, and the destruction of the domination of ruling classes.<sup>39</sup> Whereas the philosopher Feuerbach started this historical-materialist critique of the world beginning with his critique of religion, it was Marx that pointed out in his 11<sup>th</sup> theses on Feuerbach, that for the philosopher, the “point, however, is to change it.”<sup>40</sup> This “change” of the world undertaken by philosophers is precisely what Ali Shariati had intended to do in Iran, but not in the way Feuerbach and Marx thought. For Shariati, it was the removal of religion that made emancipation possible, but rather the “revivification” (*tajdid*) of religion that would liberate the debased masses.

#### *Shariati's Critique of Marx's Opiate Religion*

Through his education in Paris, Shariati came to appreciate Marx's critique of capitalism, the Bourgeoisie, and the class structure that assigns toil and misery to one part of the human family, and wealth and freedom to another segment of humanity. He agreed with Marx's analysis that all of history was the history of class struggle. In his 1970 lectures “Religion vs. Religion,” which was delivered at the Hussainiya in Tehran, Shariati stated:

We see that, throughout history, human societies are divided into the noble and unnoble, master and slave, abased and enslaving, ruler and ruled, captive and free, a group which has an essence, roots, race and is of a gold extraction and another group which

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>39</sup> Both Friedrich Engels and Karl Kautsky claimed the Protestant theologian and revolutionary Thomas Müntzer to be a religious precursor to the revolutionary communists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially the revolutionary uprisings of 1848-1849. See Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, trans. Moissaye J. Olgin (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 145.

lacks these. A nation which is more virtuous than another nation. A class which is continuously superior and has preference over another class.<sup>41</sup>

He saw that the history of the Muslims as being replete with such class struggle, both during their struggle to overcome *jāhiliyah* (pre-Islamic “age of ignorance”) and after the establishment of the *dār al-Islam* (the abode of Islam), within which a class structure quickly formed. Shariati agreed with Marx’s analysis of capitalism’s parasitic nature, that it feeds off the masses by appropriating the surplus value of the workers and delivers it to the ruling class, leaving impoverished those who labor and enriched those who hold power. He even agreed that religion can act as an opiate, dulling the masses consciousness so that their revolutionary potential is neutralized under the weight of eschatological expectations and spiritual resignation. Again, in Shariati’s “Religion vs. Religion” lectures, he states:

Just as the anti-religious forces of today correctly say, the elements of the religion of multi-theism consisted of ignorance, fear, discrimination, ownership and the preference of one class over another. These people, that is, those who are anti-religious, are correct. It is right that, ‘Religion is the opium of the masses of the people,’ so that the 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.<sup>42</sup>

However, Shariati could not agree with Marx that *all* religion was opiate. His reading of the *Sīrah* (biography of the Prophet Muhammad), and the lives of ‘Ali, Hussein, the Twelve Imams, and even the companion of the Prophet, Abū Ḍarr al-Ghifārīy al-Kinānīy (whom he believed was Islam’s first “socialist”), didn’t allow for

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<sup>41</sup> Ali Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion*. Translated by Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 2003), 33.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

him to place such individuals in such a counter-revolutionary category.<sup>43</sup> Rather, unlike Feuerbach and Marx, Shariati saw in religion a *dialectical* phenomenon; one that had both the potential to be a force for social statics and a force for social dynamics. Both Feuerbach and Marx, in Shariati's analysis, made the same mistake as many other 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-religious materialists: myopically, they failed to see the dialectic of religion, and therefore religion's emancipatory potential.

In Shariati's analysis, religion could either be a source for the legitimization of class exploitation, political domination, and the unjust appropriation of wealth, or it could be a source of revolutionary emancipation, freedom, and the just distribution of wealth.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, Shariati was more faithful to Hegel's dialectical logic than Marx, as he saw the dialectical tension – the inner-contradiction – within religion itself, which was overlooked by Hegel's materialist heirs. In his "Religion vs. Religion" lectures, Shariati explains that the history of religion had not been a fight between religion and anti-religion, or religion against atheism, as the Cold War was often portrayed as, but rather was a struggle between two *forms* of religion: the religion that *affirms* the status quo and the religion that *confronts* the status quo.<sup>45</sup> Linking this to the myopic dialectical materialists, Shariati said,

in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is the peak of objection to religion in Europe... they were not able to separate these two religions from each other whereas these two religions not only have no resemblance to each other, but they are even hostile and contradictory to one another, and essentially they continuously, without interruption, throughout history, fought with each other, still do and will continue to do so.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Abū Ḍarr al-Ghifārīy al-Kinānīy is venerated by Shi'i Muslims as being one of the four early converts to Islam who sided with 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib over who should rightfully be Muḥammad's *Khalifa* (successor). However, Abū Ḍarr was known even more for his critique of the third caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, and his accumulation of wealth, which continued among his family after 'Uthmān's assassination in 656 CE. Unlike the Umayyad Caliphate, which created and sustained a class hierarchy, Abū Ḍarr fought for a distribution of wealth that was congruent with the Islamic concept of *'adl* (justice).

<sup>44</sup> Seyed Javad Miri, *Ali Shariati: Expanding the Sociological Canon* (Kalamazoo, MI: Ekpyrosis Press, 2021).

<sup>45</sup> Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

This dialectical contradiction was the essential nature of all Abrahamic religions, as they are so often divided within themselves and against themselves.

*The Dialectical Politicization of Theological Language*

On the “affirmative” side of the dialectic of religion, Shariati places the categories of *Kufr* and *Shirk*. On the “negative” side of the dialectic, he draws upon the notions of *Tawhid*. Following the political-linguistic strategies of his Parisian teacher Jacques Berque, Shariati assigns theopolitical significance to these common Islamic concepts that go beyond the tradition meaning. In a conventional reading of Islamic theological language, the term *Kufr* refers to a state of disbelief in God (in the Islamic sense), or alternatively, those who are “ungrateful” towards God.<sup>47</sup> This is in opposition to the Islamic term *īmān*, or state of “faith.” A *Mu'min*, or plural *al-Mu'minūn/al-Mu'minīn*, are “the true believer(s),” having fully submitted to the will of Allah. In his “Religion vs. Religion” lectures, Shariati argues that the “disbelief” that is inherent in the meaning of *Kufr* cannot denote non-religion or atheism, as the notion of a non-religious existence was not a feature of the societies in which Islamic theological language was developed. Opposition to religion always came in the form of religion. Therefore, non-religion could not have developed an oppositional force in regard to religion, and it would be a mistake to read the term via the modern antagonism between religion and non-religion. Rather, *Kufr* represents a form of religion that conceals the truth behind a veil of “ignorance, malice, self-seeking interests or absolute foolishness... [it is the] covering over the truth of religion by means of another religion.”<sup>48</sup> What Shariati called “another religion” should not be understood as a distinctly different religion, i.e., Islam vs. Christianity, or Judaism vs. Islam, but rather it is a different *form* of the same religion. In other words, what opposes the Islam of the *Mu'minūn* is the “world-affirmative” side of Islam’s dialectical nature: the Islam of the *Kāfirūn*. Given Shariati’s dialectical approach to this basic Islamic terminology, even those who claim faith in Islam can rightly be designated *Kāfirūn*, “disbelievers,” for they have transformed Islam into a status-quo legitimating ideology (opiate religion), one that functionalizes Islam against its emancipatory aim, which constitutes its essential nature.

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<sup>47</sup> Those who are in a state of *Kufr* are referred to as *Kāfir* (singular) and *Kāfirūn* (plural).

<sup>48</sup> Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion*, 24.

In regard to *Shirk*, Shariati reminds us that the common understanding of the Islamic term is polytheism, which is not synonymous with “godlessness.”<sup>49</sup> In fact, from the Islamic perspective, it is the theological mistake of having too many gods, not a lack of gods. Polytheists are religious in nature, but with divided loyalties: “they are worshippers of excessive deities,” Shariati proclaims.<sup>50</sup> Yet, following the sublation of common Islamic theological terms into more complex socio-political terms, Shariati argues that this polytheistic worldview has a political export: “it means surrender, disgrace and the enslavement of humanity in bondage to the idols.”<sup>51</sup> For Shariati, polytheism and idol worship are the fraudulent reverence of that which is created, conditioned, and non-eternal, i.e., that which is created by humanity, as opposed to the single uncreated, unconditioned, and eternal God who created humanity. In a modern polytheistic world, the “gods” are no longer the traditional gods of the ancestors, henotheistic national gods, or the gods of nature, etc., but rather modern gods take on a more mundane existence: they are wealth as a god; power as a god; prestige as a god, etc. Just like the polytheistic gods of the premodern world, these new gods do not defy the world-as-it-is, but rather are the result of the modern world and as such affirm the world-as-it-is; they are the gods born of the status quo that legitimate the status quo.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, for Shariati, the Qur’ānic denunciation of the worship of pagan gods “which you (yourselves) carved” (Qur’ān 37:95), i.e., al-Lat, al-‘Uzza, Manat, Hubal, etc., remains true into modernity, but in a modified form: It is now the condemnation of the modern “gods” associated with the trappings and excesses of this world. Here again, like the concept of *Kufr*, Shariati subjected the concept of *Shirk* to Hegelian/Marxist determinate negation, wherein its meaning migrated from the depths of the theological realm into the political realm, thus augmenting its latent meaning-content while maintaining its manifest theological form.

Having gone through the process of dialectical-politicization via sublation, monotheism’s historical struggle to overcome polytheism subsequently transforms into a monotheistic political struggle against political polytheism. Shariati argues that just as pre-modern polytheism legitimated the unjust and oppressive status quo, so too does modern political polytheism legitimate the unjust and oppressive status quo, i.e., the capitalist and imperialist class structure. Echoing Marx’s cri-

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

tique of religion, i.e., religions' attempt to reconcile the masses to their abased condition, Shariati argues that it is explicitly polytheism, and not the monotheism of the *Mu'minūn* that attempts to opiate the masses. He says,

[polytheism's] work was to make people submit, be content with the belief that whatever took place was God's will, convince themselves that, 'I am connected to a low class not only because my essence is lowly but because my god, my lord, my creator and my master are lower than the masters of other races, lower than the idols of the race, lower than the gods of the other race.'<sup>53</sup>

For Shariati, modern polytheism induces a form of "narcosis," or "inner surrender" over society's lowers classes. The unjust and oppressive status quo, created by the *mala* and *mutrif*, is reified, resulting in a worldview defined by fate, which is predicated on the will of the gods and is therefore immutable.<sup>54</sup>

Returning to theological language, Shariati counters polytheism and its affirmative nature with Islam's concept of *Tawḥīd*, or "divine oneness," which for Shariati is manifestly dialectical in that it both denies the world-as-it-is and points to a world as it should be. Just as Muhammad's theological concept of *Tawḥīd* undermined the polytheistic religion of *Jāhiliyah* and subsequently undermined the socio-political and economic structure of that society, so too does the concept of *Tawḥīd* undermine the modern polytheistic world of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. For example, the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed that Allah was singular, and as such so too was humanity singular. If all of humanity was singular, then all of humanity was familial, and ought to treat each other as family, without exploitation, oppression, and violence. This ethical export from the theological concept of *Tawḥīd* undermined the fratricidal violence that plagued the Arab tribes and therefore undermined the tribal gods that legitimated, justified, and sanctified their continual antagonisms. It also undermined the class antagonisms within the tribes, including his own tribe, al-Quraysh. Whereas Marx saw the *abolishment of religion* as a precondition for class consciousness, and therefore the precondition for the abolishment of classes, Shariati, following Muhammad, saw the *realization of*

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>54</sup> Shariati defines the wealthy aristocrats as "mala" and "mutrif," meaning "insatiable people who live in ease and luxury" and "people who have ruled in their own society without having any responsibilities" (Shariati 2003, 40).

religion – in this case primordial Islam – as the precondition for the abolishment of an unjust class structure.

The Islamic concept of *Tawhīd*, for Shariati, was the mobilizing theological notion that brought about the realization of the oneness and equality of humanity, whereas in Marxism, such a realization of man's communal potential came about through the realization of the impermanence of class antagonisms, capitalism, and the unjust exploitation of workers and the extraction of their surplus value.<sup>55</sup> Thus, where Marx saw religion monolithically as an impediment to human emancipation, Shariati saw religion through a dialectical lense, as being both potentially emancipatory (in its *Tawhīdic* form), and potentially oppressive and exploitative (in its polytheistic form). This dialectical tension between the form of religion that emancipates, is revolutionary, and seeks to overturn the unjust conditions of humanity, versus opiate religion that induces a somnambulant state, is the basis for the claim that Shariati advocated for a "Red Shi'ism," a form of Shi'i Islam that was infused with class consciousness and revolutionary spirit, distinguishable from "Black Shi'ism" – the clerical traditional that lent itself to the status quo either through its political quietism or its outright embrace of the Iranian monarchy.<sup>56</sup> However, Shariati's revolutionary Shi'i Islam was not the result of mere "borrowing" from Marx and the Marxist tradition, as he was often accused. Rather, the secular revolutionary tradition that grew out of Marx allowed Shariati to "recover" those elements that were already latent within the Islamic tradition, especially Shi'i Islam, which remained dormant since the routinization/institutionalization of the Islamic tradition within the *dār al-Islam*. In this sense, what Shariati did was not merely a sublation of Marxist thought into Islamic thought, but rather a recovery of the Marxist-like "negative" aspects of Islam, with which Islam was reinvigorated, thus producing a "revolutionary Islam" akin to the emancipatory Islam of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. From a Marxist lens, it would appear that Shariati "borrowed" from Marxism, whereas from Shariati's perspective he "returned" to the sunnah of Muhammad. Where Shariati does engage in determinate negation is when he revolutionizes Islamic theological concepts, such as *Kufr*, *Shirk*, and *Tawhīd*, which allowed such concepts to migrate from the realm of the purely theological into the realm of political economy. From there Shariati utilized such semantic and semiotic material in his anti-monarchical and anti-imperialist struggle against the Shah and his allies.

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<sup>55</sup> Ali Shariati, *Marxism and other Western Fallacies*, ed. Hamid Algar. Trans. R. Campbell (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1980), 49-96.

<sup>56</sup> Dustin J. Byrd and Seyed Javad Miri, *Ali Shariati and the Future of Social Theory: Religion, Revolution, and the Role of the Intellectual* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 98-127.

## Conclusion

As I've argued, Ali Shariati was first drawn to revolutionary interpretations of Islam in his youth, beginning with his own father, his relations with the God-Fearing Socialists, and from his exposure to other revolutionary Iranian schools of thought. That interest in an emancipatory form of political religion was further nurtured while studying in Paris, by the likes of Massignon, Gurvitch, Berque, as well as Fanon and Sartre. Through his studies, Shariati was exposed to the writings of Karl Marx and other Marxists, but given his own religious background, could not reconcile their anti-religious positions with his own commitments to Islam, and what he believed to be Islam's revolutionary essence. Nevertheless, the political aspects of Marx and Marxism, especially issues concerning class antagonisms, the exploitative nature of capitalism, the evils of colonialism, were influential on how Shariati would conceptualize and articulate his own interpretation of revolutionary Shi'i Islam. For Shariati, the influence of Marx was not in dialectical materialism's anti-religious stance, as Shariati rejected Marx's abstract negation of religion; Shariati maintained a dialectical approach to religion, which rejects Marx's myopic "opiate" thesis. For Shariati, Marx was blinded by Feuerbach and the crass materialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, thus he couldn't adequately see the emancipatory nature of revolutionary religion. Because of Islam's uncompromising theological concept of *Tawhīd*, and its socio-political export, Shariati believed Islam was a major force for the political and economic emancipation of the Muslim world, as long as it was understood in its primordial/revolutionary way.

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## **Ibn Khaldun, Multiple Modernities, and the Crisis of Eurocentric Sociology in Iran**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the contemporary relevance of Ibn Khaldun's social theory in confronting the epistemic and political challenges faced by non-Western societies, with a particular focus on Iran. Moving beyond reductionist portrayals that confine Ibn Khaldun to premodern tribal contexts, the article argues that core Khaldunian concepts – including *'asabiyya*, *'umran*, and the cyclical decline of the state – offer powerful analytical tools for understanding structural crises in postcolonial settings. By situating his thought within the framework of multiple modernities, the study challenges Eurocentric assumptions that restrict theoretical innovation to the Western intellectual canon. It demonstrates that Ibn Khaldun's insights remain highly relevant for analyzing issues such as elite decay, corruption, institutional erosion, and legitimacy crises in late-state formations. Furthermore, the article critiques the dominance of Western disciplinary paradigms in Iranian sociology, which has marginalized indigenous intellectual traditions and inhibited epistemic autonomy. The research proposes a renewed, problem-oriented engagement with Ibn Khaldun as a pathway toward pluralizing social theory and reclaiming concep-

tual agency in the Global South. Ultimately, Ibn Khaldun is not treated as a historical artifact but as a living resource for developing alternative sociological perspectives grounded in alternative realities.

**Keywords:** Ibn Khaldun; multiple modernities; Eurocentrism; state decline; indigenous sociology

### *Introduction*

In the tradition of classical sociology, the attempt to reinterpret premodern theories has always been a site of contention between the poles of historical reductionism and conceptual expansion. One of the most prominent examples of this condition is the encounter with Ibn Khaldun's social theory within the context of contemporary non-Western societies. The central question in this regard is whether Ibn Khaldun's analytical framework solely pertains to tribal relations and premodern traditional structures, or whether it can also be employed as an alternative theory for understanding modern crises. Answering this question requires moving beyond classical binaries such as tradition/modernity, East/West, and science/ideology. Such binaries often deprive non-Western traditions of theoretical creativity and place them in a marginal position. Particularly in the Islamic world, the engagement with Ibn Khaldun has often been accompanied by the presumption that he is merely a historian, lacking theoretical dynamism for confronting late-modern conditions. This approach is rooted in a Eurocentric perception of the history of thought, which considers modernity solely a European product and tradition as static and forgettable. In contrast, however, a critical rereading of Ibn Khaldun's works—grounded in the lived experiences of contemporary Islamic societies—can offer a new conceptual openness. This rereading may lead, through concepts such as *'asabiyya* (group solidarity), *'umran* (civilization), and the "declining state," to a historical and structural understanding of emerging crises.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the significance of Ibn Khaldun lies not in his resemblance to Western theorists, but in his

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<sup>1</sup> Mohammad Reza Oveis, "The Theory of the State in Ibn Khaldun's Political Thought," *Iranian Political Research* 26 (2000): 122–146; M. Pazhuhan, A. Pourahmad, and A. Khalili, "An Analysis of the Evolution and Formation of 'City' and 'State' in Ibn Khaldun's Thought," *Arman-e Shahr Architecture and Urban Planning* 4, no. 7 (2011): 91–102; H. Kamran, and M. Vasegh, "The Theory of the State in Ibn Khaldun's Perspective with emphasis on the Geographical Dimensions of the State," *Geography* 9, no. 29 (2011): 45–59; Mohammed Abed al-

ability to offer an alternative language for understanding power relations and social order.

Our understanding of social theory in many non-Western societies has often been shaped by an imitative model grounded in Eurocentric concepts and theories. This condition has led to the systematic exclusion of substantial portions of Islamic, Indian, Chinese, African, and Latin American intellectual traditions from the field of contemporary theorization. Ibn Khaldun has been one of the most significant victims of this systematic marginalization in the global history of sociology. While his works have inspired numerous thinkers in the Turkish world, the Arab Maghreb, and even Southeast Asia since the seventeenth century, in most formal sociological narratives, his position has either been ignored or reductively classified merely as that of a political historian. However, Ibn Khaldun's thought—particularly in relation to the concept of “the state as a perishable structure”—possesses crucial analytical capacities for explaining the unstable condition of post-colonial states. Such potential, if interpreted within a non-disciplinary and post-modernist framework, can open up new horizons for social theorizing in the Global South. In other words, Ibn Khaldun is not a remnant of an archaic world, but rather a possibility for re-reading the institution of the state and the structure of power in non-European societies. This possibility can only be realized if we liberate ourselves from strictly Eurocentric methodologies. His continued absence from theoretical discussions within Iranian sociology is itself an indicator of this structural limitation within our epistemic system.

From this perspective, it is essential that the engagement with Ibn Khaldun be approached not through the lens of “civilizational nostalgia” or “Oriental self-deprecation,” but rather as a theoretical endeavor to recover alternative methods of social analysis. Such an endeavor requires moving beyond a museum-like view of tradition and rejecting a linear conception of modernity. In his works, Ibn Khaldun not only presents a dynamic portrayal of power relations and the state, but also, by drawing on the concrete experience of the decay of political structures, formulates a critical historical sociology. Contrary to some reductionist portrayals, he is not merely a chronicler of tribes and deserts, but an analyst of structural dynamics in civilizational transformations. For this reason, his theory can be employed in addressing conditions such as structural corruption, the collapse of social

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Jabiri, *Ibn Khaldun's Thought: 'Asabiyyah and the State*. Translated by A. Faradi-Ahvazi (Scientific and Cultural Publications Company, 2019).

capital, the weakening of political legitimacy, and the decline of elites. Such a re-reading enables us to draw upon non-Western traditions not as dead heritage, but as living conceptual sources. Recovering Ibn Khaldun as an alternative theorist represents a step toward liberation from the conceptual monopoly of Western paradigms in social analysis. This liberation does not entail the rejection of modern social sciences, but rather their pluralization across diverse global horizons. Accordingly, Ibn Khaldun should be reread in relation to contemporary problematics—not within the rigid dichotomy of tradition and modernity.

*A Critical Reinterpretation of Ibn Khaldun's Theory in  
Relation to Modern Sociology and Iranian Eurocentrism*

At the first level of analysis, one of the most fundamental misconceptions about Ibn Khaldun's theory is its reduction to a framework applicable only to tribal and non-modern societies. This view confines Ibn Khaldun to the position of a premodern, local theorist and effectively disregards his theoretical capacity to explain structures of power, political order, and state collapse. Yet core concepts such as *'asabiyya* (group solidarity), *'umran* (civilization), and the "decline of the state" can offer a valuable analytical framework—particularly for postcolonial societies—in understanding the emerging dynamics of power. Societies that still grapple with complex patterns of institutional erosion, structural corruption, weakened legitimacy, and socio-political conflicts can benefit from such a theoretical apparatus. In this light, Ibn Khaldun should not be viewed as a relic signaling the end of tradition, but rather as a thinker capable of explaining the continuity of crisis in the non-Western world. This perspective enables us to move beyond the dichotomy of tradition and modernity, and instead, to understand social theory as a conceptual continuum shaped by specific historical contexts. Thus, any approach that limits Ibn Khaldun solely to tribal nomadism and social order is caught in theoretical reductionism. Such a reduction closes off the possibility of articulating alternative forms of critical sociology outside the Durkheimian tradition. Accordingly, the central question is not whether Ibn Khaldun belongs to the traditional or modern world, but rather how his thought can be re-read in explaining the "late order" of non-Western societies.

The second level of analysis focuses on the relationship between the discourse of Eurocentrism and the dominant perceptions of social theory formation in Iran, in which Western concepts are treated as the sole legitimate reference for knowledge. This approach has marginalized many non-Western intellectual traditions or interpreted them as "ineffective premoderns." Within such a framework,

Ibn Khaldun—like al-Fārābī, Suhrawardī, or Shankara—has been classified as “unusable” for analyzing contemporary social issues. This epistemic condition is not the result of any weakness in these thinkers themselves but rather stems from a disciplinary knowledge system that deems anything outside the Western theoretical language as lacking in validity. This is precisely why, unlike other parts of the Islamic world—such as Turkey or the Arab Maghreb—that have maintained a tradition of engaging with Ibn Khaldun, Iranian sociology has witnessed his absence. That absence reflects an epistemological order that assumes the West to be the exclusive source of sociological truth. In such a space, any turn to Islamic thinkers is either romanticized as “civilizational nostalgia” or dismissed as a trap laid by Orientalists. The outcome of this intellectual climate is an incapacity to formulate indigenous theory and an excessive reliance on Eurocentric academic frameworks. Therefore, any reconsideration of our relationship with Ibn Khaldun is ultimately a reconsideration of our relationship with our own epistemic system.

At the third level of analysis, the concept of “multiple modernities,” as an alternative to the linear and single-origin understanding of modernity, offers a theoretical possibility for reviving alternative readings of Ibn Khaldun.<sup>2</sup> Unlike classical modernization models that envisioned a singular path to development, this concept is grounded in the assumption that different societies can shape their own modernities by adapting and reconfiguring indigenous elements. Within this framework, Ibn Khaldunian concepts need not be preserved in the museum of tradition but can instead be mobilized as analytical tools to confront the unequal global order. The experiences of fragile states, systemic corruption, or elite decay in many countries of the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia bear significant resemblance to the historical conditions Ibn Khaldun theorized. These resemblances do not indicate historical sameness but rather reflect the structural reproduction of unstable power patterns. For this reason, rereading Ibn Khaldun can offer analytical responses to problematics such as the “rentier state,” “kinship-based solidarity,” and “the erosion of legitimacy.” If the Eurocentric tradition refuses to recognize such

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<sup>2</sup> Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities.” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1–29; Peter Wagner, *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation: A New Sociology of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Ed.), *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Gurminder K. Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; Göran Therborn, “Entangled Modernities,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 6, no. 3 (2003): 293–305.

possibilities, the issue lies not in the utility of Ibn Khaldun, but in the limited horizon of the Western disciplinary system. Consequently, an alternative reading of Ibn Khaldun does not signify a return to the past, but rather the opening of a path toward a plural and decentered future in social theory.

*Reassessing Ibn Khaldun's Theoretical Relevance:  
Power Structures and Decline in Postcolonial Contexts*

Ibn Khaldun's theory offers a distinctive framework for understanding the structural dynamics of political decline, particularly in postcolonial societies. His conception of the state is rooted in the interplay between political authority and collective morality, an emphasis that sets him apart from most modern political theorists. In his historical sociology, the state deteriorates when it loses touch with its foundational *'asabiyya*—the cohesive social bond—and degenerates into a vehicle for economic monopolization by ruling elites. This formulation resonates with contemporary notions such as the “predatory state” and kleptocracy, which describe states driven by elite extraction rather than public interest. The recurrence of elite decay and rent concentration across the Global South, especially in the Middle East, illustrates the enduring relevance of his analytical framework. Unlike theories that explain state failure through economic scarcity or institutional inefficiency, Ibn Khaldun highlights the erosion of social cohesion and moral legitimacy as core drivers of decline. His emphasis on the moral-spiritual foundation of power offers a conceptual lens beyond the economic rationality dominant in liberal political thought. Moreover, his cyclical understanding of state formation, maturity, and collapse allows for a historically embedded account of political instability. In societies where corruption, patrimonialism, and delegitimation of authority prevail, his insights provide a powerful alternative to Western-centric models. As such, Ibn Khaldun enables a deeper grasp of how postcolonial state fragility unfolds in contexts where structural transformation lacks normative grounding.

The marginalization of Ibn Khaldun in contemporary sociology reflects broader modes of engagement with non-Western intellectual traditions, which can be typified as archaeological, historicist, or alternative. The archaeological approach regards premodern thinkers such as Ibn Khaldun merely as transmitters of ancient Greek knowledge, attributing to them no intrinsic theoretical innovation. The historicist model, by contrast, frames these thinkers as symbolic representatives of past civilizations, disconnected from current theoretical concerns. Both

models depoliticize and decontextualize non-Western knowledge systems, reducing their utility to either antiquarian curiosity or nostalgic admiration. The alternative approach, however, seeks to recover conceptual tools from these traditions and reactivate them within new historical and sociopolitical contexts. This perspective is especially important for the Global South, where epistemic autonomy requires liberation from Western conceptual hegemony. Within this framework, Ibn Khaldun is neither a relic of the past nor a fossilized figure in the museum of tradition, but a living intellectual resource. His insights on power, legitimacy, and social disintegration speak directly to present-day concerns in Islamic societies, including Iran. Rather than historicizing him into irrelevance, we must ask how his concepts can illuminate the crises of governance and legitimacy in postcolonial states. Yet such a reactivation remains rare or underdeveloped in much of the Islamic world, where intellectual trust in indigenous paradigms remains low. Addressing this gap requires a fundamental shift in how Islamic intellectual heritage is conceptualized within modern academic discourse.

Finally, any serious reconsideration of Ibn Khaldun must involve a comparative engagement with modern sociological theories—one that does not subordinate him to Western paradigms. In conventional comparative accounts, Ibn Khaldun is often framed as a precursor to Durkheim or Weber, which diminishes the originality and autonomy of his conceptual framework. This assimilationist logic fails to appreciate his distinct historical methodology and his emphasis on the temporality and fragility of political order. For example, whereas Durkheim theorizes social cohesion through the binary of mechanical and organic solidarity, Ibn Khaldun traces the sources of social order to group solidarity rooted in kinship, shared ethics, and political struggle. His focus on the disintegration of *‘asabiyya* as a causal mechanism of state decay offers a theory of decline that is both structurally grounded and normatively rich. Such insights are particularly valuable for societies facing protracted legitimacy crises and systemic political failure. The epistemic hierarchy that positions Western theory as universal and non-Western thought as derivative must be critically interrogated. Productive comparison requires acknowledging foundational differences in methodology, epistemology, and anthropological assumptions. Without such critical awareness, comparative sociology simply reproduces Eurocentrism in new guises. Therefore, a comparative yet autonomous rereading of Ibn Khaldun is indispensable for the revitalization of social theory in the Global South.

*Applying Ibn Khaldun's Theory to Contemporary Iran and  
Critiquing West-Centric Assumptions of Epistemic Dominance*

In contemporary Iran, contrary to certain theoretical claims, there exists no sustained or institutionalized tradition of Khaldunian scholarship in sociology. Unlike countries such as Tunisia, Malaysia, Turkey, or even Singapore—where thinkers like Mahmoud Dhaouadi and Syed Farid Alatas have worked toward indigenizing Ibn Khaldun's thought—such intellectual efforts are nearly absent in Iran. What is often referred to as a “return to Ibn Khaldun” or the “hegemony of Khaldunianism” in Iranian academic discourse is more of a conceptual anxiety than a grounded reality. The dominant trends in Iranian sociology have been shaped primarily by French, German, and American paradigms, wherein Ibn Khaldun is largely a symbolic or marginal figure. This historical disconnect between Ibn Khaldun's ideas and Iranian social science underscores that the claim of “Orientalist manipulation” reflects an epistemic victimhood narrative more than an actual colonial imposition. The absence of Khaldunian readings cannot simply be attributed to individual scholars' preferences or deficiencies but must be analyzed in relation to the institutional structures and epistemological frameworks governing Iranian academic production. At the policy level, no meaningful support exists for reviving non-Western intellectual traditions in the social sciences. This absence has contributed to an epistemic alienation in which Islamic intellectual heritage is seen not as a source of conceptual innovation, but as an obstacle to modernity. Reclaiming the Khaldunian tradition thus requires, above all, a restoration of theoretical confidence in intra-civilizational possibilities of social thought. Without this trust, no authentic or sustainable form of indigenous theorization can emerge in the Iranian context.

There exists a problematic assumption that the West possesses the authority to dictate not only our modes of knowing but even the content of our indigenous intellectual traditions. This view represents a form of epistemic projection rooted in the presumption of Western omnipotence in shaping and managing global discourse. Accusing modern interpretations of Ibn Khaldun of being merely the outcome of Orientalist deception reflects a paralyzing theoretical inferiority complex. Such a mindset reduces the non-Western subject to a passive object, incapable of critique or conceptual re-articulation. It assumes that non-Western thought has no independent agency and can only gain legitimacy through Western validation or assimilation. This outlook, rather than critiquing epistemic domination, inadvertently reproduces it by denying the intellectual sovereignty of non-Western actors. If Ibn Khaldun has been read through Western theoretical frameworks, this does

not necessarily imply distortion; it may also signal new conceptual opportunities. What ultimately matters is not the intentions of Western scholars, but our own capacity to interpret and engage with our intellectual heritage. If we fail to reread and recontextualize our own traditions, the problem lies not in external manipulation but in the internal limitations of our institutional and epistemological systems. Thus, the intellectual responsibility of scholars in the Islamic world lies not in exposing imagined conspiracies, but in generating emancipatory concepts and analytical tools grounded in their own civilizational legacies.

There is a pressing need to creatively reactivate Ibn Khaldun's theoretical legacy in relation to the specific social and political realities of contemporary Iran. The concept of *'asabiyya*, when recontextualized beyond its original historical setting, can be employed to analyze quasi-ethnic bonds in the structure of power, institutional inequality, and the erosion of social capital in present-day Iran. The notion of state decay and its transformation into an instrument of resource predation resonates closely with the contemporary theories of kleptocracy and systemic corruption and can be interpreted within a Khaldunian framework. Contrary to common assumptions, many of Iran's political, economic, and social crises stem not from incomplete modernization but from the reproduction of traditional power logics in modern institutional forms. Iran's state apparatus can be seen as modern in appearance yet traditional in function—a diagnosis that directly parallels Ibn Khaldun's theory of dynastic decay. In this sense, returning to Ibn Khaldun is not a reactionary gesture but a strategic move to recover indigenous analytical tools in a world saturated by Western epistemologies. Such a rereading demands the deconstruction of Eurocentric conceptual idols and the opening of hybrid local-global theoretical horizons. Engaging with the Khaldunian tradition is just one step, but it is a crucial one for revitalizing indigenous theorization and reclaiming intellectual agency. Only through this path can a sociology emerge that is neither imitative, nor paralyzed, nor isolated from its own realities. Such a sociology would be anchored in empirical truth, but a truth articulated through its own conceptual vocabulary—not through borrowed categories.

### *Conclusion*

In the final analysis, Ibn Khaldun's social theory must not be reduced to a conceptual apparatus for understanding tribal or premodern societies; rather, it should be reclaimed as a lens for interpreting structural transformations in fragile, rentier,

and late-state formations across the non-Western world. Core concepts such as *‘asa-biyya*, *‘umran*, and the “decline of the state” are not relics of a static tradition but dynamic analytical tools capable of illuminating power relations in the postcolonial condition. From this vantage point, the dichotomy between tradition and modernity proves less explanatory than restrictive, as it forecloses conceptual openness to non-Western epistemologies. Rereading Ibn Khaldun through the lens of multiple modernities opens a path beyond Eurocentrism and Western epistemic dominance. His theory provides a robust framework for analyzing legitimacy crises, structural corruption, institutional instability, and the inability of states to maintain social cohesion. Within this perspective, Ibn Khaldun emerges not as a thinker of the past but as an intellectual resource for both present and future crises. His interpretive capacity across politics, economy, and society generates a conceptual space for deriving novel insights from within tradition itself. Such a project requires moving beyond museum-like or reductionist readings of Islamic thought and embracing an alternative, living interpretation. This reading must engage tradition not out of nostalgia, but out of a critical concern for contemporary predicaments. As such, reclaiming Ibn Khaldun represents a foundational step in the revival of indigenous theorizing in the Islamic world.

It must also be emphasized that a significant portion of the obstacles to realizing this theoretical project lie within the epistemic systems and knowledge-producing institutions of non-Western societies themselves. The reproduction of Western-oriented educational and research structures—without critical evaluation of their compatibility with indigenous analytical needs—has led to an epistemic self-alienation. Within this condition, indigenous theorizing is not only deemed impossible but often regarded as embarrassing or regressive. The idea that theory must necessarily derive from Western experience constitutes a subtle form of epistemic violence against other traditions. In this sense, Ibn Khaldun is not only a historical thinker but a testing ground for evaluating the possibility of autonomous methodology and conceptual innovation in Islamic societies. Overcoming theoretical passivity requires rebuilding conceptual agency and epistemic self-confidence. Such liberation can only occur through critical reflection on the mechanisms of epistemic domination within the social sciences. There is an urgent need to rewrite the history of thought—not to negate Western theory, but to multiply pathways of knowledge and experience. This rewriting must begin with the recovery of historical concepts from tradition and their reconfiguration in relation to contemporary contexts. In this journey, Ibn Khaldun is not the conclusion, but the starting point.

Ultimately, if Iranian sociology is to reclaim its theoretical relevance in the global intellectual field, it must engage in a serious, problem-oriented rereading of indigenous and non-disciplinary traditions. Such engagement will only succeed if it avoids the twin pitfalls of “Eastern inferiority” and “identity romanticism.” Ibn Khaldun may serve as a model for this theoretical transition—provided he is neither imprisoned in the museum of civilizational nostalgia nor absorbed uncritically into the frameworks of modern Western theory. Striking this balance requires redefining theory in relation to real-world problems, not in accordance with pre-established Western referents. Within this horizon, concepts such as state, order, corruption, legitimacy, and social cohesion must be rethought through a Khaldunian lens. This theoretical endeavor necessarily calls for new epistemic institutions, alternative curricula, and the training of a new generation of scholars. Reclaiming intellectual authority is impossible without reconstructing the structures of knowledge production. Otherwise, Iranian sociology will remain trapped either in the servitude of translation or in the paralysis of epistemic submission. In this light, returning to Ibn Khaldun means returning to ourselves—analytically, critically, and pluralistically.

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## Ibn Sīna and the Theory of Ontological Distinction

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### Abstract

One of the most important achievements of Ibn Sīna's ontology is the development and expansion of the theory of the distinction between existence and essence. This theory has its roots in the fundamental understanding of the difference between existence and being, which began with Al-Fārābī and was expanded upon by Ibn Sīna. Aristotle, by way of his "essentialist" thinking, most likely did not pay attention to distinctions. Without a basic understanding of the essential meaning of existence, the theory of distinction cannot be proposed. The reason for the opposition of Ibn Rushd, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus to the theory of distinction, despite their influence from Ibn Sīna, is the lack of precise understanding of the meaning of distinction and the occurrence of existence. In the Greek tradition, the term distinction refers to conceptual and logical distinction, whereas Ibn Sīna, following Al-Fārābī, has introduced ontological distinction. The Islamic philosophical tradition, due to its foundation on the authentic meaning of existence, differs from the Greek tradition regarding ontology. The important point is that for the first time, Ibn Sīna

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was able to formulate the theory of existential distinction based on the question of the nature of existence and how essence is attributed to being. In this article, we first aim to clarify the relationship between Islamic philosophy and Greek tradition through a comparative study. Second, we reveal the importance of the theory of distinction innovated by Ibn Sīna. Third, we will highlight the influence of this theory on philosophers after him, especially Ibn Rushd and Thomas Aquinas. Fourth, we aim to discuss the fields of comparative study between Aristotle and Avicenna and explain the importance of Ibn Sīna's perspective and his ontology system.

**Keywords:** Existence, Essence, Conceptual Distinction, Ontological Distinction, Aristotle, al-Fārābī

### *Introduction*

One of the most important achievements of Ibn Sīna's ontological system is the presentation and expansion of the theory of distinction between existence and essence. The root of this theory returns to the understanding of the pure existence, which was proposed earlier in al-Fārābī's philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Sīna (980-1037 CE), based on his critical understanding of Aristotle (384-322 BCE), believes that Aristotle did not pay attention to all aspects of distinction, and was not proposed in the Neoplatonic tradition either.<sup>4</sup> Many philosophers, such as Meister Eckhart (1260-1328 CE), Albertus Magnus (1200-1280 CE), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE), and Duns Scotus (1265-1308 CE) were influenced by Ibn Sīna's theory of distinction in the problem of existence.<sup>5</sup> In the Islamic tradition, Muhammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE), Abu al-Najīb Suhrawardī (1154-1191 CE), and Ibn Rushd (1126-1198 CE) also criticized the theory of distinction.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Talihat* (Hekmat Publications, 1992), No. 59, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Richard C. Taylor, "Essence and Existence," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (McGraw-Hill, 1967), 551.

<sup>5</sup> Ghasem Pourhasan, *Ibn Sīna and Iranian Wisdom: Analysis of the Sources of Eastern Wisdom* (Serat press, 2021), 629.

<sup>6</sup> Averroes, *Metaphysics Summary* (Hekmat Publications, 1998), 7-8.

*The Philosophy of Aristotle and Ousia*

Aristotle's ontological approach to the problem of distinction was critically studied by Ibn Sīna. Specifically, in the fourth and sixth chapters of the book *Metaphysics*, Aristotle presents an Ousia<sup>7</sup> (οὐσία) understanding of existence.<sup>8</sup> Many commentators on Aristotle, such as John McDowell, Martha Nussbaum, and Werner Marx believe that Aristotle's ontology is based on his substantial theory.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle's insufficient understanding of existence likely prevented him from fully developing a theory of distinction and recognizing its ontological significance. With a correct understanding of the meaning of pure existence (*wujūd-e-mahd*), al-Fārābī (870-951 CE) and Ibn Sīna were able to explain how existence is attributed to essence.

In the introduction to his book *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time), Martin Heidegger says that with the emergence of metaphysics and Aristotelianism, the correct meaning of existence was hidden.<sup>10</sup> *Ontos* and *ousia* are central concepts in Aristotelian ontology.<sup>11</sup> According to Heidegger, the question of the meaning of existence has been forgotten today, and we need to revisit it again.<sup>12</sup> Heidegger argued that all philosophers interpret existence as substance, tracing back to Aristotle's concept of existence as *Ontos* and ultimately *Ousia*. Heidegger believes that there is a fundamental difference between pure existence and essence. According to him, Aristotle used existence as substance and *esse* (essence) without paying fundamental attention to the meaning of existence. From Heidegger's point of view, there is a clear difference between *ontos* and existence. In fact, *ontos* cannot indicate pure existence.

In the fourth book of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says that the fundamental subject of philosophy is existent, and philosophy is the knowledge that deals with existent or substance. In his *Kitāb al-Hurūf* (Book of Letters), al-Fārābī examined and

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle defines "Ousia" as a substance that has existence, meaning that substance is distinct from being itself. In Greek, there were four terms used for being: *einai*, *ontos*, *ousia*, and *esse*. Aristotle's commentators have interpreted "ousia" not as meaning pure existence, but as a substance that possesses being.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (Hekmat Publications, 2010), 87-88.

<sup>9</sup> Werner Marx, *Introduction to the Aristotle's Theory of Being as Being* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 19-21.

<sup>10</sup> Aletheia, first used by Parmenides, denotes disclosure, revealing, or unhiddenness.

<sup>11</sup> *Ontos* is one of the four concepts that Aristotle used in his book *Metaphysics* as an equivalent to "existence."

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and time* (Harper, 1962), 23-24.

criticized this problem and said that the subject of philosophy is existence (*wujūd*) and not existent (*mujūd*).<sup>13</sup> Ibn Sīna would later expand al-Fārābī's theory. Some thinkers say that what Aristotle means by *Ousia* is not merely "substance." They believe that *Ousia* is derived from existence (*einai*). Werner Jaeger and David Ross emphasize that what Aristotle means by "*Ousia*" is "existence." They argue that in the Greek language, substance and existence are used in the same sense (i.e., existence).<sup>14</sup>

It seems that the view of these commentators can be criticized, because Aristotle says that existence alone is empty and absurd, that is, he considers the truth of existence to be meaningless, therefore he has neglected the principle of distinction. Nicholas Rescher and Amélie-Marie Goichon also agree with Jaeger, saying that Aristotle proposed the theory of distinction for the first time. One way to investigate and contest this difference of views is through an explanation of Ibn Sīna's thought.

Ibn Sīna admits that Aristotle formulated the theory of distinction for the first time. However, Aristotle only stated the intellectual and conceptual distinction but did not understand the existential distinction.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, Ibn Sīna, in the first article of the *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (Book of Healing), in the fourth section of the *al-Ishārātwa-l-tanbihāt* (The Book of Directives and Remarks), and in the *Kitāb al-Ta'liqāt* (Book of Notes) and *al-Mubāḥathāt* (Discussions), began a critical reading of Aristotle's ontology and believes that the theory of distinction is impossible without a proper explanation and understanding of the meaning of existence.<sup>16</sup>

### *Ibn Sīna and the Ontology*

The question of ontology is the beginning of questions. According to Ibn Sīna's point of view, existence is the most important issue and is self-evident. A genuine understanding of existence is fundamental in Islamic philosophy, including in Ibn Sīna's philosophy. Under the influence of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīna began his critical reading of Aristotle's ontology. Ibn Sīna even interprets the concept of Love in the universe ontologically. Without an ontological foundation, the theory of existential

<sup>13</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Al-Harūf* (Dar El-Machreq, 1990), chapter 15.

<sup>14</sup> See David W. Ross, *Aristotle* (Methuen & Co., 1949).

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 208.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Sīna, *al-Ishārātwa-l-tanbihāt* (Al-Balagha Publishing House, 1996), Namat. 4 (نمط), Chap. 17.

distinction cannot be proposed. Accordingly, Ibn Sīna begins with the question of the meaning of existence in his philosophy. Without understanding existence, he cannot explain the system of epistemology<sup>17</sup>, practical wisdom, moral system,<sup>18</sup> theological system, and the problem of the soul and its survival, as well as the life after death.

The most important part of the book of *al-Ishārāt* discusses existence, which is presented in the fourth chapter of the book. All his achievements in the book *al-Ishārāt* are due to his philosophical explanation of the meaning of existence. According to most Islamic philosophers, existence is the origin of all philosophical discussions.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, under the influence of Ibn Sīna, Mulla Sadra (1571-1635 CE) says that the understanding of existence is the foundation of all understandings, and lack of knowledge about it causes neglect of fundamental philosophical issues.<sup>20</sup> Heidegger says in *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time) that the question of existence is the basis of all philosophical reflections. However, he does not understand the meaning of existence correctly, and thus he will grapple with it in a primitive way.<sup>21</sup>

Ibn Sīna's effort to explain existence shows his fundamental understanding of it. Nevertheless, he considers Aristotle's understanding of existence to be insufficient and incomplete. Ibn Sīna considers existence to be evident and obvious and believes that existence can be understood only through a philosophical encounter and on the basis of contemplation (تَفَكُّر).<sup>22</sup> As such, Ibn Sīna criticizes Aristotle's attempt to define existence based merely on words and logic and considers confrontation and contemplation as the only way to discover and fully understand existence. This effort of Ibn Sīna to explain the correct meaning of existence is the beginning and fundamental foundation for the theory of distinction.

### *Ibn Sīna and the Theory of Distinction*

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<sup>17</sup> Ghasem Pourhasan, *Epistemological System: Rereading The Epistemological Foundations of Fārābī* (Serat publication, 2021), 41-42.

<sup>18</sup> Ghasem Pourhasan and Zahra Haji Shahkaram, *The Relations between Ethics and Religion* (Serat Press, 2025), 25-26.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Sīna, *al-Ishārātwa-l-tanbihāt*, Namat 4 (نمط).

<sup>20</sup> Mulla Sadra, *al-Masha'ir* (Sadra Islamic Philosophy Foundation Publications, 2002), 118-120.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Sīna, *The Cure, Theology* (Ayatollah Marashi Library, 1983), Article. 1, Chap. 5; Ibn Sīna, *The Cure, Theology*, (Cairo, 1955).

Comparative studies of the Greek and Islamic traditions has resulted in important philosophical achievements. Although this form of study has a long history, a critical reading in the foundations of two philosophical traditions has yet to be done, specifically a critical study of Ibn Sīna and Aristotle. Contrary to popular belief, Ibn Sīna was neither a follower nor a commentator of Aristotle. Ibn Sīna viewed Aristotle's philosophy critically, especially in the most important philosophical topics, such as ontology, the meaning of intellect, the soul, and the theory of distinction. Arguing the distinction between existence and essence is a part of Ibn Sīna's critical studies of the Greek tradition. In this way, Islamic philosophy is not just a continuation of the Greek tradition, as some may argue.

Ibn Sīna's theory of existential distinction influenced western philosophy during the European Middle Ages. Cornelio Fabro argues that the origin of the theory of distinction in Aquinas philosophy derives from Ibn Sīna.<sup>23</sup>

A) Ibn Sīna, like al-Fārābī, defined the distinction as the attribute of essence to existence, and said in the book of *al-Ta'liqāt* that existence is not the essential part of essence, that is, existence is not the foundation of essence.<sup>24</sup> A philosopher must first understand the different meaning of existence and essence and then be able to recognize that essence achieves its actualization through existence. In other words, existence necessarily has actuality and reality, but essence does not innately have actualization. According to Ibn Sīna's interpretation of distinction, the existence of essences is not essential to essences, that is, existence for essences is added to essence.<sup>25</sup>

B) The theory of distinction in Ibn Sīna is based on a presumption called "the originality of existence." The theory of the Principality of Existence is one of the most important achievements of Islamic philosophy, which was obtained from a critical reading of the Greek tradition. The Principality of Existence has a precise

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<sup>23</sup> Cornelio Fabro, "Existence," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (McGraw-Hill, 1967), 721-722; Cornelio Fabro, "Participation," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (McGraw-Hill, 1967), 1042-1043.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Sīna, *The Notes* (Islamic Propaganda Office, 2000), No. 240.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Sīna, *The Discussions* (Bidar Press, 1992), 235.

meaning, and it is the origin of many theories such as gradation of being, the univocity of being, the evidence of existence, theory of cause and effect in the subject of Emanation.<sup>26</sup>

C) Ibn Sīna used words such as attribution, necessary, otherness, the addition, Non-Constitutive, Non-Essential and the subsequent (لاحق) for the theory of distinction, some of these words were also used before by al-Fārābī.<sup>27</sup> al-Fārābī's example in the theory of distinction is human, and Ibn Sīna expresses the concept of triangle.<sup>28</sup>

Ibn Sīna emphasized that everyone understands the meaning of the essence of the triangle, which is the three sides of a geometric shape, but he questions its existence or non-existence, and its meaning is hidden from that person. Therefore, we are faced with two things: the essence of the triangle and the existence of the triangle. Therefore, it is not the case that anyone who understands the meaning of the triangle will also understand its existence. The concept of essence is different from the concept of existence. Hence, the essence must be attributed to the existence of the triangle in order to be realized.<sup>29</sup> Ibn Sīna, in the books *al-Talīqāt* and *al-Ishārāt*, referring to the “principle of non-sameness,” considers the two meanings of essence and being as an important proof of the theory of distinction. Existence is not essential to the essence of the triangle, that is, it is not its constituent. The attribution of being on the triangle needs a reason, and this is the correct meaning of distinction.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ghasem Pourhasan and Zahra Haji Shahkaram, *Religious Studies and the Future of Religion* (Serat Press, 2024), 107-109.

<sup>27</sup> Pourhasan, *Ibn Sīna and Iranian Wisdom; Analysis of the Sources of Eastern Wisdom*, 602-603.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Fusus Al-Hikam* (Society for the Appreciation of Cultural Works and Dignitaries, 2002), Chap. 1, p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Sīna, *al-Ishārātwa-l-tanbihāt*, Namat. 4 (نمط), Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Sīna, *The Notes*, Islamic Propaganda Office, No. 265-267.

### *Existential Distinction*

The theory of distinction in Ibn Sīna and Islamic philosophers is an attempt to explain the Principality of Existence. According to them, existence is intrinsically personalized and no essence can inherently contain existence. Ibn Sīna considers the distinction between existence and essence in three categories: the distinction is either conceptual (intellectual) or real, and the real distinction is either metaphysical or natural.<sup>31</sup>

In Greece and in Aristotle's philosophy, there was a distinction in the logical and conceptual sense. Ibn Sīna also added existential or metaphysical distinction to it, which became the normative understanding in Islamic philosophy.

One of the important controversies in the issue of distinction was Ibn Rushd's and Thomas Aquinas' critiques of two types of distinctions: mental or conceptual, and external or existential.<sup>32</sup> Undoubtedly, it can be said that Ibn Sīna's influence on Aquinas and Scotus was much deeper than Ibn Rushd's influence on them.

Etienne Gilson emphasizes that in the discussion of existence and essence, all the philosophical traditions of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries until Francisco Suarez (1548-1617) were influenced by Ibn Sīna's thought and the theory of distinction.<sup>33</sup>

Ibn Sīna's thought on distinguishing between intellectual and existential caused him to separate from Aristotle, which invoked Aristotelian criticism in response. Ibn Sīna believed there was a fundamental difference between the two types of intellectual and existential distinction. And the most important type of distinction in philosophy is the existential distinction. Ibn Sīna argued that Aristotle only paid attention to mental distinction and due to his lack of understanding of existence, he could not understand the most important type of distinction, namely existential distinction.<sup>34</sup>

Ibn Sīna believes that attention to existential distinction is rooted in the understanding of the meaning of pure existence. Philosophers who were against the existential distinction could not go beyond the logical realms of the distinction.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibn Sīna, *Philosophy for Alāʿ-ad-Dawla* (Moli Publications, 2015), 370-374.

<sup>32</sup> Frederick Copleston, *History of Philosophy: Medieval Philosophy* (Elmi Farhangi Publishing Co., 2008), 428-429.

<sup>33</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Hekmat Publications, 2006), 170.

<sup>34</sup> Pourhasan, *Ibn Sīna and Iranian Wisdom: Analysis of the Sources of Eastern Wisdom*, 581-582.

The objections and criticisms of Ibn Sīna, such as Suhrawardī,<sup>35</sup> Ibn Rushd,<sup>36</sup> and Thomas Aquinas, were likely due to the following: first, they did not understand the meaning of existence and consequently they didn't grasp the correct meaning of existential distinction. Second, for them, the concept of attribution of essence to existence was considered a difficult and complex issue. And third, they did not make a critical reading of Aristotle similar to Ibn Sīna's. For this reason, they did not pay attention to the metaphysical distinction in addition to the intellectual distinction.<sup>37</sup>

### *Opponents' Objections on Distinction Theory*

The basis of the critics and objections on the distinction theory returns to the existential distinction. In the tradition of Islamic philosophy, Suhrawardī and Ibn Rushd, and in the medieval period in the West, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus are the most important opponents of the theory of distinction.<sup>38</sup> There are two types of critiques in their view: Ibn Sīna's detachment with Aristotle and also the interpretation of the meaning of attribution to the concept of accident. They believe that Ibn Sīna's existential distinction causes us to interpret existence in the sense of accident, while existence cannot be considered as a category at all. Under the influence of Ibn Rushd, Aquinas started to oppose objective or existential distinction. By separating from Aristotle, Ibn Sīna proposed existential distinction in addition to logical distinction. The critics interpreted the attributing essence to being as the accident of existence and based on that, they proposed incorrect results. Both Suhrawardī and Ibn Rushd, in expressing their opposition to the theory of existential distinction, said that the concept of existence and essence is a mental and intellectual matter and has no actualization outside of it.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, existence can only be added to essence in the mind, and in real world, it has a unit existence, and it cannot be superadded to essence. In their critique of existential distinction, they have argued that if the existence in the real world, is added to the essence, then it

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<sup>35</sup> Suhrawardī, *Collection of Works* (Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2001), 22.

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Rushd, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* (Dar El-Machreq, 1992), 369.

<sup>37</sup> Ghasem Pourhasan, *Al-Fārābī and Al-Horuf* (Sadra Islamic Philosophy Foundation Publications, 2020), 325-329.

<sup>38</sup> Copleston, *History of Philosophy: Medieval Philosophy*, 611-612.

<sup>39</sup> Mohammad Sh. Al-Shahrazuri, *The Commentary on Hikmat al-Ishraq* (Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1993), 182.

is necessary that either the existence becomes a substance or be as an accident. Both suppositions and objections are false and invalid. Ibn Rushd also interpreted the meaning of attribution to the meaning of accident and made a mistake like Suhrawardi, and this caused the philosophers of the Medieval ages to make mistakes.<sup>40</sup>

Ibn Rushd says that Ibn Sīna's existential distinction is wrong because the metaphysical distinction causes existence to become an accident and needs a place (*mahall*) or a subject.<sup>41</sup> Ibn Rushd, like other opponents, did not understand the difference between the meanings of attribution and accident in the theory of ontological distinction, which was proposed in Ibn Sīna's philosophy. Gilson believes that the main basis of Ibn Rushd's and Aquinas's objections on Ibn Sīna is not simply a lack of understanding of the meaning of existential distinction. Rather, they believed that this interpretation of distinction is different from Aristotle's interpretation. Even Gilson says that according to Ibn Rushd, the duty of every philosopher is to follow Aristotle. But Ibn Sīna made a critical reading to Aristotle, so he was criticized by them.<sup>42</sup>

Gilson explains that Ibn Sīna and his views, including the theory of distinction, have not been properly understood by philosophers after him. Ibn Sīna was a philosopher who thought independently of Aristotle because he could not explain the difference between the existence of God and other beings with the help of logical distinction. Existence in God is the same as entity, while in all other beings, existence is additional to nature.<sup>43</sup> This issue was not Aristotle's concern. Perhaps another important reason should be presented in the philosophers' opposition to Ibn Sīna. As Heidegger said, all philosophers interpret existence as substance, and in Aristotle's philosophy, existence means *Ontos* and returns to *Ousia*. They thought that Ibn Sīna's statement about existence being an attribute of essence means that existence is an accident and cannot be substance. Duns Scotus also made the same critique on the distinction. Ibn Sīna's meaning of attribution was that existence is not intrinsic nor the foundation of essence. Ibn Sīna's intention was not that existence does not have an independent existence.<sup>44</sup> Similar to being and substance in Aristotle, accident and attribution has the same meaning. The Critics such

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<sup>40</sup> Ibn Rushd, *Tafsir ma ba'd at-tabi'at* (Hekmat Publications, 1998), 313.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Rushd, *Metaphysics Summary*, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 127.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Sīna, *The Discussions*, 235-236.

as Ibn Rushd and Aquinas did not try to understand the precise meaning of the existential distinction.<sup>45</sup>

Ibn Sīna's philosophy has fundamental differences with Aristotle's. Ibn Sīna has thoroughly explained such differences in his works, including in the *Manṭiq al-mashriqiyyīn* (the Logics of Orientals), *al-Taliqāt* (the Notes), *al-Isharrat* (the Remarks) and *al-Mubāhathāt* (the Discussions). He believes that peripatetic philosophy contains many deficiencies and as such the Aristotelian system should be reformed.<sup>46</sup> Ibn Sīna's view differs from Aristotle's not only in the meaning of God, soul, intellect, survival of the soul and its immortality, but also in the true meaning of salvation, rather, in the most important philosophical issue, i.e., the meaning of existence. Ibn Sīna initiated a critical re-reading of Aristotle; instead of focusing on intellectual distinction, he considered existential distinction as his most important philosophical achievement.<sup>47</sup>

Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīna not only considered the principality of existence as a fundamental achievement but also paid profound attention to its theological and ontological results. Aristotle did not need to think about God and the difference between his existence and possible beings. While Ibn Sīna, without understanding the correct meaning of existence and the exact meaning of the metaphysical distinction, could not explain the difference between the existence of God and other beings. Both he and all the Islamic philosophers were able to find a way to think about the meaning of God's existence<sup>48</sup> through the explanation of existential distinction. As such, they emphasized that there is no distinction in God at all and his entity is the same as his existence.<sup>49</sup> According to Ibn Sīna, God's being is the same as its essence, it is the origin of existence and is simple: it does not need a cause and is the cause of all causes, and the emanation of existence is rooted in his type of existence. Al-Fārābī also says in his works, including in *al-Taliqāt* and the *al-ilāhiyya* (Theology), that God's entity is his existence. The essence of beings other than God cannot be the cause of the existence of something, therefore only existence can be the cause of beings.<sup>50</sup> The same statement is mentioned in Ibn Sīna's *al-Ishārāt* (the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibn Rushd, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, 369-370.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Sīna, *Manṭiq al-mashriqiyyīn* (Ayatollah Marashi Library, 1985), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn Sīna, *The Notes*, No. 240.

<sup>48</sup> Pourhasan and Haji Shahkaram, *Religious Studies and the Future of Religion*, 1026-1028.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Sīna, *The Notes*, No. 217.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Fusus Al-Hikam*, 3.

Remarks), that causation is nothing other than existence.<sup>51</sup> It is on this basis that Gilson emphasizes that Ibn Sīna was neither a follower nor a commentator of Aristotle; he was a philosopher who thought independently. For this reason, Aristotle's logical distinction could not be very useful for Ibn Sīna's philosophy.<sup>52</sup>

### *Ibn Sīna's Influence and the Theory of Distinction*

Ibn Sīna's philosophy was brought to the West by Dominicus Gundissalinus (1115-1190 CE) in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. All the thinkers of the Latin world in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries were influenced by Ibn Sīna. His ontological system left a great impact on thinkers. Many of the great minds reflected on the theory of distinction having been influenced by Ibn Sīna.<sup>53</sup> Fabro believes that the origin of the discussion of distinction in Aquinas returns to Ibn Sīna.<sup>54</sup> Copleston says that Duns Scotus was influenced by Ibn Sīna in many philosophical issues, especially the problem of distinction.<sup>55</sup> Gilson believes that all the philosophical currents of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and after were influenced by the philosophy of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīna.<sup>56</sup> It is quite clear that we can see the influence of Ibn Sīna in many philosophical opinions and theories, including the problem of distinction in the medieval ages and even the modern period. Ibn Sīna's influence on Roger Bacon (1219-1292 CE), Albertus Magnus, Meister Eckhart, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, cannot be denied. Bacon studied Aristotle and Ibn Sīna and compared their similarities and differences. He believes that after Aristotle, Ibn Sīna is considered the most important philosopher.

Aquinas was aware of Ibn Rushd's objections to the distinction theory. Under the influence of Ibn Rushd, he criticized the theory of distinction and based on Aristotle's philosophy, he returned existence to substance. The important point is that the sameness of existence and substance, according to Aristotle, has been noticed by the intellectuals of the Medieval period; for this reason, they considered God as substance, a matter that Ibn Sīna had previously opposed. For Aquinas, being and substance had the same meaning, therefore, understanding that an essence can

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Sīna, *al-Ishārātwa-l-tanbihāt*, Namat (نمط). 4, Chap. 17.

<sup>52</sup> Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 118-119.

<sup>53</sup> Pourhasan, *Ibn Sīna and Iranian Wisdom: Analysis of the Sources of Eastern Wisdom*, 629-630.

<sup>54</sup> Fabro, "Existence," 721-723.

<sup>55</sup> Copleston, *History of Philosophy: Medieval Philosophy*, 611-612.

<sup>56</sup> Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 159.

be without existence and existence is attributed to it, it had no meaning for him. In the Latin language, as in the Greek language, existence or “esse” and essence or “Essentia” were used in the same sense. Although Aquinas and Scotus were influenced by Ibn Sīna’s ontology, they criticized the theory of distinction both because of their linguistic approach and adherence to Aristotle and Ibn Rushd, and also because of their theological attitude.

In Ibn Sīna’s philosophy, the existence of possible beings cannot be the foundation and intrinsic of their essence. The existence of possibilities is only due to the attribution of existence. Due to attribution (اتصاف), possibility beings can be actual. Therefore, the essence of possibilities is without actuality, and they do not have existence by themselves. Christian theology was in conflict with this attitude.<sup>57</sup> Aristotle’s philosophy was also not compatible with the idea of existential distinction. The philosophers of the Christian period even understood Ibn Sīna’s interpretation of the meaning of existence and the emanation of existence from God based on the idea of distinction, which they interpreted as determinism. They failed to pay close attention to the meaning of pure existence and even the cause-and-effect relationship in Ibn Sīna’s philosophy.<sup>58</sup> This caused them to oppose the theory of distinction and interpreted the attribution of existence in a categorical sense. They perceived the necessity as determinism without a correct understanding Ibn Sīna’s interpretations. In Ibn Sīna’s philosophy, necessity is like the relationship of existence, on the basis of which the process of existence takes place. Essentially, from Ibn Sīna’s point of view, necessity does not cause determinism in emanation.<sup>59</sup> Although Scotus is influenced by Ibn Sīna in ontology, he nevertheless says that necessity in Ibn Sīna leads to determinism in existence. This wrong understanding of causality and necessity in Ibn Sīna was also done by al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd.

However, Giacomo Bonaventura (1221-1274 CE), who was a contemporary of Albertus, was influenced by Ibn Sīna more than others.<sup>60</sup> His critiques of Aristotelian Intellect and emphasis on illuminative Intellect, the deficiencies of the Peripatetic philosophy, belief in active Intellect, Divine emanation, and illumination are completely influenced by Ibn Sīna’s philosophy. Under the influence of Ibn Sīna, he

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<sup>57</sup> Pourhasan and Haji Shahkaram, *Religious Studies and the Future of Religion*, 194-196.

<sup>58</sup> Ghasem Pourhasan, *A New Interpretation of Fārābī’s Philosophy: A Fundamental Epistemological Separation from the Greek Tradition* (Naqdefarhang Press, 2018), 184-185.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Sīna, *al-Ishārātwa-l-tanbīhāt*, Namat (نمط), 4, Chap. 18.

<sup>60</sup> Pourhasan, *Ibn Sīna and Iranian Wisdom: Analysis of the Sources of Eastern Wisdom*, 553.

differentiated between the necessary of existence in itself and the necessary of existence through another, and proposed the necessity of possibilities for absolute existence based on Ibn Sīna's idea. He used Ibn Sīna's special term, which means possible being (*mumkin al-wujūd*) and the necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), and in defending the theory of the best universe and the omnipotent of God, he is completely influenced by Ibn Sīna.<sup>61</sup> Yet, he accepted Ibn Sīna's theory of distinction and said that there is a difference between necessary existence and possible existence, and the existence of possibilities is attributed to their essence.

### *Thomas Aquinas and Ibn Sīna*

Thomas Aquinas has done many studies on Ibn Sīna's philosophy and was greatly influenced by Ibn Rushd. Ibn Sīna's influence on Aquinas was much greater than Ibn Rushd's impact on him. He was influenced by Ibn Sīna on the meaning of existence, the necessary being and possible existence, the issue of the soul and immateriality and its survival, and especially on the problem of distinction.<sup>62</sup> Aquinas, following Ibn Sīna, considered the necessary existence to be pure existence and actuality. He accepted Ibn Sīna's point of view both in the unity of God's entity and existence and in the theory of rational distinction, but he opposed the existential distinction. Like Ibn Sīna, he said that necessary (*Wajib*) is its existence and its existence is essential Necessity. Aquinas used two terms "esse" and "ens." "Esse" means both existence and actuality. For him, God is both existence and absolute actuality, so he uses the word "esse" for God. Before Aquinas, the term "essential" was used to mean existence, but Aquinas considered it as an entity that existence is added to. Aquinas interpreted the concept of attribution in Ibn Sīna as the addition of existence.<sup>63</sup> Fabro says that Aquinas's ontology is completely influenced by Ibn Sīna.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the objections that Aquinas made to the theory of distinction are influenced by the philosophy and attitude of Aristotelian substance thinking. This view is not compatible with the theory of distinction. Aquinas's mistake was that, despite his important understanding of existence and actuality, he returned to the categorical meaning of existence in the question of distinction and hence used the

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<sup>61</sup> Pourhasan and Haji Shahkaram, *The Relations between Ethics and Religion*, 108-110.

<sup>62</sup> Ghasem Pourhasan, *Theism and Atheism* (Serat Press, 2023), 448-451.

<sup>63</sup> Mohammad Ilkhani, *Boethius' Metaphysics* (Elham Publishing, 2001), 255-260.

<sup>64</sup> Fabro, "Existence," 720-721.

term “addition,” which is contrary to Ibn Sīna’s thought. But despite of this interpretation, Aquinas is a follower of Ibn Sīna in the analysis of essence and existence. He says that possible beings have the two dimensions of existence and essence, and existence is not the foundation or form or substance of essence, but is added to it.

Interestingly, although Thomas Aquinas is against the distinction, he accepts that existence is not the intrinsic of essences, but is predicated on them from the outside. That is, essences are realized and actualized through existence. Ibn Sīna said the same thing in *Dāneshnāme-ye Alāī* (the Alai Encyclopedia) and *al-Isharat* (the Remarks) that existence is the actuality and realization through which essence possess the existence. Like Ibn Sīna, Thomas accepted that there is a difference between the existence of God and other beings. God’s existence is the same as his entity, but in possibility beings, existence is added to their essence. However, Aquinas made a mistake between the meaning of “attribution” and “accident.” Duns Scotus, like Aquinas, was influenced by Ibn Sīna in the ontology. Like Ibn Sīna, he and Aquinas considered existence as a univocity of existence, which is attributed to God and possible being in the same sense. Gilson considers Ibn Sīna’s influence on Scotus to be important and says that he accepted the principle of distinction between existence and essence, like Aquinas, but he could not understand the correct meaning of the distinction of existence.<sup>65</sup>

### Conclusion

Ibn Sīna’s critical reading of Aristotle had both profound effects on philosophy and a new perspective on philosophy. Most Islamic philosophers accepted the principle of existential distinction and presented important philosophical and theological results based on it. Without the principle of distinction, it is impossible to talk about the difference between God’s existence and possible being. However, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus seem to misconstrue the precise meaning of distinction. Ibn Sīna considered Aristotle’s view of intellectual distinction to be insufficient, it means that a purely conceptual distinction cannot answer many philosophical problems. The concept of existential distinction did not exist in Greece and Aristotle, nor did Plotinus (204–270 CE) and Boethius (480–524 CE) understand its importance and worth. The distinction proposed by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīna is a philosophical innovation. Ibn Sīna and then Suhrawardī and Mulla Sadra explained the concept of death, life after death, rewards and punishments, and the human body

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<sup>65</sup> Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 184.

in the afterlife according to Islamic thought. Therefore, they referred actuality and objectivity not to the essence or body, but to the soul, which is the actuality and perfection of the body. Actuality and perfection is an existential quality. The theological results of Ibn Sīna's theory of distinction are important and warrant additional research.

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## **Ali Shariati's Critical Perspective on the Ideal Islamic Community and Committed Leadership during the period of Socio-Political Transition**

Mehdi S. Shariati

### **Abstract**

This article analyzes Ali Shariati's reinterpretation of *Ummah* (community) and *Imamate* (leadership) as foundations for an ideal yet attainable society. Situating his thought within political philosophy and utopian traditions, it highlights his project of decolonizing religious concepts distorted by hegemonic power. Rejecting static or nostalgic models, Shariati proposes a dynamic framework centered on reconstructing ideals through conscious conceptualization. A key distinction is drawn between unattainable "utopia" and realizable "eutopia," defined as a flexible, participatory, and evolving social order. The study emphasizes Shariati's critique of institutionalized religion as a source of superstition, stagnation, and "religious tyranny." By reclaiming Islam as an ideology oriented toward justice (*'Adl*) and unity (*Tawhīd*), he redefines the Ummah as an active, self-aware collective confronting marginalization (*Estezaaf*). The article concludes that Shariati offers a dialectical, action-oriented model of social transformation grounded in collective agency and ethical responsibility.

**Keywords:** Ummah, Imamate, Justice, Monotheism, Martyrdom, Internationalism, Utopia

*Introduction*

I'm going back! I'll return to the paradise I once left behind. I cleanse myself of that initial disobedience – I reclaim all the pavilions of my first heaven from myself: nature, history, society, and self. Together with Love and God, I will join in a shared mission to reshape the world. We'll begin creation anew. In this endless moment, neither God nor I will be alone. We'll dismantle heaven, lift the veil of what is hidden, and bring the divine realm down to earth – a paradise where every tree is forbidden, and a world shaped by the artistry of our own hands

~ Ali Shariati<sup>1</sup>

The concept of an ideal society has been examined across various cultures and within communities frequently marked by persistent socio-economic, political, and cultural challenges. Historically, this notion has developed as a response to environments characterized by oppression, exploitation, conflict, poverty, and even instances of ethnic cleansing and genocide. This paper explores Ali Shariati's critical approach to analyzing Ummah as an ideal community, and Imamate as committed leadership during transitional period.<sup>2</sup> The transitional period commences when the masses in an embryonic state require guidance and direction and conclude once the community attains sufficient awareness and can make autonomous, collective decisions. The study further emphasizes Shariati's methodology in his broader initiative to decolonize culture and religion. It focuses on how authentic religious concepts are appropriated and interpreted to advance the interests of dominant groups, as well as the apocalyptic interpretations of religion employed to instill fear as a tool for social control. In Shariati's approach, the emphasis is placed on the reproduction of high ideals through conceptualization, rather than replicating historical conditions in the present era. In practice, there is a concerning tendency to modify concepts or ideologies to suit contemporary circumstances, while simultaneously adjusting reality to align with these adapted notions, particularly within

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<sup>1</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #13, 134.

<sup>2</sup> The foundational citations underpinning this paper are drawn from Shariati's original works in Persian, encompassing both editorial and analytical commentary.

systems that predominantly address the symptoms of underlying structural contradictions. Shariati's study of Ummah and Imamate offers a comprehensive analysis of the foundational goals in early Islamic history, emphasizing their initiatives to construct a society based on the principle of *Tawhīd* (unity). Shariati's critical examination of Ummah and Imamate highlights the growing disparity between the ideal and the actual conditions present in contemporary Muslim societies.

The study of political philosophy and treaties extends across time and space throughout history, reflecting the intricate complexity and diversity found within societies, cultures, and traditions. From early philosophical approaches to politics, discussions have evolved to include theological, ethical, and moral arguments. Shariati addresses the fundamental Islamic concepts such as *Ummah* (the community) and *Imamate* (leadership) first to decolonize them, reclaiming their authenticity highjacked by the internal colonizing hegemonic forces, and second to provide a model of an ideal society with a set of characteristics to gauge the socio-economic and political conditions of the existing reality. This is intended to demonstrate that due to its ideological foundations, Islam represents a forward-looking movement rather than a static and retrogressive set of beliefs often promoted by its own institutionalized version. Core concepts in political sociology such as power, authority, law, property relations, and the relationship between individuals and the community are key elements in understanding legitimacy, types of government, official duties, and resource distribution. Diverse bodies of knowledge inherited from pioneers such as Plato, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīna, Ibn Khaldoun, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Hegel among others, reflected the fact that they were the product of social, religious, and cultural milieus in which they were residing. Similarly, contemporary political philosophy reflects contemporary reality with newer variables resulting from intense technological development and globalization. In most cases, the attempt was to demystify, deconstruct, and decolonize the prevailing thought that enabled the reproduction of the system – a reality far removed from what they considered “ideal.”

Shariati's political philosophy includes a sharp focus on foundational and controversial Islamic concepts such as Ummah – an ideal community – and Imamate – committed leadership. Given the diverse views and opposing factions within Shi'i Islam (twenty-seven identified) and narratives by the Sunni religious scholars on the issues of Ummah and Imamate, Shariati offers a universal view consistent with the Islamic ideology and stated ideals for the community. Shariati's approach

has been questioned in this case precisely because it is grounded in a religious tradition. This is due to the fact that religious narratives are often viewed as “ideological” (in negative sense of the term) and unscientific (among others), therefore not suited for inclusion in any meaningful free-thinking discussion. To traditionalists, however religious belief ought not to have any traces of secularism, rationality, scientific, and tolerable constructs – a self-destructive and violent “ideological cultism” vividly manifesting itself in the contemporary reactionary class politics. A critical reading of the Islamic text is offered as an answer to both views by Shariati, with an emphasis on decolonization and demystification of a systemically sanctioned “stupefaction.” Shariati emphasized the necessity of removal of toxic superstitions from religious thoughts along with demystification of religion – a debunking of the mainstream beliefs in search of an accurate and scientific understanding of religion in general and Islam in particular.<sup>3</sup> In extracting and refining authentic Islamic concepts, Shariati also directs his criticism towards the institutionalized clerical establishment as the main culprit – “cult vanguardism” – in the production and the reproduction of colonial superstitions, thereby facilitating religious tyranny that he considered to be the worst form of tyranny. In his view, religious tyranny not only destroys political freedom, but also shackles man’s moral conscience and historical consciousness. In societies with a large number of people adhering to the traditional version of religion, the threat of religious tyranny along with delusional tendencies and reactionary violence, full blown in certain areas, looms large in others.

The Islamic concepts of Ummah and Imamate have been frequently used to suggest a genuine move towards an egalitarian and dynamic society. Although references to the Qur’ānic concepts describing a just or an egalitarian society are fashionable, and occasionally references are made to small societies of the formative years of Islam as models, in reality a just system has never existed in any period in Islamic history even though repeated attempts were made. And it has not been made clear by the institutionalized religious authorities when and under which conditions and characteristics the existing society will be on its path moving closer to what ideally is expected. It is in the context of this uncertainty that Shariati in the late 1960s drew the attention to the urgent need of decolonization of a body of thought, concepts, and their relationship that has been buried under layers of falsehood, fabrication, and superstitions, serving as tools of stupefaction for the goal of enabling internal colonization.

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<sup>3</sup> Shariati explicitly stated that he believes in a religion that comes after science.

Ummah refers to an ideal society, representing humanity's longstanding aspirations for a desirable community. It has a set of general as well specific characteristics extrapolated from the reality and type of society they were concerned with. Even though Utopia means "nowhere," it reflects yearning for improvement and positive change. It reflects imagination and the power of thinking about the possibility and necessity of changing a reality that violates human dignity and principles. The yearning for that condition, which is ultimately not attainable, was named and popularized by St. Thomas More's book *Utopia* in 1516.<sup>4</sup> However, long before More's *Utopia*, a similar set of characteristics for future societies were offered by nearly all societies with and without a literary tradition. The idea of a better society continued to appear across different cultures and civilizations spilling over from the realm of theology to philosophy to social sciences. Various civilizations and cultures have examined the possibility of establishing a society that reflects the qualities of an ideal community. The conceptual development of an ideal society, contrasted against the problems and deficiencies of actual conditions, has been a longstanding practice throughout history and across cultures. Ancient civilizations of Persia, India, China, Greece, Rome, Native Americans, Africans, and Arabian yearning for a better world constructed models of what a good society ought to be. With few exceptions, the majority envisioned an improved society informed by their experiences and guided or inspired by their theological and cosmological traditions.

In ancient Iran, the concept of an ideal society founded on Zoroastrian principles highlighted justice, stability, and prosperity as fundamental pillars for social development. Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* are philosophical examples of Utopia, reflecting idealism during times of oppression and violence. Saint Augustine wrote "The City of God" in response to Rome's plunder in 410 CE. In 943,

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<sup>4</sup> Utopia literally means "out of nowhere," ideal, and more importantly unattainable. Utopia is synonymous with tolerance and particularly religious freedom as the basis of an alternative society established by King Utopus. In More's reading of utopia various faiths coexisted peacefully regardless of what they worshipped. In all forms of utopia, the core concern is the idea that the existing social condition imposed on humanity, must be transformed towards that which is by far greater even though it is "nowhere," such as oppression, poverty, degradation and destruction of nature and society: a condition which continues to impact a great majority of humanity.

the Islamic philosopher Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī,<sup>5</sup> often referred to as “the second teacher,” articulated the defining features of his *Virtuous City* as a model for reviving a deteriorating society. The concern for the plight of their society and people continued to be expressed by others such as Ibn Sīnā and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī among others.<sup>6</sup>

The quest for human perfection persists, and from the nineteenth century, this aspiration continued with a critique of existing societies in social sciences, notably within sociology. The concept of an “ideal type” through which to navigate the distance between reality and the ideal echoed utopian concerns and was aware of the unknown distance between reality and utopia. Utopian constructs are unachievable (*waiting for Godo*) or an impossible aim. According to Shariati, the concepts of Ummah and Imamate may facilitate the progressive closing of the gap between existing realities and the envisioned ideal. It is in this context that Shariati forwards not an unachievable utopia, but rather a conception akin to “eutopia,” which he finds achievable.<sup>7</sup> As he states,

This religion that we are introducing is not a religion of utopia that cannot be realized, it is not a religion that praises transcendent human beings who are made only in imagination or exist in the heavens! Rather, it is a utopia that can be realized on earth,

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<sup>5</sup>Al-Fārābī argued that a virtuous state led by a philosopher-prophet with supreme leadership qualities: supreme leadership, love of wisdom, disdain for wealth/greed, courageous, intelligent, and a great strategist. Al-Fārābī notice that all existing states of his time fell short or less worthy of having a supreme leader because of ignorance falling in the category of “immoral state”—a state that has rejected Saada. Al-Fārābī lists 6 types of state; (1) the state of necessity (survival); (2) vile state (wealth concentrations); (3) base state (pleasure); (4) timocratic state (honor and glory); (5) despotic state (power, subjugation, coercion), and (6) democratic state (freedom and integrity and he was optimistic about its actualization). Al-Fārābī lists 12 characteristics; wisdom, courage, justice, temperance, prudence, love of common good, educated, ethical, happiness and responsible.

<sup>6</sup>Sana Mahmoudi and Fatemeh Azizmouhamdi, “A Study of the Concept of Utopia in Hakim Sanai’s Walled Garden of Truth and Thomas More’s Utopia,” *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature* 2, no. 6 (November 2013): 161-168; H. Asil, “Utopia in Iranian Thoughts” (Tehran: Ney Publishers, 1992), 102-105.

<sup>7</sup>The concept of “eutopia” had not yet been invented during Shariati’s life.

and this is a school by following which it is possible to build man in the ideal way he has always dreamed of.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to the early sixteenth century, the word “utopia” was not part of the discourse. While Utopia represents an ideal state, it may foster escapism or fatigue during the pursuit of this vision, potentially leading individuals to become passive in their efforts toward liberation. In contrast, “eutopia” denotes a “good place” – a desirable community distinguished by its attainability and realistic nature, making it a more practical and achievable objective. It values diversity and individuality, adaptive in management and approach. While utopia can lead to escapism, eutopia encourages active participation. The individual is encouraged to participate in the achievement of eutopian goals by focusing on continuous improvement rather than perfection. It allows for continuous development and change/evolution and engages with reality dialectically. Eutopia is realistic and flexible, dynamic and contrary to Utopia, as it prevents escapism.

The concept of Ummah as an eutopia suggests that the effort to build a better society should persist, aiming to bridge the gap between reality and the ideal. While utopia represents the unattainable vision of a flawless society, the recognition that change is essential is enough to inspire actions toward a more fulfilling life. Utopian thought frequently arises as either a rejection of, or response to, dystopian conditions considered intolerable, prompting advocacy for their elimination through incremental social change. This perspective is particularly characteristic of utopian socialists, who envision a future society founded on communal objectives and collective efforts. Utopian socialists, following the methodology proposed by More, emphasized gradual social transformation. However, unlike More’s idealistic conception of utopia, they regarded the realization of a future society as achievable. Scientific socialism, as articulated by Marxists, envisions improved societal conditions and collective well-being through the elimination of private property. The key difference is the approach, specifically the methodology of class struggle carried out by the proletariat through active social engagement. Viewing the Ummah as eutopia involves more than just listing the features of an ideal society; it represents a broader ideological view where humanity is defined by social responsibility and individuals are dialectically involved with their communities. Shariati provides a distinct interpretation of ideology, differentiating it from typical Western perspectives: “The most accurate definition of ideology, reflecting its

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<sup>8</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 389.

essence and truth, is that ideology is an extension of human instinct.”<sup>9</sup> He elaborates further, stating, “Ideology interprets social, national, and class composition, systemic values, social structures, lifestyles, and the ideal conditions for individuals and societies. It addresses the questions of how, why, what is to be done, and how one should be.”<sup>10</sup> Ideology encompasses self-awareness, guidance, salvation, development, values, objectives, and the pursuit of perfection. Ideological insight is a form of responsible understanding, fostering commitment and duty. Whereas ideology in all of its forms prescribes what ought to be, science describes what is. In this context, Islam – considered as a mission, message, and system of guidance and salvation – is regarded as an ideology, distinct from philosophy, science, art, literature, or industry. Ultimately, a true and comprehensive ideology embodies these defining characteristics. Throughout Muslim history, attempts to de-ideologize Islam have been constant and effective, leading to the reproduction of the hegemonic power structure. The transformation of Islam from an ideology to a set of unconscious social traditions, fixed forms, and hereditary institutions and habits that are peculiar to the common people has made it degenerate, and at the same time it has strengthened and stabilized the common people in their traditional decadence and reactionary unconscious: the dialectical and reciprocal relationship between degenerate society and degenerate thought. Ideology must adapt and evolve without compromising its principles and values if it is to sustain itself. Islamic Ummah and its ideology is expected to stand out, for it is expected to be a role model in aim and conduct.

*Ummah: The Image of an Ideal Community in a Fragmented Reality*

In Islamic societies the word “Ummah” is often uttered implying unity, particularly when faced with the threat of colonialism, oppression, and deprivation. “Ummah comes from the root ‘um,’ which literally means path, departure, journey, migration, moving forward... it is a collection of human individuals; a community of synchronous individuals who like most other communities are united by goals.”<sup>11</sup> Ummah refers to the ideal Islamic community, which is brought into being by people themselves. It is a human creation that continues to evolve over time. In Islam, “Ummah” describes the collective, reflecting the broader view of society and

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<sup>9</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #23, 111.

<sup>10</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #16, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #7, 45.

shared identity within the faith. They have gathered of their own free will with a clear direction, a direction determined by its ideals (eutopian outlook) and its ideology (equality of nations and races). While it may seem utopian, unlike many historical versions (except possibly al-Fārābī's "Virtuous City"), the ummah requires active participation from its members. It does not encourage abrupt social change, and it does not allow idle waiting, i.e., social inaction. Shariati's approach evaluates current perspectives on Ummah by comparing them to the ideal, measuring the gap between reality and aspiration. The conventional understanding of the concept of Ummah suggests that nation-states and national borders are insignificant. Shariati, however, does not replace concepts such as nation or homeland, with the notion of Ummah, while firmly opposing the idealization of the past, especially when it is employed, intentionally or otherwise, in ways that detract from the energy needed for current progress and future planning.

The reality of the Ummah today reflects ongoing fragmentation and division, much of which stems from external forces in alliance with dominant internal forces in pursuit of their own interests. Ethnic tensions are becoming more prominent, proxy wars occur regularly, and alliances often benefit select groups. The enduring impact of colonialism, coupled with persistent economic inequality, further highlights a reality that stands in stark contrast to the ideals originally envisioned for the Ummah. The mainstream idea of Ummah along with all of the slogans and emotionally charged references to the plight of Ummah points to an aimless collection of scattered and traumatized groups engaged in infighting and often blaming exclusively an external perpetrator. The current state of the Ummah, as well as the broader global context, exhibits many characteristics typically associated with dystopian conditions. Rather than referring to this as "dystopia," Shariati employs the Qur'anic term "*estezaaf*" to describe a general state of disempowerment and marginalization. *Estezaaf* encompasses issues such as internal conflict, sectarian discord, marginalization, disparities between wealth and poverty, perpetual infighting, political repression, societal stagnation, exploitation, and both internal and external colonialism. *Estezaaf* is considered a key factor underlying the difficulties encountered by the Ummah and is seen as contributing to the persistence of these challenges.

The concept of Ummah is not focused on idealizing exaggerated past achievements but rather involves recognizing both historical successes and errors while engaging proactively with present and future challenges. It is not a conservative concept focused on preserving outdated traditions or restricting freedoms. The

Ummah values and emphasizes strong collective defense. The mission of the Ummah transcends the pursuit of its own excellence, encompassing a universal and enduring responsibility. Its objectives extend beyond individual interests. Shariati observes that, according to the Qur'ān, the Ummah is intended to serve as an exemplary for all of humanity: "So that you may be an example for the people of the world, and the Prophet may be an example for you."<sup>12</sup> This status involves being considerate of others and caring about the well-being and salvation of different societies, while also focusing on shaping its own destiny. Ummah stands in opposition to a system of absolute materialism and a system of fear mongering absolute apocalyptic cocoons. It is a nation, which is exemplary from the temporal point of view; it is the embodiment and symbol of human and social evolution. From the geopolitical and spatial point of view, ummah is not confined to a limited space. It rejects global isolation, alienation, and negative neutrality from the scene of human conflicts and has not splintered from the overall body, not separating its own destiny from the fate of other suffering masses and victims of oppression struggling towards emancipation.<sup>13</sup> Although it pursues self-improvement, strength, and its own development, it does not stand on the sideline of the world revolution for justice and development. "The strongest and most meaningful connections are those of shared belief and convergence... Ummah represents a profound human connection that surpasses ties such as class, profession, family, land, and race."<sup>14</sup> The concept of Ummah should not be regarded as an alternative to established notions such as nation, people, country, or homeland.<sup>15</sup> Instead, its members are united by their shared commitment to a common purpose and direction.<sup>16</sup> Its members associate freely and voluntarily without coercion, aiming collectively for moral improvement.<sup>17</sup> Shariati's concept of Ummah critiques tradition using modern epistemological methods. It centers on raising awareness at every stage of personal and social development: promoting peace, respect, and self-evaluation within a community framework. The Ummah rejects individualism, highlighting the dynamic interaction between agency and structures that drives change. According to this perspective, religious concepts are essentially dialectical and therefore correspond more

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<sup>12</sup> al-Qur'ān, 143:2.

<sup>13</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #17, 312.

<sup>14</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 311.

<sup>15</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #7, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 341, 349.

<sup>17</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #7, 104.

closely with Islamic reasoning. Shariati describes Ummah as “a human society in which all people who share a common goal come together to move towards their ideals based on a common leadership.” To prevent decline within the Ummah, committed leadership – referred to as Imamate – is considered essential, as it drives the vitality and progress of the community. Agency within the Ummah is defined by collective interests and goals, emphasizing togetherness rather than accepting outsiders’ labels or divisions, which have historically been used by colonial powers to sow discord. In striving for *Tawhīd*, (unity), and *’Adl* (social justice) the Ummah reflects an ideal social structure that Shariati describes as reflecting humanity’s desire for a better society, even if it feels far removed from current realities. Throughout history, many utopian ideals have emerged, but the Ummah is notable for emphasizing the cultivation of agency as an essential step toward progress and transformation. This agency within Ummah is active, and able to make choices in the context of the collective, and it is charged with confronting all forms of oppression – *estezaaf* – as a core responsibility. The principle of “enjoining the good and forbidding evil” is regarded as a responsibility for every conscientious member of the Ummah, guiding their development into exemplary individuals and agents of positive structural change.

If today we [in some Islamic societies] have made the concept of good or evil petrified only in superficial issues such as dress code or having a beard of a preferred size, then what is left after imposing dress code and shaving their beards? It is clear that if the duty of enjoining the good and forbidding evil is reduced to such convenient and superficial concerns then the abdication of expected greater social responsibilities is certain. The greatest vices are that we confine the circle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil to the secondary and individual issues and fixed and exclusive phenomena! The greatest vices today are global imperialism, global Zionism, colonialism (old and new), Oligarchy, exploitation, tyranny, class conflict, cartels, trusts, racism, stupefaction and cultural colonization. To neglect the preponderance and to rely on the corollary instead of principle, and to deal with the individual matter in order to escape the collective matter and concentrating on insignificant issues at the expense of greater

threats, is treasonous. Anyone who, in the current critical situation, emphasizes insignificant and petty vices than the structural vices has enjoined the vice and forbade the good.<sup>18</sup>

*Waiting/Longing (Entezar), and Martyrdom (Shahadat) as Ideological Components of Ummah*

Within the Ummah, human agency encompasses both the will and the right to resist or oppose all forms of *estezaaf*. The concept of agency rejects individualism while recognizing the importance of individuality, as well as individual rights and responsibilities within the community. In Ummah, human agency is a negation of scattered, aimless, and individualistic social constructs. The active participation of individuals in society – in the Ummah – conveys the principle of expectation and the philosophy of *entezar* – waiting as the “religion of protest” and martyrdom – being a “witness” to the pivotal events in the historical progression. To counter *estezaaf*, agency in the Ummah must be engaged as an active participant; it is expected that the agency understands the two interconnected concepts of *entezar* and martyrdom, which Shariati introduces in the evolutionary process of becoming an Ummah.<sup>19</sup> Members of the Ummah are socialized to commit to the defense of the community (as it is indeed the case in all threatened societies), to the point of sacrificing one’s life, in this case referred to as martyrdom. A martyr serves as a messenger who warns of potential disasters and takes steps to prevent them. As a socially responsible person, a martyr is consistently proactive and engaged. Acting as a living witness, they embody truth and distinguish it from falsehood, providing an example through their actions and self-reflection. Ultimately, a martyr stands out as a role model for others striving to achieve greatness. The martyr is an exemplary human being who is a model for all human beings at any time and in any place. As a “witness,” the martyr is someone who stands out, remains ever-present, and serves as both an example and a model for others. In contrast to the prevailing interpretation of martyrdom as inherently linked to death, Shariati broadens this concept to encompass not only the ultimate sacrifice but also the significant function of serving as a “witness.” As referenced in the Qur’ān (2:143), “Thus have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced that ye might be witnesses over the nations and the Apostle

<sup>18</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 275.

<sup>19</sup> *Entezar* and *Martyrdom* are the titles of two lectures delivered by Shariati in the early 1970s.

a witness over yourselves”<sup>20</sup> The destiny of an Ummah is chartered by its own hand. Requirements are bearing witness (martyrdom), and waiting (active engagement, voiding passivity, apathy, and inaction). The revival of an Ummah as an independent decision-making collective is expected to serve as an anti-colonial strategy.

Individuals possess the capacity for dissent within the Ummah due to their free will. The community is characterized by an outward orientation, which serves to prevent decline and stagnation. Shariati outlines three consecutive steps essential for guiding the Ummah from its current state toward its intended direction: faith, migration (*Hijra*), and struggle (*Jihād*). These constitute three core directives. Initially, it is imperative to develop a belief in an ideology, fostering awareness and a sense of responsibility. Faith embodies a viewpoint or conviction that differs from existing conditions and established conventions. Furthermore, faith should be complemented by the act of migration. Stagnation reflects acquiescence to prevailing circumstances. Thus, *migration* is leaving conditions that limit growth and development. In Islamic history, the act of migration marks the start of its chronological timeline. This pivotal moment is not linked to the Prophet’s birth, the conquest of Mecca, or even the onset of Prophethood; instead, it is the migration (*hijra*) that is significant. Thus, Shariati views the emergence of the Ummah as the true beginning of Islamic historical development, a point where the community starts to form and actively participate in history. In the Qur’ān, *hijra* is not merely presented as an aspect of the Prophet’s biography. Instead, it is framed as a broad, universal principle applicable to all individuals across periods, extending beyond the Prophet’s migration from Mecca to Medina.<sup>21</sup> The third and final stage, referred to as *jihād*, emphasizes the enduring obligation for members to engage in continuous effort on two fronts: an inner struggle against personal shortcomings – the greater *jihād* aimed at self-improvement – and the regular *jihād* dedicated to societal advancement and comprehensible material and spiritual development. In the Qur’ān, references to the hereafter are consistently preceded by mentions of the present, material world. This narrative sequence appears to reflect an intentional emphasis on the primacy of the material world over the hereafter.”<sup>22</sup> Stagnation, abandonment of material dimension of reality (well-being), inaction and short sightedness, the relentless pursuit of “immediate gratification,” which may be used to keep the

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<sup>20</sup> *Al-Qur’ān*, 2:143.

<sup>21</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #11, 50.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-55.

masses content, is a danger threatening Ummah in its pursuit of perfection.<sup>23</sup> The threat to Ummah – based on Shariati’s critical reading of history is primarily from general (actual or perceived) powerlessness: the rise of a condition of powerlessness – *estezaaf* and its subset, stupefaction (with symptoms such as apathy and false consciousness), coloniality, authoritarianism, exploitation, absolutism, and low self-esteem.

According to Shariati, following the death of the Prophet, Islam underwent multiple forms of distortion resulting from both internal and external influences. He argues that although the caliphate system appeared to promote Islamic unity, it actually led to internal unrest and division. Expansion led to riches and intoxicating pride, chauvinism, racism, and imperialism by the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. Although the Qur’ān consistently encourages reflection on the errors of previous societies, the Caliphates nonetheless repeated similar mistakes. The Qur’ān emphatically points to the significance of history and the lessons that must be learned by the contemporaries as they map their long-term survival. It is especially a reminder “That was a people that hath passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did and ye of what ye do! Of their merits there is no question in your case!”<sup>24</sup> This is to emphasize (or at least this is one of its meanings) that

the Ummah that has been subjected to captivity and misery, cannot use the pretext of the previous generations or other nations besides itself and cannot consider... abnormalities, deviations, misfortunes, and captivity to be normal under the pretext that they are the result of the weaknesses or betrayals by others. The Ummah members alone are responsible. Every misfortune they are currently caught in is the result of their own doing, even if it is done by others! If members submit to the misfortunes that others have inflicted upon them, then they have made themselves the object of abuse, and it is they who will be punished for this tolerance and obedience.<sup>25</sup>

The intent is not to attribute fault to victims. Rather, as Shariati indicates, it is essential for the Ummah to present a unified front against challenges arising from

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>24</sup> *al-Qur’ān*, 134:141-142.

<sup>25</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #7, 52.

elements of *estezaaf*. Estezaaf represents a dystopian scenario, encapsulating the difficulties encountered by developing communities. Cultivating historical awareness of positive role models and fostering a shared collective memory are valuable strategies for countering the effects of estezaaf. “It is natural for a nation to rely on its sources of pride” ... “as a reflection of humanity’s search for identity” without encouraging “racist braggadocio.” Western nationalism served as an instrument of colonial control, supported by eugenics and social concepts of racial hierarchy. This type of nationalism “seeks to erase, humiliate, and enslave other nationalities; it seeks to deny others so as to prove and to impose itself.” It has been a long colonial strategy and policy to empty historical content, cultural and religious prides, which constitute one’s humanity and replace it with whatever serves their interest. The threat to a national identity is multifaceted and none has been more effective than the idea of “internationalism” in the past nearly two-hundred years. All and every type of internationalism initiated by the powerful, have resulted in devastating results for the powerless.

#### *Nationalism and Internationalism*

The divergence and disconnect between abstract, subjective concepts and their practical, objective manifestations present a significant challenge within intellectual discourses. Since the main activity of an intellectual activity is to generate deep thought, the intellectual is prone to simply fall into a mental plane that is different from the material and practical reality. Shariati emphasizes the necessity for abstraction to remain grounded in tangible reality, cautioning that otherwise, imagination may falter.<sup>26</sup> He characterizes internationalism as a “golden cocoon of mental silk” for many intellectuals, notably within Asian and African contexts. According to Shariati, this notion is constructed from elevated human sentiment, moral ideals, and refined concepts; yet he warns that the convergence of these elements can yield unintended negative consequences.<sup>27</sup> If an ideology fails to learn from history, what is it but a remnant of romantic fantasy? In its truest sense, ideology is rooted in universal values and ideals of humanity, with its spirit defined as a “mission” aimed at realizing these ideals and evolving human beings. It must provide a “philosophy of life” informed by a unique worldview, which in turn guides the correction and organization of “relations between human beings.” Ultimately, this

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<sup>26</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #27, 112.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

leads to a set of “commands and directives” – the school’s “practical wisdom,” founded upon its “theoretical wisdom.”<sup>28</sup> Throughout history, humanity has witnessed different forms of internationalism, each marked by hardship and suffering. Ultimately, these experiences have led to what has been described as “the sacrifice of the purest human beings with the guillotine of humanity.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Religious Internationalism*

Shariati’s assessment of institutionalized religion underscores its function as a hegemonic entity, closely intertwined with prevailing socio-economic and political power structures. He expands upon this perspective by situating it within a historical context, proposing his “*religion versus religion*” thesis, which places particular emphasis on internal conflicts among Abrahamic religions. Shariati posits that conflicts frequently originate among factions and social classes within individual religion, rather than solely between distinct religions. He maintains that addressing the entrenched authority of institutional religion and exploitative socio-economic systems necessitates both personal and collective awareness, alongside the development of well-considered alternatives. For instance, the intellectual and scientific movement of the Renaissance fundamentally altered the relationship between European states and the Catholic Church by challenging its intellectual and political authority. This transformation increased awareness and enabled emerging European nations to replace Christendom with secular national governments. Consequently, the Church was no longer able to perpetrate violence in the name of Christ, who did not even condone such actions against his enemies. Muslims have experienced betrayal by Islamic Empires operating under the internationalist ideology of the “Caliphate.” As the Caliphate expanded beyond national borders, it aimed to erase cultural identities (de-culturalization) or national characteristics. Nationality refers to traits that are unique to each group and, over time, create a shared identity and collective consciousness among people. In contrast, Islam acknowledges differences and diversity, encouraging people to replace conflict with cooperation and accommodation in their relationships.<sup>30</sup> Islam recognizes and upholds the individuality of nations, ethnic groups, and the autonomy, integrity, and distinctiveness of various cultures and traditions. It does not support imposing uniform standards

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>29</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #20, 86.

<sup>30</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #27, 125.

or practices upon diverse communities. Each nation is encouraged to remain connected with its authentic history, draw from the depth of its cultural heritage, and address issues of “cultural alienation” by rediscovering its identity. In this context, the call to “return to self” should not be interpreted as a retreat into narrow ethnocentrism or nationalism; rather, it represents a movement beyond “cultural alienation,” “existential meaninglessness,” and “historical depersonalization,” towards the elevated state of “human self-birth and self-consciousness.” Ultimately, this process aims for the authentic realization of “human originality,” a goal distinctly separate from imperial or colonial objectives.<sup>31</sup> The reduction or loss of national identities, which is associated with internationalism (both religious and class-based), can be counteracted when free, self-aware, and authentic nations actively participate together based on the principles of “equality” and “mutual coexistence.” The critiques often confuse “invitation” to Islam with the “imposition of Islam” unaware that imposing Islam is rejected by the Qur’ān itself: “Let there be no compulsion in religion.”<sup>32</sup> This verse clearly rejects coercion, imposition, and any form of religious dictatorship. More significantly, it outlines what religion is, its purpose, and the role of Muslims in the world. Islamic Jihād, despite misconceptions spread by both the Caliphate and Islam’s opponents, is not about conquering territories or politically dominating other nations. Instead, it aims globally to distinguish between “growth” and “non-growth,” as well as ignorance versus knowledge. To make these distinctions, people need both abstract understanding and the ability to choose objectively. The Qur’ān describes itself as a “guiding light,” a “message,” or “remembrance,” with Muhammad serving solely as its messenger. His purpose is simply to deliver the message; he is a “herald” and a “reminder.” Therefore, his aim is to reveal the clear path of evolution (the potential), distinguishing it from the routes of devolution and involution. This highlights the difference between the “sword that opens the way to power and domination” and the “sword that opens doors to dialogue” – the contrast between the Caliphate and the Imamate, the Islamic Empire and the Islamic Ummah, and ultimately, the difference between inviting people to Islam and imposing Islam.<sup>33</sup> Religious internationalism, in the language of prophets such as Jesus of Nazareth and Muhammad, invites nations to a humanist ideology on a global scale, and in the language of the Pope or

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>32</sup> *Al-Qur’ān* 256:2.

<sup>33</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #27, 132.

Caliph, is the imperialism in the form of coercive imposition of religion, which has become a tool in the service of tyrannical powers.<sup>34</sup>

### *Humanist Internationalism*

Humanistic Internationalism has resonated strongly with advocates of free thought and humanist intellectuals. It is not aligned with any specific social class or religious tradition but rather emphasizes the primacy of humanity and universal humanism in a world without boundaries. We can see that in theory, when this thought is presented as an abstract slogan and an intellectual ideal, pleasant and indicates a broad intellectual worldview. But how is it in practice? In the real world? Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher, mathematical genius, and human rights defender, in his 1951 book, *New Hopes for a Changing World*, argues that civilization is not the monopoly of any nation, even if it is more advanced in one corner of the world, it belongs to all of humanity. It is argued that a resource such as oil, which is created by nature over millennia, is the blood of industry and has become the soul of civilization. Such does not belong only to those whose land contains it; it belongs to all. Ideally this is a perfect argument, provided it is applied to all other resources. But real experiences suggest an entirely different outcome. With the oil industry in the hands of technologically advanced “civilized” people, oil should also be given to such “civilized” people. We can see how this idealism inadvertently comes to rationalize and justify colonialism. After all, colonialism was viewed as a “civilizing mission.” In the history of mankind, how many sacred slogans have brought about ominous disasters!<sup>35</sup>

### *Proletarian Internationalism*

Proletarian Internationalism represents the most recent concept endorsed by the Communist International, regarded as the universal ideal of Marxism. It is predicated on the view that workers across different societies are interconnected, mutually supportive, and share a unified stance and ideology. The aim according to this perspective is to establish a classless global society based on the solidarity of the working class. However, the communist parties in major Western and colonial powers mistakenly believed that decolonization should only occur after a proletarian

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

revolution succeeded in their own countries, a misinterpretation of Marx's ideas. According to this logic, nations such as Ireland, India, and Algeria should have waited to become independent until after the British working class overthrew capitalism through a communist revolution. The suggestion is that only then would British colonial rule end, allowing countries like India to achieve independence. Maurice Torres and the Communist Party of Algeria applied comparable logic when they decided to abstain from the Algerian uprising led by the National Liberation Front against French colonial rule. Similarly, the French Communist Party recognized colonial boundaries by naming its local branch the "French Communist Party Algiers Branch!" The institutionalization of Proletariat Internationalism, humanism, and religious internationalism, have been implicated in imperialism and colonialism. Shariati consistently emphasized that external threats are unlikely or less likely to succeed without the presence of internal vulnerabilities or the cooperation of internal forces. Throughout history, external powers have been able to gain influence more easily because the Ummah lacked unity and cohesion. Specifically, factors including social injustice, oppression, and discrimination, together with the entrenched sexism characteristic of patriarchal systems, have contributed to disempowerment, manifesting both in traditional patterns and in contemporary expressions that are sexualized or commodified.<sup>36</sup> The serious threat to ummah is multifaceted, but none more serious than fragmentation and socio-economic inequality.

Economic inequality is considered a violation of the sacred Islamic principle of "Social Justice" ('Adl), which poses a serious risk to the unity of the Ummah. Today, the Ummah's economic system includes dependent capitalism, feudalism, petty trading, mercantilism, rentier systems, and cronyism. Ideally, this system should evolve into a system based on collective ownership as it adapts to changing circumstances. Islam's emphasis on material condition is the reason for consideration of the "the economy as the base." The material welfare of individuals is evidenced by the sayings: "those who lack material means are deprived of spiritual life," and "when poverty enters through one door, faith exits through another." The social system is structured around principles of justice, shared ownership, equality, and human fraternity. Shariati advocated for socialism as both an economic system and an expression of social democracy, encompassing political and economic democratic values. He envisioned a model of equitable society and social justice that aligns with religious values while addressing diverse contemporary

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

needs.<sup>37</sup> According to Shariati, the economic foundation of the ummah is based on three key features: Mysticism (*Irfan*), Freedom, and Equality. He distinguishes this form of socialism from Western socialism, noting that in his view, the economy is not the ultimate objective, unlike Western socialism which retains aspects of bourgeois spirit. In Islam, it is a means to a greater end.<sup>38</sup> The concept of the Ummah refers to a responsible, migratory, and confessional community whose objective is to cultivate ideal conditions for human development and progress toward perfection. This society is described as having three key dimensions, drawn from *Surah Al-Hadid*: the Book (Principles), the Scale (Equality), and Iron (Material well-being). Within the Ummah, the ideal individual is regarded as the “viceroy of God,” embodying attributes that are both “divine” (spirit of God) and “earthly” (putrid clay), as referenced in the Qur’ān.<sup>39</sup> The progression towards becoming an ideal person is achieved through the triumph of spirit over matter, representing the process of human evolution and completeness.

#### *Imamate: The Committed Leadership of the Ummah*

The idea of “primacy of leadership” within the Ummah differs from the notion of prioritizing a single leader, which is often linked to fascism.<sup>40</sup> In its formative period, the Ummah requires visionary leadership, known as the Imamate, to enable effective development. When individuals join the Ummah and voluntarily adopt its leadership philosophy, which is clearly differentiated from any leader-centric ideology, they enhance their commitment, supporting a way of life founded on faith and community engagement. Society progresses when guided by leaders who are committed to a coherent ideology or belief system focused on achieving common goals. The concept of Imamate is articulated as guiding the Ummah toward well-defined objectives: “An individual becomes a member of the Ummah through commitment to communal leadership, voluntary participation, and dedication to the ideology that shapes the community’s vision and achievement of its goals.”<sup>41</sup> Ideology forms the crucial link between Ummah and Imamate. It acts as a collection of

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<sup>37</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #7, 108.

<sup>38</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #10, 74.

<sup>39</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #16, 72-73.

<sup>40</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #27, 128.

<sup>41</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 427.

beliefs rooted in Islam, providing strategic direction for the Imam to improve conditions beyond current realities. Ultimately, Imamate continues the Prophet's mission to build and sustain the Ummah. Shariati asserts that "Imamate" involves a responsibility to guide society from its current state toward an ideal, dictated not by the Imam's individual preferences but by a comprehensive ideology to which the Imam is likewise subject. The foundational principles of revolutionary intellectual leadership contrast sharply with the autocratic tendencies associated with personal despotism.<sup>42</sup> Imamate diverges from dictatorship. Imamate is solely based on competence of the leader and does not necessarily have a specific spiritual and sacred ontological aspect. "Thus, 'Imam' – which here means exemplary, representative, a model, a martyr (witness), and in Emerson's words, the 'Representative of Humanity' – in terms of cultural and spiritual role in the revival and nurturing of the transcendent values... is comparable to the terms such as gods, mythological manifestations, as well as the nurtured and sublimated heroes of history."<sup>43</sup> But inherently, unlike these types, Imama's existence and personality is real, objective, and natural. Those who have read and heard the specific exaggerations about the personality of the Shi'i Imams in the name of Shiism today, the consideration of Imam as a natural human being, even an "exemplary human being," a "real man" or "an objective embodiment of the transcendent truth of man" may seem like a weak and even degrading description. Within their frame of reference, the traditional and mainstream religious and philosophical view (which they consider the absolute truth rather than what they are, which is reactionary class politics), basically everything related to the tangible world and nature is inferior, and everything that is supernatural and unseen, transcendent, and sacred.<sup>44</sup> So, the glorification of the position of Imam in such a belief is by statements such as "the Imam or the Prophet should not have a shadow, and that he knows the language of the *Jinn* (Genies), animals ask him about solving their problems, they are born from their mother's side (instead of natural birth canal), and even the manure of their mule 'smells like musk...'" Thus, in this view the consideration of Imam as an "exemplary human being," is considered analogous to an ordinary man, and as a result, the status of the Imam is downgraded. But the Qur'anic view is exactly the opposite. "After God, there is no one dearer, more holy, and higher than the perfect man. Prostration is the utmost sign of humility and obedience, and in the story of Adam, all the angels, even the

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<sup>42</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #7, 118.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>44</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 362.

great angels, fall down to his feet. The only angel who denied Adam's divine status was Satan."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, in the Islamic worldview, there is no possibility to consider the Prophet or the Imam as having a non-human essence because if we consider them superior to man, we have elevated them to the level of God and fall into polytheism (*shirk*), and if we view them as ordinary human beings, then we question their leadership ability. This is why I consider Imam neither as God, nor a metaphysical being, nor an angel, but a human being who is the objective embodiment of the subjective man, and in a word, the Imam is not a "superhuman" – above and beyond human beings but a being, a human who is extraordinary being."<sup>46</sup> Imam holds the position due to his personal values and qualifications. This perspective rejects concepts such as the "cult of personality," "ideological cultism" (elitism), and "cult vanguardism" (as seen in totalitarian systems), primarily because the interaction between agency (active participation) and structure serves as a safeguard against such tendencies. As the Ummah is a society undergoing continuous development and transition along its evolutionary trajectory, it requires leadership that is equally dynamic, supported by an ideology rooted in the principles of *Tawhīd* (unity) and *'Adl* (social justice). Given that the Ummah embodies aspirations toward higher objectives, the importance of leadership – Imamate – is fundamentally affirmed.

The quality of leadership approaches the ideal as the collective consciousness of the Ummah increases. When a leader of a Muslim mosque identifies as an "Imam" or is addressed as such by the congregation, the term does not necessarily carry the same connotations as those described by Shariati in *Sociology of Ummah and Imamate*. Historically, Shi'i Islam has viewed the eleven Imams as figures who opposed unjust state power. However, after the period of the eleventh Imam, questions arise regarding the significance of the title "Imam," especially in cases where individuals referred to as Imams hold positions of authority. An Imam is a leader who emerges from the Ummah, representing its values without promoting authoritarianism or hero worship. The Imam guides the community to maintain progress and purpose, preventing stagnation. The Imam is regarded as an exemplary figure whose conduct serves as a model for others, particularly through efforts to prevent or oppose internal discord, external threats, fragmentation, deviation, and manipulation. The title of "Imam" does not signify an object of worship; rather, he is viewed as a servant of God and of the people, embodying qualities exemplified by

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<sup>45</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 288.

<sup>46</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 388-389; Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #16, 98.

the Prophet of Islam. Notably, the Prophet of Islam is recognized as a messenger and an Imam, entrusted with promoting monotheism as the basis for a just society. A prophet conveys the message, he is a messenger, and a herald, but an Imam is he who implements the directives. The Prophet holds both roles.<sup>47</sup> If an Imam does not reflect the qualities described by Shariati (as an ideal), it risks becoming a means for cooptation and domination, and subject to manipulation by those in power. An Imam is an actor in the revolutionary leadership. The primary distinction between dictatorship and revolutionary leadership is found in their respective attitudes toward freedom and political development. Revolutionary leadership typically fosters independent thought, promotes political progress, and contributes to greater individual liberties. Conversely, dictatorship, irrespective of its form, tends to suppress knowledge and restrict or eliminate personal freedoms. Shariati describes the Imam as a person who represents the kind of human that should exist, but does not yet, and must eventually come into being.<sup>48</sup> Al-Fārābī was the first to mention the idea of a complete (ideal) human in Islamic *Irfan*. This “complete man” embodies the highest virtues such as wisdom, both theoretical and practical knowledge, foresight, and dedication to society. The aspiration for the “complete man” represents a core, universal attribute observed across various cultures throughout history.<sup>49</sup> However, contemporary emphasis on democratic processes and the essential role of public participation in the election of leaders forms the underlying basis for critiques directed at Shariati’s depiction of the status, position, and function of the Imam. A closer look at Shariati’s argument shows that the idea of “democracy” as an ultimate objective has actually evolved into different forms. Shariati separates democracy into two types: “committed” and “non-committed.” In his view, a non-committed democracy refers to a government that comes to power solely through the people’s vote and is bound only by their initial choices. Typically, this kind of democracy focuses on immediate interests and concerns. While elections in modern democracies are often seen as an end goal, Shariati believes they should serve a higher purpose: the process of raising consciousness and promoting evolution and setting the stage for continued progress and development. “If we look at the current political situation in western democracies, specifically Europe and the United States, it would be inaccurate to assume that those who were elected by the “majority” of the people are the most prominent and worthy

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<sup>47</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 329.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

human beings in these exemplary societies.”<sup>50</sup> Shariati’s explanation is: “there is freedom of vote, but votes are not free.”<sup>51</sup> This perspective is currently echoed by many individuals within these societies. The Imamate is not established through the process of pledge of allegiance or consultation; the Imam is not selected by means of general consensus or allegiance. Should there be an election, it would typically favor individuals who share similar backgrounds and are already familiar to the electors. During the selection process in Medina, Sa’d ibn ‘Ubadah received all votes except those cast by the *Muhājirūn*, while Ali did not secure any votes. Despite being a notable companion of the Prophet, Ali was unable to solicit votes due to a lack of name recognition.<sup>52</sup> In contemporary liberal democracies, candidates are often elected based on their level of public recognition.”<sup>53</sup>

A “committed democracy,” by contrast, seeks to reshape society, culture, social dynamics, and societal structures according to a progressive or revolutionary ideology and a specific blueprint. Its aim is to advance society to a stage where it can fully realize its revolutionary potential and move forward from a strong foundation.<sup>54</sup> Thus, in the perspective of the Ummah and Imamate, it involves not just managing, preserving, and protecting the community, but also fostering the development and advancement of individuals and society as a whole. Within this framework, the role of agency becomes particularly prominent, especially when considering the dominant hegemonic structures whose interests often conflict with those of the collective. The type of leadership which is equipped to guide the community toward shared goals is a leadership that is dedicated to reshaping reality, so it aligns with the aspirations embodied in its ideals. If Imamate is understood as a statement concerning leadership caliber and qualifications, implying exemplary guidance, then it may be applicable to various forms of political structure. Some critics contend that Shariati’s concept of Imamate does not align with modern notions of democracy. However, they often fail to clarify which form of democracy they reference, such as whether they mean liberal democracy with voting as its central mechanism. The assertion that democracy is exclusively achieved through the voting practices characteristic of liberal states is inaccurate. Shariati’s political philosophy describes leadership in the Ummah (Imamate) as fundamentally different from the

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<sup>50</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #12, 228.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 320.

<sup>53</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #12, 229.

<sup>54</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 428.

approach found in liberal democracies, since it is both an ideal system and universally applicable. In this perspective, the Ummah embraces a form of universalism that acknowledges and accepts diversity. Additionally, what is the current role of the Imam? Nowadays, the Imam serves as a leader chosen by consensus or election, assuming the community is sufficiently informed and understands its long-term needs. Based on Shariati's description of the general traits of an Imam and the concept of Imamate, this leadership model can be broadly applied, since it does not require any specific cultural, racial, or ethnographic qualifications. Imamate "is not a permanent system. It is a regime that, in any form, according to the Imami Shi'i belief, is limited to twelve specific persons, and there is no doubt that they are no more. Therefore, it cannot be a permanent regime" because there are none left.<sup>55</sup> In the "Twelver Imami" Shi'i tradition, the twelfth imam is considered the hidden messiah, known as the Mahdi. According to many Shi'i religious scholars (*marja'*) it is not permissible to establish a religious government while the twelfth Imam remains hidden (occultation).<sup>56</sup> Imamate, as both a political philosophy and system is thought to be a form of revolutionary leadership during a temporary, transitional phase, grounded in an ideology designed to guide society toward independence and social democracy. Accordingly, the differentiation between dictatorship and revolutionary leadership pertains to matters of freedom and political development. Principled revolutionary leadership fosters independent thought, leading to political progress and ultimately greater freedom. In contrast, dictatorship in all forms perpetuates ignorance, thereby restricting or removing individual freedoms, a condition well familiar to many at the present.<sup>57</sup>

Shariati vehemently rejects the traditional religious arguments regarding the hereditary position of leadership, by declaring that the position of Imam is not by appointment or inheritance, it is based on existential values. "So don't humiliate them by lining up a few sons and fathers in a row and erasing their core values...."<sup>58</sup> Imamate is a revolutionary regime – a regime that builds anew – with a limited number of people in line of succession, and more importantly, it is related to the transitional period, transition from a backward, degenerate, and ignorant society to a society with solid cultural, ideological, and political awareness and potential to transcend general state of ignorance to a fully developed society. In this difficult

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>57</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #7, 65.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 208.

transition there is a necessary guide called “Imamate.” The Imamate constitutes a political philosophy and system distinguished by its revolutionary leadership during periods of transition. Grounded in an ideology emphasizing unity and social justice, it directs society toward independence, maturity, and the development of a unique democratic framework. This evolutionary process progresses until individuals attain sufficient awareness to independently shape their own destinies, make autonomous decisions, and resist internal and external domination.

Imam is neither installed nor elected, nor hereditary. It is done by pointing out the most qualified – “Wasiyyah,” which in the case of early Islam was the responsibility of the Prophet. “Wasiyyah” – recommendation that is neither an appointment nor an election.

The most sensitive and contentious religious and historical disagreement between the Shia and the Sunni is with respect to two principles: the principle of Wasiyyah and the principle of allegiance. Shia negates the principles of ‘allegiance’ and ‘consultation’ (*shūrā*) and instead emphasizes ‘Wasiyyah.’ And the Sunni negates Wasiyyah and emphasizes *shūrā* in the context of caliphate. In reality, none of these principles are in contradiction with each other and none can be labeled as fabrication and un-Islamic. *Shūrā*, consensus and allegiance mean democracy, which is an Islamic principle explicitly mentioned in the Qur’ān... Certainly, among those who were most familiar with candidates for recognition and demonstrate maturity in decision-making, the Prophet stands out.<sup>59</sup>

The concept of Imamate relies on the inherent qualities and abilities of the individual designated as Imam and does not depend on outward symbols like uniforms or attire. Once this is understood, the idea of Wasiyyah naturally follows. For instance: Damavand as the tallest mountain in Iran; Einstein as the most influential physicist; Hafez as the greatest poet; Hegel is known for his philosophical brilliance; Beethoven regarded as a musical genius; Marx recognized as the founder of scientific socialism; and Gandhi seen as representing Indian spirit, culture, and spirituality. These are qualities inherent to individuals, not roles determined by election or appointment to high office. It is different from the person who occupies a political

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<sup>59</sup> Ali Shariati, *Collected Works* #26, 436.

office such as a prime minister or a president, etc.<sup>60</sup> “Imamate” is the difficult mission of the leadership that must guide society from “what is” to “what ought to be,” but not according to the “personal will of the Imam,” but on the basis of an ideology to which the Imam is subordinate. The mechanism(s) of the movement of the Ummah forward is tied to political philosophy: the Imamate. The other meaning of “Imamate,” which is a political philosophy and a specific regime, is that it is neither a democratic regime, nor a hereditary regime, nor an authoritarian regime, nor a class-based regime. Imamate in Islam is an extremely sensitive, precise, and complex type of leadership that requires great precision. It embodies the ultimate aspirations of humanity to achieve all favorable outcomes for individuals. In this respect, it serves as a universally relevant and inherently abstract concept.

### *Conclusion*

Shariati characterizes Ummah and Imamate as exemplary models of community and leadership, serving as guiding principles toward which reality should aspire. The concept of Ummah collectively represents an anti-colonial framework that counters colonial powers’ divide-and-rule strategies, which are often based on distinctions such as race, religion, or nationality. The Ummah is regarded as a dynamic and progressive community unified by common values and goals. The term “Ummah” refers to a cohesive society that transcends regional, ancestral, or geographic boundaries. The leadership of the Ummah, the Imamate, is neither determined by heredity nor by electoral processes. Instead, it is founded upon the intrinsic qualities and values of the Imam. This leadership model aims to support the transition from stagnation to sustainable development by offering strategic guidance during pivotal (transitional) periods. Any social change in any form, large and small must be based on awareness. Shariati repeatedly warned that “a revolution undertaken without sufficient awareness and carefully considered alternatives is likely to result in tragic consequences.”<sup>61</sup>

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# **Book Reviews**



**The Trump Revolution: A New Order of Great Powers**, by Alexander Dugin. London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2025, 114 pp. (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-917-64623-9

On February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin ordered the military forces of the Russian Federation to invade Russia's neighbor, Ukraine. Helicopters, planes, tanks, armored personal carriers, and other military hardware engaged in a blitzkrieg of Ukraine, taking large swaths of its territory in the north, east, and south, in addition to the Crimea, which it had already illegally occupied since 2014. Behind the scenes, the rightwing neo-fascist Russian philosopher, Alexander Dugin, was seeing his longed-for dream come true: the reappropriation of Ukraine by Russia – the forced reconciliation of the original motherland of the Rus with its much larger and perpetually abusive Eurasian offspring. Known in Russia as one of the most prominent creators and advocates of the of the religio-political “Russkii Mir” ideology, an ideology meant to return Russian to its self-described sacred mission to defend Christianity, “God-Bearing” Russian people, and the world, Dugin cheered as the Russian armed forces destroyed parts of Ukraine. For Dugin, with the 2014 Euromaidan movement, Ukraine had fallen into the hands of the “anti-Christ,” the collective democratic and postmodern West, which was hellbent on liberating Ukraine from the sacred orbit of Moscow, the self-proclaimed “Third Rome.”

Dugin's distaste for the West, especially the United States of America, is legendary. He has spared no chance to condemn the West for its liberal freedoms, cultural licentiousness, its emphasis on science, and what he calls its “neophilia” – love of all that is new – coupled with the denigration of the ancient, traditional, and sacred, i.e., all that belongs to the world before modernity. His 1997 book, *The Foundations of Geopolitics*, was a handbook on how to undermine the West and as a consequence weaken its influence on the world. Dugin advocates for a “multipolar world,” wherein powerful “poles” dominate the less-powerful nations around them, but in doing so protect them from the undo political, economic, and cultural influences of the United States and its “vassal states” in the West. Yet, with the rise of Donald Trump, Dugin saw something happening in the United States; Americans seem to be discarding the “ideology of progress” inherent within liberalism and

were embracing a palingenetic political movement that promises to “return” America to a way of life that was more pure, more moral, more traditional, and more religious – a conservative retrotopia. Trump’s movement also was isolationists: “America First” was its slogan, as the movement promised to withdraw America from the world’s problems with a renewed focus on America’s domestic wellbeing. America would no longer take care of the world; it would from now on take care of itself. In doing so, it would reverse the status decline of the White Working class, which had suffered from globalism, immigration, and the U.S. government’s long neglect of its workers. Trump’s movement would not only renew America culturally, but it would also revitalize strained relationships with adversarial countries, specifically Putin’s Russian Federation. For Dugin, this seemingly “paleoconservative” voice coming from the halls of power in the U.S. was music to his ears, and he began his years-long embrace of Trump, publicly advocating for Americans to embrace Trump and Trumpism as well. Trump was the promise for an America returned to its “Christian” roots, much like Putin returned Russia to Orthodoxy.

From 2015 to early 2026, Dugin wrote glowingly about Trump, with only a few criticisms. After Trump’s 2021 return to the presidency, which was preceded by a four-year court-filled interregnum, the rightwing publishing house, Arktos Media Ltd., published Dugin’s book, *The Trump Revolution: A New Order of Great Powers* (2025) – the culmination of Dugin’s “American Turn,” which coincided with an increase in his hatred for Europe, especially NATO and the European Union. However, instead of an honest assessment of Donald Trump and the Make America Great Again movement, Dugin’s *The Trump Revolution* reads like a series of irrational panegyrics. As such, it is more of an entry point into the distorted psyche of Alexander Dugin and his wish fulfillments than an attempt to offer a diagnosis and prognosis of America’s rightwing populist. For example, Dugin claims that Donald Trump is a “classical conservative” (86) or even a Paleoconservative (like Pat Buchanan), with Trumpism being some kind of “well-defined ideology” (41-65, 85). In fact, neither claim is true. One will never find Trump presenting, arguing about, or citing a single Paleoconservative intellectual, author, or advocate. He simply has no knowledge of political theory. He has no understanding of political ideologies, as he is not ideological. Politics for Trump is merely a means to an end, and the end he has in mind is not a “better world,” as almost all political ideologies promises. Trump is simply devoid of such intellectual materials. As Trump is not an ideologue, neither is Trumpism an ideology; it is merely a collection of emotive narratives that are meant to operate on his followers via their Amygdala, not the Prefrontal Cortex and the faculty of reason. Such narratives serve to forward the personal interests of Trump himself.

No form of altruism, political or otherwise, has ever animated Trump's actions. Despite this, Dugin even suggests that the most counterrevolutionary movement in American history, the MAGA movement, is itself a "revolution" (41, 67). In reality, MAGA is an attempt to retreat behind the liberal American revolution as it seeks to undue the very laws and structures of the democratic American *Willensgemeinschaft* (willed community). A true revolutionary movement would take that which is still revolutionary in the American Constitution and Declaration of Independence – both rooted in the Enlightenment – correct its failures and expand freedom, not foreclose on it and return to pre-Enlightenment thought and polity. Trump is no revolutionary and Trumpism is no revolution. Trump is merely a self-interested demagogue seeking higher office to benefit personally. In fact, history teaches us that his first run for president was a marketing campaign for his business, and from his actions and behaviors during his second term, we can see he ran for president again to accomplish three things: (1) to stay out of prison; (2) to monetize the government and maximize his accumulation of wealth from doing so, and (3) to continue his self-aggrandizement, which is meant to deify him as the greatest of all American presidents – thus his absurdly destructive "vanity projects" in Washington D.C. Trump. In contrast to Dugin's claims, Trump is not interested in a "multipolar" world as Dugin is, unless such multipolarity places Donald Trump at the top of the world – a global "Red Caesar." Foreshadowing such an august status, Trump proclaimed himself "the boss" to the leaders of the most influential countries at the June 2026 meeting of the G7, and this after he proclaims that he was "saved by God to make America great again" in March of 2025. Surely, there is no space for anyone else in Trump's apotheosis.

Dugin's own proclamations in his book border on a psychosis. By choosing J.D. Vance as his V.P., Dugin claims Trump is not interested in "big capital," but rather "traditional values." On the contrary, there are very few things other than "big capital" that Trump cares about, and "traditional values" are not one of them (68). For Trump, invoking traditional values is merely a means to garner the support of the Evangelicals, rightwing Catholics, and other conservative support; it is not to be taken seriously. Trump has never lived by traditional values; he has only spoken of them within the political arena as a rhetorical ploy. This is part of Trump's Machiavellian character, not a religio-ethical commitment as Dugin seems to think. The only concern Trump has for "traditional values" is whether or not invoking them continues to be an effective camouflage for his immorality, greed, and licentiousness.

Dugin's book even makes fanciful claims about trivial things regarding Trump, including Trump's continual use of the Village People's song, "YMCA," as a campaign anthem. This unofficial anthem of the LGBT+ community was co-opted by Trump, as it is a reminder of when he peaked as a man in the 1980s. However, Dugin curiously claims that the song "YMCA" is the "anthem of conservative Christian youth" (74). This is one of the most hilarious moments in the book, as it is indicative of Dugin's gross misunderstandings about Trump and American culture. Additionally, Dugin felt the need to comment on the Jeffrey Epstein affair, which has dogged Trump's second term. Dugin writes, "Trump promised the imminent publication of the Epstein... lists, which would undoubtedly implicate the leadership of the Democratic Party and those protesting against Trump" (75). Like so many of Trump's MAGA devotees, Dugin fell for Trump's Epstein grift, as the person most prominent in the Epstein files is Trump himself. Because of his close ties with Epstein, Trump has done everything possible to bury the Epstein files; he does not want them released in their entirety for it exposes him as a possible pedophile, or at minimum a person who frequently enjoyed the company of pedophiles such as Jeffrey Epstein and his sidekick, Ghislaine Maxwell. Dugin thought Trump would take down Russia's nemeses in the Democratic Party, only to find out that it was Trump himself whose political career could be foreclosed on by the Epstein files. As a philosopher, I find Dugin's gullibility unforgivable, but it's a gullibility that seems to be born of his desire to see authenticity and genuineness in Trump, which Trump himself knows is a grift.

In this book, Dugin comes off as a true believer in the promise of Donald Trump to change America into a benign power, one that would not only actively impede Russia's attempt to return to "great power" status, but one that would actively work with Russia to do so. In this book, Dugin sees Trump as a visionary and truly revolutionary American, one that has turned his back on the "rules based" order so that a new multipolar order can emerge – a dream of both Dugin and Putin. However, when Trump ordered an unprovoked attack on Iran on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2026, the slow-developing cracks in Dugin's commitment to Trump turned into a volcanic chasm. It was as if Dugin finally realized that Trump – the notorious grifter – wasn't sincere in his isolationist, America-first, Russia-is-our-friend rhetoric, that it was all just a political narrative to help get him elected. Soon after *The Trump Revolution* was published, Dugin forcefully abandoned his irrational praise for Trump, but the genie was out of the bottle, and Dugin – flush with embarrassment – couldn't put it back in. Just like millions of Americans, Dugin had been conned into believing Trump was a force for good, only to realize that Trump is a force for

himself and only for himself, nothing more, nothing less. However, instead of denouncing Trump, Dugin henceforth tried to save face: he now embraces Trump not out of commonalities, not because of what he believes Trump will positively bring into the world, but for the sole reason that Trump is inherently destructive to the world order – a destruction that needs to happen if palingenetic Russia is ever to return to the forefront of history as an imperial power – this itself being a fanciful wish. While we all may hope for a better tomorrow for the world, it will not be by turning the clock backwards to an anachronistic new age of empires, but rather through a determinate negation (*Aufheben*) of the Enlightenment, wherein that which is revolutionary continues and improves, and that which is barbaric, destructive, and harmful to human flourishing, is left in the ditch of history. Unfortunately, Dugin longs for a better world by *abstractly negating* the post-WWII liberal “rules-based order” and for a decade had firmly put his hopes in such a world historical shift with the “leadership” of Trump. That is Dugin’s ultimate folly.

Again, this book is less of an honest, critical, and penetrating analysis of Donald J. Trump by an influential rightwing philosopher, and more of an entry into the mind of Alexander Dugin himself. Dugin’s lack of psychoanalytic insights into Trump and Dugin’s reliance on his own palingenetic ideology blinded him to the reality of Donald Trump as a person and Trumpism as a movement. Therefore, what you find in the pages of *The Trump Revolution* is not Trump, but rather Alexander Dugin staring at his own reflection and proclaiming it to be Trump. Sadly, it is not. Therefore, what makes this book an important repository of thought is not its “analysis” of Trump; that much is comical. Rather, the book is important because it shows Dugin’s own analytic and psychological deficiencies and the limitations of his ability to recognize truth behind cleverly constructed rhetorical camouflage. Understanding those deficiencies and limitations is exactly what is needed to aggressively engage Dugin in the *Noomakhia* (war of ideas) he longs for with the West. He has given anti-fascist thinkers plenty of ammunition to attack him with in this little book.

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**Terrorism and Insurgency in Asia: A Contemporary Examination of Terrorist and Separatist Movements**, edited by Benjamin Schreer and Andrew T.H. Tan.  
London: Routledge, 2019, 270pp., \$57.99 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-36767-140-2

*The Book's Importance*

*Terrorism and Insurgency in Asia: A Contemporary Examination of Terrorist and Separatist Movements* is an edited volume that contains several essays related to revolutionism and terrorism, whose definitions depend on the political views of the observer. Why did this book, published several years ago, still need to be reviewed now, and thus attract reader attention? The reason is the major thesis of the book: insurgency is not a local and passing social pathology, but a permanent attribute of modern society. Scholars who deal with recent history typically pay attention to few phenomena, as is the case with those who study terrorism, insurgencies, and related subjects. Consequently, the political scientists, historians of the recent past, journalists, and casual observers of the “lay public” paid attention to ISIS, Al-Qa’ida, and related events. However, the book clearly shows that insurgents, revolutionary activists, separatism, etc., are practically permanent features of post-WWII society, and presents Asia as an example of this.

It is this notion – the global persistence of insurgence and related phenomenon – that makes this volume stand out of the crowd as an exceptionally valuable work up to the present. The essays of the volume are focused on Asia and the aggregated information provided across the articles could provide fresh insights, not just for specialists in terrorism, but also for those who study recent history. It clearly could change readers’ worldviews: the social universe is defined not just by conflicts of great powers, but a variety of events that, while seen as being local, could become global players in the future.

*Structure and Arguments*

Many insurgencies look similar to each other, and this may tempt observers to create a uniform reason for insurgencies. Most of those who engage in Islamic insurgencies, for example, assumed the “wrong” ideology and have a similar goal. The authors of these essays avoided this simplistic explanation. They argued that insurgencies may be caused by a variety of reasons.

The nature and motivation of insurgents can differ from group to group, and they pursue different goals. They can act independently or be connected to a political or ideological center.

**(1) Economic Reasons:**

Some antigovernment activities are not necessarily politicized and are mostly motivated by economic interest. In India, the Adivasi tribe (known as “the forest dwellers”) want simply to preserve their right to use forest resources and have resisted the Indian government’s attempt to restrict these rights.

**(2) Nationalistic Reasons:**

In Thailand, some ethnic groups have engaged in long conflicts with the Thai government, aiming to either broaden their autonomy or achieve independence. These groups are apparently inspired by a nationalistic animus. Finally, there have been numerous Islamist groups that emerged either in Islamic countries (Indonesia) or predominately Christian societies (the Philippines). They aim to (1) overthrow the government, believing the current government “perverted” Islam, and (2) replace the government of “infidels” with an Islamic government, or to at least create an independent Islamic space. Here, Islamism is blended with nationalistic animus.

**(3) Radicalization:**

The varied reason for radicalization is another important aspect of the volume. Some Muslims become radicalized in alien environments and become internalists, moving to a place where they can engage in jihad. This was the case with millions of Central Asian guest workers who lived and worked in Russia. Some revolutionaries-cum-terrorists have developed internally without much influence from outside forces. Others have a foreign impetus. Mao’s victory had a great influence over

many separatists, plainly because the Chinese revolution demonstrated that peasants could overpower a well-entrenched government. Here, Mao clearly departed from Marxist-Leninist theory, which implied that revolution could only be victorious if the urban proletariat led the rebellion. The emergence of ISIS was an even greater incentive for Muslim radicals all over the world. The role of ISIS was similar to that of the young USSR, which inspired radicals all over the world and led to the emergence of global Community parties.

*Dealing with Insurgencies and Similar Phenomena:*

The volume also addresses how authorities deal with separatism, terrorism, and similar issues. The wide variety of Asian regimes applied a similarly wide variety of models. In some cases, they employed repression and attempted to squash insurgency by force. In other cases, the authorities engaged in concession. Another approach has been to provide rebels with incentives to lay down their arms. Some regimes have plainly legitimized paramilitary units and acknowledged their claims, creating practically autonomous regions. Still, most insurgencies are similar to crime in large cities or to cancerous cells. One can reduce their numbers, but it is hardly possible to eliminate the problem entirely. At the time, not all methods were equal, and all regimes were equally successful in dealing with problems. In the reviewer's view, the authors of the introduction should have pointed to the most efficient model of dealing with problems or potential problems. This is, in the reviewer's view, the Chinese model, the manner in which totalitarian China deals with the "Uyghur problem." And the information provided in the book provides clues as to how the Chinese government efficiently dealt with that problem.

*The Chinese Model of Dealing with Insurgencies and Potential Insurgencies*

The most successful approach, at least from this reviewer's point of view, was the Chinese government's approach to Uyghur populations. Chinese authorities engaged in the following strategy in dealing with the Uyghurs: Totality of control, as is the case with the rest of the population, Chinese authorities control, or at least attempt to control, the smallest units of society through Party and state organs. They also utilize an abundance of surveillance cameras. Additionally, authorities tried to create a national database of each citizen. This would allow authorities to identify anyone within a matter of seconds. This Orwellian approach, combined

with the other techniques employed by the totalitarian state, resulted in the near complete eradication of Uyghurs as a distinct ethnic or cultural group.

Several approaches are employed here. First, the authorities discourage Uyghurs from having many children and/or encouraged to marry Han Chinese. The government also isolated them and, as per the author of the quoted essay, sent thousands of Uyghurs to the Han Chinese heartland to assimilate them. This combination of repression, control, and “big carrot” required a considerable investment from the Chinese government. It is likely that the Chinese totalitarian approach is the only workable solution, albeit, as was noted, it is unlikely that the insurgency/potential insurgency of minorities would disappear completely. Indeed, as in all other cases, insurgents and terrorists can be put in remission, so to speak, but never can be totally destroyed.

### *Conclusion*

The importance of the reviewed volume is the very fact that it presents insurgencies and related phenomena not as localized sociopolitical pathology, but as a permanent part of global political scenery. The authors also eschew the uniform explanatory model for insurgencies and similar phenomena. Finally, the book deals with insurgencies that are usually ignored by mainstream books on the subject. All of this made the reviewed volume an important contribution to scholarship, that needed to be revisited by present-day readers, even after several years of publication.

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