# The Islamic Liberation Theology of Ali Shari'ati

***Religion and Revolution***

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## Introduction

The emergence of Islam 1438 years ago in Makkah resulted in massive shifts in power dynamics and in social relations and ways of living within, firstly, the Arabian Peninsula and, within a couple of centuries, in most of West Asia and large parts of Europe. The Islamic leader, Prophet Muhammad, following with experience of the Judaic and Christian traditions, delivered the message of a religion that challenged the status quo and advocated a new system of social, political and economic relations, one based on the principles of justice and equality. Almost fifteen centuries later, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when more than twenty percent of the world's population is Muslim, millions of Muslims around the world continue to rely on the faith as an inspiration for their own struggles and for their solidarity with the struggles of oppressed peoples across the globe.

In a context where discourses on decolonisation have become a major focus in political science, especially at universities, there has been a shift in discussions on struggle and revolution. A concerted effort has been made to tend away from the reliance on Western epistemologies and to throw the spotlight on thinking from and about the global South in an attempt at embarking on a process of 'decolonising' knowledge, academic spaces and society at large. In an attempt to expand beyond just Marxist analyses, much emphasis in decoloniality discussions has been placed on thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Leopold Senghor, Che Guevara, those within the Indian subaltern tradition and others from the Global South. However, following the modernist (and postmodernist) tradition, there seems to be resistance among many such thinkers, who have enjoyed relative popularity within the academy, to afford any religious – including Islamic – strands of thought a seat at the decolonial intellectual table, though there are exceptions. This research report will make the case for further extending this privilege to Islamic thinkers through a presentation of the work of the Iranian revolutionary intellectual Ali Shari'ati.

## The Setting

The mid-1900s witnessed Iran's ruling Pahlavi dynasty under the authority of the Shah,[1] in its attempt to satisfy Western powers that it served politically, and in order to persuade them into believing that Iran was 'modernising,' put into place new social and economic laws that flew in the face of the traditionalist undertakings of most of Iran's population.[2] This gave rise to a malaise in which Iranians were trapped in a "contradictory dilemma", caught in the labyrinth between the need to move towards modes of modernity and also the will and "struggle" to protect Islam and the national culture of Iran.[3] These contradictions facilitated the emergence of an array of movements within Iran which sought to uproot the Pahlavi regime that was failing to win over the support of the Iranian people.

Out of this epoch surfaced one of the most prolific figures in modern Islamic thought who sparked and stimulated the spirit of resistance and revolution in many Iranians, especially the youth. This towering figure in Islamic political thought, Ali Shari'ati, was born in 1933 and assassinated in England in 1977, two years before the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Assef Bayat who was a Marxist activist in the midst of the revolution mentions that Shari'ati's death was suspicious and claims there was no doubt among leftist and Islamic groups in Iran that the Pahlavi secret service, SAVAK, was responsible for his death, despite the British press as well as many other's insistence that it is was a death by natural cause.[4] The assassination incited massive protest and mourning in Iran and even caught the attention of French philosopher Michel Foucault who suggested that his death raised Shari'ati up to the honoured level of martyr, attaining "the position, so privileged in Shi'ism,[5] of the

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[1] The Pahlavi dynasty was a monarchy that ruled over Iran from 1925 until 1979 when it was overthrown by the Iranian Revolution.

[2] Rahnema, A. (2014). *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati.* London: I.B. Taurus. p.ix.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Bayat, A. (1990). 'Shari'ati and Marx: A Critique of an "Islamic" Critique of Marxism' in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics,* No. 10, Marxism and Other Critical Discourses. p22.

[5] Shi'i and Sunni Islam are the two most prominent factional divisions within the global Islamic 'community' which have an intricate history of conflict between them. Shari'ati came from and identified with the Shi'I tradition which dominated Iranian culture. Although this is an important position to make clear, I do not however wish to enter into the debates on the conflict between the two. Furthermore, I steer clear from denoting Shari'ati's theology as Shi'i, even though he is at times explicit about this, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, within both the Shi'i and sunni sects there exists further denomination; certainly, for Shari'ati, he presented a face of Shi'ism that departed from the dominant brand propagated by the Shi'i clergy in Iran which presented an Islam devoid of revolutionary potential. Shari'ati thus provides a certain interpretation of

invisible Present, of the ever-present Absent."[6] The impact of Shari'ati in the creation of a revolutionary, Islamic collective subjectivity in Iran earned him the privilege of being identified as a major ideologue of the revolution.[7]

Shari'ati was born into a staunch Islamic tradition – with his father, Mohammed-Taqi Shari'ati, being a well respected Islamic scholar and teacher - and inherited the duty of instilling Islam and Islamic Iranian culture into the hearts of the Iranian masses in order to mobilize them and develop a collective consciousness, particularly in the youth, who would revolt against the authoritarian regime and set Iran on a journey towards the liberation from dictatorship and the independence from foreign powers. Shari'ati, in this regard, "fought on two fronts".[8]

On the one hand, he fought against the intransigent conservative Islamic clergy who "separated Islam from society" and, ultimately, utilised Islam to pacify the Iranian people so that they would not garner the energy to revolt against the status quo; this was a fight against the "religion of legitimation" which sought to cover up and ignore the misdeeds and ills of and within society. On the other hand, he opposed, though with still some sympathies, against Marxists within the anti-Shah movement, particular in the Communist Tudeh Party in Iran, which attempted to mobilize Iranians with the rhetoric and teachings of Western epistemologies which would

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Shi'i Islam and even mentions that he could never be accused of sectarianism, nor has anyone ever accused him of it and, in fact, there has been much more accusation against him for not being explicitly Shi'i and sectarian enough (Shari'ati, A. (1980). *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies* (translate by R. Campbell). Berkeley: Mizan Press. P120, fn12). Secondly, Shari'ati's conception of Islam, I argue, goes beyond the particularity of any sect and, instead, he wished to frame a complete and true Islam. Certainly when speaking of hegemonic Sunni thought, the need to mention that it is 'sunni' Islam is not generally felt by many sunni and more distanced academics and commentators since 'Islam' itself is often taken as 'Sunni' Islam. I will thus present Shari'ati as an Islamic intellectual beyond sectarian particularities to hoist his theory up to a more universal attempt at articulating an Islamic world-view. Of course I do not, in saying this, wish to rob Shi'ism of Shari'ati not rob Shari'ati of his Shi'i identity; not to suggest that any academic work is capable of this.

[6] Foucault, M. (2005). 'What are the Iranians Dreaming About?' in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (J. Afary and K.B. Anderson) Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press. p207.

[7] Abrahamian, E. (1982) and Abedi, M. (1986) describe Shari'ati as the "Ideologue" and "Architect" of the Iranian Revolution while Keddie, N. (1981) suggests that Shari'ati had the most significant role of "preparing the youth for revolutionary upheaval". Rahnema, A (2014) claims that he is considered by many as the "ideological father" of the revolution. However, it seems superfluous to attribute the status of "the ideologue" to Shari'ati since he was one among many other; including the likes of Ayatollah Khomeini who certainly was the most popular of ideologues.

[8] Algar, H. (1979). 'Foreword' in *Sociology of Islam: Lectures by Ali Shari'ati* (translated by H. Algar). Berkeley: Mizan Press. p20.

have the effect, he believed, of alienating Iranian Muslims from their national culture. In the battle on these two fronts, Shari'ati's attempt was to preserve, alter, and supersede a body of religio-political thought which upheld a revolutionary capacity and with a mobilizing capability in order to assist in the establishment of an effective Islamic movement which did not sever itself from the spirit of the Iranian people by removing Islam from the heart of their struggle. Instead, he wanted to posit an Islam based on struggle, movement and revolution, which considered the present and looked towards the future, without being stagnated by the nostalgia of the past. Shari'ati's goal was to create an Islamic ideology – which I would describe as an Islamic liberation theology - to be employed towards the creation of a collective, revolutionary subjectivity in Iran that would – and eventually did – play a pivotal role in the overthrowing of the monarchy.

**Translating the 'Gibberish'**

In this report I will examine the political thought of Shari'ati and present, through it, a perspective on Islamic theology of liberation. Iranian-American political theorist Hamid Dabashi postulates that "Shari'ati was an ideologue, first and foremost" and that it would be a erroneous to think of him as a philosopher or political theorist. "To look into Shari'ati's collective writings for a systemized political theory or a thorough definition of what is to be done is a futile task," Dabashi argues. He continues, "At best, one has to try to catch those vibrant moments of ideological drive that made this revolutionary thunderbolt roar."[9] This approach, I argue, misses an important theoretical and political opportunity. A large portion of Shari'ati's published works comprises of a compilation of his speeches presented in Iran that were delivered to an audience of Muslim and non-Muslim Iranians who came to seek revolutionary wisdom and guidance from the ideologue. The nature of these publications, as transcribed lectures, often results in various inconsistencies and seeming contradictions in his work that, it seems, Dabashi does not think can be reconciled into a coherent and prolific theory. While sympathisisng with Dabashi's sentiment to a degree, I, however, do not wish to miss this opportunity and find myself recognising Shari'ati in the words of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze who, in writing about thinkers in general, and Foucault in particular, argued that "[g]reat

[9] Dabashi, H. (1993). *Theology of Discontent: The ideological foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York: New York University Press. p104.

thinkers are somewhat seismic; they do not evolve but proceed by means of crisis, in fits and starts."[10] Indeed, Shari'ati was "seismic" in the most radical sense, a sense that perhaps could not be escaped considering the nature and context of his work. This, I argue, should not lead us to consider the formation of a coherent theory of his work as a "futile task"; we should, instead, make strides to exhume from the rubble productive strands in his work; to consider those moments when the "revolutionary thunderbolt roar[ed]" that may allow for more serious theoretical consideration.

This is an important point and forms the foundation of this research report. There seems to be a sense that, in studying Shari'ati and giving proper theoretical consideration to his work, we may be removing what is emotionally and psychologically moving about it and reducing it to mere academic jargon, thereby destroying the *spirit* of it. I suggest that this sentiment, held by some who have great regard for Shari'ati, is not trying to preserve the spirit of his work but, instead, seeking to protect him from critical scrutiny.

Taking a similar approach as such admirers of Shari'ati, Dabashi suggests, "Shari'ati's discourse would be totally mutilated, reduced to rhetorical gibberish, were it to be dissected into its matters of fact."[11]For Dabashi, then, it is better to understand and appreciate Shari'ati as an ideologue reduced to the mere particularity of a spirit in struggle. These sentiments seek to protect Shari'ati, it seems, from being exposed to scrutiny that would render his work as "rhetorical gibberish." In this sense, I argue, they wish to protect Shari'ati from the harsh scrutiny of the academy like a parent would shelter a child from the evils of the world. This defensive posture does a disservice to Shari'ati and is one of the causes of the stagnation in the study of his work. Shari'ati certainly saw himself as more than just an "ideologue", but instead as a philosopher bringing forth truth to initiate movement in society.[12]

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[10] Deleuze, G. (1991). 'What is a disposotif?' in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher* (translated by T.J. Armstrong). New York: Routledge. p159.

[11] Dabashi, *Discontent,* p103-104.

[12] Shari'ati does mention that, "I am not a theory maker. Whoever makes up theory is only good for universities. What is theory for anyway?" Shari'iati, A. *Message to Enlightened Thinkers.* Available online: http://www.shariati.com/english/rome/rome1.html. Accessed: 8 June 2016.

The question is how should we treat such a 'seismic' thinker. I do not intend to put forward a coherent theory of Shari'ati, and so to reach a final resolution in his thought. Instead, I wish to examine certain dimensions of his work, consider the power and contradiction in them, and highlight strands that may present productive trajectories. Instead of protecting his work, I suggest that we make use of those moments of brilliance in which he "roared", albeit in fits and starts, in order to put forth a coherent theology of liberation. **Purpose of Study**

Having provided some cautionary remarks in defence of this research report, I will discuss its aims and objectives. The aim of this paper is to consider and examine the work of Ali Shari'ati and to identify productive strands within it that serve as the main foundations of his thinking. I will explain various productive trajectories in order to reveal the contours of his Islamic liberation theology that may present Islam beyond the particularities of the events leading up to the 1979 Iranian revolution towards a more universal position among other theories of liberation. For Shari'ati, western epistemology was hegemonic; that is, it was viewed as an ideal and absolute. But it is important to move away from this hegemonic worldview imposed by state power, as well as seeming counter-hegemonic movements such as Marxism, which, for Shari'ati, was the revolutionary face of the same coin and represented the same modern hegemony. According to Shari'ati, it was necessary to establish revolutionary theories which has its ideological and theoretical roots within the specificities of non-Western contexts. There was a need to move away from atheist and anti-spiritual worldviews of the West to a third way that represented the feeling and cultures of the Global South. As Shari'ati explained, "This humanity which has suffered so greatly in its search for liberation, having undergone bitter experiences with Western capitalism and struck its head against the blank wall of communism, seeks a third road... a third road which it is the mission of the Third World to set upon."[13]

A third way did exist, as can be seen in the works of those mentioned by Shari'ati: Cesaire, Senghor, Fanon, Omar Mawlud, Muhammad Iqbal and so forth, and it is important to know and study these strands, as Shari'ati insisted. However, I suggest that the third way is yet to be complete and requires to be vastly expanded. Today,

[13] Shari'ati, A. (1980). *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies* (translate by R. Campbell). Berkeley: Mizan Press. P93.

when thinking in terms of counter-hegemonic theories from the Global South, Fanon and thinkers such as him, particularly in Africa, who build their work primarily from epidermal, racial consideration, are invoked and celebrated. I suggest that contributors like those from the Islamic world – such as Shari'ati – are excluded, and in excluding them, an entire, rich, body of knowledge and innovative thought that ought to contribute to decolonial thought is being left-out and its potential productivity is being ignored and lost. Certainly, with Muslims contributing twenty-one percent of the global population and forty-eight percent of Africa's population; this global phenomenon called Islam deserves serious consideration. Most revolutionary movements continue to hold a certain level of disdaintowards God and religion, as Fanon did, towards an atheistic world-view or an essentialist one where God is seen as history, as in Senghor's works.

I present in this research report a theory and theology of liberation that stems from an Islamic tradition. Shari'ati, espousing Islamic epistemology and ontology managed to captivate and speak to an audience of people who, in their very spirit, understood themselves as Muslim. It is a consideration of an epistemic shift from an atheistic or secular conception of struggle and resistance to one that is based on Islamic theology, but speaks about the present, and looks towards the future, without risking of stagnation or being stuck in the past. It must be said, however, that although Shari'ati was immensely critical of Western epistemologies like Marxism and existentialism, he was by no means completely opposed to their use. For Shari'ati, Western thought, just like African thought, ought to be studied, considered and used, but never blindly adopted since the particularity of each context was, potentially, radically different. Shari'ati engaged not only with thinkers from the Global South but also with Marx, Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre as well as many others who had, I would claim, seemed to have had a greater influence on him compared to their counterparts from the Global South. This research report is, then, also a consideration on how it is possible to move away from hegemonic epistemologies, and in what way we should do so. It is an attempt to present a view of Islam as a force of liberation that may afford it consideration within a broader anti-colonial and decolonial paradigm. This report thus presents an epistemic question, struggling for value within the realm of the intellectual South as well as introducing questions around the possibility of transcending modern Western thought. Is it possible to cut

ourselves off from modernity and think beyond the framework? How do we, to use Chatterjee's slogan, "cope"[14] with modernity?

In this research report I will, firstly, highlight productive elements in Shari'ati's thinking that will assist us in arriving at a starting-point for thinking about resistance, decolonisation and revolution from an Islam faith-based perspective. I will not stop at a mere summation of Shari'ati's work but will also put him into conversation with other thinkers such as Jalal Al Ahmad, Fanon, Hegel and Heidegger; additionally, others, such as Foucault and Kant, will provide a framework for some of the discussion. Importantly, Shari'ati's work will not be synthesised with that of other authors or thinkers. My aim is to fill gaps in Shari'ati's thinking in order to add more potency and functionality as an overall theory to his works. I, thus, put the other theorists into conversation with him in order to fill those gaps, provide better understanding and add more philosophical weight to the strands of his thinking in order to provide a more powerful and coherent theoretical structure to Shari'ati's work.

**Chapter Outline**

This research report consists of five chapters as well as an introduction and a concluding chapter. I begin in Chapter 1 with a discussion on Shari'ati's hermeneutical approach, highlighting the methodology and methodological tools that he privileges as important in arriving at an understanding of Islam. Shari'ati's view is that in order to understand Islam properly one has to consider five interrelated facets of the religion. First, the God of Islam as revealed in the scriptures and as seen in the stories of the Prophet and his companions. Second, one must know the Qur'an and how it reveals and explains a holistic and complete worldview relating to God and the place of God in the cosmos and the lives of individuals and communities. Third and fourth, one must know the Prophet as described in the narrations of his life, as well as the way nature and context in which the Prophet presented God's message Finally, one ought to consider the stories of the Prophet's companions, as well as of those who continued the fight of true Islam once he died – in particular,

[14] "One cannot be for or against modernity; one can only devise strategies for coping with it." Chatterjee, P. (1997). *Our Modernity*. Rotterdam: SEPHIS and Dakar: CODESRIA. Available online: http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za/files/partha1.pdf. Accessed: 22 January 2017. p3.

those figures whom hold prominence within the shi'i tradition. Shari'ati considers these interrelated aspects of Islam as imperative considerations in a study aimed at preparing a complete interpretation of the religion. The discussion on Shari'ati's Islamic hermeneutic provides an obvious springboard to begin with the study of his complete liberation theology.

Following the discussion of Shari'ati's method of interpretation of Islam and its scriptures, Chapter two will discuss the ontology of human being, according to Shari'ati, and the implications of his view. For Shari'ati, the ontology of the human can be understood from the Qur'anic story of the creation of the first human – Adam. Adam was created with two natures: mud and God's spirit. God, Shari'ati argues, used the basest of substances, mud, to create the first human and then blew his spirit into the creature, giving it life, consciousness and, importantly, free will. This symbolic story, suggests Shari'ati, is God's explanation for the condition of human beings, who exist between these two poles: the pole of base mud, attributed to Satan, and the pole of spirit, attributed to God. Man's mission is to navigate between these two contradictions and, ultimately, strive towards the pole of Godliness. This striving is done through active engagement in the world as worldly affairs and the spiritual dimension of man are not separate but interrelated. Islam provides the map for a way to move from mud to God.

Chapter three moves beyond hermeneutics and ontology to present an interaction on theory between Shari'ati and Western epistemology, particularly Marxism. This chapter engages with Shari'ati's critique of Marxism as a form of revolutionary ideology that has been exported from the West to Iran and erroneously copy-and-pasted into that context. Interestingly, Shari'ati himself has been labelled an "Islamic Marxist" and he is not wholly opposed to Marxism or any other Western epistemology. However, he is wary of the way in which Western epistemologies hold a certain hegemony, whether in service of state power – the vertical – or in service of people's struggle – a horizontal dimension. I will consider the important role of critique, in a Foucauldian sense, in such an engagement and suggest ways of interpreting Shari'ati's ambiguous relationship with Marxism. This chapter serves as a linkbetween more philosophical questions and questions regarding active roles in political struggle. The engagement with Marxism, in this regard, forms an important theoretical dispute which has its roots in the immediate context of Shari'ati's struggle

in Iran. It is a question of framing hegemony and strategy, as well as a question of opposing power more generally and preserving, in the forging of a collective consciousness, what is dear to Shari'ati and Iran – Islam.

Chapter four deals with the role that Shari'ati posits for the intellectual in political struggle. He places the intellectual in a position that grants them a pivotal and imperative role in justice struggles. The intellectual must, however, like Fanon's intellectual, be very wary of the privileged position bestowed on them and must not attempt to hijack the struggle. The intellectual instil in the people a sense of identity that was lost through colonialism and modernization since native identities were negated and replaced with what they were not – Western. It is the duty of the intellectual, according to Shari'ati, to disabuse native people of their affection for the West, usher them away from the alienation of assimilation and replace the Western identity with a new one that acknowledges the past, is based on the present, and looks towards the future. Second, Shari'ati says, the intellectual should understand the contemporary conditions of the people, and from that understanding assesses the reasons for their depression and then insert the contradictions discovered into the consciousness of the masses. The intellectual must not, however, lead the masses but must be led by them.

Finally, once consciousness is recovered and a revolutionary subjectivity is realized, Shari'ati's offers careful motivation towards active struggle and revolution. This is the subject of Chapter five. First, it deals with the manner in which Shari'ati posits Islam specifically as a religion of justice and revolution and how, he argues, Islam's primary function is to fight in the cause of justice. The chapter deals with the method that Shari'ati abstractly used to promote insurrectionary struggle and violence through his advocating the idea of the martyr or *shahid.* Martyrdom and the martyr are important facets of Shari'ati's work that, more than any other aspect, act as catalysts to promote the notion of bodies going forward in struggle and towards revolution. Shari'ati has a concept of the martyr that radicalises Heidegger's notion of being-towards-death and positing it, instead, as being-in-death.

## Chapter 1: An Islamic Hermeneutic Towards a Theology of Liberation

### Introduction

Arriving at an Islamic theology of liberation, for Shari'ati, was not merely an abstract performance of rhetoric employed to activate a collective consciousness in the struggle against the oppressive Pahlavi regime in Iran. Although Dabashi claims that Shari'ati should be viewed as an ideologue, and suggests that "[o]ne would be totally misled to treat him as a historian, a philosopher, a sociologist, an islamicist",[15] it would be equally "misled" to think that Shari'ati did not see himself as a political theorist whose work transcended the confines of the particular and made absolutely no strides into universal truth – which becomes significant when considering his Islamic hermeneutic. Shari'ati intended to provide a scientific[16] and detailed mapping of an Islamic ideology. In arriving at "Approaches to the Understanding of Islam"[17] one would, undoubtedly, discover true Islam and, in turn, arrive at the inevitability of an Islamic theology that privileges those on the margins of society. Importantly, he proposed his methodology not for the purposes of "outsiders" (non-Muslims) studying Islam, but for Muslims to know their religion and be critical of it. It also served as a necessary polemic against the clergy who Shari'ati accused of being complicit with the status quo and of using religion to "narcotize the people".[18] A new Islamic hermeneutic, Shari'ati believed, could provide an alternative and, Shari'ati would suggest, correct methodology for approaching an Islamic understanding.

In this chapter I will take the first step in presenting Shari'ati's Islamic liberation theology by attempting to coherently illustrate the methodology that he used in interpreting Islam as a religion and a way of life, and consequently, how this methodology convinced him that "Islam has a revolutionary notion".[19] Contrary to

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[15] Dabashi, *Discontent,* p104.

[16] Shari'ati uses the word 'scientific' often, with the intention of characterising something carefully considered and mapped out.

[17] Shari'ati, A. (1979). *On the Sociology of Islam: Lectures by Ali Shari'ati* (translated by H. Alger). Berkeley: Mizan Press. p39.

[18] Shari'ati, *Marxism,* p105.

[19] Shari'ati, A. (2010). *Religion Vs. Religion* (translated by L. Bakhtiar). Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc. p65.

Dabashi's suggestion,[20] Shari'ati seemed convinced that the claim that intellectuals had, until then, only spoken about their suffering and they had reached the time to act was incorrect. "In reality," he said, "we have not talked up to now, we have not spoken of our sufferings, we have not closely and scientifically analyzed our sufferings. All we have done is moan in our misery, and it is obvious that such moaning is of no value."[21] Shari'ati seemed to believe that Iranian philosophers had not yet reached the point where the sentiment of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach – "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" – was applicable. It is with this spirit that Shari'ati embarked on developing his Islamic hermeneutic; that is, his methodology of interpreting Islam which connects Islamic texts, traditions and history to contemporary conditions in the world. I will present his expanding hermeneutic and also supplement it with further discussion on other aspects of his methodology to provide a more thorough understanding of it.

**Interpreting for the Present**

Carl Baaten defines hermeneutics as "the science of reflecting on how a word or an event in a past time and culture may be understood and become existentially meaningful in our present situation."[22] Hermeneutics has traditionally referred to the method of interpreting a text or an event. I would like to broaden this view of interpretational methodology to illustrate the tools used by Shari'ati to interpret Islam – that is, what he regards as True Islam. Shari'ati provides a method of understanding Islam and getting a picture of the essential nature and principle of the religion. He uses this conception of Islam, derived from the hermeneutic he developed, to posit his Islamic liberation theology. It is about taking from a tradition and interpreting it in order to reproduce it productively in the present. In developing his hermeneutical framework, Shar'iati wished to give the Muslim intellectual the tools with which to fulfil their duty. This duty, according to Shari'ati, "is to recognize and know Islam as a school of thought that gives life to man, individual and society,

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[20] "Shari'ati wished to change, not interpret; lead, not argue; move, not convince; achieve, not rationalize." Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent,* p104.

[21] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p39. Shari'ati further mentions that "speaking and acting, analyzing and applying must always be joined together," thus suggesting that theory and practice must work hand-in-hand. Ibid, p41.

[22] Braaten, C. (1966). *History and Hermeneutics,* quoted in Esack, F. (1987). *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression.* Oxford: Oneworld. p51.

and that is entrusted with the mission of the future guidance of mankind."[23] I will delineate what Shari'ati viewed as the tools that are to be used in order to set the foundation and structure of this Islamic "school of thought".

**An Approach to the Understanding of Islam**

Shari'ati believed it important that, in arriving at an understanding of Islam, Muslims do not rely on European methods but, instead, are able to "be innovative in the choice of method"[24] so that they may discover their own truths and their own way of life. He thus set out on a mission to describe this method.

Shari'ati suggests that there are two ways in which to know an individual, and these become analogous with the ways of understanding a religion. First, in order to know a person[25] one must come to know their works, theories, and books; this provides a "preliminary" understanding of an individual. Secondly, one should study the biography of the person and read their intellectual history; that is, to know the context and circumstances of the individual in question.[26] Although Shari'ati presents these as "two ways" which suggest their independence from each other; it is certain that, for him, in order to know an individual (an intellectual), one ought to have knowledge of both that person's works and life. This, for Shari'ati, provides a methodological basis by which one comes to know a religion and, particularly, Islam.

The "work" of a religion is made up of its scriptures or primary texts. The "biography" or "life" of the religion is its history.[27] In considering the case of Islam, the Qur'an provides the primary, albeit preliminary since it is not the final and only consideration, object of study in understanding the religion. Secondly, Islamic history ought to be a focus of study, "taking it as the sum total of the developments undergone by Islam from the beginning of the Prophet's mission down to the present."[28] As previously mentioned, Shari'ati requires that both these elements of Islam should be understood and analysed in order to proficiently comprehend Islam as a religion. However, it is not in simply understanding each facet as independent of the other

[23] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p42.
[24] Ibid. p60.
[25] Shari'ati speaks about knowing a "great personality" not just a person. When we consider his method of knowing this person we can assume that he is referring to an intellectual.
[26] Ibid. p62.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

that one reaches understanding. The text and the history are not independent of each other and each should be read through the other in order to understand the religion more precisely and profoundly.

Shari'ati goes on to suggest that "another method exists" of interpreting and understanding Islam.[29] In saying "another", similar to the way in which he suggested "two ways", there is an assumption of independence. That is, that the first methodology – the combination of a study of the scripture and history of Islam – is one method and the new one that he is to present is a second, independent method. However, the second method – which he terms 'typology' – is a more thorough explanation of the 'first' explaining and elaborating the detail in how Islam is to be understood through scripture and history. The "second" method provides an expanding hermeneutic. In particular, it serves as a necessary elaboration on what constitutes the Islamic history that Shari'ati deems important in dealing with an understanding and explanation of Islam. I will, thus, take the "typology" as the expounded elaboration of the primary method which studies the Qur'an qua 'work' and Islamic history qua "biography" of Islam.

Shari'ati describes the sociological method of typology as the "classifying [of] topics and themes according to type and then comparing them on that basis."[30] He then presents five "distinguishing aspects" of every religion that ought to be considered and compares them with aspects of other religions which will provide a more detailed understanding of the religion. Although I will not altogether dismiss and ignore the latter aspect of this method of typology – comparison – I will pay more attention to the actual aspects that warrant study in order to understand religion and, particularly, show how Shari'ati inserts the Islamic case study into his work.

The first of Shari'ati's five "distinguishing aspects" is to know the God or gods of the religion. The second is to know the primary subject of deliverance of the message of the religion – the Prophet or prophets. Third, to know the scripture or sacred book of the religion; fourth, to know the context within which each prophet presented the message and to know the people to whom it was presented; and finally, to know the

[29] Ibid. p63.
[30] Ibid.

"choice individuals" that are exemplary figures of each religion, people who upheld the principles of the religion with the greatest authority.

Before examining Islam from the perspective of this five-aspect typology, a few preliminary remarks are in order. First, although the point is to present a general, albeit somewhat detailed, hermeneutical framework on religion – particularly Islam, the broad Islamic hermeneutic serves as a macro-hermeneutic of sorts. Within the five aspects there exist micro-hermeneutics at play that becomes important in interpreting each aspect. Of course, in general, a hermeneutic of history as well as of religious – particularly biblical – texts is well theorised and this can, as a broader philosophical discipline, be situated as a method within these five aspects – as the micro-hermeneutics of this study. Within Islamic scholarship the aspect of interpreting the Qur'an (aspect three) and the prophet through the reading of *hadith* (aspect 2) is well theorised as a science and I will, in my examination, add a brief discussion of this, though it is not the primary focus of this section.

**Five Hermeneutic Keys**

Let us now give more detailed consideration of the five aspects of Islam that, according to Shari'ati, provides an epistemological imperative in the formation of an adequate hermeneutic of religion.

1) *God*: The deity or entity at the centre of the religion; that which followers or members of a religion worship. In Islam this is based, fundamentally, on the belief in *Tawhid* which, simply put – although not the complete meaning and intention of the word in the Qur'an – relates to the Oneness of God, or Allah. That is, the belief that there is only one deity, who has no partners and no equals. Shari'ati claims that there are various ways in which to know God in Islam "such as gazing and meditating upon nature and the methods of philosophy, illumination and gnosis" which all seem to pertain to a more spiritual understanding of God. He, however, also proposes a different way of knowing God, which is to "examine the type, concept, features and characteristics of the God discussed in Islam". What is the nature of God? What are His characteristics and His attributes? For Shari'ati, these characteristics are elucidated by the Qur'an, the Prophet of Islam and those righteous companions "trained" by the prophet. It is in considering the manner in which these three discuss and consider God that one may arrive at a proper and

adequate understanding of God.[31] I must, however, insist that this 'understanding' of God is not and cannot be complete or absolute but is just what is revealed, as Shari'ati, I argue, would agree, stretching his acceptance of the dimension of an unseen and an unknown as he states that "The Qur'an... proclaims faith in the unseen to be the prerequisite for guidance and the very source of piety."[32] Nevertheless, what is revealed is that which is made known to human beings and, thus, what translates to usefulness in grasping an understanding of Islam.

2) *The Prophet:* The person with whom the message of God is sent to the people; the conveyer of the words of the Divine. This "stage" of understanding Islam pertains to the knowing of the final Abrahamic Prophet, Muhammad. Knowing Muhammad, according to Shari'ati, is a dualistic mission; that is, to know both his personality traits as well as his relationship with God; knowing both his "human and prophetic aspects".[33] Muhammad is the most exemplary human being in Islam, the primary example, and the one to whom the spiritual and social dimensions of the religion were entrusted by God. It is, thus, no surprise that in attempting to understand Islam, knowing Muhammad becomes an undeniable imperative.

As mentioned earlier, there is an existing body of theory dealing with the sciences of *Hadith* – the recorded narrations by companions of the Prophet regarding his words and actions.[34] Although I will not go into extensive detail about the hermeneutical sciences of hadith, I will elaborate by way of example. Jeenah, for instance, in journeying *Towards an Islamic Feminist Hermeneutic*[35] identifies French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" as a fundamental principle in the study and interpretation of hadith; though he concedes that the nature of hadith puts it beyond the criteria of what Ricoeur considers to be a "text" since, according to Ricoeur, "text is only really text when it is not restricted to transcribing anterior speech".[36] Hadith, claims Jeenah, has always been approached by scholars with some degree of suspicion, and rightfully so, due to the nature of the recordings.[37]

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[31] Ibid. p64-65
[32] Shari'ati, *Marxism,* p66.
[33] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p65.
[34] See for example Siddiqi, MZ. (1993). *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development & Special Features.* Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.
[35] Jeenah, N. (2001). *Towards an Islamic Feminist Hermeneutic,* Journal for Islamic Studies, Vol. 21, p36-70.
[36] Ibid. p49.
[37] Ibid. p49-51.

Aspects such as the context in which a certain statement was uttered by the Prophet ought to be considered, and suspicion should also extend towards the narrators regarding their character and capacities. Jeenah does not, however, negate the importance of hadith. There are various other considerations when determining the "strength" of hadith, which could be classified "authentic", "weak" or a number of other classifications and sub-classifications. "Authentic" hadith are those that should be afforded greatest consideration, though still with some level of suspicion and scrutiny. It must be mentioned that Shari'ati does not mention that to know the prophet one must know the hadith. I, however, in providing an expanded hermeneutic supplement his skeleton hermeneutic and suggest the hadith to be the source of knowledge of this nature of the Prophet.

3) *The book:* The scripture dealing with the proclamations of the religion. In Islam, the Qur'an is a scripture believed to be a direct revelation from God to Muhammad, providing the primary message delivered to the people; it is, quite simply, according to Esack, the "Speech of God."[38] Muslims believe the Qur'an is the untainted, untampered-with and direct words of God and is, according to Shari'ati, "the only document that has been safe from (major or minor) changes or distortions by the enemies of Islam."[39] In order to know the Qur'an one should "understand what kind of book the Qur'an is, what topics it discusses, and what areas it emphasises... In short, what matters does it treat and in what fashion?"[40] The Qur'an, in all Islamic scholarship, represents the focal point of departure in understanding the religion. It is in understanding the Qur'an that one begins the task of knowing Islam. Likewise, according to Shari'ati, although the Qur'an is not the only factor in understanding Islam and is, in fact, interrelated with its other aspects, it forms the foundation of Islam and that aspect which "should always remain with Muslims to the degree that its light may pulsate and enlighten the heart".[41]

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[38] Esack, *Qur'an,* p53.

[39] Shari'ati, A. *A Message to the Enlightened Thinkers.* Available online: http://www.shariati.com/english/rome/rome1.html. Accessed: 26 August 2016.
This point is further supported by Qur'anic verses such as "We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)" (15:9) and "Those who reject the reminder when it has come to them—it is an invincible Book. Falsehood cannot approach it, from before it or behind it. It is a revelation from One Wise and Praiseworthy." (41:41-42).

[40] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p65.

[41] Shari'ati, *Enlightened Thinkers.*

As previously mentioned, Islamic scholars have established a body of knowledge dealing with the sciences of the Qur'an, akin to Hadith, which presents a hermeneutic methodology in an approach to understanding the Qur'an.[42] Jeenah, in his Ricoeur-Rahmanian model, suggests that "the reader enters the world of the text in order to appropriate the text and its meaning" which becomes even more effective when considering a historical interpretation of the revelation of the Qur'an.[43] The Qur'an thus provides a tool to be used in the present by the interplay between it and the interpreter or reader while allowing it, as per Ricoeur, primacy over the reader without the fixation of the intention of the author (God). While, simultaneously, considering the context, as per Rahman, in which the verses were revealed in order to gain proper understanding of the principles of the text. It is certain that for Shari'ati the Qur'an was the provider of knowledge and understanding of a world that ought to be and a tool sent forth by God in order to be used in every era and in every context. According to him, what makes this possible – aside from the genius of God – is the use of symbolic language which is not straight forward or literal, allowing it a degree of fluidity and everlasting interpretational potential from generation to generation without diluting its truth as the word of God.[44] At the same time, Shari'ati insists that attention to the history of the prophet and his followers in a reading of the Qur'an remains of utmost importance.[45]

4) *The setting of the Message:* Relating to the nature and audience of the message delivered by the Prophet. Shari'ati places importance on how and to whom the message of God, via the Prophet, was delivered. In Islam – as well as in the case of other Abrahamic religions – the Prophet goes to the people *(al-nas)* with a message of rebellion against the existing "secular power".[46] It must be noted, however, that reading this together with Shari'ati's *Religion Vs. Religion* exhibits a contradiction. In the latter, he insists that religion has never been in conflict with non-religion or secular power but, instead, religion has always been in constant conflict with

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[42] See, for example, Rahman, F. (1982). *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition.* Chicago: University of Chicago press; Denffer, AV. (1983). *'Ulum al Qur'an: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an.* Leicester: Islamic foundation; Esack, F. (1987). *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression.* Oxford: Oneworld; Tabataba'I, SMH. (1987). *The Qur'an in Islam: Its Impact and Influence on the Life of Muslims.* London: Zahra Publications.

[43] Jeenah, *Islamic Feminist Hermeneutic,* p43-49.

[44] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p72.

[45] Shari'ati, *Enlightened Thinkers.*

[46] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p66.

religion.[47] That is, "religion of revolution" has been in opposition to "religion of legitimation", thus negating the notion of the existence of "secular power" to fight against.[48] Shari'ati insists these prophets "emerged from among the masses" with the mission of bringing about new, revolutionary ideas that sought to depart from and undermine the status quo and provide a drastically new vision of the world and life within it.[49] The Abrahamic prophets brought about "great revolutionary, uprooting and yet constructive movements" which "caused frozen, static and stagnant societies to change their directions, life-styles, outlooks, cultures and destinies".[50] This message of revolution was delivered not to the elite, but to the people:

> *The Prophet is sent to al-nas; he addresses himself to al-nas; it is al-nas who are accountable for their deeds; al-nas are the basic factor in decline – in short, the whole responsibility for society and history is borne by al-nas. The word al-nas is an extremely valuable one, for which there exists a number of equivalents and synonyms. But the only word that resembles it, structurally and phonetically, is the word 'mass'.*[51]

In studying this aspect of Islam, it is then clear what Shari'ati wishes to illustrate: that Muhammad was sent with a radical message to the people – the masses – and this message was a message of rebellion against the existing, oppressive social order. I would go further in suggesting that what this aspect means for Shari'ati is that rather than the Prophet himself being the major actor of change, it is the masses who are responsible for their own destiny which they can struggle towards by utilising the tools taught to them by the Prophet.[52]

5) *Choice individuals:* These are exemplary individuals, aside from the Prophet, who best display the principles of the religion. With regard to this aspect it is important to bring a few methodological issues to light. First, in order to be able to identify these individuals, a knowledge of the previous four aspects – all of which are intertwined

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[47] The entire theme of Shari'ati, *Religion,* deals with this notion that, throughout history religion has always only been in conflict with religion.
[48] Burgess, A. Foreword in Shari'ati, *Religion,* p5.
[49] Shari'ati, A. *Where Shall We Begin?* Available online: http://www.shariati.com/english/begin/begin1.html. Accessed: 2 September 2016.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p49.
[52] "In the Qur'an, the Prophet is not recognized as the active cause of fundamental change and development in human history. He is depicted rather as the bearer of a message whose duty it is to show men the school and path of the truth. His mission is then completed, and men are free either to choose the truth or to reject it, either to be guide or to be misguided" Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p48.

with each other and help to explain the others – is a prerequisite so that one may first know what these 'principles' of Islam are before knowing who best upheld them. It follows that this fifth aspect important in understanding Islam today is the only, or at least most independent, aspect of the five. It is acted upon by the other aspects but does very little to, itself, act upon those previously mentioned aspects. Aside from this point, when dealing with Shari'ati, this is where the hermeneutic question of the role of the interpreter of creating meaning becomes quite stark, precisely because of the examples he uses. Shari'ati's main examples are Hussayn, Ali, Fatima, Zainab and Abu Dharr; all of whom form important figures within the Shi'ite tradition of which Shari'ati – and the majority of Iranians – belong.

A question that emerges from this is whether the previous four aspects guided the choice of these individuals who, within the Shi'ite-Sunni conflict become contentious figures, or whether Shar'iati, with certain presuppositions, had chosen them already and had then decided on the previous four aspects. Alternatively, it could just be – although this sits well within the Shi'ite tradition – that Shari'ati views them as exalted because of the familial and close relationship and, in turn, training of them by the Prophet himself. This problem, of course, applies to the entire hermeneutic but is well displayed in the choice of figures. However, it must be made clear that the stories of these figures fall well within the realm of righteousness as per a Shari'atian world-view. That aside, Shari'ati's Islamic hermeneutic suggests that a consideration of the character and lives of these exemplary individuals helps us to reach an understanding of Islam.[53]

A study of these five aspects then provide a methodological hermeneutic approach to understanding Islam in its entirety and arriving at what Shari'ati would argue is the true essence and meaning of Islam.

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[53] For discussions by Shari'ati on the figures mentioned, see Shari'ati, A. (1980). *Fatima is Fatima* (translated by L. Bakhtiar). Tehran: The Shariati Foundation; Shari'ati A. (2013). *And Once Again Abu-Dhar.* Feedbooks; and Shari'ati, A. *Martyrdom Arise and Bear Witness* (translated by A.A. Ghassemy). Al-Islam.org Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project. Available online: https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/9817. Accessed: 1 July 2016.

## Islamic Liberation Theology

In his consideration of Islam as text and Islam as history, Shari'ati concluded that Islam, in its essence and true form, is a revolutionary religion. God, the creator of humanity and the One who revealed the truths to the Prophet, by nature, represents justice and equality through the concept of *Tawhid*.[54] The Qur'an presents a spiritually and politically revolutionary manifesto with which to guide the Prophet and the people. The Prophet, the greatest revolutionary according to Shari'ati, provided the message of rebellion to the people on the margins of society, inviting all to accept a revolutionary consciousness and those revolutionary Muslim exemplars. All of these aspects of Islam, for Shari'ati, present a revolutionary world-view, one that places emphasis on the liberation of those on the margins of society and the defeat of those at the top – the oppressors. A study of these aspects leads, for Shari'ati, to a theology of liberation or an Islamic liberation theology.

Esack defines liberation theology as:

> *[a theology] that works towards freeing religion from social, political and religious structures and ideas based on uncritical obedience and the freedom of all people from all forms of injustice and exploitation including those of race, gender, class and religion.*[55]

And, within an Islamic tradition:

> *Islamic liberation theology derives its inspiration from the Qur'an and the struggles of all the prophets. It does so by engaging the Qur'an and the examples of the prophets in a process of shared and ongoing theological reflection for ever-increasing liberative praxis.*[56]

Shari'ati's Islamic hermeneutic presents a methodology for arriving at a true understanding of Islam. It is in discovering this "true Islam" that Shari'ati views Islam as synonymous with liberation and, thus, presents an Islamic liberation theology. Abbasi states that "liberation theology always seeks to analyze power relations, takes seriously the interpretation of religion from the margins of society and the undersides of history, and asks epistemic and political questions in order to

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[54] Tawhid generally denotes the concept of the Oneness of God. While accepting this view, Shari'ati suggests that, in Islam, tawhid regards "the whole of existence as a single form" which he considers the world-view of "unity" inferring justice and equality more broadly. Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p82-87.

[55] Esack, *Qur'an,* p83.

[56] Ibid.

transform the self/society."[57] This was precisely the mission of Shari'ati. True Islam, for Shari'ati, is a religion that favours the masses, the marginalized and the oppressed. In considering the characteristics of God, the message of the Qur'an, the words, actions and context of the Prophet as well as the significant Muslim figures that followed, Shari'ati arrives at a theology that privileges the disenfranchised and, unapologetically, challenges power and elites.

Sometime after returning from a trip to Egypt to visit the pyramids. Shari'ati delivered a speech discussing his trip.[58] In his speech, he explained how, during his visit, he discovered some rocks 400 metres away from the pyramids and asked the tour guide what these were. He discovered that beneath the rocks was the pit in which many slaves who built the pyramids had been buried after being killed during their labour.[59] Looking on those rocks, an unidentified graveyard, Shari'ati felt "a close family relationship" with the dead slaves. When looking at the pyramid, in contrast, he had a sense of "complete strangeness towards their greatness, glory, and majesty".[60] In fact, it was "hate and anger" that had overwhelmed his heart when he gazed on the great pyramids which caused him to, in this speech, write a hypothetical yet beautiful letter to one of the dead slaves who he repeatedly refers to as "Brother".[61] This sensitivity, this sentiment toward not the greatness of the pyramids built under the command of the Pharaoh, but toward the unrecognisable grave of unidentified slaves – the spirit of those who faced grave oppression – is precisely where, in his theology, Shari'ati places Islam. An adequate study of Islam, following the proper hermeneutic, leads to the understanding of a religion that does not marvel at opulence and majesty but, instead, serves as a redemption to the people on whose backs it was built and a call and guide to other oppressed people to revolt and stand firm against all oppression as followers of a "religion of revolution".

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[57] Abbasi, A. (2016). *Revelation and Revolution: Dr Ali Shari'ati's Liberationist Approach to the Qur'an.* Paper presented at the University of Johannesburg on 2016/05/04. p1.

[58] The speech has been published in the booklet: Shari'ati, A. (1979). *Yea, Brother! That's the Way it Was* (translated by N. Assef). Tehran: The Shariati Foundation.

[59] Ibid, p5.

[60] Ibid, p6.

[61] Ibid, p7.

## Conclusion

A fundamental starting point in Shari'ati's Islamic liberation theology is his methodological schema which provides interpretational tools to be employed in a process of understanding "true Islam". Shari'ati identifies five aspects of religion that ought to be considered when engaging in a thorough study of a religion: God, the Prophet, the scripture, the exemplary figures and the context of the message and mission of the prophet. For Shari'ati it was in understanding the word of God in the Qur'an as well as the historical elements derived from the Prophet and his companions that one is able to arrive at an elaborate and functional understanding of Islam. In understanding the God of Islam – Allah – one understands a God that is wholly just and on the side of the poor and the oppressed. The Qur'an provides an understanding of this God directly and also by way of its general principles which are collections of the "speech of God". This speech of God, the Qur'an, provides a fundamental understanding of a religion that is rooted in struggle and revolution, towards the liberation of the disenfranchised in society. God provided this word of revolution to Muhammad so that he may seek out those from the margins of society and imbue them with a new spirit of justice and of rebellion against all forms of oppression. Furthermore, those who were trained and tended to follow the guidance of God and the Prophet provided a further depiction, after the Prophet's death, of a religion that advocated the abhorrence and negation of elites and power. These five aspects provide the basis of an understanding of Islam that serves as a clear and distinct liberation theology that Shari'ati wished to share with the people of Iran – and the world – to mobilize them and ignite their true Islamic spirit in an act of resistance against the powers that rule over society and that promote and maintain the oppressive status quo.

## Chapter 2: A New Humanist Ontology

### Introduction

Martin Heidegger viewed man, or more precisely, *Dasein*,[62] as peculiar from all other beings in that it is 'ontological':

> *Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is optically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it... Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being.*[63]

That is, Dasein is a particular kind of being due to the concern that it holds regarding its own 'existence in the world.'[64] Shari'ati takes this Daseinian curse seriously as he ventures into an ontological understanding of man from an Islamic perspective. The question of being and, indeed, being-in-the-world, becomes significant in his overall schema of an Islamic liberation theology, particularly as man relates to the Absolute – God. As Shari'ati insists, "It's important to try and seek knowledge of man because that is knowledge of ourselves and without it we are enveloped in the darkness of self-ignorance."[65]

For Shari'ati, the symbolic story of the creation of Adam addressed in the Qur'an denotes what amounts to a philosophical ontology of man. It relates to man the nature of being in constant contradiction between the poles of God and Satan; good and evil. A contradiction which accords man – by God – free will to act in the world. Furthermore, Islam also issues a pathway to reach God; the highest form of being. Man is thus a free being whose deliverance is to be found in an ever-searching for God; that is, God in the world. In this chapter I will tease out the God-man relationship that Shari'ati positions within an Islamic framework and put this schema into conversation with Min's analysis of Hegel's conception of the same problematic. I will start off, however, by considering the thought of the Egyptian contemporary of Shari'ati, Sayyid Qutb, which, I argue, posits God as a transcendental other to man; a view that goes against that of Shari'ati's.

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[62] Solomon, RC. (1988). *Continental Philosophy since 1970: The Rise and Fall of the Self.* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press). P154. Uses 'human being' to 'cautiously' characterize Dasein but states that the more appropriate meaning of the Heideggerian word is 'being there.'

[63] Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time* (translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson). Oxford: Basil Blackwell. P26.

[64] Solomon, *Continental Philosophy, p160.*

[65] Shari'ati, *Marxism,* p15.

**Sayyid Qutb: Worship From Below**

Sayyid Qutb is often credited as being an inspiration for Islamic fundamentalism in the 20th century. He was a member and major influential figure in the Muslim Brotherhood Islamic movement in Egypt. Like Shari'ati, Qutb founded a liberationist theology based on the Qur'an as well as the example of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. Although Shari'ati and Qutb move towards a theology of liberation from a similar departure point[66], their conclusions tend to vary quite radically at times. Qutb's focus was to create a blueprint for the formation of a truly Islamic society that should eventually rule the world and rid it of all of division and injustice. In this section I will consider the relationship that Qutb posits between man and God. In doing so, I will suggest that his conception of this relationship is to be situated in the transcendentalist tradition.

Qutb, citing the Qur'an[67], states that man has been created by God and placed on this earth as His 'vicegerent'.[68] He considers the purpose of man as God's vicegerent to be for the worship of the almighty.[69] Worship, as is suggested in Qutb's work, can be displayed through the total following of God's Will on earth. That is, the complete submission to the laws and lifestyle set forth in the Qur'an and manifested perfectly by the actions of the Prophet. It is God's word that is the most True and that through consultation with the Qur'an, the Shari'ah or divine law can be extracted and established which "provides the necessary way and means to overcome any problem."[70] Complete obedience to divine Will manifested in the Shari'ah, according to the Qutbian framework, will enable society to reach deliverance from all oppression and all division.

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[66] I use this phrase "similar departure points" very lightly as their methodologies differed quite significantly. However, I take this "departure point" to be Islam in a more general sense.

[67] "And when Thy Sustainer said to the angels, 'I am going to make My vicegerent on earth.' (Qur'an, 2:30)

[68] Qutb, S. *Milestones. Durban:* Taj Company. p9.

[69] Ibid., p12.

[70] Qutb, S. (1993). *Islam and Universal Peace.* Indianapolis: American Trust Publications. p2.

Oppression and injustice, Qutb insists, is resultant from the absence of God in the consciousness of man. Servitude stems from *Jahiliyyah*[71] that he suggests is "based on the rebellion against God's sovereignty on earth" and which "transfers to man one of the greatest attributes of God, namely sovereignty, and makes some men lords over others."[72] The subjugation of man by man is based upon a rebellion against God in which oppression of His creation is mediated. The movement towards liberation thus has an obvious direction, the obedience – contra rebellion – of man vis-à-vis God. It is only, then, in the establishment of a holistically and radically Islamic society that oppression can be completely obliterated:

> *Only in the Islamic way of life do all men become free from the servitude of some men to others and devote themselves to the worship of God alone, deriving guidance from Him alone, and bowing before Him alone.*[73]

What stands out is the place, in the Qutbian social ontology, that God occupies in relation to man. That is, as an exteriority; something distinct and 'other' from man. In my reading of Qutb, it is apparent that God takes a transcendental position which stands over and above man as a completely sovereign other. It follows that, only as a result of the acceptance of God as sovereign, that man can be freed from the chains of man since "[there exists] no sovereignty except God's, no law except from God, not authority of one man over another, as the authority in all respects belong to God" since all are equal "under the banner of God."[74] The ideal man, as well as the ideal society arrives at an equal and just social structure when they accept God as the sovereign and submit to his absolute Power and Divinity. Submission to God, for Qutb, presents the greatest key in arriving at the perfect society and the perfect man.[75] This result, I argue, in the view of an absolute, transcendental image of God – one that posits Himself above man, as the ultimate Ruler of man.

Hegel, according to Min, presents the notion that this idea of absolute transcendence does nothing but logically 'finitizes' God as it makes God just "one of the two" and, in

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[71] Jahiliyyah is often translated as 'ignorance' and specifically, ignorance against the divinity of God. It is commonly used to refer to the pre-Islamic period in Arabia – 'the time of Jahiliyyah.'

[72] Qutb, *Milestones,* p12.

[73] Ibid., p13.

[74] Ibid., p31.

[75] Ibid., p44, 55.

turn, 'infinitizes' man since it stands on its own as next to, and, thus, independent of the finite - God.[76] That is, by situating God as an external, transcendental feature separate from the world, man and God become two entities next to each other; a view that a Qutbian conception, under scrutiny, falls in line with, but one that he would certainly not claim to support. Qutb holds that God has ordained his natural laws on earth and in the universe which man is bound by; but man, beyond these natural laws pertains to his 'voluntary actions' which the Divine law – Shari'ah – prescribes a manner of conducting; Shari'ah "must organise his life."[77] God is thus postulated as an exteriority vis-à-vis man and nature with the revelation of the Qur'an – beyond the primordial and universal natural laws – being the link between the natural and the Divine realm. This revelation, the Qur'an, provides a "way of life" for mankind to follow in order to "harmonise human life with natural law"[78] and reach an absolute and just mode of being free from the bondage of man by man.

**Man: a 'Dialectic Reality'**

My interpretation of the God-man relationship in Qutb's thought situates God as an absolute transcendental other against man. Rahnema likens Qutb's conception of God as within the line of Greek mythology in which "rivalry and animosity" exist between the gods or God and man;[79] a view that Shari'ati insists is 'antithetical' to a truly Islamic conception of God.[80] I will now present a detailed commentary on Shari'ati's Qur'anic interpretation of the God-man dyad and, in turn, illustrate his ontological understanding of man and how this constructs the foundational elements for his Islamic liberation theology.

For Shari'ati, the ontology of man is displayed in the Qur'anic account of the creation of Adam – the first human creation. Before explaining this, it holds importance to state that, for Shari'ati, taking seriously his theory of being, Islam serves as the greatest humanism. He states that modern civilization in the West is based on humanism, "that is, the originality and worship of man" which came about as a resistance to the Christianity of the middle-ages in which man was seen as having to

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[76] Min, AK. (1976). 'Hegel's Absolute: Transcendent or Immanent?' *The Journal of Religion,* Vol. 56, No. 1. p70.
[77] Qutb, *Milestones,* p113-114.
[78] Ibid., p118.
[79] Rahnema, *Islamic Utopian,* pxx.
[80] Shari'ati, *Marxism,* p18-19.

"sacrifice himself for the Gods."[81] So the turn to humanism was then a turn away from the sovereignty of God towards the sovereignty of man; that is, creating a God out of man. However, Shari'ati insists that the story of Adam presents an Islamic view of man in which man is presented with God's trust and vicegerency on earth; situating man as possessing Godly qualities and expunging the notion enmity and opposition between God and man – placing Islam as an absolute humanism. For Shari'ati, in the lectures to be discussed here, the goal was to create a theory answering the question concerning the kind of phenomenon that Islam sees in man; a fundamentally ontological inquiry. However, in employing different lectures, we find a seeming contradiction in what this ontology leads to – making use of the story of Adam as a starting point – since on the one hand he suggests that it is about man's journey towards God and, on the other, he uses the same story to display man's dual responsibility; that is, spiritual and worldly. I will however argue that these are not contradictions but that Shari'ati was merely talking about two different principles, drawn out of the same symbolic story, and that the latter supplements added substance into the argument of the former.

For Shari'ati, akin to Qutb, man represents God's vicegerent on earth, explained with a quote from the Qur'an in which God says to the angels: "I want to create a vicegerent on earth."[82] This claim leads to the "first superiority" that man has above all other beings on earth – that he is God's vicegerent.[83] Shari'ati mentions that the Qur'an discusses man in two different ways: biological and philosophical. When it discusses man in the biological sense it uses "language of the natural sciences" but when it discusses man in the philosophical sense; "its language is metaphorical and philosophical, full of meaning and symbol." [84] Man, described in the "philosophical" sense, is understood from the Qur'anic story of Adam. God's creation of man, described in the story of Adam, takes on the following formula which Shari'ati indicates is symbolic and not literal:

The spirit of God + putrid clay = man[85]

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[81] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p70.
[82] Qur'an (2:30)
[83] Ibid., p73.
[84] Ibid., p88.
[85] Ibid.

Putrid clay, or mud and dust as is used elsewhere, represents "lowness, stagnation and absolute passivity" while the spirit of God represents "an endless movement toward perfection and infinite exaltation."[86] God creates a two-dimensional being that is created from the "most basest of things" – mud – and then he "breathed His spirit into the dry mud and man came into being"[87] in a process of assignation. Thus, man has been created from "two contradictions"[88] and it is up to man to decide which of the two poles he will tend towards.[89] The view of a bipolar man is not, Shari'ati insists, contradictory to the world-view of Tauhid which posits a unity of the universe as a whole with a single essence so that man and nature are not "alien" or "remote" from each other,[90] as well as positioning humanity as a "unified genus"[91] which looks "upon all beings as a unity"[92] not to be divided by class, race or any other divisive constructions. The story of the creation does not, thus, fall in line with a Cartesian mind-body dualism since the physical and natural as well as the spiritual dimension are all from the "same origin."[93]

Shari'ati deepens the metaphor by equating the mud or clay to Satan and spirit to the spirit to God. These two contradictions create in man a "dialectic reality" in which both the thesis – God – and the antithesis – Satan – "exists both in his nature and his faith."[94] It is these two poles that are ontological realities that "create motion in him, a dialectic, ineluctable and evolutionary movement, and a constant struggle between two opposing poles in man's essence and in his life."[95] Man, as "trustees" of God, which Shari'ati claims, in the Qur'an, refers to man's free will,[96] are endowed with the capability to choose his position between these two poles; which he will be closer to and move towards. Again it must be stated that Shari'ati does not wish to fall into a dualism:

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 73-74.
[88] This is mere symbolic language and, of course, these factors are not real contradictions since it is all from the Oneness of God.
[89] Ibid., 74-75.
[90] Ibid., p83, fn2.
[91] Shari'ati, *Religion,* p30.
[92] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p86.
[93] Ibid., p83, fn2.
[94] Ibid., p89-90.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., p76.

> *The duality of God and Satan in Islam is not the same as the duality of God and Satan in dualistic religions such as Zoroastrianism and Manicheism. Further, it is not in any way opposed to tauhid. In Islam there is no question of a contradiction or dualistic warfare in the world between [good and evil]. The contradiction exists only in man. Satan is not the antithesis of Allah; he is His impotent and submissive creature, permitted by God to engage in enmity with man... the struggle between light and darkness, Allah and [Satan], plays itself out in the world of men.*[97]

The idea of the bipolar man is thus a symbolic description of man's free will, to choose between his lower form of self and his highest.

**God in Man and Man in God**

The breathing of God's spirit into man and thus creating his vicegerent on earth links appropriately with the Hegelian view, as Huang puts it, of the "human elevation to the Divine" or, "the Divinity of the human."[98] Man is thus elevated to a status of God, or at least of part of God since God's spirit is within him. Of course, there is still that element of man which is other to God – though not altogether other since all of being and creation is within God Himself – and together, man is created as a self-reflective element of God, or, to use Min's words in discussing Hegel's view on the topic, "as the self-differentiating and self-finitizing of the infinite self"[99] making man an element of God, within God's absoluteness, but also something different from God. The element of difference, in the Shari'atian schema, is the mud even while mud forms part of God but is the element that constitutes a different manifestation of the same essence, God – the self-differentiating of God in the creation of man. So, while man within God is both God and God's other (mud), God too is both man as well as man's other since man is within God's absolute being as it is a being *qua* infinity and additionally, within a panentheist realm, something that stretches beyond merely the existence and consciousness of the world. Shari'ati's insistence that "the Islamic cosmology rests upon faith in the unseen"[100] and that "in this world-view of tauhid, being is divided into two relative aspects: the unseen and the manifest"[101] suggests, in my interpretation, that God's existence transcends natural phenomena and

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[97] Ibid., p91-92, fn2.

[98] Huang, Y. (1996). 'God as Absolute Spirit: A Heideggerian Interpretation of Hegel's God-Talk', *Religious Studies,* Vol. 32. p497.

[99] Min, *Hegel's Absolute,* p74.

[100] Shari'ati, *Marxism,* p65.

[101] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p83.

extends beyond man's sensory capabilities. However, while the finite, man, does not exhaust the infinite, God, and God exists also beyond the finite world, Min mentions that Hegel deems it nonsensical to try to understand the further elements of God-in-Himself beyond God-in-the-world.[102]

**The Pathway to God**

Aside from the relationship, drawn from the illustration of creation of Adam, between man and God, Shari'ati also views the "trusteeship" as free will and the free will to venture between the two poles of Satan and God, the antithesis and the thesis:

> *The distance between the spirit of God and putrid clay is the distance between two infinities; and man is a 'hesitation,' a pendulum between them, a free will faced with a weighty and difficult choice – the choice of the spirit, the spirit of God, while contained within putrid clay and buried beneath mud and sediment... One extremity of man touches God; the other, the devil.*[103]

Shari'ati locates man between these two poles or, rather, locates these poles within man in constant struggle, the dialectic mediated by man's free will which ushers the synthesis of man's consciousness at that point in time. Man is "situated between two possibilities", but "God is infinity" so man "can never attain a final resting place and take up residence in God."[104] God is not a possibility but an impossibility since God is infinite and stretches beyond the consciousness of man. I would add that the 'possibility' of the lowly facet of man, Satan, too is an impossibility since there is always in existence, within man, the element of the other, and, without the absence of the other, man cannot at all attain, in complete totality, either one of the two but always lies somewhere in between, though rarely right at the median point. As Shari'ati states, "man is a 'choice,' a struggle, a constant becoming," that is, a becoming of something in constant movement situated between lowliness and the High – he is "infinite migration."[105] For Shari'ati, religion, and particularly Islam,

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[102] Min, *Hegel's Absolute,* p85-86.

[103] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p90-91.

[104] Ibid., p93.

[105] Ibid., p93.

The concept of migration, for Shari'ati plays an important role in his theology, borrowing lessons from the migration of the early Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Abyssinia and Medina. He also considers the way migration is spoken about in the Qur'an and takes seriousness the importance of migration in the development of a civilization and a mode of becoming. Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p43-45. This mode of

proffers a passageway for humanity. It serves the function to lay a path and a road for man to travel from clay to the exalted Being of God. Shari'ati notes that when spoken about in the Qur'an, the Arabic word "madhhab" is used to denote its meaning which means "path," not "aim"; it is a road and not at all a destination.[106] In fact:

> *The word din (religion) itself has the meaning of road, in addition to the other significances that have been proposed for it, such as sacred wisdom and so forth. Other terms also have the same meaning: silk: a narrow mountain path; shari'at: the path leading down to a river, enabling the thirsty to take water; tariqa: a broad path or road leading from one town to another or one land to another; madhhab: a highway; sirat: a road leading to a place of worship; umma: a group of people moving toward a common destination under a single leader and along a single road.*[107]

It is thus, Islam – true Islam – as a divine revelation that, for Shari'ati, sets guidelines for man to be liberated from clay and mud and venture onto the infinite pathway towards God.

For Hegel, according to Min, "[t]he finite (man) is truly finite only in this movement of self-transcendence to the infinite (God), only in its being-for-the-infinite-Other, which is at the same time its own internal determination or true being in itself" and, as he further states, "[i]t is the very nature of the finite (man) to transcend itself, to negate its negation and to become infinite (God)."[108] And since God reveals Himself to man, according to Hegel, "not as a 'thing,' a brute Other, but as a 'self,' 'a spirit'"[109] he provides a way towards God and, more precisely, a direction for man to make the movement to God in order to reach a higher stage of *self-ness*. For Shari'ati, as discussed in his hermeneutics, God reveals Himself through the Qur'an as well as the words of the Prophetic tradition which, in turn, gives this same pathway towards Him. The Qur'anic term *taqwa* has often being translated to "God consciousness." Taqwa, according to Ali and Leaman, "signifies protecting oneself from moral peril, preserving one's virtue, and guarding oneself from the displeasure of God."[110] It is

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becoming can also, as we see in Shari'ati, be used to consider the individual as his constant movement and struggle.

[106] Ibid., p93.

[107] Ibid., p94.

[108] Min, *Hegel's Absolute*, p73-74.

[109] Ibid., p84.

[110] Ali, K. & Leaman, O. (2008). *Islam: The Key Concepts.* London, New York: Routledge. p142.

thus through the consciousness of God – taqwa – that one can make this journey from the evil of Satan, to the spirit of God. Interestingly though, Shari'ati also posits that one of the other way to know God is through "gnosis,"[111] a methodology more consistent with a Hegelian conception of 'knowing' God.[112] Indeed, Min's claim that Hegel would have no opposition to the Augustinian assertion of "intimior intimo meo"[113] meaning 'nearer to me than I am to myself' which is not different to the Qur'anic claim that "We (Allah) are closer to him (man) than [his] jugular vein"[114]. This is a claim that Shari'ati would no doubt agree with.

So, for Shari'ati, man, this dialectic being between God and Satan, has the mission of journeying towards the former and away from the latter by means of following Islam. However, this journey within the self is not merely a Gnostic or mystic venture. Shari'ati uses the same analogy of creation of Adam to show that man, as a two-dimensional being, has not only an abstract responsibility of spiritual and Gnostic practice. The journey towards God cannot be satisfied by mere isolation and meditation – as many of the clergy in Shari'ati's time may have claimed – but through a spiritual responsibility in the world. The two dimensions of man, mud and God's spirit, is also representative of two poles of responsibility that Islam caters for. Man has the mission of, in himself, in this sense of the dual nature of clay and God, to be two-dimensional and, thus, be in equilibrium. For Shari'ati, "a religion which will also be two-dimensional and exert its force in the two different and opposing directions that exist in man's spirit and human society". is needed to create harmony within man, and, within this harmony, allow man to – in terms of the first dialectical nature of man – tend towards the exalted spirit of God; this religion, for Shari'ati, is Islam.[115]

Shari'ati states that, in Islam, God is a two-dimension being with "the aspect of Yahwa, the God of the Jews, who interests Himself in human society... who is stern, severe in punishment... and also the aspect of the god of Jesus, who is compassionate, merciful and forgiving."[116] Likewise, the Qur'an is bidimensional with

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[111] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p64.

[112] Min states that Hegel's insistence that to know one's self one ought to know God has led many to charge Hegel with mysticism and even pantheism. Min, *Hegel's Absolute,* p84.

[113] Min, *Hegel's Absolute,* p76.

[114] Qur'an, 50:16.

[115] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p80.

[116] Ibid.

aspects dealing with political and military affairs and affairs, in general, of society, but also dealing with the purification of the soul. The Prophet and his closest companions are similar, they were people of piety but also of politics, people of spirituality but also of the world.[117] This came together in a single spirit; a spirit in equilibrium. It is for man, then, to understand that Islam directs one towards the path of God, but in doing so, he should be able to be both spiritual and worldly and that these two elements are not mutually exclusive or negations of each other but are, in fact, intertwined and interrelated and both help to shape, correctly and completely, the other.

## Conclusion

Contrary to Qutb whose theoretical discourse on God and man leads him towards a purely transcendentalist view of God in which God becomes just an other of man. Shari'ati's discussion on the creation of man presents a more nuanced theological conception in which man and God have a relationship of "reciprocity."[118] Man has a dialectic nature within him that does not fall within the dualistic Cartesian or Manichean realm. He is a consciousness between the symbolic realm of God and Satan with the ultimate goal of venturing towards the pole which represents the highest form of being – the impossibility of God. God, in the revelation of Islam, presents a map which directs the way from the pole of mud to the pole of God; a journey that all of mankind must make. The responsibility of pursuing Godliness, however, does not rely on a Gnostic, individualistic and isolationist way of being but, rather, insists on a spirituality that is situated within worldly life. Islam sets out responsibilities that both tend to a spiritual and worldly self that does not form two separate dimensions altogether; but that are two intertwined dimensions that both inform and assist the other's growth. Spirituality and the journey towards God is closely associated with the responsibility of man within the world. In particular, the Islamic responsibility to strive for justice, freedom and equality for all of mankind.

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Shari'ati, *Marxism,* p69.

## Chapter 3: Islam, Critique and Western Epistemological Hegemony

### Introduction

Western modernity has been characterised by a radical secularisation; a direction in which the Pahlavi dynasty was determined to push Iran, in a sense, as religion was diluted, mediated and controlled. Shari'ati was deeply troubled by this movement in which a Western, secular world-view was being imposed upon a profoundly religious – in culture and faith – society. Much of the opposition focused on the way in which modernity alienates the people of the Global South from their authentic being and creates a new subjectivity that negates the feelings and thoughts of the natives. It is no surprise then that Shari'ati took huge issue with the prominence of Marxist thinking within the movement against the Pahlavi dynasty since for him Marxism was simply the other side of the same Western coin; that is, the side with a potential for liberation but Western, nonetheless. As a result of the prevalent setting in which religious scholars were reactionary, and the secular opposition demonised Islam, Shari'ati lamented: "It is certainly difficult these days to speak of religion; the modern mind can hardly accept it as a progressive, liberating force."[119] This was a myth that he became determined to debunk.

Shari'ati wished to radically challenge the prevailing conception of struggle that negated the usefulness of religion, particularly Islam, as a potential productive force towards liberation. In this chapter I will look at Foucault's idea of critique and discuss how it relates to the Kantian notion of enlightenment. Shari'ati's "enlightened soul" falls within this realm of critique as its aim was to present a critical understanding of the present conditions of a certain society with a deep sense of exactly what and who that society is. It is in this spirit that I understand the importance of the nature of Shari'ati's "Islamic critique" of Marxism, particularly for this research report. It is particularly interesting the manner in which Shari'ati approached Marxism as a foreign, Western force akin to Western liberalism, which would alienate the people of Iran and the Global South from themselves. I therefore suggest that Shari'ati is presenting a meta-critique of Marxism within this context and that certain aspects of his thoughts about Marxism offer an important understanding into his Islamic

[119] Shari'ati, *Marxism,* p49.

liberation theology as a whole, as juxtaposed against a secular, Western theory of liberation that isMarxism.

**Enlightenment and Critique**

In a response to the question "what is enlightenment?", Immanuel Kant wrote a short essay in 1784 in which he described enlightenment as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage".[120] Enlightenment, according to Kant, is the human's release from blind obedience to authority – a blind obedience which human being enforces on themself. It is, thus, for the enlightened to administer their own departure from this "tutelage", "minority" or "immaturity" status by having the "courage" to use their own reason. It requires one, according to Chatterjee, to be free and "assume the responsibility for one's own actions".[121] Enlightenment, asserted Kant, is about the use of human reason and the escape from the fettering of that reason by authority so that the human can acquire knowledge and change orthodoxies through critique and discourse.

Foucault was, according to Michael Hardt, "obsessed" with Kant's text "What Is Enlightenment?" [122] Foucault referred to Kant's article repeatedly throughout the latter part of his career, most notably in *What is Enlightenment?*[123] and *What is Critique?*[124] In these works he highlighted some interesting considerations of Kant's essay – particularly with regard to a conception of critique. What Foucault found most outstanding in Kant was that for the first time a philosopher aimed at making his own circumstances the "subject of philosophical investigation" and inquired into the contemporary conditions which allowed for the pursuance of knowledge.[125] Kant describes enlightenment as a period, an era, in which philosophical inquiry into the present conditions of society is made possible.

In the West, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Foucault says, a certain attitude developed that related to a particular mode of thinking; one that was not

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[120] Kant, I. (1794) *What is Enlightenment?* Available online: http://www.allmendeberlin.de/What-is-Enlightenment.pdf. Accessed: 26 January 2017

[121] Chatterjee, P. (1997). *Our Modernity.* Rotterdam: SEPHIS and Dakar: CODESRIA. p3.

[122] Hardt, M. (2011). 'The Militancy of Theory' in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol. 10 No. 1. p20.

[123] Foucault, M. (1997a). 'What is Enlightenment?' in Rabinow (Ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth.* London: Allen Lane. p303-320.

[124] Foucault, M. (1997). *What is Critique?* (translated by Hochroth, L.) in *The Politics of Truth: Michel Foucault* (edited by Lotringer, S. & Hochroch, L.) New York: Semiotext. P23-82.

[125] Chatterjee, *Our Modernity,* p10.

merely concerned with the way things are but, going beyond that, giving consideration to how conventions and orthodoxies should *not* be. It was, he suggests, a period of enlightenment[126] that gave rise to a "critical attitude".[127] While the question of how to govern was ever prevalent, it was accompanied by an attitude of critique that posed another set of questions concerning "how *not* to be governed like that", which Foucault described as the "art of not being governed quite so much".[128] This attitude presents the emergence of a profound concept called critique which seeks to defy, challenge, and ultimately transform the arts of governing. Thus, while the question surrounding how to govern constituted a "movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to truth", critique presented "the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability".[129] Foucault regarded Kant's conception of enlightenment as being precisely in line with this definition of critique. Critique, for Foucault, addresses, importantly, the knowledge-power relation and it considers "connections that can be identified between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge".[130] Critique deals with the re-emergence of the Kantian spirit of enlightenment in an engagement with what he calls a "critical ontology of ourselves" that, for Hardt, correlates to "Kant's conclusion that his present is defined as not an enlightened age but an age of enlightenment, a project of exodus, indicates not only registering or analyzing the present but also, and more importantly, *making* the present and identifying or even constituting the subject that can achieve its autonomy."[131] Kant thus illustrates the way in which enlightenment allows for critique that is present in nature and also makes a movement within this to try to shape and form thinking and subjectivity.

It is from this point of departure that I am ushered into a discussion about Shari'ati's *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique.* Of course, the obvious linkage between Foucault's discussion on Kant's age of enlightenment and, in turn, a conception of critique derived thereof, is presented in the mere factuality that what

[126] Historically, this is not when the Enlightenment is dated. However, Foucault's suggests that this is where it finds its roots.
[127] Foucault, *What is Critique,* p24.
[128] Ibid., p28-29.
[129] Ibid., p32.
[130] Foucault, *Enlightenment,* p50.
[131] Hardt, *Militancy,* p22.

Shari'ati is presenting is "an Islamic *Critique*".[132] However, there are other interesting intersections when considering the nature of critique launched by Shari'ati against "Western fallacies" when concerning ourselves with the reasons behind the critique. While Foucault discusses critique in *What is Critique?* as part of a study of governing, I will present critique beyond just the power of authority, and will, thus, also include within its ambit resistance organisations and movements in their varying strands within the broader struggle. I will examine the often antagonistic relation between the Islamic and Marxist strands with which Shari'ati engaged in the Iranian struggle and explore how his critique sought to bolster the former's reputation and credibility vis-à-vis the latter. While Shari'ati's actual critique of Marxism, if placed under close theoretical scrutiny, may fall into some theoretical problems, his discussion serves as something of an embellished polemic that is important precisely because of a battle for framing between his Islamic strand of struggle and the Marxist strands within the anti-Shah movement.

Another important aspect for consideration when thinking about Foucault and critique is regarding critique and the knowledge-power relationship. After all, his explication of the relationship between knowledge, which "refers to all procedures and all effects of knowledge which are acceptable at a given point in time and in a specific domain", and power as a "series of particular mechanisms, definable and defined, which seem likely to induce behaviours or discourse",[133] may have been, according to Dreyfus and Rabinow, "the most radical dimension of his work".[134] For Foucault, it was through a critical analysis of the knowledge-power relationship that one is able to find the source of what are regarded as "truths". It is a process of questioning the roots and sources of knowledge and understanding that knowledge and power are inextricable and that they both act in a mutually productive fashion. It is interesting that while Foucault views critique as knowledge production, it is, nevertheless, knowledge production that remains stuck within this relationship. That is, critique does not escape power but is merely a reference to it. This is important in relation to Shari'ati because of the way he seems to be bound by the same political concepts

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[132] Emphasis mine.

[133] Foucault, M. (1997). *What is Critique?* (translated by Hochroth, L.) in *The Politics of Truth: Michel Foucault* (edited by Lotringer, S. & Hochroch, L.) New York: Semiotext. p51.

[134] Dreyfus, H.L. and Rabinow, P. (1982). *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics.* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf. p114.

and terminology as those "Western fallacies" that he thought were part of an ever-present power mechanism of "westoxication".[135] In truth, Shari'ati did not have a problem with reading and using Western epistemological resources, but the dominance of this alien body of knowledge within Iran and the Global South presented an asymmetry in power relations since, just like the alienating modernity of the West that was being propagated by the Shah, a critique of the regime based on Western epistemologies was, for Shari'ati, "utterly a product of the history, social organization, and cultural outlook of this same West".[136] However, Shari'ati could not escape its pervasive authority and he remains heavily reliant on it in his own work and thought. I will begin this presentation of Shari'ati's thought with a discussion of his view on the "enlightened soul" or "enlightened individual", the person who is an active participant in critique qua enlightenment.

**Shari'ati on the 'Enlightened Soul'**

In Shari'ati's framework, the enlightened soul is a person who undertakes the Foucaultian task of critique in a way that may stretch – productively – Foucault's definition. Shari'ati strenuously emphasises that the enlightened individual is not necessarily an educated person or an "intellectual".[137] He implies that an enlightened person need not be one with a formal education but is, as we will encounter in the next chapter, an intellectual since it is the enlightened intellectual that is tasked with the duty to create a revolutionary collective conscience among the masses. To resolve the contradiction, then, it seems that Shari'ati refers to an "intellectual" here as a person who is formally educated. Thus, the enlightened person need not necessarily be an "intellectual". However, if we consider his repeated interchanging of "intellectual" and "enlightened soul" elsewhere, then it is clear that "intellectual" is not necessarily one who is formally trained, and then, indeed, the enlightened soul is always the intellectual.

Shari'ati's enlightened soul is a person who is, firstly, in tune with the spirit of their society and, importantly, with the problems that that society faces.

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[135] This concept will be discussed further in chapter four.
[136] Shari'ati. *Marxism.* p49.
[137] Shari'ati, A. *Where Shall We Begin?* Available online: http://www.shariati.com/english/begin/begin1.html. Accessed: 1 October 2016.

> *In a nutshell, the enlightened soul is a person who is self-conscious of his "human condition" in his time and historical and social setting, and whose awareness inevitably and necessarily gives him a sense of social responsibility.*[138]

To be enlightened is to understand the present in the most radical sense. That is, understanding the present by understanding society in every facet of its existence. Understanding a society is not merely about understanding its intellectual strands or economic conditions but it also requires a thorough understanding of the people of that society, their history, culture, mores and all else that constitute the spirit of that place, in that time, among those people. It assumes a radical notion of specificity; of the "here and now". Shari'ati illustrates this when he asserts that "there is no universal prototype" for being an effective, enlightened person.[139] An enlightened individual in France is not an enlightened individual in Iran, and one in Iran is not one in Africa – being enlightened is about knowing and understanding the immediate context and conjuncture and the "inner pains"[140] of the society. The enlightened soul understands that a foreign school of thought cannot merely imported into a society to shape its struggles. "Enlightenment," Shari'ati points out, "is directly related to time, place, social environment and historical conditions"[141] which, Foucault says, is consistent with the Kantian conception. Thus, it is such an enlightened intellectual who has the potential to offer new insights to the movement and progress of a society. "A valid and true statement expressed at an improper time and place will be futile," argues Shari'ati. "Conversely, an unsubstantiated argument may be of significant consequence in a particular atmosphere."[142] The intellectual's awareness of the present is necessary for an awareness to be createed of what is required to create a collective subjectivity among the masses.

For example, Shari'ati asserts, nationalism "played a positive role in Europe toward the end of the Middle Ages, but now it plays an opposite role in Africa."[143] In Algeria in the 1950s, he notes, the central thesis of nationalism was being propagated, but instead of relating to the positive function that it played in Europe, it factionalised the Algerian people and the Berbers and the Arabs – who were once united under the

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[138] Shari'ati, Where Shall We *Begin?*
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.

commonality of Islam – became divided and society was weakened in the face of French colonial authority.[144] (Of course, nationalism was not as "positive" or successful in Europe as Shari'ati suggests; however, he makes an important point through this polemic.) Humanism, on the other hand, is often used to create "false bonds" or "fake common denominators" which "aims to eliminate the natural state of enmity, struggle and rancor between [colonizer and colonized] and to create a mystical, humanistic and general peace between them". This serves to distract and throw the people off of their course for self-determination and liberation. It is thus important to not merely import ideologies and concepts from the West, or anywhere else. The enlightened intellectual must be so immersed in the present that they alone – and not someone far away – know what the remedies to aid that society are.

Shari'ati thus stretches and deepens Foucault's conception of critique in suggesting that the enlightened person should not only be able to critique what is in the present, but that this critique should be steeped in a profound understanding of the social and cultural spirit of that society and they should know the "real causes of the backwardness of his society and discover the real cause of the stagnation and degeneration of the people of his environment."[145] What is crucial in this explanation of critique is that Shari'ati's attack on Marxism uses the Foucaultian concept of critique; critique of the present while also making movement within it. In saying this, I tend towards the idea that the actual theoretical critique of Marxism that Shari'ati gives is less important than the meta-critique that he provides. This addresses the way in which the Marxist tendencies within the anti-Shah movement in Iran adopted Marxism as the basis of their critique for the monarchy. I call it a meta-critique because what I find productive in his charge against Marxism is the way in which he posits it as a foreign ideology, as a Western entity, Western epistemology, and part of a hegemonic power imposing on Iran. He critiques the very validity of a Marxist perspective within an Iranian, and broadly Islamic, context. Most important, are the strands of critique that deal with this and, as I will show, that deal specifically with Marxism vis-a-vis Islam as a religion and culture in Iran and the Muslim world. Shari'ati wishes to show how Marxism operates as a particular Western gaze on Islam and, additionally, he wishes to juxtapose Islam and Marxism to show that Islam

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[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.

is more capable of presenting a proper and revolutionary critique for the problems Iranians faced, as well as a more productive mobilizing theory since an non- (or anti-)religious, foreign theory would "scare the masses" and "force them to take refuge with the reactionary, deviant and colonial element in order to escape the anti-religious educated group".[146] I will thus consider Shari'ati's discussions on Marxism that pertain to opposition to Islam and that provide the argument which boasts Islam as a more productive revolutionary force.

**Two Marxs**

Ervand Abrahamian mentions that, for Shari'ati, three different Marxs existed:[147]

1) The young Marx who was predominantly an atheistic philosopher, advocating dialectic materialism and denying the existence of God, the soul and the afterlife.
2) The mature Marx, predominantly a social scientist, revealing how rulers exploited the ruled and how the superstructure was informed by the infrastructure.
3) The elder Marx, chiefly a politician forging a political party which did not do justice to his social scientist's method.

Of these three, Abrahamian suggests, "Shariati clearly rejected the first and the third but willingly accepted much of the second" since Shari'ati agreed with the delineation of society into infrastructure and superstructure. Abrahamian further suggests that Shari'ati placed religions into the superstructure since religious leaders aimed to pacify the masses and acted in complicity with power and the status quo. [148]

I, however, would like to diverge from this (mis)understanding of Shari'ati's thoughts on Marxism and I consider it a misreading since Shari'ati, in fact, negates the Marx which priveleges the idea of structure. Instead, Shari'ati identifies two Marxs which become important in a discussion on his critique of Marxism. These two Marxs are consistent with the Althusserian division of the young Marx (1840-45) and the old Marx (1845 and after). Althusser argued that the young Marx was the humanist who considered that "'man' was not just a cry denouncing poverty and slavery... The

[146] Ibid.
[147] Abrahamian, *Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution,* p26.
[148] Ibid., p26-27.

'Essence of Man' (whether freedom, reason or community) was the basis both for a rigorous theory of history and for a consistent political practice." [149] As for Althusser's old Marx, a shift took place which moved away from the preoccupation of man's essence and the human subject as the foundation of society towards society as a structure. In this stage of Marx's thinking he becomes a proto-structuralist as he shifts towards "theoretical anti-humanism".[150] This shift away from the essence of man, Althusser says, sees "[t]he formation of a theory of history and politics based on radically new concepts: the concepts of social formation, productive forces, relations of production, superstructure, ideologies..."[151] Althusser privileges the latter Marx over the former, humanist Marx.

Shari'ati splits Marx similarly to Althusser, but without formulating as sophisticated an argument around it as Althusser, since this was not the focus of his project. Certainly, the conceptualizations of Shari'ati and Althusser are not the same; however, the Althussearean split between the young Marx and the old Marx provides a good way of thinking more rigorously about the Marxs that Shari'ati identified.. While Althusser gave theoretical privilege to the old, anti-humanist Marx, Shari'ati saw worth in the former and dismissed the latter Marx – contrary to Abrahamian's explanation. Shari'ati celebrates the humanist Marx who, together with Engels:

> *speak[s] of [man] as a reality replete with "virtuous qualities" and "sublime eternal values." He is a free thinker capable of choice and "independent cause." He is a maker of his own destiny and even a "prophet" and "savior" to his own people. He is free, thinking, and capable of choice, an "independent cause" superior to material causation in nature, history and society. He is distinguished by a sense of honor, by courage, creativity, philanthropy, a readiness to sacrifice himself for his beliefs, and a sense of responsibility towards others. Finally, he is the maker of his own destiny and intrinsic nature, and even "prophet" and "savior" to his own people.*[152]

This Marx, Shari'ati says, is Marx the philosopher within whose theory exists strands of religiosity and mysticism.[153] The older Marx – "Marx the sociologist", in contrast, "undoes all he has accomplished":[154]

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[149] Althusser, L. (1969). *For Marx* (translated by Brewster, B) London: The Penguin Press. p223.
[150] Ibid., p229.
[151] Ibid., p227.
[152] Shari'ati, *Marxism,* p76.
[153] Ibid.

> *[Marx] takes [man] who was situated on the divine throne and hurls him headlong to the ground. This mighty creator who has created God, history and even himself, and who has transformed nature to conform to his self-aware and dominating will, suddenly turns out to be created by his own economic tools, themselves the inevitable product of the law of dialectic materialism. Those tools fabricated two things: goods and man.*[155]

Instead of "man becomes God" Shari'ati says of "Marx the sociologist", "man becomes goods."[156] In other words, the human who, for Marx, was once the centre of the world became a mere product of the economic infrastructure. Abrahamian is mistaken in his designations of Shariati's Marxs. Shari'ati, in defence of religion qua humanism, and ultimately in defence of the human, thus privileges the humanist Marx who deals with the human essence and the human as the shaper of society. This against the theoretical anti-humanist Marx that is privileged by the structuralist Althusser. Shari'ati seeks, thus, to preserve the human, preserve its essence and, ultimately, preserve Islam and God.

**Islam Against a Marxist Conception of Religion**

This aspect of Marxism was the one that Shari'ati seemed to have felt most required debunking. Following the nature and reason for Shari'ati's charge against Marxism, it is imperative to consider Shari'ati's discussion of Marxism vis-à-vis religion and the way in which he positions Islam within this discussion. Shari'ati believed that Marx had felt a "loathing towards the gods" and he attempts to figure out what evoked such an "emotional" rather than a "philosophical or scientific" response from Marx on the issue.[157] Shari'ati ascribes Marx's view of religion to the limited knowledge that the latter had about religion in general, and he argues that this stemmed from Marx's Jew-turned-Protestant father.[158] Beyond this experience, Marx's knowledge and conception of religion was inadequate to allow him to make generalized arguments about all religions since "[h]e had not even heard of one of the most basic doctrines of Judaism, Protestant Christianity, and Islam alike: God's assignation of free will to

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[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., p76-77.
[157] Ibid., p54.
[158] Ibid., p58.

man, that he might struggle in his earthly life and search for his own liberation".[159] This is again an embellished polemic to deliver his point.

This context led Marx, Shari'ati asserts, to a particular conception of religion and God which has become a predominant and universal cry from those struggling for liberation under the banner of Marxism – including in Iran. Shari'ati argues that this led to a serious problem in the understanding of the man-God relationship in Marxism. This understanding, he insists, is derived from the conception of Greek religion. Marx, Shari'ati says, took this perspective as a universal religious perspective, as if religions are homogenous throughout societies. Marx, according to Shari'ati, sets up a straw-man attack on all religions, basing the attack on a particular conception which is inconsistent with many "Eastern" religions and incomprehensible in an Islamic framework – or, at least, within Shari'ati's Islamic schema. Marx's conception of the man-God relation, in terms of Greek mythology, posits a "bond of enmity between man and god" since the gods are "archetypes and expressions of natural forces" and seek dominance over man by these "physical forces".[160] "The greatest, most astounding sophistry that the modern humanist – from Diderot and Voltaire to Feuerbach and Marx – have committed," Shari'ati argues, is that "they have equated the mythical world of ancient Greece, which remains within the bounds of material nature, with the sacred and spiritual world of the great ancient religions."[161] Marx thus created a homogenous view of religion, one that views the relationship between God and human as oppositional and antagonistic.

The view of religion being based on enmity between human and God is what leads to the Marxist charge of the "the alienating effect of religion". It is this separation from God and this worshipping and servitude under an absolute other which brings human beings into a state of alienation and, as Shari'ati claims Marx believes, "if one can avoid this alienation, one will arrive at oneself, experiencing the self-awareness of *Homo homini deo* (man who is his own god)."[162] However, by positing that human, nature and God are in unity and, as we saw in the previous chapter, God and man are not absolutely distinct in the sense that the Greek conception of the man-God relationship is, then such a charge of alienation holds less validity. "Not only does

[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid., p18.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid., p53.

religion's alienating effect... not apply to Islam, but the opposite is true: man's alienation from himself before God is replaced by man's awareness of himself in relation to himself," insists Shari'ati.[163] Through the Islamic notion of *taqwa* (God consciousness)[164], Shari'ati says, the human becomes himself. Furthermore, the fetishized Marxist dictum that "It [religion] is the opium of the people"[165] holds little weight when considering Islam as articulated by Shari'ati and as in the discussions that thread through this paper. The form of religion articulated here creates a collective subjectivity that is ready and willing to revolt. That is, when Islam is followed in its true sense and not as a "religion of legitimation" of the status quo.

**The Religious Fanaticism of Materialist Dialectics**

A further aspect of Marxist thought propagated within the Iranian struggle and which attracted an attack from Shari'ati was Marx's articulation of dialectical materialism. Marx developed a particular teleological view of history in *The Communist Manifesto.*[166] He considers history as being a formulaic movement towards a certain end – a *telos.* Marx and Engels suggest that society experienced periodical shifts which ordered society in a particular hierarchical fashion and, when the time was right in each historical stage, contradictions within the social structure will result in revolt and a change in the ruling elite and the subjugated class, and the relations between them.[167] This will result in a new form of society which will, again, lead to more contradictions and the eventual overthrowing of the structures of power and their replacement. The bourgeois, capitalist society thus came about from the bourgeois revolt against the feudal lords in the feudal system. The capitalist society, with its bourgeois and working classes in a constant battle with each other, Marx and Engels argue, will provide the necessary conditions and contradictions for a final, proletarian revolution that will lead to the rule of the proletariat in socialism and the eventual collapse of the state to usher in the ideal classless, communist society that will see the end of history.

Marx "presents [man] as being in a state of evolution, moving forward with the historical dialectics, Shari'ati claims. "By this stratagem, Marx transfers humanity

[163] Ibid., p67.
[164] This concept was discussed in more detail in chapter two.
[165] Marx in Ibid., p56.
[166] Engels, F. and Marx, K. (2016). *The Communist Manifesto.* London, New York: Verso.
[167] Ibid.

from the realm of nature to that of history."[168] "But," Shari'ati continues, "man gains no nobility through this promotion. Since history, according to Marx, is 'the continuation of the movement of material nature,' man, in the context of history, is ultimately returned to the mechanical nature of the naturalists, to be conceived of as a material entity"[169] robbing the human of all value and agency. This view of history "withholds from humanity a crown of glory" and establishes, since it is teleological and definite, a determinism which "amounts to another chain".[170] Marx's view of history through dialectic materialism, thus

> *truly leads to the fettering of the human will, the source of man's primacy in the world, and ultimately plunges humanity into the same pit of fatalism that upholders of superstitions religious teachings (or rather, philosophers and theologians dependent upon the political establishment) dug for it.*[171]

Marx ends up sounding just as fanatical and superstitious as the religious leaders whom he had a "loathing" for. This view of history deeply troubled Shari'ati who insisted on the free will and agency that Islam bestows on human beings. Islam, he says, wants to exalt the human to the throne of their own destiny and establish a theology in which human beings are the makers of their own future. The human, according to dialectical materialism, is subjugated by the dialectics of history and is left as a "plaything" of history, floating about with no real say about what to do and who to become, argues Shari'ati. The agency of human beings, he says, becomes nothing but the inevitability of history. However, the future that Shari'ati would like to see emerge from the struggle against oppression and exploitation "is neither predestined nor prefabricated. Instead, it remains to be built."[172] This determinism is similar to the determinism spoken of by clergy who insist that everything is as it should be since everything is within the "Will of God" and, thus, any attempt at changing it would be futile. Shari'ati's reading of Marx's materialist dialectic begs the same question: if deliverance is inevitable, why revolt? True Islam, on the other hand, places the human alone as the responsible actor with agency within society to strive towards change and liberation and does not rely on any natural forces to decide human destiny in the world.

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[168] Shar'iati, *Marxism,* p29.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid., p35.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid., p95.

**Islam ≠ Marxism**

Having challenged Marxism on various fronts, Shari'ati exhibits the same disdain for those who sought to represent Islam as being similar to Marxism. These people who show the goodness of Islam by pointing to its likeness to Marxism made a huge mistake by confusing the "similarities in ideals" with the "similarities in ideology" and by not realizing that, in terms of their ideologies, these two schools of thought – Islam and Marxism – "are diametrically opposed".[173] This is an important intervention by Shari'ati since thought that seeks to make positive an image of Islam by showing its similarities to a Western epistemology falls into a major colonial trap, that of idolising Western epistemologies and unconsciously suggesting that it is only with reference to such thought that something can be judged as good and productive. This critique of Shari'ati is also an unapologetic insistence on a counter-hegemonic discourse and liberation theology.

Important in the difference between Marxism and Islam, says Shari'ati, is the Islamic negation of materialism and the fact that the "Islamic cosmology rests upon faith in the unseen".[174] Shari'ati insists on the unity of human beings, nature and God in a cosmos in which human beings and nature are both "manifestations of a single exalted essence" and that holds, within it, a reference to divinity. The human, thus, is not merely matter in the world but plays an important role as a vicegerent of God and the holder of the free will entrusted by God. Shari'ati reminds that the relationship between God and human beings should not be overlooked as this is a fundamental facet of Islam and is ultimately different to a Marxist, materialist conception of the human and the world. Important in this is the assertion of spirit into the ontology of man which moves away from a materialist conception towards one imbued with spirituality as well as with earthly responsibility. From Shari'ati's perspective, suggesting that Marxism and Islam are similar, I argue, is conceding to the "death of God," as perceived by some Western thinkers, and the revoking of the spirit, consequently bowing to the chains set by modernity in which "it is certainly difficult to speak of religion".[175]

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[173] Ibid., p63-65.
[174] Ibid., p65.
[175] Ibid., p49.

## Conclusion

"Humanism refers to the school that proclaims its essential goal to be the liberation and perfection of man, whom it considers a primary being, and principles of which are based on a response to those basic needs that form the specificity of man," Shari'ati explains.[176] Though Marx was anti-religious, Shari'ati saw in the young Marx strands of humanism which exalted the human into an agent of change and movement. Unfortunately, however, the old Marx's insistence on society as a super-structure undid this worth and nobility of human beings and made them a product of economic tools. Islam, on the other hand, posits the human as the maker of his own destiny, not determined by fixed, deterministic laws of materialist dialectics, even though some clergy may have, as a means to legitimate power, suggested that it is all God's and not human will. Islam, Shari'ati says, presents the greatest humanism since the human is bestowed with the spirit of God and is a free agent capable of anything.

Shari'ati's critique of Marxism regards the Marxist negation of religion and God as erroneously based on only one conception of God – akin to Greek mythology. His attack on Marxism was thus an attempt to expose the flaws of Marxism within the anti-Shah movement in Iran, an altogether different context from that in which Marx presented his ideas. Shari'ati's enlightened soul, the one who knows entirely the spirit of his society and people, would not make the mistake of importing Marxism to Iran and the Global South since it would have an alienating effect on that society, particularly with regard to the negation of religion. It was Shari'ati's aim to show how the Marxist critique of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran was not real critique in the Foucauldian sense but just mimickery unbecoming of an enlightened intellectual. Only Islam, according to Shari'ati, held the revolutionary key to unlock the urgency of the people and set forth a proper doctrine that would, through critique, see the ultimate challenge to the regime.

[176] Ibid., p17.

## Chapter 4: The Role of the Intellectual

### Introduction

It is clear that, for Shari'ati, the intelligentsia ought to play a pivotal role in the struggle for liberation. This is not to be a role of a leader or vanguard but of a guide. The intellectuals, that is the enlightened intellectuals, are individuals who emerge from the masses and understand the masses. They are the people who are trusted with undertaking the imperative task of identifying the ills of their society and, once doing so, transferring that knowledge in a practical way to the masses, inspiring a thirst for change to motivate the beginning of their journey towards revolution and emancipation. Iranian novelist and social commentator Jalal Al Ahmad popularised, in Iran, the concept of Westoxication which stripped the Iranians off of their identity and replaced it with a new "modern" one. What this did was, in removing the original identity, created a void which the natives sought to fill. However, this was not a free process of subject formation, but one that was already pre-determined by colonial, Western powers; the natives tended towards assimilation of Western ideals and identity which left them alienated and inauthentic.

Shari'ati identifies the intelligentsia as that body capable of and responsible for the removal of the imposter identity and replacing it with something else. The intelligentsia, in knowing the history and spirit of a society would be able to make a return to that self. However, Shari'ati was not convinced that the return to self would be a self that is located in the past. Instead, in understanding the past, one is able to understand oneself and, from there, the process of self-determination and the creation and emergence of a new man becomes possible. Furthermore, once the natives have been cleansed of the inauthentic self, they must be imbued with the spirit of revolution so that they may, once and for all, rid their society of the evils that permeate through their streets and minds. Shari'ati thus identifies the tasks of returning the masses to the self as well as inspiring in them a will for revolt by inserting in their consciousness the causes of the wrongs in their society. This chapter considers the role of the intellectual, that Shari'ati puts forward, within the liberation struggle against, particularly, external forces of domination.

## Westoxication

Iranian intellectual Jalal Al Ahmad popularised, in Iran, the term *gharzadegi* which has been translated to 'occidentosis,' 'Westruckness,' 'Westoxification' and 'Westoxication.'[177] The idea of Westoxication, offered by Ahmad, presents a "seething critique of the West's cultural hegemony in the Middle East."[178] Westoxication, as the word suggests, tenders an idea that Western culture and norms have been deliberately penetrated into the worlds of Africa, Asia and Latin America and polluted their modes of being. Westoxication has two opposing pole - East and West – which do not denote geographical or political conceptions, but economic concepts; "[t]he West comprises the sated nations and the East, the hungry nations."[179] Ahmad compares the power relationship between those sated nations and those who are hungry – Iran being one of them – as an asymmetrical one in which the one, the West, exerts an unequal power over the East which "resembles and infestation of weevils" that dig into wheat and destroy it from the inside leaving the bran intact, "but it is just a shell, like a cocoon left behind on a tree."[180] Alas, Westoxication describes the cultural infestation of the West onto and into the East, leaving Eastern, hungry nations with no soul or spirit of their own.

These two poles, furthermore and as alluded to, are poles signified by economics, first and foremost for Ahmad. It is a pole of producer and exporter on the one hand, and a consumer and importer on the other, who engage in "conflict" in the global market.[181] Even the rise of the Shah, for Ahmad, can be attributed to the will of Britain and the race for oil – this belief, Hanson suggests is common among Iranians.[182] Shari'ati holds a similar view which attributes colonialism and imperialism

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[177] Hanson, B. (1983). 'The "Westoxication" of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, al-e Ahmad, and Shariati' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 15, No. 1. 1-23, notes that although Ahmad did not coin the term, "he did more than any other Iranian to popularize the term and crystallize the issue for serious analysis within Iran." p8.
Though I have offered three words to equate for *gharbzadegi*, I will use, consistently 'Westoxication" as it most obviously and apparently offers a meaning for it.

[178] Varzi, R. (2011). 'Iran's Revolution: Religion, Philosophy and Crowds' in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences,* Vol. 637, *Race, Religion and Late Democracy.* p56.

[179] Ahmad, JA. (2016). 'Excerpts from Gharbzaadegi' in *Modern Iran: A History in Documents* (translated and edited by Nabavi, N). Princeston: Markus Wiener Publishers. p162.
"East" would denote what would ordinarily be referred to today as the global South.

[180] Ibid., p162-164.

[181] Ibid., p163.

[182] Hanson, *Westoxication,* p10.

with what he described as modernization in consumption. For Shari'ati, modernization was spread across the world by Western nations under the "guise of civilization" with an economic rationale of expanding markets into the 'East'[183]; that is, to create consumers out of those nations from the global South – modernizing for consumption.[184] Westoxication, in Shari'ati's view, was an imperative pre-condition for the West to expand their markets, in order to eat away at the particular wants and needs of that society in order to replace it with those similar to Western societies which would lead them to demand the consumption of Western produce. The West had to obliterate the native culture and, "overcome the influence of religion" since, Shari'ati insists, "religion causes any society to feel a distinctive individuality."[185] Modernization is thus, according to Shari'ati, "changing traditions, mode of consumption and material life from old to new."[186] That is, destroying the identity of a society in order to replace it with a false-identity which the native people will assimilate to and, in turn, consume what they are told to consume.

What holds important is that, for Shari'ati and akin to Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks*, there was an obliteration of a culture and identity and a replacement of a new one – an alien one. Like the black man in Fanon's writing who has only one "destiny" which is to try and be white,[187] the Iranian, the Muslim, through the negation administered by Westoxication, has only one destiny, to be Western and, in particular, Western in consumption. The notion of Westoxication thus becomes a focal point for the native, revolutionary intellectual to address within his society.

**Prophetic Function**

There has always existed a false impression that religion has throughout history, been at war with non-religion or atheism. As mentioned in a previous section, for Shari'ati, atheism, or, non-religion, is a fairly new concept which relates to the last two or three centuries[188] and, in the past, there have been two opposing poles which

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[183] I use 'East' in an Ahmadian sense pertaining to the Global South.

[184] Shari'ati, A. *Civilization and Modernization: Reflections of Humanity.* Available online: http://www.shariati.com/english/machine.html. Accessed: 22 August 2016.

[185] Ibid.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Fanon, F. (2008). *Black Skin, White Masks* (translated by Philcox, R). New York: Grove Press. pXIV.

[188] Shar'ati, *Religion,* p24.

both constituted religion: "Religion of Revolution" and "Religion of Legitimation."[189] For Shari'ati, it has been the religions of monotheism against that of multitheism which has always been at odds with one another where multitheism, represents the pole of oppression of people and the suppression of monotheism:

> *Multitheism means servitude. It means rebelling against the servitude to God and, at the same time, it mean surrender, disgrace and enslavement of humanity in bondage to the idols, that is, that which deceivers, liars, ignorance and oppression al; built with the help of one another is to invite people to servitude and worship of other than God.*[190]

This discussion seems to fall in line with a Qutbian conception of Islam in which rebellion against God is what causes man to oppress man and, only when God is placed above, as the sovereign, will man be freed from the chains of man.[191] However, I must insist, that this goes against the general spirit of Shari'ati's work and I would rather suggest that we consider this as the opposition to monotheism in the terms of the discussion to follow. For Shari'ati, multitheism has always represented a face of religion that used religion to oppress man and the religion of monotheism, that is, the religion of the Abrahamic prophets which represented the revolutionary face of religion and, alas, the true face of it. For Shari'iai, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and all with a similar message of equality and justice and the Oneness of God, were met with great repression from rulers who, under the guise of religion, sought to crush their surge against the status quo. These prophets spoke and acted out against the ruling powers and, firstly, came from, and also stood with the masses of people whom were objectified and oppressed by the rulers. The rulers did not fight the prophets because they did not believe in religion, but because the religion of these prophets spoke about truth and justice which was contrary to the face of the religion used by the rulers to oppress the people of their time and place; it was religion that's primary aim was to oppose and destroy the current order and societal structure.

For Shari'ati, what is imperative for the intellectual in Muslim societies is to continue this prophetic function and tradition. That is, to continue to fight the religion of legitimation by using the religion of revolution which he suggests Islam, in its true

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[189] Burgess, A. Foreward in Shari'ati, *Religion,* p5.
[190] Shari'ati, *Religion,* p35.
[191] See Qutb, *Milestones,* p7-15.

sense, exemplifies. What must be brought to the fore is "a struggle against religion for the establishment and revival of religion," that is, "the establishment of a religion which in history was not realised and people have to grow and develop so much that they find and awaken their consciousness and religious consciousness."[192] Important to recall is that Shari'ati did not only fight against the forces of Westoxication which sought to destroy the native religions of the people, but also against the clergy in Iran and in other Muslim societies which acted to uphold the status quo. Nevertheless, for Shari'ati, an intellectual, and particularly a Muslim intellectual, should follow in the footsteps of the prophets who brought the word of religion of justice and bring consciousness to the people so that a revival of a movement against oppression can take place. As Shari'ati states, "the responsibility and the rule of contemporary [intellectuals] of the world resemble that of the prophets and the founders of the great religions – revolutionary leaders who promoted fundamental structural changes in the past."[193]

**Guidance, Not Leadership**

Shari'ati was left uneasy with a trend regarding the intelligentsia vis-à-vis the masses. His concern pertains to the "gap" between the intelligentsia in a society and the masses in which the intellectuals are "trained inside invincible fortresses" and "pursue life in ivory towers" leaving the uneducated masses starved of their wisdom and support.[194] There exists a double-edged alienation in this structure; on the one hand, the masses are alienated from the expertise of the intelligentsia and, on the other, the intelligentsia are alienated from the people and their society. According to Shari'ati, "[t]he greatest responsibility" for those who have taken up the task of creating movement and change in their societies is to bridge the gap between theory and practice and pull together the intelligentsia and intellectuals into one, solid movement.[195]

As mentioned, Shari'ati believed strongly that just as the great prophets came from the masses, so too must the intellectuals who will create consciousness within society. This commonality helps mediate the gap between the intellectual and the

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[192] Shari'ati, *Religion,* p55.
[193] Shari'ati, A. *Where Shall We Begin?*
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.

people since the intellectual is of and from the people, the mass. For Shari'ati, the enlightened intellectual, the one who is from the masses and understands and shares their inner pains is not necessarily one who holds a university education, but rather, one who understands his society; he is, as was discussed in the previous chapter, an enlightened soul.[196] The intellectual is not to lead society and doing so accounts for "one of the most serious mistakes" since, he continues, "the most worthless elements for leading people are [intellectuals]."[197] He insists:

> *the revolutionary leaders are from among the masses and the common people. [Intellectuals] have always been the worst disaster for revolutions...Unfortunately, those societies which have had successful revolutions became conservative and corrupt when intellectuals and the educated wrested the leadership from the revolutionaries. Tunis is a typical example. Therefore, the function of [intellectuals] is not the political leadership of society, rather, their sole job is to bestow awareness on the masses, that's all. If a[n intellectual] can awaken his society, the product of his mission will be heroes who can lead [intellectuals] themselves.*[198]

It is thus important that the intellectual is from among the people himself so that he knows the language, heritage and life of the people and may then begin to conscientise them so that they, themselves, may be equipped with the sufficient tools to take the revolution forward and lead themselves – of which the intellectuals will form a part of. This will enable the intellectual to understand the present; the here and now.

**The Mission of the Intellectual**

I have identified two main interventions that the intellectual should engage in vis-à-vis the masses. The first is that the intellectual, being from the people and knowing the present and the history, must reconstruct and restore a form of identity to the people and, secondly, must insert the pains and contradictions of a society that have been masked and forgotten into the consciousness of the people of that society.

*1. Forging Identity*

In terms of Westoxication discussed earlier, we understand that, for Shari'ati, colonialism and imperialism through modernization has come to strip natives in

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[196] Ibid.

[197] Shari'ati, A. *Mission of a Free Thinker.* Available online: http://www.shariati.com/english/mission/mission1.html. Accessed: 8 October 2017.

[198] Ibid.

Africa, Asia and Latin America off of their native identities and cultures in order to create a uniform man for uniform consumption. For Shari'ati, this brings about a problem for a society which is empty like the wheat destroyed by the infestation from the inside left as nothing but shells to be filled by whatever the powers deem necessary. This is why a society needs to be enriched with an identity first since "a society which lacks spiritual character will always be a consumer."[199] It is thus imperative to create an identity within society first, before attempting anything else – "cultural" liberation, for Shari'ati, comes before economic or any other kind:

> *As long as man has not gained self-consciousness, he cannot have economic consciousness. He must become a human first; think, choose, create, quit regurgitating European talks, and instead talk about himself. In order to become independent of the West, I must get to know her and reach a stage of 'mental independence.'*[200]

What is proposed, is for the revolutionary intellectual to mediate, first, a *return to self*. But what does this actually mean?

First and foremost it is imperative that native intellectuals escape from the seductions of the West and move away from assimilation. Fanon identifies this assimilation as the first phase of the native intellectual in which his "works correspond point by point with those of his metropolitan counterparts."[201] This phase of assimilation was identified by Shari'ati too as he postulates that the intellectuals "have their mouths open for any European cultural morsels."[202] This of course is a stage that the intellectual needed to immediately escape from as no revolutionary good would be resultant from the assimilation of the native intelligentsia. The intellectuals should instead think about their own society and, in doing this, administer a return to self of the masses.

Of course, as should be clear, this return would differ from place to place and context to context. However, within an Iranian context; or, a context in which the society in an Islamic society, the return will be to "a religious self."[203] Fanon attributes a return

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199 Shari'ati, *Free Thinker.*

200 Ibid.

201 Fanon, F. (2004). *The Wretched of the Earth* (translate by Richard Philcox). New York: Grovw Press. P159..

202 Shari'ati, A. *Man and Islam: Extraction and Refinement of Cultural Resources.* Available online: http://www.shariati.com/english/culture.html. Accessed: 9 September 2016.

203 Davari, A. (2014). 'A Return to Which Self?' in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* Vol. 34, No. 1. p89.

to a past as within the realm of the second stage in which the colonised intellectual, in attempt to escape from his assimilation and alienation, immersing himself in his geographic and historical past which he insists will lead, eventually, to stagnation.[204] Shari'ati's return, however, is not a project of returning to a stagnant past but to a feeling in the present based on a history: "if you have heard that I emphasize religion, that I emphasise Islam [on the issue of 'Return to Self'], my emphasis is on a reformed and reconsidered Islam... an Islamic renaissance movement."[205] It is thus a formulation of a present self based on a real spiritual feeling rooted in the past – a past that the West has attempted to wholly erase. So, as Shari'ati posits, it is not so much a return to a universal self, but a "Return to One's Own Culture, and learning from that self."[206] Shari'ati explains:

> *It is in this line of study that we reach "the return to Islamic culture and ideology," where Islam is not a tradition, a heritage or a belief system in society, but an ideology, a faith that brought awareness and created a miracle in this same society.*[207]

He continues,

> *In truth, the emphasis is not on the basis of an inherited religious feeling, or a dry pious feeling; rather, it is on the basis of an intellectual motto which is put forth by all intellectuals on a global scale.*[208]

It is thus not a return to a static historical past but a return to a self "that is actual and present in the consciousness of society."[209] In Iran the return to self must be a return to an Islamic culture, a culture as a moving and working ideology – the only ideology that captures the spirit and feelings of the people of that society. The same self that has been removed from the people through Westoxication and created alienated, lost individuals. It is the return to the Islamic self that, for Shari'ati, will fill the spirit of the people of Iran and Muslim societies because it is the only culture and ideology that "is closer to us than anything us."[210] But of course, this return must not be a nostalgic regurgitation of the past, but an understanding of a heritage and a history

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[204] Fanon, *Wretched,* p159.

[205] Shari'ati, A. (2016). 'Excerpts from Return to Self' in *Modern Iran: A History in Documents* (translated and edited by Nabavi, N). Princeston: Markus Wiener Publishers. p167.

[206] Ibid., p168.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Ibid., p169.

[210] Ibid.

that assists in the reformulation of a set of Islamic ideals that Iranians and Muslims hold so dearly.

*2. Igniting the Consciousness of the People*

It is, for Shari'ati, important that the intellectual understands his society and people and everything that belongs to that society so that he may be able to know the reason for its deficiencies. It is important for this enlightened intellectual to identify the "real causes of backwardness" and the "causes of stagnation and degeneration" in his society and among the people of his society.[211] And, in doing so, it is up to these individuals to "transfer the shortcomings and abnormalities of his society into the mind and conscience of the members of that society."[212] Once that is done, Shari'ati suggests, the people will continue the struggle and take over. Fanon's third stage of the native intellectual is the "combat stage" in which the intellectual galvanises the people's consciousness to creative a revolutionary collective subject. [213] It is by knowing the history and insisting on an understanding of the past, albeit not an obsession with it, that the intellectual can reach this phase in which he relates the struggle of society to the people.

For Shari'ati the intellectuals role is to create awareness about the social, political and economic ills of society and ensure that "contradictions must enter [the] subjectivity" of the people.[214] The intellectual, knowing what the society feels and understanding its pains can create consciousness amongst the masses and once this consciousness is created they should step back – not lead. The masses, with this new consciousness, will know better than anyone how to move forward and make the tangible and concrete changes that are required to deliver the society to liberation and emancipation from the identified ills.

Although it would be naïve to suggest that Shari'ati had a real, concrete insistence on a timeline of first creating an identity and then creating another consciousness and movement, it is important to mention that he did give some kind of privilege to the return to self. He saw it as imperative and a precondition for real change to take

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[211] Shari'ati, *Where Shall We Begin?*
[212] Ibid.
[213] Fanon, *Wretched,* p159.
[214] Shari'ati, *Free Thinker.*

place. Qutb takes the Qur'an and uses its sequence of revelation as a methodology for the emergence and rise of an Islamic society. For Qutb, it was important that an Islamic soul enters into the subjectivity of the people in order for an honest and just Islamic society may be forged.[215] A comparison could be made from this Qutbian methodology with what Shari'ati may be suggesting. Perhaps, Shari'ati follows a similar methodology of first cleansing and establishing a spirit before creating a concrete movement that will establish a social, political and economic order – otherwise they will be mere consumers. However, Shari'ati's claims do suggest that instilling an identity amongst the people should come first, I would take this as rhetoric and suggest that he was serious about his claim that "speaking and acting, analyzing and applying, must always be joined together."[216] It would certainly, considering Shari'ati's context and actions, be erroneous to suggest that Shari'ati seriously sought a halt in praxis so that the theoretical dimension could be completed. Certainly it is within the praxis of struggle that the emergence and effectiveness of a theoretcal framework may have any relevance and effect at all.

**Conclusion**

The intellectual that is privileged as one who is to play a vital role in the revolution is the enlightened one, as per Shari'ati's conception of an enlightened soul highlighted in the previous chapter. This intellectual is one who understands the spirit of his society and is able to identify and diagnose the reason for its destitution and ills. The intellectual in Iran, and in the third-world, ought to understand that colonialism and imperialism which have led to Western hegemony has infested societies with Westoxication leaving natives of the third-world as colonial subjects, eating out of the hands of the Western powers. The intellectual has the task of removing this alien and imposed subjectivity and reinserting one that acknowledge the past and history of the society that has almost been erased. By doing so, however, Shari'ati does not insist on a return to that self or those modes of being that are in the past; indeed this will be a futile activity. By understanding the past, the intellectuals and society are able to engage in struggle to grasp at a new identity that is based on the past but geared towards the future, and towards the formation of a new man. In Muslim societies, it is important that the people have an Islamic spirit and ignoring and

[215] Qutb, *Milestones,* p26-54.
[216] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p41.

placing Islam aside would be a grave mistake, furthering the process of alienation. In these societies, a return to an Islamic identity, an ever-changing identity based on Islamic principles and virtues is necessary in reaching authentic being. Furthermore, the intellectual must engage in an outright process of mobilization by inserting into the minds of the people a sense of the wrongs in society so that may awaken and rise towards realising a future which they are no longer held subjugated by forces of oppression.

## Chapter 5: Resistance, Death and Being

### Introduction

Our discussion until now has, in a way, being a build up to this section of the paper. I have thus far gone through Shari'ati's thoughts on how an Islamic hermeneutic can provide a rationale – and indeed insist on – a revolutionary Islamic subjectivity. However, I now focus precisely on revolutionary praxis and, although the previous section on the intellectual does speak to an important facet of praxis, here I focus specifically on praxis as insurrectionary action. That is, how does Shari'ati promote an idea of active and physical political engagement. In beginning this discussion I go through Shari'ati's "philosophies" of history and sociology which position history and society of one with inherent contradiction. That is, that throughout history, societies have been characterised by a notion of antagonism and struggle between the oppressor and oppressed. What is important, however, is the way in which Shari'ati's Islamic hermeneutic positions Islam precisely on the side of the oppressed and calls Muslims forward to engage in active political action.

I argue that Shari'ati presents his insurrectionary discourse in his discussion of the martyr in Islam. Shari'ati celebrates the idea of the martyr in Islam as, in a sense, the highest and most exalted form of being. That is, the most authentic and absolute form of being. I will thus analyse Shari'atis discussion of the martyr and propose that it is through these sets of propositions that we may find a distinct call towards insurrectionary action. The martyr, in Shari'ati's argument, I will argue, presents a certain type of being, one that is authentic in a Heideggerian sense which I will briefly examine. In privileging the status of the martyr, I argue that, Shari'ati presents a call for action and an inspiration to use the body and mind as a weapon in a direct sense:

### History and Society as Contradiction

An important entry point in delineating how Shari'ati posited Islam as a religion of struggle and revolution is to consider his "philosophy of history" as well as his "philosophy of sociology." Now it must be stated from the onset that what these "philosophies" point to, as I see it, is no real theory of history or sociology but as a view and tale, of sorts, to speak to the Islamic conscience of the people and awaken

a spirit of resistance and collective consciousness and subjectivity. The "philosophies" under consideration find their foundations in the Biblical story of Cain and Abel – the sons of the first of creation, Adam and Eve – which is briefly mentioned in the Qur'an:

> *And recite to them the story of Adam's two sons, in truth, when they both offered a sacrifice [to Allah], and it was accepted from one of them but was not accepted from the other. Said [the latter], "I will surely kill you." Said [the former], "Indeed, Allah only accepts from the righteous [who fear Him].*[217]

This verse, as can be seen, does not even mention the names of Adam's son but Shari'ati takes the details of the story from the Hebrew Bible which, Algar explains:

> *It is said that both Abel and Cain had twin sisters, and Adam decided that each should marry the other's twin sister. But Cain regarded his own twin sister as more beautiful than Abel's and therefore determined to marry her, not shrinking even from the murder of his brother in order to gain his wish.*[218]

I will not repeat or examine the story but instead consider how Shari'ati invokes it in his "philosophy" of history and sociology. At the end of the day, out of jealousy for Abel, Cain kills him. This act of defiance to God by Cain, for Shari'ati, signifies the beginning of history as well as the nature of society. What he means by the beginning of history though, is the beginning of dialectic contradiction in society. That is, the moment when society is split into two camps and, thus, the conflict between the two creates continuous movement in society. "The war between Cain and Abel," Shari'ati insists, "is the war between two opposing fronts that have existed throughout history, in the form of a historical dialectic."[219] Abel and Cain present two poles in society, that of "killer and victim" or, "ruler and ruled" which have been a feature of society throughout history – society has consisted of the two antagonistic camps, one on top, and one at the bottom; that is, the oppressor and the oppressed. The story depicts the "tale of bifurcated humanity in all ages, the beginning of a war

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[217] Qur'an (5:27)

[218] Algar, H. in Shari'ati, *Soiciology of Islam,* p98, fn: 1.
Naturally, this incestuous and patriarchal parable may invoke an intense repugnance within us, but nevertheless, we will attempt to suppress it for now and consider the point at offer.

[219] Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p98.

that is still not concluded"[220] and the beginning of a war that, in Shari'ati's view, will continue until the end of history – the end of the world?

Undeniable is a certain contradiction here. Shari'iati attacked Marx's dialectic materialism for preaching a teleology that will ultimately and naturally deliver man to an end of exploitation in communism. Shari'ati, however, presents a view of history that is in the state of "permanent"[221] war between the rulers and the ruled but will eventually lead to "the end of time... when Cain dies and the 'system of Abel' is established anew."[222] "This inevitable revolution," Shari'ati claims, "will mean the end of the history of Cain; equality will be realised throughout the world, and human unity and brotherhood will be established, through equity and justice."[223] There is no doubt that Shari'ati presents a teleological view of history akin to Marx, *sans* the terminology of 'communism.' However, what Shari'ati is implying here is unclear. It not certainly stated whether the "inevitable revolution" will be a final revolution that will deliver justice and equality to earth eternally, or whether this "end of time" suggests that the final revolution will usher in the end of the world. Either way, presented is, in fact, a teleological view of history borne out of dialectic social contradictions which will, for Shari'ati, inevitably come to a final resolution. On this, I suggest that what is important, for Shari'ati, is the notion of constant struggle in this life and choosing the path of Islam; that is, the side of Abel in the present. This does not resolve the likeliness, though, of Marx's dialectic materialism as explained and critiqued by Shari'ati; certainly Marx too made the call for revolt in the present as well.

The "pole" of Cain, in society, represents the "ruler," owner," and "aristocrat" and the "pole" of Abel "the ruled," "the people."[224] Importantly, the latter camp; that is the camp of the people – of Abel – is the camp of Allah, God.[225] The people, the people of Abel, represent the righteous cause and Cain's the corrupted rulers and oppressors who rule over societies and exploit and destroy the masses and the down trodden. What is clear, for Shari'ati, is that "[i]t is the responsibility of every

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[220] Ibid., p108.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid., p9.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid., p115-116.
[225] Ibid., p118.

individual in every age to determine his stance in the constant struggle between the two wings."[226] The individual must choose, with engagement in society, whether to then choose mud or spirit – Satan or God.

**Islam: Religion of Revolution**

It has already been mentioned that, with the use of Shari'ati's hermeneutic tools, Islam presents a religion with a "revolutionary notion." However, this has not been yet explained in terms of a movement. Islam, that is, true Islam, favours the camp of Abel and insists on individual and collective action against oppression and opposes becoming mere spectators of historical contradiction. As Shari'ati puts it, "Islam pays attention to bread, its eschatology is based on active life in the world, its God respects human dignity and its messenger is armed."[227] Every Muslim, for Shari'ati, ought to take this role of messenger, as an armed and active member of society, on the side of the oppressed; in the trenches of Abel. Islam is a religion of *Jihad;* that is, constant striving towards *Adlat* (Justice). "'Adlat," according to Shari'ati, "is not simply a religious principle but the spirit that governs all aspects of Islam, and is considered the very objective for which the prophets were sent. The muslim community; that is, the muslim *Umma*[228] – the ideal society – has the mission of justice and is imbued with the responsibility to, through whatever means necessary, strive towards it, as is consistent with the prophetic tradition.

So it is clear, Islam has an objective cause – a revolutionary goal. It is not a religion that stands in support of the status quo, nor does it straddle the death-bed of indifference. It is a religion that does not, as many of the clergy might claim, isolate worship to the confines of the *masjid* - A Muslim's 'place of worship.' Of course the notion of a place of worship is here being completely deconstructed as, in this Islamic worldview, the place of worship is the entire earth – as God's vicegerents on earth – and cannot be limited in prayer within humanly constructed walls. Worship is struggle and struggle is worship. Shari'ati's Islam is a complete negation of Islamic mysticism which transforms man into "a kind of egotism" where "each is searching

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[226] Ibid., p109.

[227] Shari'ati, *Where Shall We Begin?*

[228] "The word ummah derives from the word amm, which has the sense of path and intention. The ummah, therefore, is a society in which a number of individuals, possessing a common faith and goal, come together in harmony with the intention of advancing and moving toward their common goal." Shari'ati, *Sociology of Islam,* p119.

for a way to go to paradise alone."[229] For Shari'ati, worship as mysticism, as a self-fulfilling ideal, is not the point of Islam as Islam deals with issues of bread. Mysticism which confines worship to an individualistic interpretation of the man-God relation, for Shari'ati, robs man of his social responsibility in the world and, in a sense, makes him "less than an animal" since even animals feels "instinctive sympathy towards others."[230] Furthermore, the clergy who posit history as a religious and spiritual deterministic realm in which God's Will is absolute and infinite have misunderstood and misinterpreted true Islam and only seem to propagate religion of the rulers, at the expense of the real, revolutionary Islam of the masses. This type of clergy thinking acts as a "cancer" in society and stifles real consciousness and movement in society.[231]

Neither isolationism nor complete trust in the deterministic will of God, for Shari'ati, posits a complete Islamic worldview, these serving as nothing but the opaque left-hand of power, mediating the anger of the masses and pacifying them to the reality of their conditions, and importantly, of the conditions of the worst off in society. It is thus, an Islamic notion that to worship, is to revolt!:

> *And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, "Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper? Those who believe fight in the cause of Allah , and those who disbelieve fight in the cause of Taghut. So fight against the allies of Satan. Indeed, the plot of Satan has ever been weak.*[232]

And of course, this Islamic duty is for every Muslim to take on until the end – the end of history:

> *And fight them on until there is no more tumult and oppression and there prevails justice and faith in God altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily God sees all that they do.*[233]

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229 Shari'ati, *Marxism,* p114.
230 Ibid., p115.
231 Shari'ati, *Martyrdom,* p18.
232 Qur'an (4: 75-76)
233 Qur'an (8: 39)

Every Muslim has the duty to propagate for and actively engage in the process of revolution. Islam is about bringing about justice and equality and it thus becomes the duty of every Muslim to be an active participant in the movement towards the ideal.

**Insurrectionary Discourse**

According to Davari, Shari'ati, like Fanon, viewed insurrectionary violence as both a means and an end.[234] Shari'ati's discussion on insurrectionary action is not as straight forwardly put as Fanon's who claims that "decolonization is always a violent event" and overtly insists that "the last (colonized natives) can be first only after a murderous and decisive confrontation between the two protagonists (colonized and colonizer)." [235] For Fanon, it was imperative in the struggle that a mass violent overhaul of power takes place with the colonized violently destroying the colonial structure and, in turn, being rewarded with a sense of self-worth as well as a place above the colonizer – a master in his own land. With Shari'ati, his call for insurrectionary action cannot be seen in a direct provocation to masses of people to flood the streets and storm the Bastille. Instead, I read a call to physical insurrection in a more symbolic discussion on his theories of martyrdom and its place in Shi'ism, Islam and in struggle in general. Of course, Shari'ati's immediate setting did not allow him to, in his speeches, speak directly about mass revolt as his every word was being monitored by the SAVAK and he would have been arrested. So this is a more carefully and strategically engineered discussion promoting insurrectionary violence and the use of the body as a weapon for the ideal. In speaking about and romantacising the notion of the death of the martyr, Shari'ati promoted an idea of physical revolution in the most radical sense possible.

**Martyrdom**

As mentioned, Shari'ati mobilization towards insurrectionary action can be understood in the analysis of his discussion of martyrdom. For Shari'ati, there was a profound value in the life and, more importantly, death of a martyr that requires careful consideration when thinking about resistance and revolt. The word martyr

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234 Davari, *Return,* p96.

235 Fanon, *Wretched,* p1-3.

means "the one who dies for God and faith."[236] It is one who dies in the pursuit of the cause, the divine cause; and, in Islam, this is the cause of justice. This presents, however, only a technical definition of a martyr, for Shari'ati and is, in fact, incomplete as per the Islamic tradition and Islamic use of the word. A shahid, that is, a martyr in the Islamic sense of the word, is one who is not dead or gone but one who is "alive and present."[237] A reading of this understanding of shahid can be understood in conjunction with the Qur'anic verse in which God exclaims: "And say not of those who are slain in God's cause, "They are dead": nay, they are alive, but you perceive it not."[238] There is profound meaning in this verse and in what Shari'ati is suggesting about the shahid which serves as the focal point for his discussion and celebration for the concept of shahadat, or, martyrdom. What Shari'ati presents in his romantacisation, celebration and promotion of the ideal of shahid is, in turn, I would suggest, a promotion of that very ideal and an abstract push towards the mobilization for Jihad; his goal is to enter the consciousness of his audience and plant the seed of revolution and striving towards justice.

**Being-Towards-Death**

Shari'ati makes note of two different kinds of martyrs in Islam. The first one is exemplified by the Prophet's companion who was killed in battle during the battle of Uhud – Hamzah – who Shari'ati calls "the master of masters."[239] Hamzah, a *mujahid* (one who is engaged in the act of jihad),[240] is killed in battle, fighting in the cause of God. His aim was to fight and kill the enemy, but in a tragic turn of events he, like many other *mujahidin*,[241] pays the ultimate price. In this instance, the "death is a tragedy" to be "wailed and eulogized."[242] Shahadat chooses the man who acknowledged the finitude of his life and stared the possibility of death straight in the face when he went into battle in pursuit of the divine cause; but, in the effort to kill

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[236] Shari'ati, A. *Jihad & Shahadat: A Discussion of Shahid. Available online: http://www.shariati.com/english/jihadand.html. Accessed: 23 June 2016.*

[237] Ibid.

[238] Qur'an (2:154)

[239] Shari'ati, *Jihad.*

[240] "The mujahid is a sincere warrior who, for the sake of defending his belief and community or spreading and glorifying his faith and community, rises so that he may break, devastate, and conquer the enemy who block or endangers his path." Ibid.

[241] Plural for Mujahid.

[242] Ibid.

the enemy, he was killed. The enemy negated his life and afforded him the most noblest of titles in Islam – shahid. Of course, although not clearly expected, there was an acceptance of the potentiality and, indeed, probability of death; but Hamzah picked up the sword and strove towards the goal of justice in the hopes of victory in battle, to offer everything possible which eventually led to the demise of his body. A shahid in this sense is an authentic being who acknowledges and accepts the possibility and potentiality of death and engages in the noble act of jihad with the consciousness of the possibility of death.

There exists an authentic being-towards-death, in a Heideggerian sense, in this act of jihad since the mujahid acknowledges and accepts the possibility of death. For Heidegger, death becomes an important topic when considering a move from an inauthentic to an authentic mode of being. Particularly, man or Dasein, is able to come to an authentic being by embracing the "possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all."[243] That is, when Dasein comes to terms with his own finitude and accepts the inevitability of his own death; the one thing that separates him from everything else in the world and the one occurrence that he has to face wholly on his own. It is thus the "possibility which is one's ownmost."[244] The mujahid has come to terms with this possibility of death and encounters it head-on in the pursuit of his cause. He has, to use a Heideggerian term, an "anticipation" towards death and does not attempt to flee from its inevitability but, in a radical sense, engages its omnipresent possibility in a courageous act of struggle. Hamzah, the master of martyrs, along with all the other shuhada, pay the ultimate price; a price that they, in the attempt to fulfil their mission, did not try to escape. Instead, Hamza acknowledged the possibility of the end of his life and, in fact, decided to meet it face-to-face in the battle-field instead of avoiding and running away from it. The mujahidin thus lives – when we consider his life as jihad – an authentic being-towards-death.

**Being-In-Death**

However, there is also another kind of shahid that, though not repudiating or devaluing the first, Shari'ati, in tone and substance, privileges over and above the

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[243] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* p307.
[244] Ibid.

first kind. This type of shahid is exemplified, for Shari'ati, by the grandson of the Prophet – Hussayn. This shahid is a shahid of a much more exalted status; he is the shahid who is not chosen by death to be a martyr, but chooses even before death that he is to reach the ideal of shahid.[245] There is a very important point to be made about this type of shahid, for Shari'ati, and that is about the possibilities of resistance. In the instance of Hamzah – the mujahid *cum* shahid – there is a potential for direct combat; that is, there are resources and man power available to engage in physical warfare. But in the case of Hussayn, there is none, "[t]here is only one man – a lonely man"[246] who has very little strategic possibilities for resistance. Hussayn does not have an army nor does he have arms, he is alone and is left with the decision, to both be silent and ignore injustice, or to find a way to resist. Hussayn, the lonely and marginalized, chooses the latter. In choosing the latter, death is chosen. So, unlike the shahid exemplified by Hamzah who is chosen to be shahid, Hussayn makes the choice himself. There is a profound welcoming of death and, as opposed to the negation by the enemy, a sincere self-negation in which the individual stands up to die:

> *Martyrdom: To arise and bear witness in our culture and in our religion is not a bloody and accidental happening... martyrdom is not a death imposed by an enemy upon our warriors. It is a death which is desired by our warrior, selected with all of the awareness, logic, reasoning, intelligence, understanding, consciousness and alertness that a human being has.*[247]

For Shari'ati there is an important and sacred function of such self-negation that is undertaken by the shahid when he chooses death. This is the function – the most revolutionary function – of "exposing what is being covered up."[248] Shari'ati explains:

> *Once upon a time a truth was an appealing precept. Everyone followed it and it was sacred. All powers surrounded it. But gradually in time, because that truth did not serve the interests of a minority and was dangerous for a group, it was conspired against in order to erase it from the minds and lives of the people. In order to fill its place, some other issue was supplanted. Gradually the original issue was completely lost and in its place other issues were discussed.*

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[245] Shari'ati, Jihad.
[246] Shari'ati, *Martyrdom,* p31.
[247] Ibid., p34.
[248] Shari'ati, *Jihad.*

*In this situation, the shahid, in order to revive the original issue, sacrifices his own life, and thus brings the démodé precept back into attention by repulsion of its sham substitute.*[249]

The function of this shahid is to bring to the fore issues that have been covered up and suppressed by power. It is a positive act of remembering and reminding. An act which is a scream, a shout, a claim that all is not okay; a testament that injustice has overridden the lives of the people and rulers have normalised these ideas of oppression – an accusation that the masses have become stagnant. "For the purpose of reviving the issue," Shari'ati states, "the shahid arises."[250] With no army, no arms, the shahid negates his very material existence. He let's go of his mortal existence in a revolutionary act of reminding. This act of self-negation, ironically, leads to the immortalisation of he who chooses to die. In this revolutionary act of self-negation the shahid not only forwards the cause, but becomes the cause himself: "A shahid is the one who negates his whole existence for the sacred ideal in which we all believe. It is natural then, that all the sacredness of that ideal and goal transports itself into his existence."[251] The martyr becomes immortalised in the very cause in which he is fighting for. The shahid becomes a sacred figure, imprinted in history and imbued with spiritual value. Death is not a tragedy, but an ideal; "it is an ideology" and a means in which hope is exhumed from the deep crevices of the people's consciousness. This act of immortalisation is apparent in the way the shahid, in choosing death and negating his individual self, becomes "thought itself."[252] The shahid becomes the torch bearer exposing truth that has been hidden for far too long and the inspiration behind a whole new ideology and consciousness that represents the people of Abel; that exemplifies the very truths of Islam and that makes the assertion that resistance will never die. For Foucault this Shahid becomes "the invisible present;"[253] the memory and symbol that is the struggle.

The sanctity of this shahid, the spiritual value that he presents is not, as is commonly considered, important, for Shari'ati, for the reward in the afterlife. Like Heidegger, Shari'ati's conception of death presents a wholly worldly idea that correlates with

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[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Foucault, M. (2005). 'What are the Iranians Dreaming About?' in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Afary, J. and Anderson, KB.) Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press. p207.

Heidegger's Being-towards-death as the shahid, before achieving the sanctity, is, in a much more radical sense than Heidegger's authentic Dasein, aware and inviting of the possibility of impossibility and, in fact invites this inevitability so that he may arrive at Being-in-death. It is a journey from the choice between inauthenticity in silence and authenticity in resistence to being-towards-death in the choice to stand up and acknowledge embrace the possibility of death in the most radical sense since death here is chosen. In choosing death, the martyr makes a further move from being-towards-death to being-in-death. For Shari'ati, the shahid achieves the status of "absolute man" as he is no longer a man, but thought, idea and movement; it is true authenticity. For Heidegger, since death is one's "ownmost" possibility, man is afforded the authenticity since he becomes a being for himself as opposed to a being for others; authenticity is concerned with moving away from the "they" towards the "I" and death, in being the most radically individual concept, allows for this. My reading of Shari'ati, on the other hand, negates the idea of authenticity, in this instance, as an individualising and a being-for-self since this "absolute man" comes to be precise because of the being-for-others and, to be more precise, the being-for-justice. Shari'ati thus takes being-towards-death and translates it into being-in-death which is valuable, authentic and absolute precisely because it is being-for-they and not being-for-himself. It is in this moment, this moment of self-negation, that the individual "becomes the crystallization if that collective spirit called a movement."[254] A being-towards-death as a conscious final stand to become a being-in-death, not for reaching authenticity for one's own individuality, but authenticity for the collective, for the ideal and for God. It is this moment that the impossibility of the infinite being is realised, man, the individual, completes that journey from mud to spirit successfully – man, in this instance reaches the ultimate form by negating his physical existence, man becomes the spirit of God.[255]

## Conclusion

History, for Shari'ati, can be characterised as a constant and permanent conflict between those at the top and those at the bottom of society. The rulers oppress the masses and in a selfish way, go to any lengths, at the expense of the people, to maintain a level of absolute superiority. Islam, however, makes the call that it is the

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[254] Shari'ati, *Jihad.*

[255] Shari'ati, *Martyrdom,* p40.

duty of a Muslim and a Muslim collective to forge a revolutionary subjectivity and oppose the oppressors of every society. It is an Islamic duty to raise one's voice against all forms of subjugation and take the side, in every instance, of those most disenfranchised in society. Taking a stand should not be taken lightly. It is not merely an act of speaking out or raising one's voice but, if strategic considerations call for it, it is call for direct and physical action against an oppressive order. Shari'ati's martyrs exemplified in Hamzah in the first case and Hussayn in the second present an inspiration to individuals to not fear death but embrace it and engage in an active "being-in-death." Even when hopes are lost and there are no other alternatives since resources for revolt are scarce, Muslims should remember the revolutionary self-negation of Hussayn and stand firm and remove the covers that have been placed over injustice. Islam, as a revolutionary religion, condemns indifference just as it condemns injustice and it is thus the duty of every Muslim to rise and "bear witness" to the ills of society and seek, by whatever means necessary, an end to subjugation.By way of conclusion it seems important to together the threads discussed in this research report. I have undertaken a theoretical study of the thought of Ali Shari'ati which were presented in the many speeches that he delivered in Iran during his life (which ended two years before the revolution took place in 1976. Shari'ati is considered to be one of the main ideologues that inspired the revolutionary spirit of, particularly, the Iranian youth to revolt against the Pahlavi dynasty. My study considered various themes within his numerous speeches and sought to present a theoretically productive trajectory of his thinking. In doing so, I identified and discussed five major interrelated themes that, I argue, allows for a presentation of a coherent Shari'atian revolutionary and decolonial schema. The thematic considerations that I undertook were his Islamic hermeneutics, his ontology, his epistemology, his discussion of the role of the intellectual in the revolution as well as his insurrectionary discourse which dealt with the Islamic conception of martyrdom.

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## Chapter Summary

Shari'ati saw an important task in reconstructing an Islam understanding from the very foundation since the clergy that he had encountered in Iran had served the interest of the regime and the status quo, particularly in the way in which they propagated Islam as religion that should be confined to worship within a mosque as well as their deterministic insistence that action is futile since it is ultimately the will of God and God alone that will bring movement or stagnation to any society. For Shari'ati, this was a fundamental misrepresentation of Islam which held the aim of preserving power, and nothing more. It was thus his task to design a methodological framework in which Muslims are to understand Islam as a religion and a way of life. Importantly, as I have positioned it, it also provides us with atool in which to consider the work of Shari'ati which stems from his devout obedience to Islam; that is, to the Islam that is delivered when correctly abiding to his hermeneutic methodology. Shari'ati's methodology includes the analysis of five interrelated aspects of Islam: God, Allah; the Prophet, Muhammad; the scripture, Qur'an; the context in which the religion was revealed, Muhammad's life and surroundings; and the notable figures of the religion, those trained by the Prophet and who followed his example the best. These five aspects, for Shari'ati, leads to an understanding of Islam that has its roots

and sensibilities in the margins of society and is, ultimately, what led him to an Islamic theology of liberation.

Following the discussion on his hermeneutic approach to Islam, in chapter two, I discussed Shari'ati's ontological considerations. That is, his reflection on the nature of man in the world. Shari'ati viewed the symbolic Qur'anic story of the creation of Adam as the foundation for his inquiry into the question of being. Man is a composition of the earthly feature of clay as well as the divine spirit of God. These two opposing poles make up the dialectic reality within man in which man serves as the battlefield between Satan and the divine element of man, bestowed on him by God. In this discussion I drew similarities between Shari'ati's conception of man within the paradigm of the God-man relationship and that of Hegel's religious philosophy. The discussion on Hegel presented to the discussion the transcendence versus immanence problematic in religion. Min's analysis of Hegel's discussion on the topic posits the God-man relationship as one that is both within the immanent and transcendental framework but not wholly either of the two. That is, that God is both within the world as well as beyond the natural phenomena of our perception. I argued that within Shari'ati's structure, there is a similar relationship in which God is both within the world and, importantly, within man as well as separate from it. Both Shari'ati and Hegel suggest that for man, the process of becoming is by moving towards God and coming to know himself in terms of God. For Shari'ati, since God has bestowed man with God's spirit; man has become God's vicegerent on earth and the holder of His trust of free will. Man has the duty to move towards the pole of God by following the guidelines of Islam which posit man as responsible on earth for both the spiritual and material aspects of life – aspects which are interrelated and inform each other. Man is thus on earth to bring about justice and equality and to strive towards the ideal that God has prescribed.

Chapter three considered an epistemological opposition between Shari'ati's Islamic understanding and Western Hegemonic discourse, particularly of the Marxist variety. Shari'ati launched a critique on Marxism with the aim of positioning Islam, as a revolutionary ideal, above that of Marxism. His discussion on this served as a polemic against the Marxsist strand of the movement in Iran that had somewhat of an alienating effect on the Iranian subjectivity as it served as another form of Western epistemological dominance and robbed the Iranian of his imbedded Islamic

sensitivities. Shari'ati juxtaposed Islam and Marxism in an attempt to demonstrate the superior potency that Islam has as a revolutionary discourse as well as how the critique on religion launched by Marx does not apply to Islam. Shari'ati thus made the attempts to save the spirit of Islam and, in turn, mobilise that spirit within the Iranian people towards a liberationist political project. For Shari'ati it was not a Western theory that would deliver the Iranian people and, one could argue, the people of the global South, to self-determination. But, in Iran, it was precisely by understanding Islam as a culture and a faith that a revolutionary subjectivity may be forged.

Following the epistemological discussion, I move onto, in chapter four, the role of the intellectual. For Shari'ati the intellectual plays a pivotal role in the struggle but it is not to be the political leader. Instead the intellectual must facilitate a "return to self." This entails negating 'modern' subjectivity imposed on Iranians that made them consumers of the West – economically and epistemologically – and focus on their history and their social and individual spirit and sensibilities. That is, importantly, returning to a religious, Islamic discourse. For Shari'ati Islam plays a huge role in the subjectivity and all round spirit of the Iranian society as well as in all other parts of the world that have an Islamic identity. It is important then, for Shari'ati, to make a return to Islam. However this is not a return to a historic self but a consideration of the past and the present that will forge a collective subjectivity geared toward the future; a task that was the duty of the intellectual. Furthermore, it was important for the intelligentsia to understand the present state of society and identify the ills and contradictions. Once these contradictions have been identified, the intellectual ought to conscientise the masses by educating them about the reasons for their backwardness. This will mobilise them and create a collective energised for struggle and ready to dismantle the oppressive structure at once.

Finally, the paper moves towards the insurrectionary discourse of Shari'ati. I argue that the concept of martyrdom used by Shari'ati was his subtle yet radical tool to make a call towards insurrectionary action. Shari'ati explained the exalted status of a martyr in Islam and romanticised and celebrated the martyrs of the past; particular the figures of Hamzah and Hussayn who presented two different kinds of martyrs. The former being the one who was chosen by the death to be a martyr and the latter who was one who chose death and, in turn, chose martyrdom. The latter martyr is

the one who lacked material resources to undertake a total rebellion and instead resorted to the ultimate act of self-negation in order to remind the people about the societal dysfunctions that had been covered up and forgotten. Shari'ati's discourse on martyrdom presents a profound understanding of revolution in Islam as well as the importance in engaging in struggle towards justice and equality – fundamental Islamic concepts.

**Conclusions of Research**

I have presented a theoretical interpretation of an Islamic theory of liberation. Particularly, a theology of liberation derived from a Shari'atian schema. Shari'ati presents a wealth of tools; hermeneutic, ontological, epistemological, as well as in terms of political praxis and in terms of the role of the intellectual as well as the soldier or mujahid in Islam. Through a thorough consideration of his work as a revolutionary ideologue in Iran but also as a thinker akin to the likes of Frantz Fanon; I posit Shari'ati as a major force in Islamic decolonial thought as well as in decolonial thought in general. In presenting his Islamic liberation theology I make a case for an expansion of a decolonial discourse that both critiques modernity as well as transcends the confines of our current paradigm. That is, the current linear focus on afro-centric decolonial thought with Fanon as the messiah. I do not wish to disrespect or negate this line of decolonial research, but instead, I insist that theology and, particularly, Islamic liberation theology enjoy a seat at the decolonial table.

While, to repeat Shari'ati, "it certainly is difficult these days to speak of religion; the modern mind can hardly accept it as a progressive, liberating force," my project aimed at forcing into the paradigm the issue of religion that has captivated millions across the world. Islam, to repeat Shari'ati once more, "has a revolutionary notion." That is, in its very being, its very purpose of revelation, its ontology, there exists an insistence on revolution and a deliberate discourse from the bottom of society. It becomes extremely important to mention this point when considering an array of opinions and discursive formulations about the religion and faith; certainly when such a large portion of the world's population adheres to it. It also insists on a turn away from the secularist notions of freedom and equality that has been imposed on most of the world by hegemonic Western discourses and suggests that in bringing back

spirit and God to the issues of justice, freedom and equality, a wide new range of intellectually rich resources can be entered into the discussion. Along with that, an enormous body of colonial subjects may be mobilised against oppressive political, economic and social orders that make up the global empire today. In sum, my study presents a step towards inserting Islam and religion as a revolutionary theory into the ever-expanding body of decolonial intellectual work, as well as into the consciousness of many demobilised people with religious sensibilities and spirit.

**Beyond My Project**

My project presented and overall framework of Shari'ati's work by extracting major consistent thematic strands from his speeches and often putting it into conversation with other thinkers. This foundational entry into the work of Shari'ati as well as theoretical Islamic revolutionary discourse leaves many aspects untouched. One important question that I would like to pose for further study is the relationship between modernity and decolonial thought. That is, the positive relationship between the two; the way that the former presents a critique of but is still heavily reliant on the latter. This problematic within Shari'ati's work is ever-present. Although Shari'ati gives a scathing critique of the assimilating intellectuals who assimilate and eat every morsel of European thought, he still relies heavily on it. I am not suggesting that Sahri'ati proposed a complete cutting off from modern epistemology completely, but he certainly did imply a non-reliance on it. However, in Shari'ati's work, there is a gross reliance on the terminology and concepts of both Marxism and other Western thinkers. He presents a critique of Humanism but at the same time wants to insist that Islam is the ideal form of humanism. Not to mention how, throughout his work, he insists on invoking the names of Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Carrel and others even when he could have made his point without such mentions. Various questions should be asked about this in general but, importantly, within Shari'ati's work. Why did Shari'ati insist on using Western thinkers even when it seemed that he didn't? In fact, it is this that made me comfortable with presenting sections of the thought of Hegel, Foucault and Heidegger, even though it may otherwise seem somewhat problematic considering the project at hand. The question has to do the possibility of epistemological escape. That is, how possible is it to completely negate the hegemonic discursive power? Or even, should this be the project at all?

Furthermore, other more general question of study may be introduced. Considering Islam as a spirit within Islamic societies, how do we conceive of a revolutionary subjectivity within those contexts. In dealing with this question Frantz Fanon springs to mind whose work was influenced and inspired heavily by the Algerian independence struggle. Algeria, that is, as a predominantly Muslim country. What are the implications then of Fanon avoiding the explicit mention and celebration of Islam as a collective spirit in Algeria, specifically when he discussed the peasantry as the ultimate revolutionary force.Would, in such instances, a consideration of Islamic liberation theology present useful points of study within these societies and what would the effects be of attempting to create a subjectivity that disregards Islam and spirit – certainly Shari'ati would see this as a major error in method.

It is important that we continue to expand our body of decolonial thought to include all aspects from across the globe that may be useful as an analytic tool for understanding, as well as a tool for the mobilisation of society at large against global empire that seeks to subjugate and place man against man for the economic and political gain of the few. Surely a trans-culture and transnational discourse is required to forge a global movement. This, however, would not be successful if one, linear methodology like Marxism is advocated for in every corner of the globe but, there should rather be a method in which the particular can act as a mobilising force towards the universal ideal. It is clear that people are not willing to lose their spirit.

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