

Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization

Negotiating Modernity in Iran

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To the memory of my father

4 Islam as a modernizing ideology: Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the discourse of authenticity through close examination of the works of Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shari'ati, two of the most influential intellectuals in the Iranian politics of the last half century. Both Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati played major roles in the effort to articulate a local, Islamic modernity as a blueprint for revolutionary social change.

For Al-e Ahmad, this effort is sparked by disillusionment with the socialist Tudeh Party's capitulation to Soviet demands. Al-e Ahmad articulates a powerful critique of the hegemonic power of the West centered around the concept of "Westoxication" (*Gharbzadegi*). This critique attacks Iranian secular intellectuals as complicit in Western power, and incapable of effectively constructing an authentically Iranian modernity. Al-e Ahmad argues that a "return" to an "authentic" Islamic culture is necessary if Iran is to avoid the homogenizing and alienating forces of socio-technological modernization. Yet, the "return" advocated by Al-e Ahmad was a rather complicated political discourse. Ahmad's populist Islam would not reject modernization as such, but would seek to reimagine modernity in accordance with Iranian-Islamic tradition, symbolism, and identities.

Ali Shari'ati continues and extends Al-e Ahmad's critique by articulating a positive theory of Islamic ideology as a modernizing force. Convinced of the necessity of an ideological basis in the struggle for Iranian national liberation, Shari'ati draws liberally from Marxism to construct a populist and activist Islam. Shari'ati urges "good" Muslims to overthrow the corrupt social order, an idea which resonated with Iranian students and youth. Shari'ati's discourse does not seek to uphold binaries between East/West, but to foster a dialogue between the two in order to articulate a viable modernity.

Through these readings, the discourse of authenticity emerges as a dialogic mode of reconciling local cultures with modernity, rather than a stubborn determination to avoid modernity at all costs. Their calls for a

revitalized and politicized Islam represent attempts to negotiate with the universalizing tendencies of modernity, rather than the gathering storm clouds of a clash of civilizations.

The ultimate contradiction

How does one reconcile the tension between the universalist claims and practices of modernity with the longing of modernizing societies to construct their own national modernities? Jeffrey Herf, in his study of German "reactionary modernism," points out that "[t]here is no such thing as modernity in general. There are only national societies, each of which becomes modern in its own fashion."¹ Even in the age of global modernity, the boundaries of national communities define, to a large extent, individual and collective identities. It is often assumed that the desire to modernize embodies a willingness to go beyond parochial bounds of native communities and identities. In practice modernization is often a preferable way to emphasize the uniqueness of national identities. Nationalist rhetoric exerts such a powerful mobilizing force because it communicates with people in a language that celebrates communal and national traditions, morality, and qualities at the same time that it promises future prosperity.

The authenticity discourse represents a cultural attempt to reconfigure modernity to make it more inclusive and diverse, and less homogenizing and totalizing. Here, the discourse of authenticity is presented as an attempt in reconciling the "universal" culture of modernity with the Iranian's local cultural context. The rise of the modern and autocratic Pahlavi state, modernization from above, and the cultural alienation of the urban and migrant population, composed important socio-political conditions of the "return" to a "nativist" ideology.

The focus of this chapter is the presentation of a narrative of authenticity in the works of two Iranian intellectuals who dominated the Iranian political culture in the 1960s and 1970s, Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shari'ati. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, a radical intellectual, was the central figure in the construction of the Islamic authenticity discourse in Iran. Al-e Ahmad builds this discourse around a critique of Iranian modernity. Ali Shari'ati takes up this critique, and builds upon it a positive and "practical" ideology based on Islamic and Iranian identity.

Al-e Ahmad: "return" to the "roots"

... Albert Camus, Eugene Ionesco, Ingmar Bergman and many other artists, all of them from the West . . . all regard the end of human affairs with despair. Sartre's

Erostratus fires a revolver at the people in the street blindfolded; Nabakov's protagonist drives his car into the crowd; and the stranger, Mersault, kills someone in reaction to a serious case of sunburn. These fictional endings all represent where humanity is really ending up. A humanity that, if it does not want to be crushed under the machine, must go about in a rhinoceros skin.²

Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–69) represents a generation of Iranian intellectuals who in the earlier part of their lives enthusiastically embraced radical universalism as a solution to the ills of their country, only to abandon universal modernity and embrace a “local” and “authentic” solution. Al-e Ahmad was a short-story writer and a novelist, an essayist and social critic, a translator of French literature, and a political activist. His works embodied the tensions between traditional Shi'i Iran and the secular modernizing programs of the Pahlavi regime. His earlier writings, mainly fiction, challenged the ignorance of blindly following Iranian and Islamic values and habits. His latter works, as a social critic, focussed on developing a discourse extremely critical of Western secularism. Although the political urgency of this task prevented him from becoming a sophisticated scholar or a deliberate thinker, he nevertheless was the most powerful social critic of the last two decades of the Shah's regime. In many ways, his fiction was an autobiographical sketch of a man ripped between these opposing tensions within himself. Some personal musings over his social vocation reveal the split he felt between religious tradition and modern intellectualism:

There is a difference between a teacher and a preacher. A preacher usually touches the emotions of large crowds, while a teacher emphasizes the intelligence of a small group. The other difference is that a preacher begins with certitude and preaches with conviction. But a teacher begins with skepticism and speaks with doubt . . . And I am professionally a teacher. Yet I am not completely devoid of preaching either. I don't know what I am.³

Throughout his life, he tried to identify the inner struggle he felt with various organized political movements, from communism to nationalism to existentialism, and finally to a resolute yet ambiguous Islamic populism. The inner struggle, in his own terms, was a sickness – “Westoxication” – and he once called his writing a “cry for help.” But many others heard in his writing the secret to revolutionizing Iranian society along authentic and non-Western lines. His work produced the basic vocabulary of the Islamic ideology, and his concept of *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) represented a “secular” contribution to the prominence of Islamic populism in the Revolution of 1978–79 and in later years.

Al-e Ahmad came from a long line of respected clerics, and his family

upheld a strong religious tradition.⁴ As a child in the twenties, he experienced Reza Shah's consolidation of power over public life and his “determination to give his Iranian subjects a European look.”⁵ Al-e Ahmad's young life was split between the “ethical absolutism” of his father's religious household and the aggressively secular transformation of society at large. The family was reasonably prosperous until 1932, when the government deprived the clerical class of their notarial function and eliminated their income.⁶ His father tried to resist these changes, and as a result lost his “official” religious position. Al-e Ahmad had to go out to work after elementary school, fixing watches and electrical wire in the bazaar. But he secretly attended night school throughout this time, hoping to complete his high school education.⁷

At twenty, his father sent him to religious school in Iraq so he could become a cleric, but after three months he returned to Iran to finish in secular school. This open defiance of his father was the first sign of what soon would separate them for nearly a lifetime.

In 1943, Al-e Ahmad encountered Ahmad Kasravi at Dar al-Fonun high school. Kasravi, a historian of the Constitutional Revolution, social critic and a radical anti-clerical reformer, acted as a midway for young Iranian Muslims who felt disgusted by the political weakness of Islam, but who weren't ready to join the Tudeh Party.⁸ In the same year (1943) he translated a pamphlet from Arabic entitled, “Illegal Mourning.” Years later he wrote about this work: “Would you believe it that religious minded merchants of the bazaar bought them on credit and then burned them.”⁹ Earlier, he had written a number of works on the reformation of Islamic ideas, which he never published.¹⁰ Within the same year, he joined the Tudeh Party, thereby completely breaking all ties with his religious background.

The Tudeh Party had been established in 1941 when Allied occupation forced Reza Shah to abdicate his throne, and political repression was subsequently relaxed. At that time, Al-e Ahmad recalled, “political parties were spreading like mushrooms.” He also remembers it was a time of deep national humiliation. There was no “killing and destruction and bombs,” but there was “famine and typhus and chaos, and the painful presence of occupation forces.”¹¹ The Tudeh Party emerged as the most effective organized political group in modern Iranian history and went on to preside over the political Left for more than a decade. It offered an ideology of “universal struggle” which appealed to many young Iranians. Al-e Ahmad was quickly recognized for his talent within the Party, and in 1945 he was sent to Abadan to organize industrial workers and promote the socialist cause. There he learned important tactics of political organization. By 1946, he had risen to membership of the Party's Tehran

Provincial Committee, and had the job of supervising Party publications. These positions allowed him great power, and he used the Party press to publish his own book, *Our Suffering*, which featured "socialist realist" stories depicting political battles of the time.¹²

In 1947, a crisis in Party leadership occurred over events developing in Azerbaijan. The Democratic Party of Azerbaijan seized power in the region in 1945, and set up an "autonomous state" under the protection of the Soviet Red Army. The Tudeh headquarters in Tehran officially issued support, but the event produced dissension within the leadership. Al-e Ahmad and another important member, Maleki, had been pushing for more democracy in the choice of Party leadership, and less blind obedience to the Soviet Union. The event provided the focus for this struggle. When the Soviet army remained in Azerbaijan, and Stalin began to demand oil concessions from the Iranian government, this split the Party between pro-Moscow and nationalist factions. Maleki led a small group of intellectuals, including Al-e Ahmad, to break from the Tudeh Party in 1948.

Al-e Ahmad's break from the Tudeh was prompted by a confusion about the relation between national and "universal" interests. He later criticized the Tudeh Party for failing to give itself a native and national identity.¹³ At a time when the leader of the National Front, Mosaddeq, was promoting the nationalization of oil to help build the Iranian infrastructure, and profits from Iranian natural resources were being appropriated by Western oil firms, the Soviet demand seemed like merely another instance of foreign exploitation. For Al-e Ahmad, this made the Tudeh Party a traitorous puppet to foreign interests. This experience disillusioned him profoundly, and he later wrote:

There was a time when there was the Tudeh Party and it had something to say for itself. It had launched a revolution. It talked about anti-colonialism and it defended the workers and the peasants. And what other objectives it had and what excitement it generated! And we were young and members of the Tudeh Party, not having the slightest idea who was pulling the strings.¹⁴

Immediately after the split, the group lead by Maleki organized their own Socialist Tudeh League of Iran and tried to receive Soviet recognition. But recognition was not granted, and when Radio Moscow denounced them as traitors, the new party self-destructed rather than daring to oppose (what they considered) the "world's most progressive nation."

After this experience, Al-e Ahmad withdrew from organized politics for several years to consider new approaches to Iran's problems. In his own words, he endured "a period of silence"¹⁵ and during this time he made translations of European literature. He considered his translations as

political work, introducing key documents and concepts into Iranian national discourse. His choice of books reflects a need for affirmation in a time of solitude: Camus's *The Outsider*, Sartre's *Dirty Hands*, Dostoyevski's *The Gambler*, and Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*. All of these works contain existentialist themes of individual resistance to modern mass society. He also translated André Gide's *Return from the Soviet Union* as an indictment of the Tudeh Party,¹⁶ and embraced Sartre's theories of a non-Soviet socialism. Later, in his seminal *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West*, he cited these "authorities" on the West as proof of humanity's future should the "Western way" prevail in Iran.

Al-e Ahmad's critique of the "West" is inspired by three different influences: (1) the encounter of Iran with the West and the history of Western domination and humiliation of this country by the British empire and by the 1953 U.S.-led coup which overthrew the popularly elected prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddeq; (2) Al-e Ahmad's personal involvement with radical and nationalist movements and ideas and his disillusionment with secular political culture. To him the Iranian secular intellectuals had no "roots" in the country's culture and were inordinately influenced by ideas and politics that were foreign and even irrelevant to the problems of Iran; (3) finally, his own reading of European literature and critical intellectuals such as Camus, Ionesco, Sartre, Jung, Heidegger, Kafka, Beckett, and their critiques of Western nihilism.

Al-e Ahmad's critique of the West (*Gharbzadegi*) is a complex and contradictory concept that cannot simply be reduced to an anti-Western polemic. Although his writings lack scholarly style or even historical accuracy, he nevertheless writes with personal passion, intellectual sharpness and anger, and as a victim with a "cry for help."

Al-e Ahmad's return to Islam was a quest to realize a national modernity in Iran. Simin Daneshvar gives an interesting biographical description of her husband Al-e Ahmad's intellectual conversion:

If he turned to religion, it was the result of his wisdom and insight because he had previously experimented with Marxism, socialism and to some extent, existentialism, and his relative return to religion and the Hidden Imam was toward deliverance from the evil of imperialism and toward the preservation of national identity, a way toward human dignity, compassion, justice, reason, and virtue. Jalal had need of such a religion.¹⁷

Al-e Ahmad's attitude toward secularism and religion underwent a number of changes, but remained fundamentally consistent all along. In his early writings, he was preoccupied with the ignorance and defenselessness perpetuated by religion upon the common people. This is made possible, in his scheme, by a lack of education. For example, a short story,

"Untimely Breaking of the Fast" (1946), shows that the religious fast of Ramadan is experienced completely according to one's social class. While the "prosperous brokers at the heart of the bazaar secure several years' income with a single transaction [and then] crawl into a cool corner of the columned hall" to relax for the remainder of the fast, the impoverished hero must slave in the dust and hot sun from morning until night. Eventually, deranged by thirst and the pounding sun, the hero leaves town to break his fast. When he returns, his wife and child have still not eaten, and then his wife's fasting becomes her bitter instrument of resentment and rage as she heaps religious insults upon her husband.¹⁸ The fast, then, while designed to engender religious unity and moral discipline, becomes a source of petty strife and resentment among the poor, while the rich barely experience a change from their normal routine. If Al-e Ahmad's fiction says anything about religion, it asserts that truly religious society is incompatible with the class system. Class privilege turns religion into hypocrisy and annihilates any possibility of brotherhood.

In a 1949 story, *The Seh'tar*, Al-e Ahmad repeats this theme but also evokes spirituality as a state of human fulfillment, a connection to personal creativity and human community. Again, he asserts that such fulfillment is impossible in class society. But the presence of a "humanist religion" of fulfilled potential and brotherhood gives an indication of what Al-e Ahmad considered important about religion: much less the soul, the afterlife, the existence of God, and much more the realization of religious ethical ideals here on earth. As we will explore in more detail below, Al-e Ahmad's "return" to Islam in his 1964 pilgrimage to Mecca, as expressed in *Lost in the Crowd*, further indicates such an understanding of religion.¹⁹

In *The Seh'tar*, a poor musician plays seh'tar at rich people's houses. Although he gives them joy, he must "pay [them] an arm and a leg to rent" the instrument, and can never feel relaxed enough in their domain to enjoy himself.²⁰ Thus, although the hero has been naturally inclined to music since a young age, he could never bring himself joy from his own artistry. Most importantly, he repeatedly emphasizes, he has not "been able to cry as a result of his own music."²¹ In Shi'i Iran, crying is associated with the weekly *rowzeh*, a ceremony where the faithful cry out of devotion to their faith. The musician in the story is denied access to the spiritual ecstasy which his instrument offers him. But eventually, through "backbreaking" work and at the point of starvation, the musician saves enough money to buy his own seh'tar. At this point, despite his physical illness, he undergoes a miraculous transformation. Although his "cheeks were sunken and his complexion sallow," he was "ecstatic and strode along blissfully" with "reddened cheeks" and a "hot" forehead. Now he

can affect everyone with "his own inner and hidden joy," and most of all he can now "produce such excitement out of [his music] that he himself wouldn't be able to stand it and would suddenly start crying."²² But in the next moment, as he carries his seh'tar into a mosque, a nearby perfume seller "wants to take out his slack trade" on the musician, and starts a fight with him for taking a musical instrument inside a mosque. In the fray, which is joined by a mass of equally angry people, the seh'tar is destroyed and with it the musician's "inner warmth" and hope.

This simple narrative contains a complex message concerning religious society and the class system. The hero's music is his happiness, his spirituality, and his connection to others (which might be seen as three terms for the same thing). But because he is poor, he can only prostitute his musical talent to make the rich happy. The work remains external to him, denies him, and makes him miserable. When eventually, near the point of starvation, he buys a seh'tar of his own, the ownership of this seh'tar fills his heart with warmth and ignites his religious soul. But because he had to buy spiritual fulfillment, it can easily be taken away from him, especially in a society of deprivation. Thus, another pauper (the perfume seller), frustrated by his failing business, resentfully attacks the musician and destroys his seh'tar. He does so under the pretext of upholding religious law, but in actuality with only resentment and anger in his heart. Thus, Al-e Ahmad lets us know how in a class system religious law is used as an instrument of petty anger, destroying true spirituality. Class society makes religion produce the very opposite of its intended effect, thereby nullifying its laws. In addition to becoming an instrument of resentment among the poor, it also becomes a commodity purchased by the rich at the expense of others' suffering. In such a society, the rich attain spiritual fulfillment, but only at the cost of others' pain. Thus, the foundation is evil, and the spirituality not truly real. Finally, the story implies the possibility of spiritual fulfillment for everyone beyond the system of property: only classless society could let everyone share in spirituality, and thus be a truly religious society.

In the period that he described as his "period of silence," Al-e Ahmad apparently decided to avoid politics. At this time he married Simin Daneshvar, a prominent writer, art historian, and translator, and moved to the northern part of Tehran to build a house. He later described the period by saying, "[W]hen one comes up short in the big world, you build a smaller one with the four walls of a house."²³ However, in the early fifties he was jolted back into politics for, in his words, "three more years of struggle."²⁴ The National Front, a coalition of liberal parties, was trying to nationalize Iranian oil. Al-e Ahmad felt his political hopes revived, and with Maleki, he organized the Toilers Party to support the effort. When

that party split, he and Maleki formed the Third Force, a nationalist-leftist group with social democratic and Third Worldist tendencies. But in 1953 the CIA-backed coup overthrew Mosaddeq's nationalist government and the Shah was restored to power. After this Al-e Ahmad returned to political isolation, feeling disgust at the impotence of organized politics.

Al-e Ahmad used his second "period of silence" (1952–62) to perform his "ethnographic works," travelling through the Iranian countryside seeking to acquaint himself with the true masses, their culture, and his own true roots. His projects were amateur, but appealed to urban activists in Tehran who felt out of touch with the rural majority they were allegedly fighting for. When he recommended other intellectuals do the same, many heeded the call and performed their own ethnographic visits. For his first study, Al-e Ahmad visited Owrazaan, the village where his ancestors had lived before urban migration. In these villages, Al-e Ahmad found a supposed "purity" which was lacking in the urban centers.

In his works Al-e Ahmad implicitly relates the city to the disease of Westoxication and equates the rural with the pure wisdom of the common people. Repeating this theme throughout his works, he creates a mood of nostalgia for a lost yet superior world, which newly urbanized and oppressed people eagerly embraced. The same year his visits began, Al-e Ahmad wrote his "Tale of the Beehives," in which the bees decide to return to their ancestral home.²⁵ This complemented his ethnography, which was explicitly soul searching. His investigation of the "onslaught of machine and machine civilization" produced this dismal anticipation: "The entire local and cultural identity and existence will be swept away. And why? So that a factory can operate in the West, or that workers in Iceland and Newfoundland are not jobless."²⁶

The ethnographic labors prompted the university of Tehran to invite Al-e Ahmad to supervise their ethnographic publications. After a short period he resigned, stating that his aim was not "objective science" but self-realization for the Iranian people. Later, he wrote:

I saw that they wanted to make a commodity out of those monographs for European consumption and only with European criteria. But I wasn't cut out for this sort of thing. Because my aim in such an endeavor was a renewal of self-awareness and a new assessment of the local environment with our own criteria.²⁷

This remark, of course, begs the question, what are authentically Iranian "criteria" as opposed to European? After all, ethnography is supposed to produce an "objective" representation of its subject of studies. These questions were answered in the culmination of Al-e Ahmad's self-

discovery, his rhetorical masterpiece *Gharbzadegi* (1962). This is how Al-e Ahmad explains the discourse of Gharbzadegi:

I speak of "Occidentosis" [Gharbzadegi] as of tuberculosis. But perhaps it more closely resembles an infestation of weevils. Have you seen how they attack wheat? From inside. The bran remains intact, but it is just a shell, like a cocoon left behind on a tree. At any rate, I am speaking of a disease: an accident from without, spreading in an environment rendered susceptible to it.²⁸

This laid the ground for a critique of "modernization" in Iran. Al-e Ahmad portrayed Iranian modernization (Westernization) as a disease that had infected the Iranian society from outside and debased Iranian life and cultural subjectivity. In his other critical work, *Dar Khedmat va Khyanat-ye Rowshanfekran* (On the Service and the Treason of the Intellectuals), he extends his critique of modernity in Iran to the entire modern intellectual tradition of secularism and social progress, and condemns modern Iranian intellectuals for their critical attitudes toward Islamic culture and the Shi'i clerics. He traces the roots of Gharbzadegi to the mid nineteenth-century intellectual movement of secular ideas and Western-oriented political systems.²⁹ He goes so far as to defend the anti-constitutionalist clergyman Shaik Fazlullah Nouri, and calls him a martyr.

Jeffrey Herf, in his study of "reactionary modernism," points out that "Romanticism took different forms in different national contexts but everywhere it was part of modernity."³⁰ More specifically, "There was much in the German romantic tradition and its modern Nietzschean variants that denigrated the role of reason in politics and/or saw in politics above all opportunities for self-realization, authentic experiences, or new identities."³¹ The anti-modernization romanticism of the Gharbzadegi discourse was similar to the German "reactionary modernist" movement's longing for the preservation of unique German qualities. Al-e Ahmad himself points out the affinity between his ideas and the German "romanticism." In the Preface to *Occidentosis*, he wrote:

I would like to thank Dr. Mahamud Human, who urged me to see one of the works of the German, Ernest Junger, a work on nihilism entitled *Uber Die Linie*. As Dr. Human pointed out, Junger and I were both exploring more or less the same subject, but from two view points. We were addressing the same question, but in two languages.³²

For Al-e Ahmad too, the critique of Gharbzadegi was an answer to a yearning for an "authentic" (Islamic) identity. Therefore, the Shi'i romanticism was more an embodiment of the self-realization of a modern intellectual lost in the plight of modern life than a return to traditional Islam where concepts such as the self do not play a focal role.

The deepest revelations of Al-e Ahmad's life were expressed in *Occidentosis*. Having considered all the intellectual ideas which had moved his life – Marxism, nationalism, existentialism – he saw that their political value was thin compared to the organic power of culturally authentic Shi'i Islam.³³ Furthermore, he realized that every successful uprising in twentieth-century Iran had included the participation and support of the clergy – the Tobacco Revolt, the 1905 Constitutional Revolution, and Mosaddeq's nationalization of oil.³⁴ Only alliance with the religious authorities gave an uprising symbolic justification in the eyes of the Iranian masses. With this claim, Al-e Ahmad encouraged a belief that the "good era" of democracy under Mosaddeq depended on an alliance of religious and secular politics. Ultimately, he hoped to bring the religious and leftist opponents of the government into an alliance. In 1964, he visited Khomeini and gave him a copy of *Gharbzadegi*. At the end of the meeting, they shook hands and Al-e Ahmad supposedly said, "[I]f we continue to join hands we will defeat the government."³⁵

Gharbzadegi opens with a dismissal of formal ("Western") learning. After proclaiming the world a division between East and West, the author claims "it is beyond the scope of this book to define these two poles in terms of economy, politics, sociology, or as civilizations." Instead, he evokes the superior peasant instinct with a clever metaphor: "Although one must secure exact data on an earthquake from the university's seismograph, the peasant's horse (however far from thoroughbred) will have bolted to the safety of open land before the seismograph has recorded anything."³⁶

In our age, he begins, every ideal has perished to make way for blind mechanization. The ideological adversaries, Russia and America, have joined in a common drive to expand industry and secure commerce: "now all of these 'isms' and ideologies are roads leading to the sublime realm of mechanization." Soviet industry is as greedy as capitalist industry, and "Soviet Russia is no longer the vanguard of world revolution."³⁷ This union of superpowers has left the world divided in two parts – "the beat of progress is in that ascending part of the world, and the pulse of stagnation is in this moribund part of the world."³⁸ Thus, he sets up nihilistic expansionism as the determining force in world politics, preying upon the Third World and Iran at the center. His own word for such nihilism is "mechanosis." One effect of mechanosis is the destruction of local cultures, and "we [Iranians] have been unable to preserve our own historico-cultural character in the face of the machine and its fateful onslaught." Mechanosis is the "murderer of beauty and poetry, spirit and humanity."³⁹

Only one defense exists – the authentic culture of Islam.⁴⁰ But, he

explains, Islam has been turned into a harmless relic among many educated ("Westoxic") Iranians, who try to adopt European modes. He deplores a historically sealed Islam as a device of Western domination: "I, as an Asian or African, am supposed to preserve my manners, culture, music, religion, and so forth untouched, like an unearthed relic, so that the gentlemen can find and excavate them, so they can display them in a museum and say, 'Yes, another example of primitive life'."⁴¹

This is rootless, nihilistic Islam – true Islam must adapt to the times and battle against social evils. Al-e Ahmad argues that the clerics have historically been the "last citadel of resistance against the Europeans," but "since the onslaught of the first wave of the machine, [they] drew into their shell and so shut out the outside world."⁴²

In fact, since the institution of the Pahlavi autocracy, the clerics had been relatively subdued. But in 1961, the clerical leader Ayatollah Boroujerdi died, and the radical Ayatollah Khomeini moved to fill the vacuum. The publication of *Gharbzadegi* coincided with Khomeini's mobilization of the clergy and politicization of the Shi'i establishment. The book contains many hints of the Islamic Republic to come, such as Al-e Ahmad's celebration of Sheikh Nouri, the "great martyr" who was hung for advocating rule by Islamic law. At the time of the Constitutional Revolution, "Westoxicated" liberals killed him to eliminate Islam as a political force:

I look on that great man's body on the gallows as a flag raised over our nation proclaiming the triumph of Gharbzadegi after two hundred years of struggle. Under this flag we are like strangers to ourselves, in our food and dress, our homes, our manners, our publications, and most dangerous, our culture . . . If in the beginning of the Constitutional era the danger brushed up against us, it has now touched our souls – from the peasant who has fled to the city and never returns to his village [to] the minister who seems allergic to the dust of our country and spends the year knocking about the world.⁴³

The generation tainted by these developments believes that modernization and Westernization are identical concepts, and that Islam must be abandoned in the name of progress. Al-e Ahmad then issues a stark prophecy for these "Westoxicated" youths – the very same secular mechanization has already caused nihilism to triumph in the West: "They failed to see that the god technology had for years exercised absolute rule over Europe mounted on the throne of its banks and stock exchanges, and it no longer tolerated any other god, laughing in the face of every tradition and ideology."⁴⁴

This is followed by a lamentation over the passivity of the Shi'i clerics, and a recommendation for them as the last power capable of resisting nihilistic mechanization:

[T]he clergy could and should have armed itself with the weapons of its enemy and countered the occidentosis of governmental and quasi-governmental broadcasting by installing its own transmitters in Qum and Mashad . . . If the clergy knew what a precious seed for rebellion against every government of the oppressors it had implanted in the hearts of the people with its doctrine of "the non-necessity of obeying the holders of rule . . ."45

The clerical establishment, Al-e Ahmad says, are a "government within a government," or a "secret government." They have authority over the nation, but have yet to awaken and realize that the most potent political force in Iran lies dormant in the Shi'i culture of the common people. Al-e Ahmad aims to make this politically mute everyday cultural power into a political ideology of revolution:

90% of the people of this country still live according to religious criteria, including the whole rural population, some of the urban tradesman, bazaaris, some civil servants, and those making up the country's third and fourth classes . . . they're all waiting for the Imam of the Age. Well, we're all waiting for him, each in our own way; and we have a right to because none of our ephemeral governments has lived up to the least of its promises, because oppression, injustice, repression, and discrimination are pandemic . . . It is by reference to this belief that 90% of Iran's population look upon the state as the agent of oppression and the usurper of the rightful role of the Imam of the Age.⁴⁶

Islam, under these circumstances, is the only possible and authentic means to revolution. But what is the goal of the revolution? Al-e Ahmad outlines two undesirable options for the future, and then implies the unrealized revolutionary existence of a third:

[W]e, as a developing nation, have come face to face with the machine and technology, and without our volition . . . Must we remain the mere consumers we are today or are we to shut our doors to the machine and technology and retreat into the depths of our ancient ways, our national and religious traditions? Or is there a third possibility?⁴⁷

The third option, and the only one for liberation, is the reconciling of Islamic tradition with industrial and technological modernity. Al-e Ahmad is never in doubt about the need for the "machine":

I am not speaking of rejecting the machine or of banishing it, as the utopians of the early nineteenth century sought to do. History has fated the world to fall prey to the machine. It is a question of how to encounter the machine and technology . . . Although the [West] who created the machine now cries out that it is stifling him, we not only fail to repudiate the garb of machine tenders, we pride ourselves on it.⁴⁸

The "garb of machine tenders," of course, is Western culture and ideology. The problem for Iran, he contends, is how to build the machine without following the same nihilistic path as the West, which allows "tech-

nology and the machine to have stampeded out of control."⁴⁹ The "third road" beyond romantic primitivism and consumer subordination – the "road from which there is no recourse" – is:

. . . to put the jinn back in the bottle. It is to get it under control, to break it into harness like a draft animal . . . One must have the machine, one must build it . . . the machine is a means, not an end. The end is to abolish poverty and to put material and spiritual welfare within the reach of all . . . Thus first we need an economy consistent with the manufacture of machines, that is, an independent economy. Then we need an educational system, then a furnace to melt and impress it with the human will.⁵⁰

Just as in Al-e Ahmad's story of the Seh'tar, his political aim is to build an independent socialist economy which fulfills people's collective spiritual needs. Clearly, he believes Islamic society is capable of managing and using the machine in a superior way to the West, and of avoiding the Western crisis of the soul. The machine must not, as in the West, be an autonomous mover beyond human ideals, ideology and tradition (i.e., nihilism). Instead, it must be subordinated to the human ideal, ideology, and tradition of Islam. Although the ideals he purports may differ from those of Ernst Junger, there is implied here a similar adherence to a philosophy of will. In the West, nihilism grew organically from the culture. But in Iran, and most of the Third World, the nihilistic nature of the machine is an imposition of the West. Colonialism and imperialism imposed the nihilist culture along with the machine, as though the two were inseparable. Al-e Ahmad argues that Iran must Islamicize the machine by rooting it in Iranian culture.

Gharbzadegi (Westoxication) met with massive success. *Gharbzadegi* as a concept became the most popular concept that the oppositional intellectuals and critical public used to show their resentment of the Pahlavi society in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s. When, in 1963, Khomeini's politically mobilized clergy mounted the first nationwide rebellion against the Shah since the clampdown of 1953, it seemed to confirm for many the message of Al-e Ahmad's book.⁵¹ Afterwards, Al-e Ahmad accused the secular intellectuals of causing the uprising to fail with their "imported ideas." He expressed this in *On the Service and Treason of the Intellectuals*, in which he condemns secular intellectuals as unauthentic: "That is how the Iranian intellectual has gradually turned into a root which is not planted in the soil of this land. And he always has his eyes on Europe, and always dreams of escaping there."⁵²

Both books articulate a theory of "authentic modernity," as a critique of the West and a revitalization of tradition. Additionally, he defined politics as an issue of authenticity:

Even if politics is a science, it is one of those very loosely defined [branches of the] humanities, with its foundations on the latent collective consciousness from religion to superstitious behaviors, from language to codes of etiquette.⁵³

In a strange way Al-e Ahmad appears to have constructed a pure mass consciousness and raises it as a banner of revolution. In evoking a mass consciousness, of course, Al-e Ahmad is also evoking a tacit "mass unconscious," which he can freely construct at his behest. The development of this ideology let him burst into his most important phase of collective action (and what better way to conceive of unified, collective will and action than by positing an unseen yet revolutionary and unifying mass unconscious?) since the Tudeh Party (whose unity was structured along class lines). But a dilemma persisted – although he had unquestionably recognized the power of Shi'i Islam for mass uprising, there still remained the issue of his personal faith. While he had brought public attention to the latent political power of Shi'ism, he was not the man qualified to lead those politics. Instead, he was caught between the hostility of the secular intellectuals and the mistrust of the religious opposition movement.

In 1964 Al-e Ahmad made a pilgrimage to Mecca, the test of his commitment to authentic Iranian culture and the opportunity to live out his convictions. It was a type of political participation beyond parties, strategies, and goals, a loaning of his body, instead, to a temporal ritual of the masses which has reproduced itself for centuries. Perhaps he hoped to fuse into the whole, and discover the higher truth in self-abandonment. He may have been affirming his belief that the Islamic community offers the best possible future for humanity (and Iran in particular). Certainly, his deed inspired many other intellectuals to perform the same ritual and write about it. But his written account, *Lost in the Crowd* (1966), shows that his predisposition as a writer forced him to retain his subjective individuality, and that he views the Hajj in almost completely human (non-religious) terms.⁵⁴ Ultimately, he went on the Hajj as a thinker, and looked at it in terms of possibilities for human society. In 1962, he had visited Israel and had been very interested in the Kibbutz system as an alternative form of socialist society. It is apparent that he searched for the realization of his political dream in diverse places. This is not to say, however, that he lacked a spiritual concern, or a special identification with Islam. It is to say that he appeared to understand spirituality as limited to the human world, that is in a "secular" mode.

Lost in the Crowd is a revealing "travel diary" as far as Al-e Ahmad's attitude toward Islam and religion in general is concerned. Al-e Ahmad decided before embarking on the Hajj to write about the "experience," thereby ensuring a self-conscious separation between himself and the

other pilgrims. Michael Hillmann gives an interesting reading of this text:

In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad presents himself as an unlikely and almost unwilling hajj pilgrim. At the outset, he admits that he is unclear as to why he is going. It is a question he repeats again and again through some fifty-seven entries in the diary covering the period from Friday, 10 April 1964 through Sunday, 3 May 1964. Not having prayed for the previous twenty-or-so years, he is self-conscious about performing ritual prayers and being on the pilgrimage. In addition, he reveals in several places his recognition that secular intellectual conferees in Tehran will think his going on the pilgrimage foolish . . . Al-e Ahmad hardly contemplates or mentions Allah, sin, heaven, human soul, or the like.⁵⁵

He refers to himself, at one point, as the "only observer" at the Hajj. By writing in a notebook that others cannot see, he makes visible the barrier of private and public. Plainly, as a result, he does not transcend his private self to join the others, and throughout the pilgrimage he (and others) are self-conscious of this. As he writes about his time at the Holy Shrine:

(I'm now sitting on the second level of the new outer corridor, and writing) . . . (A tall, fat, dark, swarthy man carrying an umbrella just passed, saying "Haji sir, mention me in your journal too – Qundahari of Mashad." "Sit down," I said, though there was hint of mockery in his voice. It seems that this sort of activity is distastefully ostentatious in this setting, though I've so far seen two or three others writing on paper, notepads, or what-have-you . . . From now on I must be more careful. Out in public writing?).⁵⁶

Al-e Ahmad is simultaneously hungry for human experience in general and hungry to identify strongly with some group in particular, but he cannot have both. His dilemma is the classic peril of modern writers and intellectuals at "liberty" in their alienation from mass society, yet yearning to belong. The Hajj, as a piece of writing, became part of a "collection" of experiences from Al-e Ahmad's entire life, marking perhaps the paramount one.

Throughout the Hajj, Al-e Ahmad is burdened by the nagging of a radical conscience, which points out the unjust economic relations behind every holy shrine. He never loses the self-conscious political perspective which marks his individuality.

When it pleases God to have a house built on the surface of this land, he should have realized that land would one day fall into the hands of the Saudi government, and that its doors and walls would be covered with neon because of the exigencies of oil exportation . . . [As a result] even the House of God [has] become a common consumer for Pennsylvania. That means tainting even the world of the unseen for company profits.⁵⁷

At another point, he uses the Hajj as an opportunity to muse over questions of European philosophy: "I was quenching my thirst with one of

these 'colas' thinking of something I'd read by a European on the question of the 'individual' and society. And that the greater the society that envelops the 'self', the closer the self comes to being nothing."⁵⁸

He launches from here into a long meditation on the "ultimate individualism of seclusion" and its parallels with the "Eastern 'ego' that forgets itself and its troubles . . . in the presence of the world of the unseen." Ultimately, he concludes that the "ego is sacrificed in isolation just as much as it sacrifices itself in society," and then raises a new intellectual issue: "[W]hat is the difference between existentialism and socialism?" His experience is conveyed in terms of Western secular philosophy. Once having descended from these speculations, Al-e Ahmad almost instantly launches into an attack upon the political contradictions of the Hajj:

God save us from the police, who are everywhere. With their hats, badges, and pistols . . . What would it be like if you didn't see the trademarks, emblems, and weapons at the mouth of the Zamzam well and you forgot that there too you're under government control? Even on the Hajj there's not a moment's opportunity to evade this ugly unavoidable reality. Oh yes. Unless the Hajj rites were to be brought under international Islamic control, and so on.⁵⁹

The final sentence hints at Al-e Ahmad's concealed political agenda: to investigate the subversive possibilities of a mass politicized Hajj. Building subversive purpose into traditional structures of Islamic ritual was a successful tactic of the Iranian Revolution.

The final point about *Lost in the Crowd* is that he views the journey in terms of its secular human possibilities as a culture which provides collective meaning, as a hope of uniting Muslim peoples across international boundaries, and as an instrument for resisting the West. Throughout his narrative, he makes an argument for an international Islamic government and the abolition of monarchies.

In sum, Al-e Ahmad's account suggests that he goes as a writer, as a political thinker, and for the sake of mankind rather than God. It is possible that what Al-e Ahmad saw with the most excitement was the promise of a strong Muslim cultural identity. Al-e Ahmad's journey to Israel in 1962 had impressed him with the might of Jewish cultural solidarity – a solidarity not engendered in Muslim peoples by secular systems. While critical of the state of Israel for its abuses against the Arabs, Al-e Ahmad could not help feeling that a strong connection to authentic roots provided this modern nation with its power. He wrote: "In the eyes of an Easterner such as myself . . ., Israel despite all its flaws and notwithstanding all contradictions it harbors, is the basis of a power. And it is the first step in the promise of a future which is not that far."⁶⁰

Al-e Ahmad's diary of his visit to Israel shows in a revealing way that his "authentic" theory of an Islamic Iran is very similar to a secularized Jewish society:

In any event, I as an Easterner [prefer] an Israeli model over all other models of how to deal with the West. How to extract from its industries by the spiritual power of mass martyrdom, how to take restitution from it and spend the capital thus obtained to advance the country, and how with the price of a short interval of political dependency give permanence to our newly established enterprise.⁶¹

Could it be, then, that the model political power for the great Islamic theorist of authenticity is Israel? He derived this message from Israel: by turning ancient religious structures into modern political weapons, industry, capital, and political independence can be achieved without the sacrifice of cultural identity. Indeed, Al-e Ahmad contrasts Israeli strength to secular Turkey, which he regards as having been robbed of its authenticity: "Let's stick to something, perhaps we can hold onto our identity. Not the way Turkey ended up."⁶²

In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad arrives at a revelation about individuals that proclaims them fodder for the power of mass faith and cultural identification. The manner in which he describes this, though he refers to Asia, implies that any cultural base might be as adequate as another, whether it be Christian, Islamic, or even Marxist:

This self, if it doesn't exist as a particle working to build a society, is absolutely nothing. It is not even a "self." It is that piece of rubbish or particle of dust, except (and a thousand exceptions) when it exists in the context of a great faith, or a great fear. Then it becomes the builder of everything from pyramids to the Great Wall of China, and even China itself. This goes for the entire Orient, from the fall of man until today.⁶³

The equation of "faith" and "fear" as ontological movers for all mankind could easily spring from the pages of Heidegger. Initially, it blends the sublime (faith) with the mundane (fear) as though they were, on some level, the same thing. And then, across cultures (Egypt to China), the ontological impulse is presumed to derive from a common basis. The socialist understanding is mixed with religious faith, i.e., was it really faith, or fear, that made thousands of European workers spend lifetimes building the ornate cathedrals of medieval times? And does such a distinction matter, if we are considering (as an ideologue of authenticity) the raw totality of human labor power applied to a goal?

Whether Al-e Ahmad truly "rediscovered" Islam as a faith or as a cultural identity, his reason for reclaiming either seems clear: a conviction that Iranian politics is impossible without the symbolic power of Islam. Around the time of these experiences, he wrote:

One can be effective in politics, or in the affairs of a society, when you have weighed the degree of acceptability or resistance of that society vis-à-vis your ideas. And in order to achieve this measure, you should have known that society, its traditions, its history, and those factors that are essential in shaping its collective belief, forces that mobilize its masses in the streets, and then its silence and its sitting quietly at home.⁶⁴

At the end of his life, Al-e Ahmad prepared an account of his travels to the “West” (Western Europe and the U.S.A.), the Soviet Union, Israel, and Mecca. He called it “Four Ka’bahs” – or “Four Directions of Prayer” – and gave an account of each place, its merits and flaws.⁶⁵ Mecca symbolized the possibility of Muslim renewal in the modern world, the final commitment of Al-e Ahmad’s unsettled life. Despite his checkered past as a Muslim, the Islamic Republic praised his contribution to the revolution. In the early 1980s, the government named a boulevard, high school, and neighborhood in Tehran in his honor. On the thirteenth anniversary of Al-e Ahmad’s death, the Tehran magazine *E’tesam* wrote that:

He was a Marxist, then [he found] socialism in the National Front organization, but eventually he realized that his lost soul belonged in righteous Islam, period. He tried to become alienated from himself and drown himself in the abyss of intellectualism. Motivated by confrontation with his pure Islamic mentality and his authentic Islamic nature, he returned to his true self.⁶⁶

Ali Shari’ati: Islamic ideology as an authentic discourse

Now I want to address a fundamental question raised by intellectuals in Africa, Latin America, and Asia: the question of “return to one’s roots” . . . Since the Second World War, many intellectuals in the Third World, whether religious or non-religious, have stressed that their societies must return to their roots and rediscover their history, culture, and popular language. (Ali Shari’ati)

Ali Shari’ati (1933–77) took up from where Al-e Ahmad had left off when he died of a sudden heart attack at the age of forty-six. In a sense, Shari’ati can be seen as continuing Al-e Ahmad’s critique of the secular political culture of the time for ignoring the Islamic culture of Iran. But while Al-e Ahmad concentrated on the critique of secularism and modernism in Iranian culture and politics, Shari’ati made every attempt to construct and popularize a modern Shi’i ideology as a more authentically grounded alternative to the existing secular ideologies. If Al-e Ahmad’s works focussed on the critique of Iranian modernity, Shari’ati’s writings and lectures offered a positive theory of Islamic ideology.⁶⁷ He was by far the most influential Shi’i oppositional intellectual of the 1970s. Although Shari’ati died just before the Revolution in June of 1977 from a massive heart attack in London, he became one of its most celebrated figures. The

People’s Mojahedin of Iran, the main oppositional movement in post-revolutionary Iran, adopted him as their ideological mentor. Shari’ati’s ideas continue to be the subject of an important debate and controversy between two intellectual circles within the Islamic republic.

Raised as a political Muslim by his father, Shari’ati was involved in pro-Mosaddeq demonstrations and other nationalist political activities.⁶⁸ In 1959 he won a scholarship to study philosophy in France. This was a very political period in France, with the Algerian national liberation movement at its height. Shari’ati soon joined the Iranian Students’ Confederation in Paris and helped with the publication of *Nameh-e Parsi* (the theoretical journal of the anti-Shah students in exile), and *Iran-e Azad*, a publication of the National Front abroad. He also helped to organize demonstrations in support of Third World liberation, wrote for the Algerian FLN (in English, National Liberation Front), and translated Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* into Persian.⁶⁹ On one occasion he was hospitalized after receiving wounds from the police during a pitched political battle in the street. In Paris he belonged to the exiled Iranian National Front, a secular-religious coalition for democratizing Iran. He also closely studied efforts to synthesize Marxism and Christianity, including Liberation Theology, and he read the radical Catholic journal *Esprit*. This journal featured a Christian-Marxist dialogue, with writings by such prominent thinkers as Lukacs, Foucault, Fanon, and various radical Catholic thinkers. The journal introduced Shari’ati to Jaure’s religious socialism and essays on Christ as a revolutionary egalitarian, almost certainly influencing his lifelong ambition to fuse religion with radical politics.⁷⁰

While at the Sorbonne, Shari’ati attended lectures by Louis Massignon and Henri Corbin (two prominent Orientalists), Raymond Aron, Roger Garaudy, Georges Politzer (the orthodox Marxist philosopher), Michel Foucault, and Georges Guirvitch. He later wrote a chapter of his autobiography on Massignon and his other teachers in Paris and titled that chapter “My Idols.”⁷¹

His studies and encounters convinced him of the necessity for a single ideological basis if Iranian national liberation was to succeed. Rejecting Marxism, the alien ideology, he determined to create a full-fledged Islamic alternative, generously utilizing Marxist categories and concepts.

When Shari’ati returned to Iran in 1964 he was immediately arrested at the border and was imprisoned. He was released in 1965 and began teaching at the Mashhad University. He was soon dismissed for the radical content of his lectures, and then went to Tehran where he began lecturing at Hoseyniyeh-ye Ershad. Although many others participated in the activities of Hoseyniyeh-ye Ershad, this institution was in many

respects different from all previous intellectual and cultural institutions of reform Shi'ism in Iran. What made it unique was the version of Shi'ism propagated by Shari'ati, and its huge success in attracting a much wider audience than any previously established religious study circles. Most importantly, Hoseyniyeh-ye Ershad was able to attract youth, high school and college students, and the modern petty bourgeoisie, segments of the Iranian population who were for the most part newcomers to religious lectures and politics.

Shari'ati articulated a brand of Islamic discourse which was most appealing to the educated middle class of Iran. Shari'ati, as a personality, represented most of the qualities that the Iranian middle class could identify with. He always dressed in a Western-style business suit and tie and lectured in secular and modernist Persian.

Shari'ati's version of Islamic ideology had an anti-clergy tone. He articulated a kind of Islamic humanism in which there was no need for a professional clerical class to mediate between the believers and God. It was a more secularized Islam, based more on individual preferences and choices. Shari'ati's Islamic reformism granted a sense of self-respect, collective and national identity, and cultural authenticity.

Shari'ati's work spoke to the Iranian youth, particularly the underprivileged university students, those from the traditional middle classes, and educated young women from a more traditional background. Many of these students felt compelled to fight for social change and perhaps a revolution, but their religious and cultural background made such a commitment problematic. There was no explicit precedent for a Muslim social revolutionary in the modern context which would speak to the needs of Iranian youth, and the prevailing ideology, namely Marxism, was secular and openly atheist.

Shari'ati's Islamic ideology offered a theory of radical change which insisted, on religious grounds, that to be a good Muslim one must fight to overthrow the existing social order. Revolutionary strength, he asserted, could be mustered only by deriving ideology from indigenous roots, and not from alien Western ideologies. With this mix of authenticity discourse and revolutionary ideology, he bridged the inner contradictions for a generation of Muslim youths. But his project in effect amounted less to a categorical split between "Western ideology" and Shi'i Islam and more to a dialogue between the two, creating a modern revolutionary ideology for the Iranian context.

This achievement should be understood in the context of Shari'ati's larger project of reconciling the experience of modernization with Iranian traditional life. He wanted to give Islam a dynamic quality to let it survive – and triumph – in modern times. Because of this, he was openly critical

of conservative clerics and Islamic doctrines, which he considered "backwards looking."⁷² In his lecture "Modern Calamities," he vividly depicts the failures of prevalent forms of modernity as he understands them:

The modern calamities that are leading to the deformation and decline of humanity may be placed under two main headings: (1) Social systems and (2) Intellectual systems. Within the two outwardly opposed social systems that have embraced the new man, or that invite him into their embrace, what is plainly felt is the tragic way that man, a primary and supra-material essence, has been forgotten . . . Both these social systems, capitalism and communism, though they differ in outward configuration, regard man as an economic animal . . . [as a result] modern technological prodigies, who ought to have freed mankind from servitude to manual labor and increased people's leisure time, cannot do even that much . . . Humanity is every day more condemned to alienation, more drowned in this mad maelstrom of compulsive speed. Not only is there no longer leisure for growth in human values, moral greatness, and spiritual aptitudes [but it has also] caused traditional moral values to decline and disappear as well.⁷³

This passage shows Shari'ati's central concern with the human (and particularly the Iranian) "soul" within modernity, and his conviction that Western materialist ideologies and culture are destroying it. It is interesting that there is little separation between cultural and ideological infestations from the West. Shari'ati intends to emphasize that the intellectual and social systems are fundamentally conjoined. Ideology is the vanguard of culture, and both communism and capitalism are ideologies which defend a materialist-atheist cultural base. As in Heidegger, the superpowers are externally opposed, but ontologically equivalent. This ontological dimension is important, because although Shari'ati sees modernity as characterized by warring ideologies, he will also raise the Islamic ideology from a mere intellectual option to the ontological necessity for mankind. The ontological dimension provides the criteria for authenticity, from which Islamic ideology derives an ultimate legitimacy beyond intellect and reason. The ontological validation of an ideology comes from a claim to authentic roots in the culture. The result is a collapsing of "culture" (i.e., the masses), "ideology," and "God" into one unified force. "God" – or the Heideggerian substitute "Being" – is extremely important for granting singular and ultimate authority to the mass movement. Ideology is the voice of this authority. In his lecture on the "Ideal Society," Shari'ati described such a mass movement as "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 (of Islamic classless society)." He notes that the basis for unity is unlike fascism ("unity of blood or soil"), unlike communism ("sharing of material benefit"), and unlike "irresponsible and directionless liberalism," the "plaything of contesting social forces."⁷⁴ In another lecture,

"Humanity Between Marxism and Religion," he describes the emergence of the Islamic solution for modernity:

We are clearly standing on the frontier between two eras, one where both Western civilization and Communist ideology have failed to liberate humanity, drawing it instead into disaster and causing the new spirit to recoil in disillusionment; and where humanity in search of deliverance will try a new road and take a new direction, and will liberate its essential nature. Over this dark and dispirited world, it will set a holy lamp like a new sun; by its light, the man alienated from himself will perceive anew his primordial nature, rediscover himself, and clearly see the path of salvation. Islam will play a major role in this new life and movement.⁷⁵

Despite the apparent dichotomizing of Islam and the West, Shari'ati took what he considered "most revolutionary" from both Western ideologies and Shi'i tradition. However, he was always certain to anchor the "Western" elements in Shi'i symbolism, as if that was their true origin and the West had merely produced an inferior copy. Marxism, for example, stole its revolutionary ideas from Islam: "It is the Marxists who have just learnt it from Islam."⁷⁶ Hence, Shari'ati's work was a type of revivalism: out of the dialogue he produced between Shi'ism and Western ideology, he "revived" Islamic tendencies which perhaps never existed, but spoke to people's contemporary needs in a traditional-symbolic language. He considered himself a modern Shi'i ideologue of the future, fighting for technological advancement and national independence. The major critique of modernity in his work is the attack on secularism, or what he called "the materialist cosmos," where "man turns out to be an object." In contrast, Islam shows "a fundamental bond, an existential relation [between man and the world], in regarding the two as arising from 'a single [sublime] origin.'⁷⁷ His purpose is to bring this bond explicitly into the everyday political lives of Iranians, as a recovery of the ideal and unified Islamic society. Like Heidegger, he felt a pervading religious background had slipped away and left people atomized from the ontological bond to their community.

His lectures often did not depict Iran's domination by the West as primarily political or economic (as the passages quoted above show), but as a suffering from Western infestations within Iranian society. To be sure, he uses the specter of the West to target many elements within Iranian society, accusing them of succumbing to false Western ideologies and lifestyles. Extending the 'Gharbzadeh' discourse, he conveyed a historical vision of Iranian spiritual decline, with Western infestations destroying a society already in deterioration after centuries of deviation from the true path of Islam. The Western intrusion represents an ideology as false as the corrupted Islam which led Iran (and all Muslim peoples) astray to begin with, and both signal the need for a return to the "true Islam." Corrupted

Islam and Western infection merge into one with the Pahlavi regime, Western ideologies in Iran, and the conservative strains of the clergy. In this manner, Shari'ati helped to structure the political discourse of the 1970s around a binary of authenticity/inauthenticity within Iranian society. What was most ironic about Shari'ati was how he was perceived by others. He was regarded by the Shi'i establishment as too eclectic and careless in his interpretation of Islamic texts and history; the secular radical intellectuals viewed him as too religious and anti-Marxist to be a radical and enlightened intellectual; the Iranian regime labeled him an Islamic Marxist.

In his *Red Shi'ism*, Shari'ati presented the "true Islam" as a modern construction of the faith designed to bring out its most radical political tendencies. He crafted it in relation to a revolutionary predecessor, Imam Hossein, who died in Karbala in 680 trying to overcome the "degenerate and tyrannical" rulers of the time. On this basis he declared the dual threads of Islamic tradition: "the war of religion against religion," or "*tauhid* [religion of revolution] versus *shirk* [religion of the status quo]."⁷⁸ The historical struggle between these two Islams pits "justice and human unity" (the mass revolution) against "social and racial discrimination" (the state and its clerical supporters), but the "inevitable revolution of the future [will culminate in] the triumph of justice, equity, and truth." Furthermore, "it is the responsibility of every individual in every age to determine his stance in the constant struggle between the two wings we have described, and not to remain a spectator."⁷⁹ Thus, Shari'ati "created" a perennial yet historically repressed tradition which gave young Muslims the moral mandate to fight for the overthrow of existing society.

In the promise of renewal for Shi'i identity, Shari'ati found the most visceral axis for the politicization of urban Iranian youth. His highly inventive conception of history served this purpose. Yann Richard has pointed out that Shari'ati "disliked (studying) history" and "refers very little to it," preferring to evoke "an ideal original Islam, not its historic compromises."⁸⁰ Shari'ati freely blended his conception of history with an explicit ideological agenda. In effect, Shari'ati's historical work rejects the amassing of so-called "one-dimensional facts" (as with Western social science) and constructs a revolutionary purpose to bring the most radical elements of "self" to the surface. It is history which interweaves cultural self-realization and radical political commitment. In his scheme, "ideology" has an especially powerful role, and control of the ideological superstructure can even transform the socio-economic infrastructure. Ideology has this power because it derives its roots from the living culture of the people's history which is cast in the shape of "geography" (the desert),⁸¹

and in the “symbolic language” of religion, “the clear and explicit language that expresses meaning directly.”⁸² In sum, the Islamic ideology transcends existence as a mere intellectual property, and thrives in the domain of ontological legitimacy.

Shari’ati’s work also employed the axis of class very effectively. In his *Islamology* (1972), for example, he prioritizes the economy as the determinant of class formations, political dynamics, and cultural features, and names class struggle as the “motor of history.” He elaborates a religious basis for this class interpretation, citing the story of Cain and Abel as the symbol of class struggle throughout history.⁸³ Class struggle, as its symbolic expression in the Koran demonstrates, is perennial, but its formation differs across history. Accordingly, he insists that the essence of class struggle for our time is the conflict between developed and underdeveloped nations, probably drawing this insight from his exposure to Third Worldist political ideologies in Paris. The positing of the “Third World revolutionary subject” in place of the “Western proletariat” as the class of historical liberation is one of his chief disputes with Marxism. Western regimes, he contends, have eliminated the revolutionary potential in their countries by letting the workers “buy into” the bourgeois lifestyle at the expense of the Third World.⁸⁴ This new global class dynamic calls for a redefinition of the “revolutionary class.” In the context of Third World peoples, revolutionary consciousness must be defined along different axes than merely class-conscious classes which are formed by “religious beliefs, symbols, mores, customs, traditions, cultures, and popular notions of justice” as well as economic rank.⁸⁵ The progressive potential of religion is a crucial ingredient for successful class revolution in this context. It is this revelation that allows Shari’ati to center a mystical religious “identity” at the heart of any class politics in Iran.

The issue of class struggle is integral to Shari’ati’s thinking, and he employs what he considers the most sophisticated system for analyzing it: Marxism. But for Shari’ati, Marxism is like technology or industry: an objective phenomenon to be taken by Iran and “Islamicized” from its Western roots. In his Marxist lectures of 1972, he broke Marx’s life into three parts to extract the most useful elements: (1) the young Marx as an irrelevant atheist philosopher, attacking religion out of personal bitterness; (2) the middle Marx, a genius sociologist who uncovered the objective laws of capitalist economy, and revealed the solutions to social oppression; (3) the aged Marx, as leader of the First International, a compromised politician overshadowed in his failings by the brilliance of his earlier career.⁸⁶ According to Shari’ati, this third trend was intensified by Engels, Kautsky, and Stalin, who turned Marxism into a crude and narrow dogma of economic determinism. He accused Soviet and Eastern

European Communism of lapsing into the “iron law of oligarchy,” and “vulgarizing” and “bureaucratizing” Marxism.⁸⁷ He accused the Iranian Tudeh Party of employing incorrect tactics in dealing with the people:

Not surprisingly, the public has formed the distinct impression that [the Tudeh Party] are enemies of God, country, religion, decency, spirituality, morality, honor, truth, and tradition. In other words, the public has come to the conclusion that these gentlemen have one aim: to destroy our religion and replace it with foreign atheism. The reader is now probably smirking and muttering, “these criticisms are cheap, vulgar, and common.” Yes they are. But then the common people are exactly the kind of audience we are trying to reach. And most of our common people are peasants, not industrial workers . . . they are highly religious, not secular as in capitalist Europe . . .⁸⁸

Marx’s scientific contribution, then, must be provided with an authentic Islamic substratum to be effective in the Iranian context. Atheism, this passage reveals, is not simply the absence of religion, but a foreign presence and imposition. It is over the issue of secularism that Shari’ati is most hostile to Marxism, and the closest to Heidegger and existentialism. In “Humanity Between Marxism and Religion,” he acknowledges this kinship to Heidegger, and expresses sympathy for the wave of Western intellectuals who search in vain for a lost God:

Today, in philosophy, Heidegger does not speak in the (atheistic) terms of Hegel or Feuerbach. In science, Max Planck, the outstanding exponent of the new physics, opposes the ideas of Claud Bernard. Heidegger is searching for Christ in humanity, and Planck is searching for God in the world of physics . . . Today, in contrast to Marx, who felt human liberation depended upon the denial of God, and Nietzsche, who boasted, “God is dead,” even an atheistic philosopher like Sartre speaks of God’s absence from the universe “with painful regret,” seeing in this a source of the futility of man and existence, the loss of values.⁸⁹

The politicization of religion as an anti-secular movement is what brings Shari’ati’s work into the camp of authenticity. His discourse of authenticity reaches obscure metaphysical depths as a “total ideology,” but its most practical ramifications are evident in his correspondence with Frantz Fanon.⁹⁰ In his letter, Shari’ati disagreed with Fanon over the necessity for abandoning religion before national progress can be made. Instead, he insists, a nation must regain its cultural and religious heritage before it can fight imperialism and borrow Western technology without losing its unique identity and self-esteem. Religion is the strongest practical force for bonding masses and directing them toward progressive goals. Religion, as an ideology, is associated with the idea of “roots,” and roots are a conceptualized public ontology (which is very similar to Heidegger’s intellectualization of religious experience). The concept of public ontology becomes a theory of authenticity, with implicit limits as to what a

human may be and still remain a true Muslim. Here we arrive at the heart of Shari'ati's dilemma, one not unlike Heidegger's: how can a unique cultural identity be preserved under the onslaught of modernization? Or, how can we as a people adopt modernity in accordance with our society and history, rather than allow it to master us as a Western tool of subjugation? In this sense, authenticity is a modern prescription for adopting modernity without sacrificing cultural or political autonomy.

In one of his major works, *Return to Self*, Shari'ati discusses the issue of "roots" in relation to Islam:

I want to stress that non-religious intellectuals, as well as religious ones, have reached this conclusion. In fact, the main advocates of "return to roots" have not been religious – Fanon in Algeria, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Leopold Senghor in Senegal . . . When we say "return to one's roots," we are really saying one's cultural roots . . . some of you may conclude that we Iranians must return to our racial [Aryan] roots. I categorically reject this conclusion. I oppose racism, fascism, and reactionary returns . . . [Our people] do not find their roots in [pre-Islamic] civilizations. They are left unmoved by the heroes, myths, and monuments of these ancient empires. Consequently, for us to return to our roots [means rediscovery of] our Islamic roots.⁹¹

This passage expresses Shari'ati's conviction that only with religion can a revolutionary ideology mobilize the masses to fight for social change and a new society. But his Islamic ideology is concerned with religion on a deeper level than just its political utility. He is also concerned with the meaning and purpose of human life and society. He gives the name "worldliness" (*zendegi-ye donyavi*) to the culture of Western nihilism.⁹² In the secular West "all human beings must become consumer animals and all nations must get stripped of their authenticity."⁹³ "Worldliness" is a social philosophy which promotes individual hedonism and disregards any higher purpose to life. It "exclusively defines the purpose of man's life as pleasure and enjoyment."⁹⁴ "Worldliness" has tainted Iranian society, including the clerical establishment. Meanwhile, "true Islam," the revolutionary sort, has been "forgotten." "Worldliness" has produced "alienation, or even in some instances, hatred for self" in the Iranian people, and instilled a "deep, obsessive, or even boastful pretension to attachment to the West, and rootless and vulgar modernism." Shari'ati locates a class basis for this "plague" in Iranian society: it embodies all the most detestable attributes of the "bourgeoisie," a "dirty, stinking, money-grabbing class."⁹⁵ The corruption of the Iranian clerical establishment is a result of its organic ties to the national bourgeoisie:

Do you know what the source of misery is for Islam? It is the formation of, and the dependency of the religion on, this [petty bourgeois] class, establishing a connection between the seminary and the bazaar. Should Islam be able one day to get rid

of this dirty connection, it will, forever, assume the leadership of humanity; and should this relationship continue, Islam has been lost forever.⁹⁶

The worldliness grown from this relation has produced a hypocritical clergy, which passively supports a system which produces poverty, and then admonishes the rich to give handouts to the poor. As the dominant spirit of modernity, "worldliness" has enslaved humanity to modern technology, rather than making technology a servant to human need. Shari'ati describes this condition as "the idiocy of the contemporary philosophy of man, the result of purpose-free technology," where "the whole meaning of civilization has been robbed of any ideal." In a different passage, Shari'ati describes technology (and science) as the liberator of humanity from the prisons of "nature," "heredity," and "history" – but this is possible only in a society which has achieved union with God.⁹⁷ Thus, Shari'ati clearly perceives a necessary connection between "ideals" (i.e., religious roots) and a just ordering of material society. Without being explicit about what the purpose behind technology will be, he codes the idea of technology in Islamic language, as if this alone will improve its moral character. It seems that the triumph he envisions over technology is a psychological one, to create new associations for it, beyond rapid modernization and Westernization, in a realm more acceptable and familiar to the mass of Iranian people. Yet Shari'ati's revolution is not merely psychological in character. He is interested in more than merely changing the concepts in people's minds associated with technology, industry, and modernity in general. He explicitly states that his aim is a classless society, and openly attacks the vested interests of pre-revolutionary Iran. In the intermingling of socialist and authenticity diatribe, however, there is a tacit hierarchy which locates his ideological priorities. This hierarchy shows itself in his conception of truth on the level of knowledge and the level of practice. For Shari'ati, scientific method is universal: the correct cognitive method "is of far reaching importance in determining progress or decline," more so than "genius," "philosophy" or "mere talent." But at the same time, "each society has a fixed basis, or in the words of the Qur'an, it has a road, a path, a particular character."⁹⁸ The first is universal truth, the second is the particular ontological character of each society. The forces of timing and temporality stemming from the ontological basis are mightier than truth. Any formal knowledge is preceded with organic knowledge of context, i.e., social context, feeling, timing, etc. This is comparable to Heidegger's concept of mood as a basic structure of Being. Abstract understanding – such as Marxist economics – can only be effective in mobilizing the masses if the conveyor also has a strong familiarity with social and historical circumstances on the pre-thematic level of

popular understanding. Thus, authentic knowledge is more primary than objective knowledge. Shari'ati cites this to explain the failed attempts by secular intellectuals to communicate with the Iranian masses. Although they possess the formal, "universal" truth, they lack the deeper and broader everyday truth which opens up space for communication. This space is not accessed by a knowledge of Islamic principles – anyone could learn these from a book in any part of the world – but by familiarity with the facticity and practice of Islam in Iranian culture. Such facticity is all but impossible to articulate objectively, but a familiarity with popular meanings of Islamic stories and myths enables one to speak in the "authentic" language of the people. It is coded slang, popular imagery, and secret language in the everyday world.

Authentic knowing, Shari'ati tells us in no uncertain terms, is a spiritual phenomenon: "Spiritual knowledge alone can raise the existential value of man to a degree that protects him against feelings of inferiority toward occidental greatness." Spiritual life is anchored in the past, and "it is absolutely impossible for an individual without a past to have a future."⁹⁹ From this we may surmise that the "soul" for which Shari'ati fights is, of course, tradition. The understanding of this tradition, or soul, is beyond scientific verification – "beyond the scope of examination, observation, and experiment (and hence knowledge)."¹⁰⁰ It unites man and God in "the whole universe as a unity, into this world and the hereafter, instead of dividing it into the natural and the supernatural," and this "whole existence [is] a single form, a single living and conscious organism, possessing will, intelligence, feeling, and purpose." Thus, while science deals with the "manifest and observable,"¹⁰¹ which is to say the superficial, there is another essential, hidden level to knowing, which is authentic knowing. The ultimate truth of this cosmic knowing is Islam. On this basis, Shari'ati can claim with justification that although the West has made better use of scientific truth, Shi'i Islam is still in possession of the only ontological truth, and therefore remains in a superior position.¹⁰²

For Shari'ati, then, objective knowledge is crucial but superficial in relation to authentic knowledge. The reality to which these two forms of knowledge refer is located in objective action itself, which has a will and intelligence of its own beyond human belief. Authentic knowing stems from this action, which is conditioned by everyday traditional structures. This outlook is a serious reversal of received Islamic doctrine, which normally places scholastic learning before correct action. With this bewildering reversal, Shari'ati is able to transform Islam into a nihilist-populist doctrine of revolution. Nihilist because it grounds its truth in action rather than intellect, populist because it raises the activity of the mass to a

sacred and uncorrupted level, and revolutionary because with the correct ideology, this mass power can be motivated to destroy existing society to make way for a new one. In one passage, Shari'ati tells the story of a well digger to evoke his conception of the sanctity and revolutionary nature of everyday action:

I was deeply entrenched in . . . the awesome [artistry] of the Master [well digger], and the miracle he did with his axe, the beauty of labor, the striving in the dark, and the majesty of courage to plunge into the depth of the earth; and then meaning – so meaningful – of searching for water, and the superlative sanctity of digging in the heart of darkness, far from [the surface of] the earth, far from life, to open wells which have been closed down. Suddenly I felt a delicate caressing in between the [toes] of my bare feet. Gradually murmurs, intensifying and expanding every moment, came from everywhere, joining together, becoming one cry, and the cries were raised from all over, joining together, and now turning angry, rebellious, aggressive: water.¹⁰³

In light of this prioritization of action over formal knowledge, Shari'ati's *Shi'ism: A Complete Political Party* outlined the difference between traditional "knowledge-Islam" and revolutionary "action-Islam." He cites the Koran to insist that one's beliefs do not make a Muslim, but one's practices: "Examine carefully how the Koran uses the term 'Kafer'. It uses that term to describe those who refuse to take action for the truth. It never applies that term to those who deny existence of God and the soul."¹⁰⁴ Thus, it is not subjective belief, but objective action that primarily defines a Muslim. Accordingly, Shari'ati relocates truth in a field of human action and not formal learning:

[In the midst of] life [we] cannot be in the course of understanding and comprehending the truth through intellectual genius, or inner illumination, or scientific thinking and subjective ratiocination. Just as one can only "understand" a fiery bullet when a fiery bullet hits him, so he can understand a concept precisely when he stands in the current course of application of that concept. It is in action that truth manifests itself.¹⁰⁵

This conception of action in the everyday life of the people amounts to a central pillar of Shari'ati's ideology of True Islam, the legitimacy of populist Islam. Populist Islam is the pure form of Islam, while scholastic Islam can be corrupted to oppress the people:

Islam has two separate Islams. The first can be considered a revolutionary "ideology." By this, I mean beliefs, critical programs and aspirations whose goal is human development. This is true religion. The second can be considered scholastic "knowledge." By this I mean philosophy, oratory, legal training, and scriptural learning. The second can be grasped by academic specialists, even reactionary ones. The first can be grasped by uneducated believers. This is why sometimes true believers understand Islam better than *faqih* (religious jurists), and *'alem* (scholars), and the philosophers.¹⁰⁶

Thus, there is an idealization of the religious wisdom of the common man, as opposed to the received learning of the religious establishment. It was this feature that allowed Shari'ati to introduce the most innovative currents into Islam and then bypass the religious authorities to go directly to the people for legitimacy. Shari'ati's claim to be attuned to popular Islamic wisdom allowed him at times to invent streams with only the loosest precedent in theological doctrine, but to claim that they were always in the hearts and minds of the people.

Shari'ati realizes the mass energy he has tapped, and at times speaks almost like an anarchist about the political role of the people:

Islam is the first school of social thought that recognizes the masses as the basis, the fundamental and conscious factor in determining history and society – not the elect as Nietzsche thought, not the aristocracy and nobility as Plato claimed, not the great personalities as Carlyle and Emerson believed, not those of pure blood as Alexis Carrel imagined, not the priests or the intellectuals, but the masses.¹⁰⁷

Yet once having conceived this mass base of popular power, how does Shari'ati recommend it be harnessed? For the central pillar of his system is authenticity, a mass force which, while useful for political mobilization, is difficult to truly control or even define. There is a silent core to Shari'ati's philosophy which subordinates reason to will, intellect to "Being," and for these reasons (again) embraces a form of nihilism. Here he comes very close to the Nietzschean tradition of German Romanticism.

The concept of *Ummah* (religious community) shows where Shari'ati stands on the question of harnessing the popular will. He redefines *Ummah* as a "society on the move, a society not in place but on the way, towards an objective, having a direction."¹⁰⁸ Based on the majority support for Islam, a vanguard party must mobilize society for revolutionary action, and then lead society in restructuring the class system and resisting the imperialist world. In light of the betrayal of Islam by the clerics, this party must be led by revolutionary Muslim intellectuals. This, he calls the "Total Party of Shi'ism":

"Party," in the general vocabulary of modern intellectuals, with a "world-view," is basically a unified social organization, an "ideology," a "philosophy of history," an "ideal social order," a "class foundation," a "social leadership," a "political philosophy," a "political orientation," a "tradition," a "slogan," a "strategy," a "tactic of struggle," and . . . a "hope" that wants to change the "status quo" in man, society, people, or a particular class, and establish the "desired status" in its stead.¹⁰⁹

It is quite likely that this political party would be authoritarian in nature, considering that Shari'ati believes the masses are bound by "superstition" and would therefore elect reactionary representatives. In *Community and Leadership*, Shari'ati argues that only the intelligentsia has

the authority to govern post-revolutionary society.¹¹⁰ Their task would be to build a classless society in which religious devotion and industrial might could flourish side by side. Thus, in the economic sphere there would be no rich and poor, with individual greed a thing of the past. In the cultural sphere, there would be "religious collectivism" instead of "religious individualism" (i.e., secularism). This uniform religious culture must be mystical and ascetic, producing individuals who find satisfaction beyond material gain; but society at large must be productive and materialistic, employing the most modern techniques to serve people's needs and defend the nation.¹¹¹

Shari'ati died just before the Iranian Revolution. The Islamic Republic named a city street after Shari'ati and put his portrait on postage stamps. He has been recognized as the thinker who "did the most to prepare the Iranian youth for revolutionary upheaval," and his work is studied widely in Iran as the "Islamic answer to Marxism and the West."¹¹² We need to ask, however: is the post-revolutionary Iran the society that he envisioned for his country?

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to explore the emerging face of modernity in our time. In the context of the disillusionment with so-called universalist alternatives (Marxism and liberalism), radical mass movements are likely to emerge in modernizing nations based on ideologies of cultural authenticity. These movements promote social and cultural institutions which are modern but "authentically local." These "local" forms of resistance confront a global problem – the universalizing and homogenizing tendencies of "Western" modernity – and thus they have a distinctly universal character. The politics of authenticity is therefore neither local nor authentic. What matters is that it is grounded in some construction of the "local."

Other studies on the politics of authenticity, such as the German romanticism of the early twentieth century, suggest that ideologies of cultural authenticity – whether cast in religious or national terms – are likely to hold great appeal for the publics of societies in crisis. This is not because of any popular attachment to the "roots," but because the banner of "culture" is such a unifying cover for confronting economic and political grievances.

The politics of authenticity have a strong intellectual history stemming back to some of Europe's "great philosophers," and the ideologues of the Iranian Revolution did not lose any time in exploiting the rich German intellectual legacy left to them.

Mass movements based on the discourse of authenticity tend to stem from the same conditions as most twentieth-century revolutions: rapid modernization from above, urbanization and destruction of traditional modes of life, domination by powerful foreign interests. However, the narrative of these movements is often presented in the language of cultural identity. We must look at these "cultural" movements as significant faces of modernity for our time. We should try to understand them and their causes without recourse to any simplistic distortions about the "resurgence of ancient impulses" or "religious fanaticism."

5 German intellectuals and the culture of modernity

Introduction

This chapter lays out a comparative analysis of intellectual discourses in Germany between the World Wars as a means to further explore, and strengthen, the argument that social movements based on discourses of authenticity are internal to modernity, and in fact represent a common means through which "cultures" attempt to localize the course of modernization. Detailed examinations of the work of Junger and Heidegger show how they constructed versions of modernity rooted in German traditions. By exploring their claims, we can further understand the centrality of discourses of authenticity as a cultural, intellectual, and political response to modernization.

The works we have examined so far make abundantly clear that by defining modern experience as lacking in "soul," "substance," or "meaning," particularly on the "collective" level, intellectuals like Shari'ati and Al-e Ahmad were not envisioning a new form of protest within the modernist discourse; on the contrary, they echo a constant, reappearing, and troubling aspect of modernity which is anything but unfamiliar to Western intellectuals. The situation of alienation they describe is evoked in nearly every major narrative representing the modern situation. This dilemma is made much of, not only in the mystical or religious-inspired works of, for example, Heidegger and Kierkegaard, but also in the self-proclaimed scientific narratives of modernity by writers such as Weber and Marx. For Weber, the experience of modernity is an "iron cage," a rootless world without any meaning. Indeed, he viewed modernity as an endless search for meaning by its very nature. In the early Marx, where social alienation from the self is a key concept, religion is presented as "the spirit of a world without spirit." This confrontation with nihilism occurred over and over in Western Marxism. We see it in the messianic yearnings of Benjamin, and his preoccupation with the destruction of the past. We see it also in the writings of the Frankfurt School, in Horkheimer's grim depiction of a world in which