

CHAPTER 2

Ali Shari'ati: The Islamic Ideologue Par Excellence

"One of the remarkable facts of his intellectual history during this period," says a biographer of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the great theologian of American puritanism, "is that, despite a very stormy propensity to theological innovation, he seems almost completely untouched by the questions of ministerial authority."¹ There is always something of a contradiction in the very terms of "theological innovation." Theology, as our historically received knowledge of God and as a hermeneutically sealed claim to monolithic interpretation of it, has something in it of the "eternal yesterday," as Weber called it. The atemporal omnipresence of God and the sanctity of the "eternal yesterday" when His knowledge was construed make all present and future "innovations" dubitable propositions. But at the same time, "ministerial authority" always seeks to institutionalize a reading of the received theology that is most compatible with the political exigencies of the status quo. The result of this theological paradox—remaining true to the received charismatic spontaneity of a vision of God or lending a legitimating hand to the powers that be—is an ideological bifurcation: "Theological innovation" is always congenial to critical engagements in matters of politics; "ministerial authority" is often inclined to sustain its own legitimacy via its institutional recognition by the political establishment. In the course of every major revolutionary movement, whether theological in New England or ideological in Iran, there is a major area of contention between "theological innovation," which wants to break loose from the inhibiting doctrinal fetters, and the "ministerial authority," which fears for its exclusive professional claims on possibilities of public salvation. The result never fails to be tumultuous.

From One to the Other

"But I am totally at a loss," Al-e Ahmad exclaimed once towards the end of his life, "why this new generation . . . still has fixed its hopes on the previous one? And why it refuses to understand that we no longer are capable of doing anything?"² An otherwise acute and perceptive observer of his contemporary political scene, Al-e Ahmad failed to see the heroes of the new generation coming. He could not have fully imagined that right before his eyes Ali Shari'ati (1933–1977) would extend the implications of what he had merely sensed and suggested much beyond his own expectations or abilities. Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati actually met in Mashhad in 1968, a year before Al-e Ahmad's sudden death. But the significance of their historical meeting, remarkable as it is, is pale and passing compared to their ideological rendez-vous.

Ali Shari'ati: a Phenomenon

How exactly does one man manage to capture the revolutionary imagination of an entire generation? Where exactly is the source of ideological energy one draws from to launch a cataclysmic movement? That Shari'ati energized the Iranian political culture, or at least a significant component of it, beyond anything known in its modern history is, more than anything else, an indication of a deep conviction on his own part, the conviction that he had a vision. Perhaps it is beyond the realm of inquiry for a student of political culture to seek the intellectual and spiritual sources that form and inform this conviction of a man that he has a vision. Perhaps an illusive image, perhaps something in the constitution of one's moral disposition, perhaps a piece of poetry, who knows, perhaps a deep and unlettered nostalgia for a promised utopia that once so deceptively, ever so deceptively, reveals itself to a man. Perhaps. We all live on the margins of possibilities. But what we can see is only the appearance, the external, the visible, which is thus also the invisible, the internal, the content. That is the only way we know how to know and how to judge: by and through the external. There is, undoubtedly, something in Shari'ati's external, the legacy of his writings, the power of his imagination, that betrays a deep and desperate conviction, a panoramic vision, a certain kind of certitude as to what precisely the end is—where the path, who the guide, when the time—and why all this is worth fighting for.

Assuming a voice that can address such a committed vision, the visionary finds all historical accuracy, logical consistency, and breadth of erudition superfluous and irrelevant. Shari'ati's discourse would be totally mutilated, reduced to rhetorical gibberish, were it to be dissected into its matters

of fact. Shari'ati was an ideologue, first and foremost. One would be totally misled to treat him as a historian, a philosopher, a sociologist, an Islamicist, or any other such brand of quiet limitations imposed or adopted for addressing the specific course of mundane realities.

Shari'ati wished to change, not interpret; lead, not argue; move, not convince; achieve, not rationalize. To do this he assumed a compelling ahistorical language, a language that would naturally and convincingly make Ayn al-Quddat Hamadani, a twelfth-century Persian mystic, his "brother," who writes—actually writes—an introduction to one of Shari'ati's books first published in 1970. By quoting a long paragraph at the beginning of *Kavir (Desert)* (1970) and calling it an "Introduction" by "my brother" Ayn al-Quddat Hamadani, Shari'ati assumes such a universal language that when he, Shari'ati himself, talks, history talks. Not having the authorial voice of God behind his tone, as did the clerics, Shari'ati settled, as he saw it more fit, for the perhaps equally compelling voice of history: not "history" as the cumulative measures of actual shared experiences, but "history" as the ideological reconstruction of a revolutionary "self" around which every other experience is forced to redefine itself.

To achieve this ahistorical voice, Shari'ati reaches out for the most sincere moments of his thoughts, his silence, and his solitude. Dividing his writings into three broad categories—(1) Societal (*ijtima'iyyat*), (2) Islamic (*Islamiyyat*), and (3) Deserta (*Kaviriyyat*)—he confessed, "what only the people like are the Societal; what both I and the people like are the Islamic, and that which makes me happy . . . [are] the deserta."³ What was closest to Shari'ati's heart, obviously, were the writings he called Deserta. He had a cryptomorphical notion of the desert. He thought the desert is where you go to do your ritual ablution (the image he sublimated was sands for drops of water) before you reach your truth. From Deserta to Islamica to Societal there seems to be a line, as it were, from Shari'ati's most sincere sentiments to his most political ambitions.

Despite Shari'ati's professed categorization of his own writings, it is not to the advantage of his ideas to divide them into typologies of purpose. He could only bring the totality of his emotional moments and the immediacy of his political agenda to bear on whatever he presently uttered. Shari'ati entered the Iranian ideological scene more like an unexpected thunder than a forecasted rain, thus giving his writings a certain emotional immediacy, a certain urgency of purpose. To look into Shari'ati's collective writings for a systematized political theory or a thorough definition of what is to be done is a futile task. At best, one has to try to catch those vibrant moments of ideological drive that made this revolutionary thunderbolt roar.

The thunder broke in the desert, in the silence and certitude of a primeval conviction. Shari'ati entered the Iranian urban intellectual scene with a deep distrust for the city and a profound, almost mythical, nostalgia for the

desert. He identified whatever was corrupt and degenerating with the city and whatever was pure, true, and beautiful with the desert. He longed for the desert as a fish for the sea. He spoke proudly of his learned ancestors who had come from Faryman, a desert oasis in Khorasan, and who had all chosen to return to the desert to live in solitude and serenity. Despite his profoundest love for his father, Shari'ati seems to blame him tacitly for having been the first in the chain of his ancestry to have decided to stay in the city and find his sanctuary there, in that urban celebration of distraction and mediocrity.⁴ Concurrent with his disdain for the city, Shari'ati ridiculed and despised the traditional notions of "history," which he considered nothing but an account of the ruling banalities polished by the urban intellectuals garbed and employed as court scribes and official historians. Shari'ati did not believe for a moment the claim of the modern historians to have redirected their focus from the ruling class onto "the real people." Look, he argued, at the enormous publicity that surrounded the death of President Kennedy. The "real" history was the one conducted and recorded in the desert. The desert, in fact, was "a history in the shape of a geography."⁵

Equally compelling in Shari'ati was a deep, almost sardonic, disdain for formal learning. In a moving recollection of a learning experience he never forgot, Shari'ati described how in his early youth he once asked a well digger to show him how he worked in a *Kariz* (a subterranean canal). That experience, which must have occurred some time during Shari'ati's youth in the mid- to late 1940s, remained the archetypal image of learning for Shari'ati, a learning that teaches "revolution, not information, . . . becoming, not being."⁶ That almost magical description of how water gushes through the cold stone from the persistent mastery and hard work of the well digger gave Shari'ati the most vivid similitude of how a revolutionary movement would actually take shape and reach its final goal:

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 the courage to plunge in the depth of the earth; and then meaning—so meaningful a meaning—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 cool and delicate caressing in between the fingers of my bare feet. Gradually the 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.⁷

The opposite, but integral, end of Shari'ati's pronounced and emphatic political agenda was his personal agonies in search of an ontological identity that would define and locate him in his self-created and self-sustained history. That Shari'ati consciously struggled with such desperate measures

of self-perception we know through a letter he wrote in 1965 to an unnamed friend. In this letter, Shari'ati sincerely discussed his penetrating introversion for a self-definition. He admitted that the "I" who has written and lectured, preached and led, addressed and been recognized by his audience, is an "I" that he has successfully projected, but is, in fact, only a mask, a cover (*hejab*) he insists, that he has put on. He does report jubilantly of a truer and more honest "I" that he has recently discovered. He describes the birth of this new "self" in him with powerful, somewhat apocalyptic, conviction.⁸ But the most remarkable context of this apocalyptic self-creation is solitude, which Shari'ati describes as his most reliable "safe house and . . . solid fortress."⁹ "The Prophet used to say," Shari'ati paraphrased for his friend, that "I love perfume, women, and praying in your [mortals'] world." But, continued Shari'ati with absolute conviction, "I have chosen solitude. Had it not been for this impeccable convent, this safe haven, this world . . . would have killed me."¹⁰

More than anything else, what this ability to retrieve into the safe haven of solitude gave Shari'ati was a remarkable ability to control and then gradually release the fury and conviction that was so intensely accumulated in him. He was, without a doubt, the most furious revolutionary among the ideologues of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. There is a vast and deep reservoir of revolutionary fervor in him matched by no other ideologue. But by his confessed retrievals to conscious and self-imposed solitude, he seems to have been able to bring his furious energy under control for gradual and systematic release. There is a short piece he wrote as an homage to his late teacher in Paris, the distinguished French scholar Louis Massignon, in which Shari'ati insisted on the superiority of *dust-dashtan* (a more dispassionate love in Persian) over *eshq* (passionate love). While *eshq* is a blind, rapid, and explosive outburst of emotion exhausting itself as it is consumed, *dust-dashtan* moves majestically and steadily towards a consciously chosen course of devotion where one's immediate gratifications are postponed and translated into longer spans of sustained beauty and truth.¹¹ With the abstract and removed notion of "the people" as his most glorious object of love and devotion, Shari'ati did manage, in the short span of life that he lived, to offer his love a historical measure of gratification. He charted his energy, the revolutionary fury he so consciously and decidedly tapped, with a clear, however tacit, political agenda, all mobilized towards a massive ideological reconstitution of the status quo. The ultimate target of this conscious sublimation of raw energy was political, leading to a tangible social transformation of private pieties into public virtues.

From Kariz to Paris

Shari'ati's revolutionary disposition and his almost irresistible urge to revive and redefine single-handedly Islamic history and dogma into a massive and systematized ideology of revolt is rooted, at least partially, in his experiences as a student in Paris. Although it is not possible, nor is it advisable, to reduce Shari'ati's complex revolutionary disposition to traces of his learning and education, one particular influence seems to be more persuasive and relevant than others. In a short piece, titled "My Masters," that Shari'ati wrote in praise of those who had taught him, the name and almost saintly omnipresence of Louis Massignon is particularly evident. The terms of endearment with which Shari'ati praised and honored his old teacher are almost hagiographic in tone, somewhat magical in mythical properties. As an Islamicist, Massignon was attracted chiefly to Mansur al-Hallaj, the martyred Persian mystic who, for the Catholic scholar, was an obvious historical transfixation of Christ, as is quite evident from the title of his magnum opus, *La Passion d'Hallaj*.¹² Chiefly and most pronouncedly a prophet of social revolution, Shari'ati seems to have had a peculiarly antinomian obsession with Massignon, whose mystical, somewhat ascetic, disposition seems so at odds with Shari'ati's pronounced revolutionary postures. The evident paradox ought to be seen in Shari'ati's restless determination to transform Massignon's ascetic mysticism into a puritanical revolutionary absolutism. The closing link, however, between Shari'ati's fascination with Massignon and his committed political activism seems to be in the long and sincere passages on solitude and sustained and dispassionate love he composes in his Deserta writings. There is something in the mystical and ascetic disposition of Massignon that is most appealing to Shari'ati as an ascetic revolutionary. The power, the sustained fury, of Shari'ati's rhetorical discourse comes in part from this mystical belief in the power of his words, in the magic of the Shi'i collective mythology, in the irresistible charm of his charismatic eloquence, so much so that it is as if the mystical truth of the Sufi masters, the stuff of Massignon's scholarship and erudition, is somehow transfused into the ideological truth of Shari'ati's claim to a political agenda. The ascetic exercises, the self-denunciatory demands, that accompany this mystical conviction are equally congenial to the political promotion of a revolutionary disposition. But perhaps more than anything else, it is the self-imposed solitude that provides the indispensable ingredient of the creative imagination inherent in any formulation of revolutionary myth.¹³

A Word of Caution

Before we go any further, building on these preliminary themes of Shari'ati's revolutionary disposition and message, a word of caution is in order. Central as he has been in the ideological build-up of the Revolution, Shari'ati's significance should not be overrated and overemphasized. Certainly such laudatory epithets as "the outstanding intellectual of the . . . whole of contemporary Iran"¹⁴ or "the main intellectual, even the Fanon, of the Islamic Revolution"¹⁵ are highly hyperbolic. Al-e Ahmad was much more central in Iranian political and literary culture than Shari'ati ever was. Motahhari was infinitely more erudite in matters of Islamics than Shari'ati could have ever been. Shari'ati's ideological contribution to the making of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 ought to be measured and balanced in relation to other prominent figures in this category. His knowledge of the French and Arabic languages and Islamic history and doctrine as well as contemporary European literature, sociological and otherwise, has been greatly exaggerated. Although compared to his clerical contemporaries, like Motahhari, he was more directly aware of European sources, that claim does not get him anywhere near the exalted status to which his devoted admirers elevate him.¹⁶

This word of caution is necessary because it is important to have a realistic understanding of these ideologues' grasp of the outside world. As it pertains to their knowledge of "The West," the specifics of their actual knowledge of European and American political and intellectual history is crucial in measuring the range of mythological constructions in which they participated. To complicate this picture even further, these ideologues themselves have become, perhaps inevitably, subjects of massive hagiographical mythology. Altogether our knowledge of Shari'ati's years in Iran, his education in Paris, his teaching at Mashhad University, his lectures at the Hosseyniyyeh Ershad, and his death in London are all shrouded in hagiographical and martyrological fantasy. There is as yet no accurate and reliable biography of Shari'ati. What compounds this highly dubitable composure of his martyrology are equally exaggerated negative statements by his opponents about his character. Charges of illiteracy, charlatanism, and even outright accusations—with no concrete evidence—that he was an agent of SAVAK to offset the power of the clergy abound about Shari'ati. These are natural and perhaps even inevitable symptoms of a highly ideological figure thriving in a martyrological and conspiratorial atmosphere. It is indeed the task of a conscientious biographer to collect these scattered data and construct a relatively reliable and coherent statement about Shari'ati. Before that task is competently achieved, false and fictitious pieces of political urban legends ought to be seriously discounted.

As unreliable as Shari'ati is in his emerging hagiographies, we can be

certain of his popularity with the urban students, achieved mainly through the vast body of writings he has left behind. It is precisely with that body of literature that we ought to limit our understanding of Shari'ati and his contributions to the ideological basis of the Revolution.¹⁷

A Revolutionary Ideologue

The most serious exponent of the revolutionary uses of faith,¹⁸ a Paris-educated sociologist, the chief ideologue of some of the major political trends in modern Iran as well as other Islamic societies, Ali Shari'ati has been recognized as a theorist who "did the most to prepare the Iranian youth for revolutionary upheaval."¹⁹ It has also been suggested that "events made this Muslim sociologist, shortly after his 1977 death, the ideologist of the revolt."²⁰ Despite such apparent hyperboles, there is a certain element of truth in identifying Shari'ati with some major revolutionary urges in his immediate political culture. He managed to exemplify what was most central to an entire revolutionary spirit.

Born in 1933 in Khorasan, Ali Shari'ati received his early education in this northeastern province of Iran.²¹ Upon graduation, at age nineteen, he became a teacher at an elementary school. When he was twenty-three years old, he entered the Faculty of Letters at Mashhad University. That same year he married a fellow student. In 1960 he received a bachelor's degree in French and Arabic. Then, through a scholarship from the government, he went to Paris to continue his advanced education. There he studied sociology and religious history. In 1965 he returned to Iran, was imprisoned for a short time, and then settled in Mashhad. He began teaching, first at a Mashhad high school and then at Mashhad University. From there he went to Tehran in 1967 and commenced a series of lectures at Hosseyniyyeh Ershad, an institution that attracted many of the religiously minded young intelligentsia. Between 1967 and 1972 he actively preached in Hosseyniyyeh Ershad and attracted a considerable number of followers. In 1972, his activities were interrupted, and he was imprisoned. In 1975, he was released from prison following the intervention of the French and Algerian governments on his behalf. Between 1975 and 1977 his activities were tightly controlled by the Shah's secret police. In May 1977 he was permitted to leave Iran for London, where he died of a heart attack on 19 June of the same year.

Shari'ati was raised in a religious family. His father, though not a cleric, was an active Muslim preacher. Ali Shari'ati grew up in Mashhad, the city in which the Eighth Shi'i Imam is buried and which is, next to Qom, the spiritual capital of Iran and the center of the most intense religious activities. At the age of nineteen, Shari'ati had already begun writing and translating works on political aspects of Shi'i Islam. Following his graduation

from Mashhad University and upon his arrival in Paris, he actively participated in many political movements, particularly in the Algerian liberation cause. During these formative years he was influenced chiefly by Franz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, who left a lasting impression on him both intellectually and politically. Shari'ati translated Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* into Persian and is reported to have corresponded with him.²²

Shi'ism: a Total Party

Upon his return to Iran, Shari'ati was determined to leave a revolutionary mark on his contemporary history. As a revolutionary ideologue, his most serious obstacle was the persistent clerical tradition against which, as against the political order that tacitly sustained it, he was to launch his ideological movement. Particularly evident from the title and content of one of his major lectures on Shi'ism, "Shi'ism: A Complete (Political) Party," Ali Shari'ati considered this branch of Islam as a "revolutionary ideology," capable, if properly reconstructed, of mobilizing the masses for specific political purposes. Signalled by this very title, Shari'ati sought to transform Shi'ism from what he considered to be a religious tradition with a multiple set of historical traits and institutions into a political ideology of monolithic revolutionary proportions. As a student of Marxism, actively supporting the revolutionary causes of Cuba and Algeria, Shari'ati had been convinced of the necessity of ideological convictions to augment, or advance, the "material conditions" of any revolution. He said he disagreed with Franz Fanon, in this particular regard, that "Third-World" countries should abandon their religion in order to be ideologically equipped to either defeat the imperialistic powers or launch a revolution against their government.²³ On the contrary, he sought to use an already-established "ideology" in the Islamic world in order to create the necessary political apparatus—party, slogan, banner, and popular force—to achieve the same revolutionary ends. As an observer of the political movements in the Islamic world, he witnessed the failure of radical "Western" ideologies, transplanted from their native soil, attempting to take root in the political consciousness of the masses. In his own country, he had witnessed in particular the bloody consequences of the (Communist) Tudeh Party and its endeavors to transform a deeply religious society into a socialist camp. Thus realizing the fundamental problem of introducing a secular political ideology into a religious world and, at the same time, aiming to mobilize the masses for political ends that the very secular ideology had articulated, Shari'ati sought to achieve his revolutionary ends through the same ancient tradition that other secular ideologies considered as the opium of the masses. To achieve this, he had to reconstruct, single-handedly, the entire history and "ideology" of Islam. Thus, he set upon himself the Herculean task of rewriting

the entire Islamic history, while "discovering" and introducing the "true ideology" of the faith. He titled his major work *Islamshenasi (Islamology)*: a new and revolutionary reading of the "true Islam." In this version of Islam, Shari'ati turned the universality of faith and transformed it into a universal ideology. In his newly reconstructed reading, Islam is the "ideology" of emancipation and liberation with a dominant political goal to achieve for all humanity. For Shari'ati, as later for Khomeini in a different cast, politics and piety, ideology and faith, are interchangeable, indeed synonymous, the same.

For Shari'ati Shi'ism had a built-in mechanism of ideological preparation and political mobilization. The form and structure of this ideology and its concomitant politics were already there, in people's collective imaginations and shared sensibilities. The form had to be stripped of its "traditional" and conservative forces and refurbished with up-to-date revolutionary zeal and semantics. His lifelong achievement was precisely this systematic endeavor of reconstructing a new outfit from some very old fabric.

In order to systematize his revolutionary reading of Islam, Shari'ati gradually developed an ideology that he liked to call "Alid Shi'ism," a Shi'ism identified with the authoritative figure of the first Shi'i Imam. "By systematizing the concept of Alid Shi'ism," it has been rightly suggested,

Shari'ati attained a double result; he detached himself from the petrified official Islam rejected by idealistic youth, and he brought a new and combative meaning to Shi'i concepts. Even prayer in this renovated Islam took on a political meaning, tied to action. This insurrectional meaning of common prayer was particularly developed in the 1978–79 revolution.²⁴

To counterbalance, in his political vocabulary, the revolutionary "Alid Shi'ism," Shari'ati constituted the conservative "Safavid Shi'ism," that is, the Shi'ism identified with the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736), which for the first time established Shi'ism as the state religion. He identified "Safavid Shi'ism" with the official version of the faith as propagated under the patronage of the Iranian state in particular, or any other dominant power in general. He subsequently proceeded to conceptualize the main Shi'ite terminologies and dogmas in a new and revolutionary way. Every religious concept, such as *imamat* and *ismat*, assumed, under the rubric of "Alid Shi'ism," a revolutionary and combative meaning and significance.²⁵ In general and as opposed to "Safavid Shi'ism," "Alid Shi'ism represents original Islam," Shari'ati thought, and "is a movement of progress and revolution, with no division between intellectuals and the people—Islam in its progressive and dynamic phase."²⁶ In the new, Shari'ati-constructed terminology of Shi'ism, *imamat*, for example, was not "belief in twelve pure, saintly, extraordinary names," but "pure, honest, revolutionary conduct of the people and the correct foundation of society in terms of con-

science, the expansion and independence of people's judgment."²⁷ *Ghaybat* (the Shi'ite belief in the occultation of the Twelfth Imam and the expectation of his return to establish the perfect society) meant "total irresponsibility; the uselessness of all action under the pretext of the Imam's absence" in official "Safavid Shi'ism"; whereas in his "Alid Shi'ism" the same doctrine meant the "responsibility of men to decide their destiny, faith, spiritual and social life."²⁸

As Shari'ati begins to renarrate his collective history, beyond the limited access of Al-e Ahmad, the entire corpus of Shi'i doctrinal legitimacy becomes concomitant with the most compelling realities of Iranian contemporary exegesis. The nature of this reconstructed narrative, as it now commences to coin the terms of its neologistic discontent, is such that a forceful constituency of revolutionary hopefuls find the particulars of their mutant voice in its universal appeal.

In order to legitimize his revolutionary reading of Islam, Shari'ati had to discredit the traditionally maintained view of this faith in all its diversities. He thus observed that:

The problem which is now at hand is the thirteen-hundred-year-old complex of the misery of a people, the intellectual hopelessness of an *umma* [Islamic community], the metamorphosis and going astray of an emancipating and consciousness-giving belief, the wasting, passivity and going to sleep of a people with tyranny, ignorance, and poverty; and that with the most sacred, the most exalted, and the most progressive belief and eternal divine values that we possess, and that with the dearest personalities and epic-making figures that each one of them is enough for the awakening, self-consciousness, movement and freedom of a nation or a people.²⁹

In trying to establish legitimacy for his revolutionary version of Islam among the secular intelligentsia, Shari'ati had to distinguish himself from the traditional figures of religious authority, that is, from the bona fide clerics. Early in his lecture on "Shi'ism: A Complete [Political] Party," he indicates that he is not a philosopher, a historian, a jurist (*faqih*), an artist, a writer, a literary figure, or a theologian in a traditional sense. "I am none of these."³⁰ These are the traditional figures of authority in any Islamic society. Since Shari'ati's Islam is a new Islam, he has to create, in himself, a new prototype of authority: a "Western"-educated, politically conscious and active revolutionary ideologue of grand social causes. This obviously necessitated a new reading of Islam to be compatible with the rising expectations of a revolutionary generation. For that purpose, traditional authorities first had to be discarded and discredited. A significant proportion of Shari'ati's energy was devoted to negating the legitimacy of all such figures of traditional authority in the fabric of any Islamic society. With a similar perspective, he also thought traditional ways of learning to be cumbersome, long, scholastic, boring, and totally outmoded. He imagined an action-

Islam as successor to what he considered to be a merely knowledge-Islam. The new Islam necessitated a new class of teachers in action:

Others admonish us and [give us] guidance, good advice and wise, knowledgeable and rational counsel that "first you should think, study, acquire knowledge, do scientific research, read many books, attend many religious schools, study with many learned professors, learn philosophy, sufism, jurisprudence, doctrine, theology, logic, language, literature, history, theosophy and ethics 'with learned masters,' until you are master of both intellectual and transmitted [knowledge], and after passing through this period (which is not really possible), [then] you enter the second phase, the phase of action, the phase of correction, but [even then] individual action, the correction of self."³¹

The True Islam

This Islam was outmoded and reactionary. Shari'ati consciously believed and propagated the idea that his version of Islam, the "true Islam," the Islam that was there but forgotten or never learned, was different from and opposed to the historically received Islam. Attacking two cardinal tenets of traditional Islam, knowledge and virtuosity, and celebrating the all-too-essential revolutionary attitude, he proclaimed:

O how strange! Notice the difference between these two Islams! The other one postpones enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil [a major tenet of Islam]—social responsibility—to after the completion of the [two attributes of] knowledge and virtuosity; the two stages that in order to reach their perfection even the life of Noah is not enough. And this [Islam] puts the social responsibility of enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil upon the delicate shoulders of a young girl or boy, exactly from the moment that invites them to pray and fast! Praying and fasting, simultaneous with the responsibility of enjoining and prohibiting good and evil social deeds, and also the Holy War.³²

The demographic composition of the Iranian society increasingly in favor of young and underprivileged students, massively migrating from remote rural areas of the country to poor urban settings, had created a particularly receptive constituency for Shari'ati's revolutionary message. For this rising constituency, the minutiae of Shi'i scholastic debates were as strange and irrelevant as the concocted and hesitant language of the Marxist and Nationalist ideologies. For them, so early in their age of political awareness, a language would speak most eloquently that was at once that of conviction and action, of interpretation and commitment, of trust and enticement, the origin of which is the cradle of their childhood remembrance. Shari'ati met this challenge. For him, as for his constituency, it was necessary to act, and to act quickly,

because in 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. [Because] it is in becoming that [we] can be. 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 the application of that concept. It is in action that truth manifests itself.³³

As a revolutionary ideology, Shari'ati's, the true, Islam was to mobilize the masses, challenge the authorities that be, compete and fight with other ideologies on their own ground and on their own terms. His Islam was not that of individuals standing vis-à-vis their God, striving for or seeking salvation through the established institutions of religious authorities. His was collective salvation through collective political expression. His repoliticizing Islam was much more than Islam sanctifying politics. Shari'ati's vision of Islam is to transform it, quintessentially, into what it was: a political statement best suited for particular revolutionary objectives—in this or in any other age.

Shari'ati's opposition to Islam in its received, institutionalized, mode was manifested in a number of directions: first, against its intellectual, spiritual, and theological aspects; second, against the operative Islam, particularly its submission to a divine will as a religious doctrine. In opposition, he sought to revitalize Islam in a way best suited for his hidden and manifest revolutionary temperament. For this purpose, he concentrated on a revolutionary reimagining of the household of Ali and Fatimah (the Prophet's daughter). This household has provided the Shi'ite world with two of its most revered martyrs, Ali and Hussayn, who figured prominently in Shari'ati's scheme of "Islamology."

But when someone [such as I], with all of his being and life and belief deeply loves this household [of Ali's], both faithfully and humanistically, and believes that the only way for the freedom of this people [that is, Muslims in general, Iranians in particular] is in genuine return to Ali's school and Fatima's house[hold], then, how can he . . . remain "indifferent"?³⁴

Beyond figures of authority, the redoctrination of the faith into a revolutionary direction was equally necessary. Shari'ati severely criticized some of the most fundamental doctrinal positions of Shi'ism whenever they appeared to pose an obstacle to his revolutionary reading of the faith. While Ali and Hussayn constantly appear in his portrayal of a revolutionary way of life, in which one sacrifices one's life for a common cause, Shari'ati severely attacked *taqiyyah*, one of the most important characteristics of Shi'i Islam, the meaning and significance of which have been interwoven with the entire history of this faith. In doctrinal terms, it means the religious obligation on the part of the Shi'i believer to conceal his true identity in the face of the danger of persecution and other adversities. It developed particularly under the Umayyads (661–750 C.E.) who persecuted the Shi'ites harshly. As a doctrinal position of Shi'ite Muslims, *taqiyyah* appeared to

Shari'ati as a reactionary and outmoded mentality. Discarding such a traditional doctrine of Shi'ism was particularly important if Shari'ati was to secure the loyalty of the young revolutionary intelligentsia who were attracted to "progressive" ideologies. He did manage to give his revolutionary ideology a "progressive" aura. This "progressive" feature, however, had to be balanced carefully with a demonstrated anti-"Western" attitude. He was quite successful in presenting his deepest forms of radical secularism in an anticolonial and anti-"Western" language. Such assumptions as "Shari'ati wished to be a politico-religious thinker in the context of the Third World liberation struggles" or that he "felt acutely the problems of colonialism and neocolonialism, and attacked especially cultural colonization, which alienated people from their roots"³⁵ testify to the degree of this success. Shari'ati, in his diligent attempt to transform the historical complexity and doctrinal diversity of Islam into a unified political ideology best suited for the modernity of his revolutionary agenda, was, in effect, an avant-garde figure in cultural recolonization. Deeply alienated from, and in a disguised way resentful of, the received and operative core of the Islamic character and culture, while at the same time fascinated by the efficiency of "Western" political ideologies (particularly Marxism), he sought to revolutionize Islam to make it best suitable for competition in an age of conflicting ideologies. Permanent revolution was the ultimate goal that he sought as the most external expression of his innermost beliefs. And it was on that model that he redefined "Islam."

Islam Updated

It is in Shari'ati's attempt towards attaining his revolutionary goals that he reveals his most serious preoccupation with the extremest modes of secularism disguised in heightened religiosity. As a true existentialist, reading his Sartre into Islam, he strives to make man totally responsible for what he is and what he does, completely divorced from any historical, sacred, and securing order. Yet since this school of thought and its modern vocabulary are alien to a Muslim society, he appeals to the Qur'an to seek justification of his position and reads an existentialist understanding into this Qur'anic verse: "Those are a people who have passed away. Theirs is that which they earned, and yours is that which ye earn. And ye will not be asked of that they used to do."³⁶ Being individually responsible for their historical acts, Shari'ati's audience attends its revolutionary present with a clear vision of the Qur'anic mandate, reread through Shari'ati's existentialist eyes. The human choice is central to this vision of Shari'ati's revolutionary man. In matters of faith, as in matters of revolt, he advocates "the choice of religion and its conscious acceptance, not in imitation of your parents and the elders, but with your own reasoning and understanding."³⁷ From

a revolutionary standpoint, he isolates and atomizes individuals from their institutional context and confronts them with his version of the faith. "Religious individualists," who he believed were under the influence of "Sufi ethics of the East" or "Christian asceticism,"³⁸ were wrong; right was a "religious collectivism" that he sought to materialize on the basis of existentialized Muslimhood. Separated and segregated from the commands and context of their traditional authority, individuals become "rational creatures" ready to adopt ideological identities. To launch a revolution, Shari'ati needed rational creatures, enchanted with his revolutionary terms of identity, and the post-Muslim intelligentsia received his liberating ideology on precisely such rational grounds.

As a restless and confused generation, the young Iranian intellectuals were in search of an "ideology." Yet, if not immediately rooted in their received collective culture, this generation breathed, whether it consciously liked it or not, in a deeply religious atmosphere. Certain attachments, cultural rituals of personal identities, were too powerful to discard; they provided a strong sense of (revolutionary) purpose in life. The paradox presented itself when being a revolutionary and a Muslim at the same time appeared mutually exclusive. If only there were a way out of the impasse of simultaneously being an enthusiastic revolutionary intellectual and a Muslim. Shari'ati showed a path out of the impasse. "Young Iranian Muslim intellectuals," it has been rightly suggested, "found in Shari'ati a revolutionary Iranian Shi'i response. No more the crying Husain of the Ta'ziyeh, but Husain fighting and dying for a just cause."³⁹ The combination of contemporary revolutionary zeal with a reconstituted sense of Muslimhood was a masterful device to mobilize this particular segment of the society. Shari'ati realized that he could not mobilize a deeply religious society for any end, particularly political, with a fundamentally secular, materialistic, and atheistic ideology (Marxism). But his attempt to read social and economic schemes and ideals of Marxism (or any other secular ideology) into Islam was by far a more involved adventure with ramifications and extensions far beyond any particular political objective. Shari'ati's Islam is a repoliticized Islam, a metaphysical religious order of things as they are turned upside down into a self-conscious political ideology of things as they should be, and on a par with any other, equally powerful and equally susceptible, ideology.

As the strategical apparatus necessary for updating Islam into a revolutionary ideology, Shari'ati conceived of Shi'ism as a complete party; this he sought to prove through his redefinition of what constituted the *ummah* (the Islamic community). Since *ummah*, according to Shari'ati, is "a society on the move, a society not in place but on the way, towards an objective, having a direction," then we need an *Imam* to lead us toward that objective.⁴⁰ *Imam* and *ummah* are mere instruments of revolutionary mobiliza-

tion. The complete political apparatus needed to launch a revolution—that is, an ideology and a political party, *Imam* and *ummah*—was detected and identified in the faith of the majority of the people, with the strongest possible attachment between them and their faith securing the most effective mechanism of mass mobilization. As a revolutionary sociologist, Shari'ati recognized the necessity of this direct and immediate communication with the masses. Making direct reference to the Qur'an and giving them revolutionary interpretations was a strategy that Shari'ati utilized consistently in order to legitimize his reconstruction of Islam. In reading the Qur'anic verse 29:69, "As for those who strive in Us, we surely guide them to Our path, and lo! Allah is with the good," he provided the following reading:

"Those who fight in our cause, we will put forward our ways for their salvation and freedom; and no doubt God is with those who do good deeds and do things well." And one of these "ways" is to understand "Alid Shi'ism" as a complete party.⁴¹

Islam thus updated needs a self-sustaining machinery. Shari'ati gives a detailed definition of what he means by a "complete party," his vision of Shi'ism in modernity. This definition reveals the depth and extent of his revolutionary repoliticization of every aspect of Shi'ism:

"Party," in the general vocabulary of world intellectuals, is basically a unified social organization with a "world view," an "ideology," a "philosophy of history," an "ideal social order," a "class foundation," a "class orientation," 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; and thus each party has two aspects of affirmation and negation: "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not."⁴²

As for Shi'ism,

it is the party with all the characteristics and dimensions of an ideal and complete party; it is the party whose objective realization is that "party of God" that the Qur'an speaks of, and is also responsive to the need of this responsible, intellectual generation in giving [political] consciousness, and mobilizing the masses of the society, in leading their class struggle, in eliminating the difficulties and obstacles in the way of such a struggle, and in realizing the hopes of the disinherited classes.⁴³

Following this grand scheme of a complete party, Shari'ati came to the ultimate conclusion that:

finally, after considering all the schools, ideologies, revolutions, movements, sociology, Islamology, historical investigation, research into the causes of cultural decline and intellectual and social deviation, and a more profound recognition of [the Prophet's] family, *Imamat*, *wilayat*, *intizar*, *adl*, and man's legacy in the duration of human history, and after experiences, conflicts, reactions, and the clarification of

dark spots and concealments, I have reached this inner principle that: "essentially, Shi'ism is a complete party."⁴⁴

A revolutionary party needs a revolutionary and dynamic view of society, a society in movement towards perfection. This Shari'ati tried to achieve with a dynamic definition of *ummah* as "a society of individuals who think alike, walk along the same path, take their steps together, have similar objectives, are responsible, [and] on the move towards a single, direct, clear, stable, and collective destination."⁴⁵ The uniformity and unconditional conformity that Shari'ati envisaged for his ideal state makes it clear that there is a direct and short link between Shi'ism as a complete party and the Shi'ite state as a complete, final, and total society.

A revolutionary ideology, furthermore, necessitates revolutionary heroes to provide the followers with prototypical figures of authority. He recognized Abu Dharr, a close companion of the Prophet, as the first revolutionary socialist who

deeply felt upon his shoulders the heavy weight of social responsibility, the responsibility of changing the governing system of the society and the governing faith of his time.⁴⁶

Abu Dharr would constantly appear in Shari'ati's works as the model revolutionary hero to be closely emulated.

The Challenge of Secularism

Shari'ati faced not just a religious but also a secular audience whom he wished to convert to his brand of Islam. In achieving this, he had to present Shi'ism as a "complete political party" in order to compete with the secular ideologies dominant among the intelligentsia, for example, Marxism. Since Marxism presented a total view of the society, along with its philosophy of history, sociology, anthropology, etc., as well as a total party program for implementing its objectives, Shari'ati's Islam had to meet precisely the same criteria. To justify his brand of Shi'ism to his secular audience, he argued that

Of course, this claim might appear to some irreligious intellectuals a bit difficult to swallow . . . how can an intellectual take his ideology from religion? . . . Because of the experience of Christianity and imitations from the modern perspective of world intellectuals and seeing what today passes as Islam among us and its social role and human impact, these intellectuals cannot imagine that a party ideology or a completely convincing ideology, can have a religious origin! . . . While if religion, particularly Islam and especially the Shi'ite school and perspective, were correctly introduced, it would have been the religious intellectual who would be surprised.⁴⁷

There are many hidden dimensions in Shari'ati's "Islamic ideology" that appeal particularly to revolutionary secular intellectuals. Echoing a Trot-

skyist ideal, Shari'ati sought to secure the idea of permanent revolution as essentially present in his version of Shi'ism. Here Shari'ati assumes and assimilates into his Shi'ite ideology the two most compelling ideas of evolution and revolution. It was the detection of these traits of thought that attracted many secular intellectuals to Shari'ati's Islam. They viewed his reading of Islam as an ideology of liberation and revolution, disguised for convenience in Islamic garb.

To meet the secular challenge, Shari'ati's antiestablishment (antimonarchical) rhetoric was of particular significance. If the Pahlavi dynasty was too close to criticize directly, there were more distant candidates. Thus Shari'ati attacked the Safavid dynasty for what he considered to be their using Shi'ism as their means of legitimizing their rule by establishing it as the state religion. He believed that

where Shi'ism is so influential among people and can be the best means of securing the class interest of the ruling class . . . why should they bother to choose another faith for themselves that is abhorred and rejected by the people?⁴⁸

He even compares this to the Roman Empire's accepting Christianity for similar political purposes.⁴⁹ He, of course, turned his own observation around and launched the most comprehensive program to utilize Shi'ism for his revolutionary purposes.

On yet a different level of complexity, one of the major challenges to Shari'ati's revolutionary Islam and its potential appeal to secular intellectuals was the contemplative and devotional aspect of this faith. This he sought to alter drastically by redefining Islam as a religion of revolutionary and militant action. Both the contemplative and the devotional dimensions of Islam rendered it politically mute and localized it into sectarian divisions. But the Islam Shari'ati was reconstructing rested on its claims on universality:

The boundaries of *ummah* are not a geographical demarcation; they are not the fixed barriers of a place; *ummah* is a group in "the way," a way that passes "through" humanity and from the heart of the people, because the boundaries of Islam are extended to wherever that man is, that people are, and what am I saying? The country of Muslims is the whole world, the expansion of existence, and the owner and only presiding power upon this *ummah* is God.⁵⁰

These passages were particularly useful in expanding the applicability of Shari'ati's revolutionary Shi'ism beyond the Iranian boundaries. Being primarily identified with Iran, Shi'ism had to be so universally expanded in its revolutionary usefulness to convince not only post-Muslim Iranian intellectuals but also post-Muslim intellectuals everywhere of its great potential for the mobilization of the masses. This universal ideology was to substitute "The Western" revolutionary ideologies, particularly Marxism, which, in

an Islamic context, had lost their dynamism, that is, they were not capable of mobilizing the masses in a revolutionary movement. Shari'ati realized the failure of at least one century of disillusioned Marxism in Muslim societies. He considered Islam as the last and only chance to unite and mobilize people for particular revolutionary objectives.

A Muslim in Modernity

While in Europe, Shari'ati plunged deep into a sea of various and conflicting ideologies: Marxism, Existentialism, Liberalism, etc. He was saturated with ideological tendencies and commitments. He was also exposed to many revolutionary movements, particularly those of Algeria and Cuba, actively participating in demonstrations and meetings in support of these revolutions. During this period he recognized the indispensable role of an ideology for a revolutionary cause. Without an ideology, under whose banner to organize and mobilize the masses, he realized that no revolutionary cause could be pursued and attained. Yet he also recognized, in the light of the Iranian political scene of the twentieth century, the inevitable failure of "Western" ideologies in their original secular form. Consequently, he came to the inevitable conclusion that to mobilize the Muslim masses for any revolutionary cause, a domestic and indigenous ideology had to be sought and formulated. Both strategically and tactically this would be a more effective approach, particularly operative among a predominantly religious constituency. What kind of ideology in an historically Islamic society can be more effective than an "Islamic ideology"? Shari'ati's lifelong task was to formulate such an ideology. "The Islamic ideology" had to be "Islamic" to communicate easily and effectively with the masses, in order to use the vast source of Islamic symbolism, which was capable of mobilizing the masses beyond the limited measures that any secular ideology could achieve. Yet the formulated doctrines had to be called "ideology" in order to detach them from the element of faith that was particularly anachronistic to the post-Muslim intelligentsia who were, in Shari'ati's estimation, to lead this revolution. It was this revolutionary use of faith that Shari'ati sought to implement. He single-handedly strove to transform the devotional, contemplative, mystical, and institutional dimensions of Shi'ism into a total and final political ideology.

Man is in Charge

The totality of that political ideology demanded a particular view of man as the center of the universe. Shari'ati saw man as the active political agent in charge of his destiny. For this he always employed the image of a "God-like" man who is in charge of his fate.⁵¹ Man is born free. Man is born

knowing. Man is born creative. It is precisely with such divine attributes that Shari'ati's man takes charge of his history. Breathing with the breath of God,⁵² man cannot but be responsible for his own fate. Shari'ati's leading the cause of free will, and thus simultaneously opposing predestination, is the necessary theological stipulation of a political responsibility. But Shari'ati's siding with the theological advocates of free will is rooted in a metaphysics of a divine attribute. If God is free and creator, which He is, then man is politically responsible and ideologically creative. The logic follows inevitably. Doctrinally thus justified, man's free will is the metaphysical cause and source of his political commitment.

The ideological charge was to be directed to immediate revolutionary causes. The specifics of that ideology were always secondary to the goals they were to serve. And here is precisely where Shari'ati picked up where Al-e Ahmad had left off. Shari'ati entered the Iranian political scene upon Al-e Ahmad's well-trodden path. In giving the political discourse of the 1960s and 1970s a religious bent, he took Al-e Ahmad's lead to its logical conclusion. If the ultimate end of a revolutionary discourse were to mobilize and lead the masses, then the more intimately the conceptual and symbolic components of this discourse were related to, and derived from, the existing and valid sets of cultural paradigms, the more effective they would be in their purported objectives. Cultural alienation, epitomized for Al-e Ahmad in "Westoxication," had as its most immediate consequence the inability of the secular intellectuals to communicate effectively with their purported constituency. Beyond a mere repoliticization and reideologization of Islam, Shari'ati sought to redefine, ex nihilo, the Islamic heritage into a comprehensive revolutionary apparatus. His "Islamology," chief among other works, is the most systematic and thorough attempt to reconstitute Islamic doctrinal categories in the service of a deeply revolutionary agenda, an agenda in which the mere toppling of the Pahlavi regime was but a preliminary, merely political, stage. This massive and deep reideologization of Islam was launched simultaneously against two sets of political contenders: the ulama' and the secular intellectuals. Against the ulama's institutional authority, he wished to rescue "Islam" and redefine it into a revolutionary ideology; against the secular intellectuals' growing claim on the ideological loyalties of the youth, he wished to prove and persuade that it is possible to achieve revolutionary goals through a seemingly archaic and outmoded semiology. The revolutionary specifics of that semiology were the quintessential task of Shari'ati's ideological man to construct and legitimate.

Extending from Al-e Ahmad's call for a local construction of an ideology of revolt from indigenous cultural material, Shari'ati's revolutionary discourse attended immediately to a task Al-e Ahmad was not prepared to meet. "The intellectual atmosphere in our society," Shari'ati observed,

"continues to be considerably under the influence of the Western climate."⁵³ The words could have been written by Al-e Ahmad. With a twist of realism, Shari'ati continued that "cultural and scientific independence from the West is nothing but a distant hope."⁵⁴ In every aspect of intellectual and artistic life, Shari'ati diagnosed, Iranians demonstrated two major characteristics:

(1) alienation, or even in some instances "hatred," from "self," from their own religion, culture, worldview, and character; and (2) a deep, obsessive, or even boastful pretension to attachment to the West, and rootless and vulgar modernism.⁵⁵

More than the vulgarity of that "modernism," its very claim to substitute the revolutionary potentials of the religious culture had to be encountered. "The Islamic Ideology," the supreme revolutionary identity of Shari'ati's ideal type, was the road to political (and moral) salvation.

Fatimah Zahra': The Perfect Model of the Revolutionary Woman

With his particular brand of revolutionary language, epitomized in "the Islamic Ideology," Shari'ati reached for the widest possible range of committed intellectuals. But in order to give them tangible and compelling images of revolutionary conduct, he had to have more indigenous historical and mythological references. Women were of particular significance in this revolutionary model-building. Early in 1971, Shari'ati delivered a lecture on the life and character of Fatimah Zahra', the Prophet's daughter, Ali's wife. He later expanded this lecture and published it as *Fatimah Is Fatimah*. Although the lecture was intended for Shari'ati's students at the Hosseiniyyeh Ershad, "many others had attended too."⁵⁶ In this lecture Shari'ati wished to offer a reconstructed model of the most cherished female figure in Islamic hagiography for modern Iranian women to follow. He wished specifically to address not those women who had been either lost in the received models of passive virtuous propriety or else absorbed by the imported "Western" images, but those who want "to choose themselves, to build themselves, [and who] need a model."⁵⁷

Although Shari'ati had originally intended to give a report of his involvement with Louis Massignon's work on Fatimah Zahra', very early on he is captivated by the figure of this beloved image and sees it more fit to provide a historical answer to the more compelling question of "how is one to be," rather than lament on Fatimah Zahra's miseries or deliver a dull and detailed academic account of the Prophet's daughter.⁵⁸

For the perfect image of an ideal woman, Iranians ought to follow their righteous and valiant ancestry and seek to comprehend the "true" figure of Shi'i Imams, not the figures propagated by the Safavid kings. The answer

was in the Alavid Shi'ism, not in the Safavid Shi'ism.⁵⁹ "True Shi'ism," which is an extension of Fatimah and Ali's household, is not a sect of Islam, it is "the true Islam."⁶⁰ In this ("true") Alavid Shi'ism, as in every other revolutionary movement, the mobilized sentiments "think" with the mind of the intellectual leaders and "love" with the heart of the masses.⁶¹ Crying, a testimony of that heart, is a perfectly legitimate expression of sentiments, "even Régis Debré . . . the fellow combatant of Che Guevara"⁶² thought it was a noble gesture. The cause of lamentation in the household of Fatimah Zahra has been the innate nobility, the very salvation, of the collective Iranian (Shi'i) spirit. But both traditional religiosity and modern secularism have neglected these ennobling effects of sacred Shi'i personalities. Both have scorned Shari'ati and his revolutionary cause⁶³ precisely because he has offered such compelling revolutionary models. He lashes out with anger against the ulama' who have miserably failed to convey to the people the "red" Shi'i history, thus leaving them with a dark recollection of their past. Why should Joan of Arc be so celebrated in France as a figure of liberty and freedom but Zaynab, Fatimah's daughter, be remembered as a figure of misery?⁶⁴ If the Shi'i Imams have failed to provide a revolutionary model, if Fatimah Zahra' has failed to lead Iranian women to a virtuous life of political awareness, the clerics are to blame.⁶⁵

Upon this premise, Shari'ati sets his agenda of reconstructing "the true" image of these Shi'i figures of supreme authority, Fatimah Zahra' among them. It is precisely with such reconstructed revolutionary images that Shari'ati sought to battle the evils of his time—moral and political, local and universal. This reconstruction is particularly imperative for women who for centuries could only copy the model of their mothers. In these changing times, women, like men, need new, reconstructed, models of virtuous Shi'i figures, like Fatimah Zahra', to follow. Shari'ati's logic for the necessity of this reconstruction is taken from what he considers the "method" of the Prophet Muhammad. There are three attitudes towards social change in Shari'ati's counting: conservative, revolutionary, and reformist (he actually uses these terms in their French pronunciations). But the Prophet's method in establishing Islam, a model Shari'ati wished to emulate, was "to keep the form of the traditions, but change their content from within in a revolutionary manner."⁶⁶ This, in Shari'ati's account, is contrary to the Christian method that refuses to see reality as it is. Islam uses realities to achieve its ideals.⁶⁷ Consequently, immorality and psychological complexes abound in Europe and the United States. Openly admitting that he took some of his "theses" from Marxism, Shari'ati criticized the Iranian pseudointellectuals who, having failed to understand Islam, its ideals and realities, as well as Marxism, resort to dogmatic parochialism in their ideology.⁶⁸

Taking full account of realities, Islam charges humanity to reach for the

highest ideals. Thusly charged, Shari'ati challenges the image of the "European woman," promiscuous and immoral, that the Iranian high bourgeoisie has constructed and celebrated. He gives ample examples of European women of science and virtuosity whom Iranians ought to know. He accuses "the reactionary traditionalist and the à la mode capitalist"⁶⁹ of having created that promiscuous image of European women from James Bond movies and having failed to introduce the other model of European female virtuosity. Shari'ati condemns both "The Westerners" and the Iranian West-toxicated for denying a woman her own last name. She carries either her father's name or her husband's. This is a "Western" practice, a remnant of "the age of slavery,"⁷⁰ and the Iranian seculars have adopted it, "because they are stupid."⁷¹ Islamic laws, "the pure Islam, not the present diluted Islam,"⁷² regarding women's rights are more humane than French ("Western") laws.⁷³ Since the Renaissance and particularly in the post-Freudian bourgeois culture, women have been reduced to sexual objects. Before that they were wrapped in a "sacred hallow."⁷⁴ But in modern times, the bourgeois life has reduced women, and men, to lowly beings. An occasional accident in the Islamic world, suicide is "a social phenomenon" in "The West."⁷⁵ Marriage, too, is a soulless, lifeless social contract in "The West," presided upon by a wretched bureaucrat rather than a spiritual figure. The ultimate result is that women have been turned into sexual objects in "The West."⁷⁶ This "Western" problem has now been translated into "Eastern" societies. But whereas the sexual maturity of "The Western" men takes a long time to develop, "Western" women reach this stage early. The result is that "Northern European sociologists and psychiatrists have provided many programs to awaken the young European man's sexual urges with artificial or natural female sexuality." "Eastern" men, however, do not have "this problem" because "they reach sexual maturity before their time." Thus "Eastern" men, and women, need different programs by "Eastern sociologists and psychologists."⁷⁷ But "The West," in order to rob "The East" of its primary sources and materials, has developed designs for trapping the "Eastern" youth into sexual promiscuity.⁷⁸ To achieve this end, "The West" has equally robbed "The East" of its cultural and historical legacy by deliberately destroying it.⁷⁹ In this transaction, Muslim women have lost doubly. While they have been attracted to cheap "Western" glimmers, they have been denied their true Islamic rights in the present "pseudo-Islamic" (*Shebh-e Islami*) societies.⁸⁰ Chiefly responsible for this state of affairs is the traditional mold of the society, the failing authority of the ulama', the prevailing malaise of the patriarchal system, and the misrepresentation of the Islamic respect for the status of women in society, family, and marriage. The immediate by-product of this attraction to the cheap "Western" model, not to women's genuine achievements, has been the astronomical increase in the consumption of cosmetics, which is a splendid

market for "The Western" goods and a massive occasion for demeaning Muslim women.⁸¹

Thus stranded between the two opposing and equally demeaning images of the traditional and pseudo-"Western" models, the contemporary Iranian woman needs a third option to emulate. Shari'ati offers Fatimah Zahra', properly reconstructed, as this model. Fatimah, the fourth and youngest daughter of the Prophet, and the Prophet himself are portrayed as the daughter and father who revolutionized the despicable state of women in pre-Islamic Arabia where the best "solution" for having a daughter, better than being in her father's house or that of her husband, was to put her in a grave—alive.⁸² Shari'ati sympathetically reconstructs the nobility and dignity with which the Prophet treated his daughter, thus establishing a model for that invincibly patriarchal society with its presumed contempt for daughters. Fatimah's care for her father, in turn, was so loving that she earned the title of "the mother of her father."⁸³ In the course of Muhammad's prophetic career, through thick and thin, Shari'ati portrays the valiant figure of Fatimah Zahra' as supportive of her father. He reenacts the hardships of Fatimah, her mother Khadijah, and her father Muhammad with such emotion and sentiment that parts of this lecture resemble a play full of dialogue among the chief protagonists.⁸⁴ Fatimah is traced through her marriage to Ali and the establishment of their household, its chief properties being "love and poverty."⁸⁵ Total devotion to her father's calling, unconditional fidelity to her husband, and everlasting love and care for her children are the supreme virtues with which Shari'ati delivers this portrait of Fatimah Zahra'. The rest of her story is the beautification of an idyllic picture of her household with Ali, their children Hasan and Husayn, and the unending love of the Prophet for these four Supreme Figures of Shi'i piety. From these happy days of contentment to the difficult times of her father's death, the denial of her husband's right to succeed him, and, ultimately, her bitter death, Fatimah is portrayed as the very epitome of love, devotion, courage, and steadfastness: virtues with which Shari'ati thought the modern Iranian woman ought to attend her revolutionary destiny.

The Responsible Intellectual

Beyond the limited confinements of Iranian women, Shari'ati had more ambitious designs for the revolutionary youth of his generation. For both tactical and strategic reasons, he invested his highest hopes in the Iranian youth. He genuinely believed that the energy of youth is being consciously and conspiratorially diverted towards "sexual freedom"⁸⁶ so that the love of Ali and Fatimah's household does not take root in the hearts and minds of the young. To balance that, Shari'ati wished to rekindle this fire with a

revolutionary intent. The medium through which this was to be achieved was the Qur'an itself which, although the only document that had not been distorted, was still misinterpreted by people led by all its previous commentators.⁸⁷ More specifically, the al-Rūm chapter of the Qur'an reads as if it had been addressed to modern committed intellectuals. This chapter is a clear indication of the archetypal and universal relevance of the Holy Text to contemporary realities.⁸⁸

The apparent meaning of this Qur'anic chapter, that it had predicted a future victory of the Romans over the Persians, should not overshadow its real meaning, which, Shari'ati contended, is the promise of victory that the Prophet proclaims to his small group of persecuted followers.⁸⁹ Muhammad delivers this message of hope at a time when the "intellectuals" of his time ridiculed him for his lack of knowledge of the vast complexity of the world surrounding him. There is a marked similarity, Shari'ati noted, between the geopolitical terms of the world then and now. In the evident hostility between the two superpowers of the time (Rome and Persia) and in the utter irrelevance of Arabia in world politics, what could Muhammad's promise of victory mean for Muslims? Shari'ati dismissed some of the received interpretations that the Qur'anic passage, in fact, anticipates and celebrates the victory of the Christian Romans over the (nonbelieving) Zoroastrian Iranians. He argues that both Muhammad and Ali had accepted Zoroastrianism as a monotheistic religion and that, with the coming of Islam, Christianity had been superseded. Besides, the question of trinity had seriously marred Christian monotheism.⁹⁰

In Shari'ati's reading of Surah al-Rum, the Qur'an had anticipated the depletion of power between the two armies of Iran and Byzantium, over whom Muslims shall be the ultimate victors. This promise was given to the Muslims at a time, Shari'ati describes in a joyous and celebratory voice, when the contemporary intellectuals ridiculed Muhammad for his lack of proper knowledge of the real superpowers of the world. Substituting "the intellectuals" for the Qur'anic phrase "most of the people," Shari'ati casts a shadow of ignorance upon the Muslim elite who deny the possibility of an Islamic victory in the modern world against the two superpowers of the day, "The East and The West."⁹¹ Extrapolating on the Qur'anic phrase "a specified period," he introduces "historical determinism" as the chief force on the side of Muslims, then and now, to defeat the two superpowers of "The East and The West," then and now.⁹² Based on this Qur'anic promise, delivered then but still valid today, "the tyrannical powers ought to know that their might is dwindling, and the weak that their weakness is turning into strength."⁹³ As for his self-image in this Qur'anic passage, Shari'ati addressed himself as "O messenger / O liberator / O you who want to mobilize this wretched, poor, and weakened nation which is caught between these two [super]powers!"⁹⁴

Shari'ati's guiding objective in reading Surah al-Rum is to bridge a centuries-old gap between the time of Muhammad, when Iran and Byzantium were the superpowers, and his own time, when the United States and the Soviet Union are their functional equivalents. What was to be encountered and condemned in these two powers was their providing two alternatives to "the Islamic Ideology." Shari'ati repeatedly emphasized in the course of this lecture—with a sarcastic and emphatic tone, rhyming his talk periodically with an "I do not know whether I am speaking of the present time or the seventh century?"—the contemporary relevance of this Qur'anic verse.⁹⁵ This all-too-essential bringing together and contracting of history is central to Shari'ati's borrowing credence and legitimacy from the Qur'an for his "Islamic Ideology." As Muhammad's message had anticipated a Muslim victory against all odds and against the superpower of the time, so does Shari'ati's. This created a startling point of comparison and contrast between then and now, lending further support to the notion that the Islamic "Self" stands in sharp contrast to everything else, especially such mythically constructed notions as "The West" or "The East."

Through this short but precise exegesis of Surah al-Rum, Shari'ati achieved two objectives simultaneously: (1) establishing Qur'anic legitimacy for his ideological positioning of Islam vs. "The West" and "The East," and (2) anticipating the victory of Islam, via "the Islamic Ideology," over and against the two superpowers. The primary responsibility of the intellectuals in this entire enterprise is to attend the immediate exigencies of their historical context, translate their received cultural imperatives into ideological commandments, and lead "the People" to a utopia of promised ideals thus collectively imagined.

Islamshenasi: The Revolutionary Reconstruction of a New Collective Understanding of Islam

The year 1972 was the year of *Islamshenasi*, or "Islamology," Shari'ati's most ambitious attempt to give Islam a new collectively held (re)definition. The lectures that ultimately composed *Islamshenasi* were delivered from early February to mid-November 1972, to a mass student body at the Hosseyniyyeh Ershad and, more than anything else, made Shari'ati the revolutionary ideologue he gradually became. He delivered these lectures with a sense of urgency, bypassing a preliminary course he had intended to give on the "sociology of religion."⁹⁶ Some five years earlier, in the mid-1960s, he had given another course on *Islamshenasi* at Mashhad University, from which lectures another book on the subject was published. But he believed that "in method and in content" these new lectures superseded the old ones.⁹⁷

In the introductory lecture, Shari'ati compared his innovative approach

to understanding Islam, or what he called "the Islamic Ideology,"⁹⁸ to the modern movement in Persian literature. As the modernist movement had revolutionized the received canons of Persian literature, so too had Shari'ati's reconstruction of Islam with the canonical dogmas of the faith as historically predefined in the Islamic hermeneutic circles. With a shorthand argument, he dismissed "Islamic Sciences," the set of disciplines attending the dogmatic validation of the faith, as accurate but irrelevant in the modern world. He accused Muslim scholars of knowing every aspect of their faith in excruciating detail but of having failed to understand its spirit, just as professors of classical Persian literature had failed to understand modern poetry. What he is about to reveal is the very spirit of Islam: its ideology.

What Shari'ati wanted to argue, though with a twisted tongue so that the scholastic masters in Qom could not hear him properly, was that he could populate a new constituency among "Muslim intellectuals" who were concerned with "the Islamic Ideology" and who would leave "the old sciences for the ulama."⁹⁹ Disqualified as a properly trained Shi'i jurist and equally disqualified as a bona fide university professor of sociology, Shari'ati shunned and ridiculed both and vied for a self-proscribed revolutionary definition that would attract equally impatient revolutionary followers. To create this constituency and to carve a revolutionary ideology out of the Islamic heritage, he introduced the key term of *maktab* (school of thought = ideology) that later became a central concept in the revolutionary language of the Muslim intelligentsia. This is how Shari'ati defined a *maktab*:

A *maktab* is a harmonious and well-proportioned set of philosophical perspectives, religious beliefs, ethical principals and methods of action which in a relation of cause and effect with each other constitutes an active, meaningful, goal-oriented body which is alive, and which all its various organs are fed by the same blood and are alive by the same spirit.¹⁰⁰

Thus turned into an overwhelming ideological stance, Islam becomes, from Shari'ati's inception forward, so powerful a revolutionary dictum that the word *maktab*, its semiotic registration, found its way into the very first page of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic and into many other pages too.

Engineered by Shari'ati, there thus emerged from a monotheistic worldview a sociology, a philosophy of history, and an anthropology, all converging on and invalidating the god-terms of a generation of impatient revolutionaries: "the Islamic Ideology." Based on this ideology, both the ideal society and the ideal man are constructed in Shari'ati's revolutionary model.¹⁰¹ Whereas this emerging Islamic worldview is predicated on absolute monotheism, Shari'ati's sociology, in turn, hinges on the dialectic of a class struggle, as expressed in the hostility between Cain and Abel. His

philosophy of history equally presumes valid a linear progression from the period of prophethood to that of Imam, then to *ghaybah* (occultation of the last Shi'i Imam, which Shari'ati calls "scientific and responsible democracy"), leading to universal revolution. His anthropology (pre)postulates the validity of an innate dialectic operative between the forces of good (Allah) and evil (Iblis) in man. These three disciplines—sociology, philosophy of history, and anthropology—converge, as they sustain a neo-Manichaen dualism of good and evil, in Shari'ati's conception of Islam as the supreme (meta)ideology of a cosmic order, leading to the establishment of the ideal society or *ummah* and to the characterization of the ideal man as the vicegerent of God on earth.¹⁰²

By the time Shari'ati had reached the third lecture in his *Islamshenasi* course, on Friday, 18 February 1972, criticism of his ideas had reached its zenith. The entire introduction of the third lecture and most of its long footnotes, as well as footnotes to other lectures, are devoted to critical responses, however dismissive, to these criticisms. The chief argument against Shari'ati was a serious questioning of his Shi'i faith. Why, for example, did he defend the cause of the Palestinians who were, after all, Wahabi and Sunni?¹⁰³ Shari'ati considered these and similar charges malicious and refused to direct his attention away from his main objective to answer them in any detail.

Monotheism

As the metaphysical foundation of Shari'ati's worldview, upon which he constructs his elaborate *maktab*, monotheism is, in his reading, a (meta)epistemological reconciliation between the forces of diversity and multiplicity, compromised towards a unitary vision of the human experience. Thus *tawhid* or monethism is

the unity between love and intellect, between Beatrice and Virgil, between Avicenna and Abu Said [Abi al-Khayr], between Pascal and Descartes. . . . [It] does not divide man into two poles of love and intellect, intuition and rationality.¹⁰⁴

This insistence on monethism has a triple function: First, it underscores Shari'ati's quintessentially Islamic language to quell the visceral traditionalist opposition directed against him; second, it provides his young Muslim audience with a measure of confidence that the ideological adventure they were engaged in was, in fact, "Islamic"; and third, it suggests a monolithic epistemological foundation upon which he could claim an internally coherent ideological argument for radical and revolutionary behavior.

Tawhid, as an epistemological and ontological frame of reference, has yet another significance for Shari'ati, rendered more immediately into political terms. What he wants to establish with this term is a valid and universal

justification for revolutionary ideologies based on compelling religious grounds. Convinced that no revolutionary ideology can mobilize the necessary force of politicized masses without a firm ground in common and enduring religious symbols, Shari'ati planned to develop his mobilizing message from the bottom up. He resorted to both Marx and Weber to teach his students about infra- and superstructures in society.¹⁰⁵ Society is divided into these two major segments: its economic infrastructure and its related ideological superstructure. While Marx insisted on the primacy of the former, Weber pointed out the causal significance of the latter: "which is to say," Shari'ati interjected, "each, understood half of the social reality."¹⁰⁶ Putting the two halves together, the argument implies, Shari'ati understood the complete social reality. But—and here is Shari'ati's main objective in teaching Marx and Weber to his students at the Hosseyniyeh Ershad—a class-based and hierarchically structured society is the societal expression of (in Shari'ati's reading of the Marxist half of the social reality) a polytheistic theology. Based on a monotheistic (*tawhidi*) theology as its ideological infrastructure (Shari'ati taking the Weberian half), a classless society will be created. Contrary to the Marxist conception that all religions are the opium of the masses, a monotheistic religion, such as Islam, is thus ontologically conducive, more than any other ideological frame of references, to the formation of a classless society.¹⁰⁷

Beyond its immediate implications for Shari'ati's universal worldview and for his sociology, *tawhid* has two more conceptual thrusts upon which he constructs his "Islamic Ideology": history and ethics. What *tawhid* means in history is the purposeful movement of men towards the historical realization of the divine destiny.¹⁰⁸ What *tawhid* means in ethics is the validation of humanly attainable divine attributes by virtue of which man is "dealienated."¹⁰⁹ This *tawhid* is constitutionally congenial to the formation of Shari'ati's revolutionary man, who is neither scholar nor vulgar, but simply politically conscientious.¹¹⁰ For this revolutionary man there is no private virtue in the absence or denial of the public. The phrase "first rectify yourself, then seek to rectify the society" is "extremely horrible and anti-Islamic."¹¹¹ And of course ultimately, for this revolutionary man, "faith is [to be] turned into a conscientious ideology."¹¹²

This faith-turned-ideology had to be the supreme model of whatever is best in every other (secular) ideology. Single-mindedly, Shari'ati thought that, at least since his senior year in high school, he had been convinced of his mission to persuade others that Islam in his vision embodied the best of the two worlds: socialism and capitalism, in "The East" and "The West," in materialism and idealism.¹¹³ He saw, grasped, and assimilated the two most compelling worldviews of his time and reread Islam in their terms. His very reason for being, he confessed with Albert Camus in mind, was to revolt against the status quo¹¹⁴ and to lead his multitude, here though

unlike Camus, to the promised land of "the Islamic Ideology." He attended this task with a sense of urgency because he believed his was the last generation with any hope of salvation. "If this generation is lost," Shari'ati feared, "then all [the rest] would be type-cast and [brain]washed."¹¹⁵ He brushed aside his critics as irresponsible social parasites¹¹⁶ and declared that the single task of a committed intellectual "in an uninformed and corrupt city . . . [is] to awaken [that] society."¹¹⁷ For this task of awakening the Muslim masses, the Islamic history had to be reunderstood, as African history was reunderstood by Franz Fanon. The task of this reunderstanding the past in Islam was begun by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, the great heroes of Shari'ati.¹¹⁸ But in Shari'ati's estimation these two great predecessors had made two grave mistakes. While al-Afghani had approached the aristocratic elite to implement his ideas, Muhammad Abduh had tried to persuade the clergy. But, Shari'ati declared, standing on the shoulders of his heroes, "both the political and the clerical elites are part of the ruling class" and thus too conservative¹¹⁹ to have a reunderstanding of Islamic history and dogma conducive to revolutionary goals. Here, contrary to his heroes, Shari'ati thought you cannot educate the educators. With a convinced revolutionary bend, Shari'ati declared, "we have to begin with the people . . . especially with the young generation and the intellectuals."¹²⁰ With the massive abstraction of "The People," with the natural disposition of the young to revolt, with the experiences of al-Afghani and Abduh, and with the overwhelming gift of his rhetorical abilities, Shari'ati sought and, in great measure, succeeded in implanting a relentless seed of revolt in his time. The success of "the Islamic Revolution," pregnant with other events yet to unfold, is just one expression of his will, however posthumously attained.

Classless, Monolithic Society

Tawhid, or the Islamic monotheism that Shari'ati turns into a monolithic sociology of religion, is central in the political implications of his social thought. With a firm insistence on the dialectic of monotheism and polytheism ("the logic and the philosophy specific to the East is dialectic"¹²¹), Shari'ati challenges sociologists and scholars of religion by defending the Qur'anic position that first there was monotheism and then, out of human corruption, polytheism emerged.¹²² Upon this dialectic of detecting an innate, but concealed, monotheism in the diverse manifestations of polytheism, Shari'ati constructs a sociology of theology according to which what Marx called "primitive Socialism" or Durkheim called "mechanical solidarity" was congenial, and thus gave rise, to a kind of archetypal monotheism.¹²³ As the society is subsequently divided into the oppressor and the oppressed, and as Shari'ati's sociology departs from both Marx's and Dur-

kheim's, man's theological preference is dualism,¹²⁴ reflecting, in a subconscious Manichaen cosmology, the oppressor and the oppressed. Following the same line of argument and as the ruling class is divided further into economic, political, and religious groupings, an ontological trinity prevails over man's theological disposition.¹²⁵ Thus both dualism and trinitarianism in theology or, even more fundamentally, polytheism in man's religious disposition have been reflections of "historical polytheism,"¹²⁶ that is, multiplicity in man's perceptions of race, ethnicity, social status, economic class, etc. Only in a classless society, as the conclusion strongly implies, can true theological monotheism be achieved. Put differently, based only on a truly monotheistic theology can a (just) classless society be attained. In the first conclusion, Shari'ati rejected the legitimacy of the Pahlavi monarchy; in the second, he rejected the claim of secular revolutionaries to ideological, social, and political validity.

Revolutionary Ethics

From a "monotheistic" view of (meta)historical existence there emerges a specific kind of ethics, quite unlike the ordinary understanding of the term. Both the popular and the scholarly perceptions of ethics miss the point, one taking received notions of propriety and the other the highhanded analytical discussions for what "ethics truly is."¹²⁷ Ultimately, ethics is the commonly propagated ideals of "the perfect man" who sacrifices his interests (*sud*) for his values (*arzesh*). Thus, Shari'ati postulates three indubitable principles upon which his revolutionary ethics rests: (1) self-sacrifice (*ithar*), (2) a distinction between good and evil (*Khayr va shar*), and (3) an enjoining and forbidding force external to man himself (*amr va nahi*).¹²⁸ Self-sacrifice, that is, foregoing one's present and private interests for some future public good, is the *conditio sine qua non* of Shari'ati's revolutionary ethics. Combined with this, and as argued by Shari'ati's reading of Sartre,¹²⁹ is a personal distinction between good and evil. But taking his ethics one step further than Sartre's, Shari'ati argues for the necessity of a metaphysical force of commandment and prohibition external to the individual to give it its universal measure of success. Both Marxism and Existentialism have failed to answer with certainty man's moral dilemma of confronting an uncertain age of conflicting truths. The Marxist attempt to remain philosophically materialist but ethically idealist¹³⁰ is a logical fallacy. Confronting the barrage of successive traps to have man alienated from his historical identity—traps ranging from "superstitious religions" to magic, polytheism, asceticism, machinism, technocracy and bureaucracy, the class system, love, scientism, money, civilization, determinism, society, to materialism, and idealism¹³¹—there is but one hope. That hope rests on the committed intellectual who bypasses the social barriers thus artificially

constructed between "The People" and him and who there and then teaches them the emancipating ethics that defies the status quo and anticipates "the perfect man" in the City of God.

For this theological monotheism and its counterpart, ideological determinism, to have their institutional expression, "the Islamic Ideology" recognizes the annual pilgrimages to Mecca as its supreme symbol.¹³² Between the two opposing ideals of individualism and socialism, the hajj pilgrimage objectifies an ideal that supersedes the evils of both these extremes. In this ideal state, the Divine attributes are expostulated in the "I" of the individuals.¹³³ Realization of these Divine attributes in the "I" of the individuals, as objectified in the hajj ceremonies, precludes the possibility of any sacrifice of one for all or all for one. Opposing this "I," which is the true "I" and entails potential godly virtues, are "I's" fabricated by race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, family, guild, etc., organized conspiratorially to have the realization of these godly virtues thwarted in man. The hajj preempts a host of social and psychological maladies, including cultural and historical alienation, dispersion of individuals into atomized selves, mental stagnation, debilitating alienation from contemporary realities, etc.¹³⁴ Against the compelling appeal of false philosophies and misguided ideologies, such as materialism and skepticism, there is "the Islamic Ideology," as objectified in the hajj, providing the only possibility for man's moral, intellectual, and political salvation.

Revolutionary Historiography

Shari'ati's anthropology locates man between history and society,¹³⁵ that is, between his initial self-consciousness and his defining social strictures. He perceived the moral formation of this historical and social man as having undergone a fundamental revolution whereby aristocratic virtues have been superseded by popular ones. Even the most fascist regimes and ideologies pretend to have popular postures.¹³⁶ Shari'ati traced this moral revolution back to the French Revolution in "The West" and to the appearance of Islam in the seventh century in "The East." Ignorant of this mission of the Qur'an to make historical man conscious of himself, some naive believers had sought to reduce the Qur'anic language to their perception of modern scientific achievements. Following Romain Rolland, Shari'ati perceived history as the archetypal construction of a unique reality upon a heap of historical facts, directed towards a specific ideological objective.¹³⁷ This is precisely how he himself acted on the Islamic history: reconstructing a revolutionary edifice based on a host of otherwise benign historical "facts," totally speechless if left to themselves. Rejecting historiographies based on the primacy of events, society, race, or culture, Shari'ati ultimately preferred what he called an existentialist perception of history, according

to which history is the science of man's becoming.¹³⁸ Man, his very individuality, is the essence of history. Equally rejecting historical determinism, Shari'ati formed the view that sees man as conscious of history and in control of his own destiny.¹³⁹

Shari'ati's Disposition

About to begin his eleventh lecture on *Islamshenasi* on Friday, 5 May 1972, Shari'ati was criticized by one of the students who, on behalf of others, asked him why he attended his classes irregularly and why he was often late.¹⁴⁰ In response Shari'ati confessed that by disposition he was "irregular [in] thought and spirit."¹⁴¹ He admitted that he had always had difficulty maintaining a disciplined and ordered life and gave an example of his daily schedule, indicative of his innermost disposition:

I was here [in Hosseyniyeh Ershad] yesterday from one o'clock to seven-eight o'clock in the afternoon. Then I went somewhere and sat on the ground and wrote something which had nothing to do either with my lectures or my speeches or with anything [else] I was writing. Nothing at all! I wrote something and when I raised my head, I saw it was a quarter after four [A.M.] today.¹⁴²

Halfway through his lectures on *Islamshenasi*, Shari'ati was himself thoroughly baffled as to exactly what he was doing and where he was leading his students. At the beginning of his second lecture on Marxism, thirteenth on the subject of *Islamshenasi*, he felt compelled to return once more to the question of sciences that are afflicted by mass appeal. But here Shari'ati himself was totally bewildered. At a point, in fact, he confessed "I don't know what to do,"¹⁴³ meaning he had completely lost the purpose, language, and reason of his lectures on Marxism. His apparent dilemma was to choose between teaching just the Marxist philosophy of history in order to compare it, along with other philosophies of history, with the (Shi'i) Islamic philosophy of history, or else teach Marxism in general to provide a better background for these same objectives. But he ended up teaching nothing in that session of Friday, 19 May 1972. Instead, he continued to grapple with the necessity for science to be socially responsible and yet trivialized in the process of achieving precisely that. At this point, the confusion was so bad that one of the students severely criticized Shari'ati¹⁴⁴ who, in turn, confessed that he could not think or teach systematically¹⁴⁵ and yet insisted that it is better to teach how to think than teach per se. He further contradicted his position on knowledge being socially responsible and thus confused his students by preaching the necessity of teaching Marxism and Existentialism "objectively and scientifically,"¹⁴⁶ and by ridiculing those who profess opinions to him, who was,

after all, a professor of "these things," by virtue of their having just read a Persian article on Existentialism.

Shari'ati returned to his podium the following week on Friday, 26 May 1972, still in no mood to decide what to say about Marxism. Instead, he delivered a long lecture on periodical soul-searching and introspection as a necessary pause in the career of all great men.¹⁴⁷ In his own career, Shari'ati revealed that he had constructed a balance between technical specialty and a large-scale sensitivity, whereby he forced himself to read Rumi's *Mathnavi* and the writings of André Gide while studying in Europe. Exactly a week after he had promised to teach his students about the Marxist philosophy of history, Shari'ati publicly began psychoanalyzing himself and his occasional self-introspection, arguing against those who might consider this as irrelevant to the subject matter—"in essence I have no private life."¹⁴⁸ Believing himself to be totally a social man, devoid of any true moment he might call private, Shari'ati attached public virtues to his private recollections of a committed ideological life. Matters private to him, which he, of course, published in the form of "Kavir," were, he thought, philosophy and criticism. But he thought that since he was on a "public" scholarship in France, he should study something that is helpful to the public: thus sociology.

Apparently concerned with, and confused by, a perception of futility in his long and loosely connected lectures, Shari'ati devoted the balance of this session of 26 May to justifying a relationship between "thought" and "action." He wished to argue that "in Shi'ism . . . action is part of the definition of religion."¹⁴⁹ Revolutionary and action-provoking thinking, he argued, was the indispensable prerequisite for collective action that leads to a promised objective. He equally rejected the notion that using a religion as an ideological basis forfeits the source and energy of initiating political action to a metaphysical standstill. He, instead, promised a reading of Shi'ism that places the responsibility of action on the revolutionary man: "Relying on Alid Shi'ism is reliance on the most progressive, the most energetic, and the most active values."¹⁵⁰

Movement in History: Marxism Reconstructed

Shari'ati, gradually emerging from his confusion, taught his students the varieties of perceptions in historical progression, but always with a view towards a revolutionary interpretation of man's destiny. If Toynbee had said that history moved with a succession of attacks and defenses,¹⁵¹ Shari'ati added that a religious movement (Islam) could always be kept in its aggressive mode through the active interpretation of its actual content as opposed to holding fast to its presumed outward postures.¹⁵² From Toynbee he sought to learn and teach that Islam at this historical moment had to be

revived by throwing out its old habits and recasting its content into a new—always revolutionary—mold.

When Shari'ati came to explain his version of Marxism to his students, he betrayed and utterly negated one of his most essential principals: that true knowledge was only partisan and for "the people." At the outset of his lecture on Marxism, he bitterly complained of the "popularization" of knowledge.¹⁵³ He realized, of course, the contradiction in his terms mandating the sovereignty of "the people." To avert it, he went to great lengths in order to argue that "I do not mean to oppose the popularization of science";¹⁵⁴ yet he had to admit, contrary to his wishes, that

when science wants to assume social responsibility, coming out of the framework of the specialists and experts in order to perform its message, being accessible to all, becoming the intellectual and ideological weapon of the masses, it compromises itself, and it becomes afflicted with popularization, reducing its scientific depth and value. Marx and Marxism have had a similar destiny.¹⁵⁵

Upon this premise, Shari'ati proceeds to portray a multiple picture of Marx, whereby he is believed to have passed through three successive phases: (1) unconditional membership in the received traditions, (2) rebellion against received notions and principles, and (3) resumption of "the true self" and acceptance of "true values."¹⁵⁶ But while the masses are incapable of holding such multiple perceptions of a figure in mind, great thinkers like Marx, Abu al-Ala al-Ma'ari, or even Jalal Al-e Ahmad¹⁵⁷ demonstrate this progression within their character—and thought—formation. There are, Shari'ati concludes, (1) a philosopher Marx (youth), (2) a sociologist Marx (adult), and finally (3) the political activist Marx, which is his ultimate historical message. Shari'ati further psychoanalyzes Marx's antireligious sentiments to his unfulfilled wishes to marry a young girl whom he was denied on religious grounds.¹⁵⁸ At this last political stage, Marx sacrifices scientific precision for ideological objectives. Shari'ati, however, is concerned mainly with Marx the sociologist.

Shari'ati's stipulation of three kinds of Marxism, based on a presumed division in Marx's life as a philosopher, a social scientist, and a political activist, was a convenient mechanism through which he sought to legitimize his attraction to Marx and the "scientific" validity of his own ideas. The way he decoded Marx into these three characters, each had a bearing on the other. In other words, Shari'ati wished to accept and accredit Marx's sociological observations, especially his notion of class struggle, without appearing to share the philosophical foundation of Marx's sociology or to follow the political mandate of a Communist party (*à la* Tudeh Party). This would facilitate his unequivocal adoption of the Marxist terminology and agenda while giving them an aura of Shi'ism. To put it more accurately, Shari'ati was forced to propagate the compromising proposition that one

could be a devout Shi'i Marxist. Thus Shari'ati's criticism of the Tudeh Party was precisely on Marxist terms. The Tudeh Party, he charged, had introduced "medieval Marxism" in a society characterized chiefly by the "Asiatic mode of production," a society where such specifically European events as the Renaissance, the Reformation, or the Industrial Revolution had not taken place. The Tudeh Party was to blame for such miscalculations and for the fact that they had failed to translate even the all-too-essential "Das Kapital" into Persian.

Shari'ati and Marxism

The notion that Shari'ati had a love-hate relationship with Marxism¹⁵⁹ is based on a misreading of his highly superfluous rhetoric. A close reading of Shari'ati's writings leaves no doubt that his chief frame of reference, his conceptions of history, society, class, state apparatus, economy, culture, his program of political action, his strategies of revolutionary propaganda are all in the classical Marxist tradition. The apparent paradox is just in the matter of translating ideals into strategies. He would superimpose upon this underlying Marxist premise, resisting how they may, the Qur'anic and other canonical precepts. Attempting a close approximation of his Marxist premise with his Islamic (Shi'i) language, Shari'ati's success has to be measured in terms of a growing audience, during and after his active career, that was principally and operatively attracted to this ideological hybrid. There is, to be sure, nothing incongruent about the ingenious, though perhaps inevitable, connection that Shari'ati concocted between Marxism and Islam. As an ideologue, he reached for any viable frame of reference at his disposal that was instrumental in mobilizing his growing constituency. But we would lose the entire thrust of Shari'ati's ideological language, the rhyme and reason of his rhetoric, should we assume false ambiguities in his ideological proximity to Marxism. Nor should we take his rhetoric of a "return-to-our-origin" at face value and fail to see its great logistic significance for his particular brand of radical "Islamic Ideology." If Shari'ati appealed to the cause of a return to a mythological national (Shi'i) origin and to his version of the indigenous culture, it was more than a sentimental longing for a presumed golden age. He knew better. He shrewdly realized, however, as he said in so many words, the source of the failure in secular ideologies to be in their highhanded and alien language. Language is everything, Shari'ati realized, in the forging of a convincing and mobilizing political culture. The indigenous Persian-Shi'i language, properly charged with strategically crucial ideological notions, would be immensely powerful in potentially mobilizing a sizeable constituency, nostalgic about a past it may or may not have, anxious about a future it could or could not have. Otherwise, Shari'ati's innate resentment towards the historically received

and institutionalized Shi'i culture is patently evident in his deep antagonism towards its chief custodians, the ulama'. By discrediting and by-passing them, and with them the hermeneutic circles of Islamic learning they personify and legitimate, and by appealing directly to his own version of the Iranian Shi'i past, and to its canonical sources, Shari'ati combined the two most basic elements of mass appeal: a committed radical ideology and a popular charisma of the most sentimental sort.

Immediately related to Shari'ati's relationship to Marxism is the question of his "progressive" reading of the Shi'i tradition. There is a vast and documentable difference between the epistemological and hermeneutic apparatus of the Shi'i juridical discourse, of which Shari'ati did not demonstrate the faintest idea, and the ideological and political agenda he explicitly pursued. He was without a doubt the master of his created ideological and rhetorical language. The comparison between Shari'ati and the Shi'i clerical order as one being "progressive" and the other "conservative"¹⁶⁰ fails to see this fundamental difference, treating them, as it were, on common grounds. It is not just at the level of theological and juridical erudition that it would be ludicrous to elevate Shari'ati to the status of, say, Ayatollahs Borujerdi, Kho'i, or Khomeini. It is precisely this antischolastic trait in Shari'ati's ideas that, under the guise of anticlericalism, appeals to his secular admirers. That for "many young members of the intelligentsia," as it has been rightly suggested, the variety of Shi'i scholastic discourses sounds like "mumbo-jumbo over esoteric issues"¹⁶¹ is a clear indication of that vast realm of misconception and ignorance that separates the secular intellectuals and the Shi'i clerics from each other. By sharing Shari'ati's latent resentment against scholastic learning, the secular intellectuals equally shared his blatant anticlericalism. The most prominent feature of this group of secular intellectuals has been an artificial acquaintance with a variety of imported ideological loyalties and, simultaneously, a deep, rather resentful, apathy for the received intellectual disciplines, particularly the juridical which was both difficult to access and exclusively the prerogative of the clerics. There are a number of intellectual discourses with which Shi'i scholasticism operates, depending on the theological, philosophical, mystical, or juridical languages historically constructed. It is precisely the last language, the juridical, that the secular intellectuals particularly resent. The "mumbo-jumbo" qualification is a telling indication of the deep apathy that both Shari'ati and his secular admirers share towards a major branch of Shi'i learning, in fact, its very condito sine qua non. The diverse causes of this allergic reaction to the juridical discourse and its institutional expression among the ulama' is too complicated—and tangential to our purpose here—to be analyzed fully. At least since the Constitutional Revolution—but certainly even earlier—the Shi'i juridical discourse and its institutional custodians, the ulama', have been on the defensive against the

invading secular discourse which is not only personified in secular intellectuals but, more important, transplanted, like a Trojan horse, into the very heart of the modern political reconstruction of the Shi'i self-consciousness.

That reconstruction of the old faith had to have all the semiotic signals of the most compelling (secular) revolutionary ideology: Marxism. A key word that Shari'ati borrowed from the Marxist literature and became a prominent feature of his emerging revolutionary discourse, giving it a certain air of factuality, was the epithet "scientific." In response to those political activists who maintained that too much has been said but nothing done and that it was time to act, Shari'ati once responded that they have talked, but not "scientifically." Before assuming any course of action, it was necessary to talk further, but this time "scientifically." Shari'ati's insistence on the term "scientific" was directed simultaneously at two distinct audiences: the Shi'i ulama' and the secular intellectuals. Yet for each group, as Shari'ati knew very well, the word "scientific" (*ilmi*) had two vastly different meanings. The Shi'i ulama', their very title meaning men of "science," understood this word in the context of the Islamic (juridical) epistemology that divided knowledge into the "intellectual sciences" (*al-ulum al-aqli*) and the "transmitted sciences" (*al-ulum al-naqli*). The secular intellectuals understood the term to mean that specific and economic-based feature of Marxist socialism that distinguished it from idealist or "utopian" socialism. Shari'ati told the clerics that what they called "scientific" was not "scientific" any more, as judged by his version of French sociology. At the same time, he told the secular intellectuals that it was possible to talk "scientific socialism" but with a local (Shi'i-Persian) language. From the clerics he wished to appropriate the authority of their juridical voice. To the secular intellectual he wished to address the voice thus appropriated but with a language they would deem contemporary and thus authoritative. Shari'ati's success was with two groups: (1) the seminarian—or else simply religious-minded—students who wished to retain their faith and yet simultaneously attend their revolutionary political agenda effectively and (2) the university students who wished to see their essentially Marxist ideals addressed but had failed to concoct an indigenously sensitive language that would appeal to a politically significant number of constituencies. Shari'ati's failure was with two groups: (1) those seminarian students who saw through the veil of his blatant Islamic language a hammer and sickle they did not particularly like to pick or swing and (2) those university students who were irresistibly irreligious in what they took to be their quintessential disposition and who would break out in rashes at the slightest suggestion of a Qur'anic verse, Marxistically sugar-coated or not.

For both groups of his constituency, Shari'ati offered an unabashedly Marxist view of history that is evident in a short treatise he wrote in which he tried to argue that the insights Marx had provided in the revolutionary

destiny of the proletariat are used equally by the capitalists and other ruling elites to thwart the course of history.¹⁶² Throughout this discussion he presents the essential lines of a Marxist view of social structure and history without the slightest attempt to disguise them in Islamic garb. He insists that capitalists lure "sociologists, philosophers, scientists, even great Marxologists and socialists"¹⁶³ to inform them of the ensuing danger that the proletariat poses for them. In Shari'ati's judgment, the reason the socialist revolution has not happened in Western Europe is precisely this capitalist awareness of the dangers to which Marx had alerted them. Among the chief schemes that capitalists have designed to oppose the formation of a revolutionary proletariat is to prevent the concentration of workers and their residential quarters in one area. Shari'ati further insists that more than absolute poverty, relative deprivation ultimately accounts for the proletariat's assumption of a revolutionary role. He believes that conspicuous consumption is an essentially "Western" phenomenon and that Islam has always suppressed extravagant expenditure or manifestation of wealth.

But in modern capitalism, with its establishment learned from Marx, the crucial factor of relative deprivation has been eliminated by intentionally increasing the level of the workers' conspicuous consumption. By going to the seashore, the movies, the operas, etc., workers are given the chance to assume the appearance of having actually shared in experiences formerly denied them.¹⁶⁴ On a larger international scale, Shari'ati believes that the reason rich countries provide loans to poor countries is to prevent dangerous outcomes of an intolerable level of poverty and also to perpetuate the world market for their consumer products.¹⁶⁵ The result of such precautionary measures is that the apparent differences in public consumption are eliminated so that actual differences in economic production and in class interest are preserved.¹⁶⁶

Throughout this analysis, Shari'ati uses standard Marxist terminologies to analyze the condition of modern capitalist societies. In this and many other circumstances he adopts and presumes valid the Marxist interpretation of social structure and historical progress.

Marxism Islamicized

But Shari'ati's preoccupation with Marxism went much deeper than a mere adaptation of its language. Islamization of Marxism—or Marxification of Islam—was high on his agenda. In two private conversations and in an unpublished manuscript, Shari'ati went into the fullest extent of his Islamization of Marxism. The texts of these three crucial documents were published posthumously.¹⁶⁷

In Shari'ati's reading, Islam has been historically appropriated by Muslim petit-bourgeoisie, and thus the ascetic revolutionary spirit congenial to

the cause of the downtrodden has been sacrificed.¹⁶⁸ Revolutionary asceticism is not something modern Muslims have learned from Marxists. "It is the Marxists who have just learnt it from Islam."¹⁶⁹ In this particular regard, in fact, Islam was somewhat non-Marxist because the former emphasizes the significance of the individual in history, while the latter denies it.¹⁷⁰ The Islamic position is that unless people do not change in themselves, they will not change their social history.¹⁷¹ That modern Muslims had forgotten about their own revolutionary past and potentials and were attracted to similar alien concepts was the deepest manifestation of their self-alienation and its concurrent "Westoxication."¹⁷² In the true sense of the term, "asceticism" means "puritanisme revolutionnaire."¹⁷³

Islamization of Marxism is a quintessentially semantic and interpretative enterprise. Shari'ati confided to this group of his close followers that all the negative attributes of "bourgeoisie" are best captured in the Persian "worldliness" (*zendegi-ye donyavi*). But the problem was that the term "worldliness" had been diluted by a history of misuse.¹⁷⁴ As soon as Shari'ati would talk of "denouncing worldliness," his young audience would think him "a molla."¹⁷⁵ Thus, "I do not talk about religion. Because I am a sociologist, and I talk as a sociologist. For example, what is the spirit of bourgeoisie? [or] what is a bourgeois life?"¹⁷⁶ This, however, is only a strategic maneuver. Because

when I presented bourgeoisie as a dirty, stinking, money-grabbing . . . class, and when I made fighting against this bourgeoisie a self-conscious revolutionary stand, with humanist [proportions] . . . they will listen to me. This [mode of] discourse will influence many people.¹⁷⁷

Once this objective is attained, Shari'ati plans to substitute the "struggle against bourgeoisie" with "defiance of worldliness" (*e'raz-e az donya*), which is an Islamically more accurate and even more universal term.¹⁷⁸ At whatever stage of the dialectical progression of history we are, the feudal or the capitalist mode of production, the term "defiance of worldliness" is applicable to that group of revolutionary ascetics who revolt against the oppressive powers that be.¹⁷⁹

If from the very beginning I were to say "defiance of worldliness," they cannot understand that I wish to say something new. They would think I am talking like those "denounce-the-world" mollas!¹⁸⁰

It is the function of the revolutionary ascetics, thus defined, to refuse a moment of salvation for those who otherwise spend a lifetime accumulating wealth. He once confronted such a person who had come to listen to him in Mecca: "I am not an akhond who takes some money from you and then constantly pampers you, delivering you like an innocent baby to God, the messenger and the Imam[s]."¹⁸¹

A Marxist glance at the Islamic history would reveal the quintessential problem, as Shari'ati saw it:

Do you know what is the source of misery for Islam? It is the formation of, and the dependency of the religion on, this [petit-bourgeoisie] class, establishing [, as they have,] a connection between the seminary and the bazaar. Should Islam be able one day to get rid of this dirty connection, it will, for ever, assume the leadership of humanity; and should this relation continue, Islam has been lost forever. The Islam which is growing nowadays and which has adherents is the Islam with connection between Hajis [he means the merchants who have been to Mecca] and the Mollas.¹⁸² And these two have a [cozy set of] reciprocal relationships with each other. This [the Molla] takes care of the other's [the Haji's] religion, and that [the Haji] takes care of the other's [the Molla's] worldliness. . . . Then in [the process of] such a reciprocal relationship they make a religion for people which is of no use to them.¹⁸³

Shari'ati's visceral contempt for the bourgeoisie leads him directly to a critical rejection of the entire corpus of Shi'i jurisprudence because of its primary justification of the petit-bourgeoisie. "Look at the Islamic economics! It is the economics of the petit-bourgeoisie!"¹⁸⁴ or even more emphatically, "look at our jurisprudence, it is the jurisprudence of the petit-bourgeoisie."¹⁸⁵

We have to save Islam from this connection [between the merchants and the clerics]. In my opinion, this is the objective. Except for this commitment, with whatever we keep busying ourselves—good or evil, true or false—we have abandoned our responsibility and our mission.¹⁸⁶

In the same vein, Shari'ati sharply criticized the Islamic utopian moralism that first advocates and encourages the accumulation of wealth and then admonishes the rich to give handouts to the poor. "The Islamic economic system should be such that he [the capitalist] is not permitted to accumulate wealth."¹⁸⁷ What has given rise to this duplicitous state of affairs is that "they admonish the capitalist on the pulpit, but issue juridical injunctions in his favor."¹⁸⁸ It is this outmoded advocacy of the rich that Shari'ati condemns in Islamic law. Addressing a typical jurist, he exclaimed,

the idiot still does not relent to forbid slavery! A juridical treatise published in 1970 states: "While in a sacred state during *mas'a*¹⁸⁹ you can buy a slavegirl. That is the degree of his stupidity! During the *Sa'i* the materialist and atheist Jalal Al-e Ahmad says: "I am going mad. I want to bang my head into the wall to explode." And under the same circumstances, Haji Aqa¹⁹⁰ has seen a beautiful slavegirl, he has been aroused, and he wants to buy her. He asks the Molla,¹⁹¹ "Can I buy her now?" And he says, "yes you can buy her, and yet you cannot copulate with her while you are in the sacred state."¹⁹² You have to have sex after the *Sa'i*." The date of publication for this treatise is 1970. This is our jurisprudence. All the capitalist laws of the United States are more advanced than the laws of our jurisprudence.¹⁹³

The economic system Shari'ati saw hidden and yet betrayed in Islam prevented the atrocities that result from the massive accumulation of wealth.¹⁹⁴ Such "infrastructural problems" ought to be addressed. For the economic restructuring of Islam, to prevent boundless accumulation of capital in a few hands, the Islamic society had to adopt aggressive and progressive programs. Collective asceticism was the worst enemy of such programs. Societies ought to be materialistic and productive; individuals mystic and ascetic.¹⁹⁵ If Islam recognizes this, its original message, it will once again raise "the flag of permanent historical revolution."¹⁹⁶ This revolution is founded on a visceral contempt of capitalism and its bourgeois agency:

In our eyes, bourgeoisie is loathesome. It will not just be eliminated. It must be eliminated. This [capitalist system] is to be condemned not just because it is incompatible with the "collective production" in modern industrial systems, but more because it is antihuman. It corrupts the human nature. It transforms all "values" to "interests." It changes the nature to "money," and man, who is the representative of God on earth, . . . to a bloody wolf.¹⁹⁷

To succeed this capitalist state is the socialist, "as we understand it."¹⁹⁸ This is not merely preferable because "after capitalism, it is inevitable."¹⁹⁹ Socialism is preferable because it emancipates man from the economic and spiritual prison of capitalism and permits him to realize his divine origin.²⁰⁰ But Shari'ati insists that he is not to be taken for a bona fide full-fledged Marxist:

It is clear in what sense we are not Marxists, and in what sense we are socialists. As a universal and scientific principal, Marx makes economics the infrastructure of man; but we [hold] precisely the opposite [view]. That is why we are the enemy of capitalism and hate bourgeoisie. Our greatest hope in socialism is that in it man, his faith, ideas, and ethical values are not superstructural, are not the manufactured and produced goods of economic infrastructure. They are their own cause. Modes of production do not produce them. They are made between the two hands of "love" and "consciousness." Man chooses, creates, and sustains himself.²⁰¹

Shari'ati's socialism went beyond a mere economic preference of collective ownership of the means of production. "It is a philosophy of life," he liked to call it, quintessentially different from capitalism.²⁰² Socialism for Shari'ati, as light in Manichaen cosmological dualism, was the course, cause, and end of salvation, delivering man from the dark destiny of capitalism. For this socialism to come about, a whole new set of conceptual categories must be injected into the facile old terminologies. "Monotheism," here, is a worldview, "more scientific than materialism."²⁰³ "Faith" is the cause of human progress.²⁰⁴ The story of "Adam" is the story of what is true about man²⁰⁵ and what is essential in his dialectical dualism.²⁰⁶ Monotheism and polytheism are the expressions of class struggle in human

history.²⁰⁷ *Imamat* and *wilayat* are not metaphysical and mystical beliefs and hallucinations, they are elements of revolutionary leadership in Islam.²⁰⁸ *Shahadat* is the responsibility of keeping the flame of struggle alive in difficult times.²⁰⁹ *Entezar* is the source of continuity of a revolutionary movement in history.²¹⁰ The end result of this, the socialist utopia to be achieved, is *jame'eh-ye bi-tabaqeh-ye towhidi* ("the classless, monotheistic society").²¹¹ For this to be achieved, two preliminary ideological preparations are necessary: (1) a radical criticism of Islam as it has been unfolded historically, particularly in its dependency on the unhealthy relationship between the clergy and the merchant class, and (2) an equally radical updating of the most quintessential truth of Islam with the most recent events in human history. For Shari'ati this "quintessential truth" is in the mission of Islam to deliver man from worldly miseries of greed and domination, and the subsequent realization of a classless, tension-free, and perfectly harmonious theocentricism in history.

Bazgasht: A Return to Self

To realize that history, the nostalgic remembrance of a revolutionary spirit casting a long shadow on the "Islamic" past, Shari'ati's repoliticized man ought to be conscious of his particular location in the universe he calls home. In a series of lectures called *Bazgasht (Return)*,²¹² Shari'ati argued forcefully for the necessity of a rediscovery of the national psyche before any revolutionary course of action could be taken. The underlying assumption in the necessity of this "self"-realization is an ontological bifurcation between Iran (or Islam) and "The West." These two constitute separate and quintessentially hostile polarities. In order to achieve their "true" Iranian identity, Shari'ati's generation had to combat "The Western" scheme of things. In this battle, it would be ludicrous to attack "The West" with its own ideologies of nationalism or Marxism. Only with an inborn ideology, an ideology rooted in its own political culture, can Iran hope to fight "The West" and, in the process, gain its respect. "The Islamic Ideology" was thus the only possible banner of collective political consciousness under which Iranians could reach for their revolutionary ideals. Should Islam in Iran thus achieve its penultimate victory over "The West," the victory would be not only material but ideological, not only historical but metaphysical, not only sociological but theological, not only normative but moral.

Shari'ati: A Matter of Conviction

The morality of that utopian victory demanded a prophetic vision. Shari'ati was the last figure of prophetic vision that Iran produced in its penultimate

moment of entering the age of pervasive doubt and meticulous uncertainty. He was convinced. He was convinced, like no one else in his historical vicinity, that he had, in fact and in the fullest extent possible, seen the light. He read, wrote, lectured, and revised his ideas with furious fantasy, such forceful determination, such unparalleled conviction and drive, that he torpedoed his audience into believing his faith and sharing his vision. His schemes were universal, his ideals appealing, his factual mistakes sincere, irrelevant, and almost trivial in the face of that romantic revolution (paving the way for that innocent City of God) he so sincerely and single-mindedly wished for. In this, more than in anything else and more than anyone else, he paved the way for Khomeini's arrival. He and Khomeini were worlds apart: Shari'ati the young composer of freshly dreamt melodies of revolt, Khomeini the old master of unflinching moral austerity in matters public and private. But in that vast and blossoming field of public imagination where logic rises obediently to meet the myth, they coincided in orchestrating a massive ceremony of revolt: Shari'ati prophesying a universal revolt of the glorified masses against the tyranny of ideological multiplicity and Khomeini fulfilling, almost unknowingly, that prophecy.

A New Kind of Vision

"Whatever the explanation," is said of Jonathan Edwards's theological disposition, "the fact is that Edwards's own conversion experience . . . involved a genuinely new kind of vision of God's glory in every aspect of the natural world."²¹³ Substitute "politics" for "nature" and Shari'ati's enduring disposition would be identical to Edwards's. "A genuinely new kind of vision of God's glory" was Shari'ati's moving spirit. That vision was focused on the highest and most compelling God-term of Shari'ati's generation: "The People." Converting the historically received elements of his ancestral piety into the most demanding dictums of public discontent, Shari'ati became the most popular visionary of his age, the most vigorous proselytizer of revolutionary zeal. A committed revolutionary ideologue in the prime of his life, Shari'ati drew from experiences he could only accumulate in his tormented drive for a future that may or may not be, founded on a past that might or might not have been. In that drive he saw "God's glory" in every momentous vision where "The People" met his revolutionary demands. Glory—from God's to "The People's"—transfixed Shari'ati into a permanent niche in his followers' collective imagination. That imagination, supplementing other recollections, was the guiding force of the Revolution Shari'ati all but launched, all but witnessed. But "the new kind of vision" he had was a generation of revolutionaries to share, the particulars of which to institutionalize, the boundaries of which to enlarge, the

dreams of which to fulfill, the anxieties of which to endure. Beyond Shari'ati's inborn and acquired limitations, beyond the inherent fetters of "the Islamic Ideology," Shari'ati's followers, acknowledged or de facto, live to test the uncertain future of his self-made illusion, terms of his contagious enchantment.