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Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, ed., *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, 340 pp., \$29.99 US (pbk), ISBN 9781107670624.

In the last sentence of Arshin Adib-Moghaddam's edited volume on Ayatollah Khomeini, Babak Rahimi states, "the specter of Khomeini and his contentious memory will haunt Iran for generations to come" (306). In light of the current struggles between Western nations, especially the United States and its European allies, and political Islam, this phrase is a serious understatement, for the "specter of Khomeini" lingers heavily over the West as well, especially the United States. Since the overthrow of the Shah and his Peacock Throne, the US has been engaged in a continuous battle with a reawakened Islamic community that sees its future not with Western forms of secularism, but with a renewal of Islamic values, principles, and laws, which do not fundamentally preclude all aspects of "Western" modernity. Although those virtues are articulated and practiced in various ways within the *ummah* (Muslim community), the longing for a just society rooted within the Qur'an and Sunnah (or *bayt al-Nabi*) have grown considerably in the last half of the twentieth century among many segments of Muslim society. Although he may have shared a similar longing, placing Imam Khomeini in the same category with groups such as ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) and al-Qaeda would be an extreme distortion of his views and would severely distort our picture of who and what he was. All forms of political Islam are not identical and the nuances of each of them should be taken into account in any analysis. Nevertheless, it was Khomeini and his unique politicization of Islam that demonstrated to the world—or reminded the world—that Islamic governance was a viable alternative to dominant Western models of governance (or the political, economic, and cultural domination of the West). In other words, the Islamic revolution in Iran, led by an enigmatic and charismatic cleric who was able to re-saturate his religion with the revolutionary spirit he believed it once embodied, proved to the world that Islam as a political force was not subject to the same decay of religion that was happening in the West, but Islam, especially revolutionary Islam, was still capable of nation building. Unlike in the now secularized Christendom, where religious law has been replaced by autonomous democratic deliberations, many Muslims still believe that Islam is relevant to governance. Indeed, in Khomeini's mind, a return of the Iranian nation—and the *ummah* in general—to a revitalized Islam (*tajdid*) was the key to its independence from Western imperialism, cultural domination, and economic exploitation. It was a future-oriented remembrance of the "true Islam" of Muhammad, 'Ali, and Husayn

that guided Imam Khomeini's struggle for an Islamic Republic, and the ripple effects of that historical moment have carried the defiant spirit of Khomeini through the continual struggle against neo-imperialism and domestic tyranny in multiple areas of the Muslim world, especially among the Shi'a.¹ While many within the Sunni community recalcitrantly deny Khomeini's influence in their political-theology, the fact that after the 1979 revolution in Iran both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims began to rediscover the revolutionary potentials long forgotten within the *sira* (biography) of Muhammad, testifies to his enduring tenure within modern Islamic thought. Whether explicitly recognized or tacitly felt, the defiant spirit of Khomeini's form of political-theology "haunts" both the Muslim world and the West.

In a 1978 interview with Hamid Algar, Khomeini explained that Shi'a Islam had always "preached resistance against...oppressive governments," while, he claimed, the Sunnis "regard...rebellion against oppressive governments as incompatible with Islam," but that Azhari influenced Sunni quietism was also coming to an end.² From this perspective, we can see the Arab Spring of 2011-2012, which occurred predominately within Sunni populated countries, as being the fulfillment of Khomeini's prediction that even Sunnis would follow the lead of the revolutionary Shi'a and overthrow their unjust tyrants.³ It may have taken longer than Khomeini expected, but the push to liberate the Muslim world from its colonial legacy as well as its submissiveness to the growing hegemony of Western culture, economics, and politics, has arrived. Only time will tell if the Sunni revolutionaries, if one so chooses to anoint them with that title, are able to construct a society that is both modern and Islamic in the vein of the Islamic Republic of Iran, or will those nations that so violently passed through the Arab Spring return to a situation much the same as before the Arab Spring.

Being that the memory and spirit of Khomeini continues to animate various forms of Islamic resistance to both western hegemony and domestic tyranny, it is important to gain a better understanding of his revitalization of revolutionary Islamic potentials that made his toppling of the Shah possible. Towards this goal, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam has edited a new volume dedicated to a critical study of Khomeini in various facets of his thought, his biography, his mysticism, his views on gender, his politics, and his political-theology. Fourteen scholars contributed to this work, each bringing a penetrating analysis to their subject. Adib-Moghaddam begins the work with an opening essay that sets the tone for the discussion about Khomeini as a "clerical revolutionary," in which we get a clearer understanding of what form of a revolution a "conservative" cleric can bring into history. Unlike so many other revolutionaries that came before him, such as Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh, who are easily classified by their secular leftwing philosophies, Imam Khomeini's form of revolutionary thought and praxis is without precedent in the Islamic world and is not easy to categorize within the given geography of political/religious categories. The debate among historians and scholars as to whether he was a progressive, liberal, conservative, leftwing, right-wing, etc., is confused by

¹ Khomeini believed "true Islam" only lasted for a very short period before it was corrupted. See: Ayatollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, ed. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 332.

² *Ibid.*, 326-327.

³ Just as in Iran during the uprising against the Shah, many prominent Sunni scholars rejected the concept of revolution as being incompatible with their understanding of governance and authority. For them, the revolutionary period of Islam was within the first generations of Muslims. Rooted in a Hobbesian-like analysis, that society can easily descend into a war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) which is destructive to Islam and the Muslim community, these Sunni scholars believed it was better to obey and have patience for bad rulers than to engage in revolutionary activities.

the fact that these terms are, firstly, amorphous, and, secondly, do not fit easily within the Islamic, Shi'a, and clerical contexts. On some social issues, as Babak Rahimi points out in his essay, Khomeini seems to be socially liberal compared to fellow clerics, while on other issues he maintained the traditional conservative religious stance of the Shi'a *ulema* (296). From the perspective of Marxist revolutionary theory, Khomeini's attachment to traditional forms of religion, especially clerical and scriptural authority, remains hopelessly conservative. For them, it betrays the reality of religion within a modern society, i.e. that it is *ideology*, or false consciousness that legitimates the position of power and influence held by the clerical establishment.⁴ Religion, in that sense, is a force for the reproduction of the status quo, in which the masses are held in ideological chains. The fear that the Iranian revolution would devolve into a clerical tyranny—i.e., that it would become an “Islamic” revolution—has come to pass with the establishment of *velayat-i faqih* (rule of the jurist). Yet, Khomeini's tacit embrace of Islamized leftwing thought, especially that of the revolutionary sociologist Ali Shariati and his entrance into the political domain in defiance of the quietist establishment of the clerics, was extremely progressive and revolutionary.⁵ Many scholars and activists of the political left found them in solidarity with the Iranian people's struggle for emancipation from the American installed Shah despite the fact that at the head of that struggle was a cleric.⁶ From this perspective, Imam Khomeini was an important part of the global struggle for Third World independence from First World domination. This struggle had begun in the Islamic world most forcefully in 1954-1962 with the Algerian war for independence, which led to the eventual collapse of French rule in their North African colonial territories. For much of the secular left, religion could only be tolerated if it was bent towards the emancipation of an oppressed people. On the other hand, Khomeini's breaking the long established quietist tradition of the Shi'a *ulema* was met with criticism from conservative voices, including Ayatollah Abul-Qassem al-Kho'i, who thought that it unnecessarily risked the social status and position of influence that the clerics had enjoyed for generations. In their opinion, Khomeini was influenced too much by those leftwing radicals that imported revolutionary ideas from the West to Iran. For them, he illegitimately appropriated the cult of praxis—in opposition to the quietist tradition—that had come to characterize leftwing politics.

The different political, economic, and cultural trajectories taken by Khomeini during his revolutionary period as well as after the establishment of the Islamic Republic and *velayat-i faqih* (rule of the jurist), continues to this day to be contested by various factions all wanting to legitimate their claims via this thought and praxis. As such, both conservative and reformist in Iran today trace their philosophical and theological lineage back to the founder of the Republic. Reformists, like Seyyed Mir-Hussein Mousavi, as well as conservatives like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who struggled with each other for the Presidency of Iran in 2009,

⁴ Here I use the critical/Marxist notion of the word “ideology,” which is a systematic camouflage of class interests. Throughout the book the contributing scholars use the word in its non-critical sense; “ideology” as a sum of political, economic, philosophical ideas. The reader should bear this in mind when reading the chapters as the confusion between these two definitions could potentially distort the meaning of the text. Unfortunately Hamid Algar, one of the most important scholars of the Iranian revolution, who was also familiar with the dual use of this word, also used it without making this important clarification in his well known essay “Islam as Ideology: The Thought of Ali Shariati,” in *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran: Four Lectures by Hamid Algar* (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publication International, 2001), 85-118.

⁵ Ali Rahnem, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 274-275.

⁶ See Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

both anchor their thought in what they each consider to be a more faithful expression of Khomeini's vision of an Islamic society ruled by a government infused with Islamic principles. For many commentators in the West, the heightened visibility of the 2009-2010 Green Movement in Iran demonstrated the desire for the youth of Iran to shed the cloak of Khomeini from their nation and adopt a more Western-friendly form of government. Unfortunately, this claim, rooted in a post-9/11 neo-conservative ideology, failed to grasp the real phenomenon that occurred; Khomeini and the Islamic Republic were not on trial, but those who interpreted and laid claim to his legacy were. Did the future of Iran and the Islamic form of governance continue to elevate the conservative side of Khomeini or should it turn itself towards his more moderate, progressive and compassionate side? In other words, which side of this multi-faceted and complex cleric, poet, philosopher, politician, theologian, and jurist should the Islamic state legitimately embrace? Whether it is the mystical side of Khomeini, as explained by Lloyd Ridgeon's chapter entitled, "Hidden Khomeini: Mysticism and Poetry," or Khomeini's struggle to formulate a vision for the modern Iranian woman that both remains faithful to his republican (populist) and Islamic worldview, as written by Azadeh Kian and Arzoo Osanloo, Adib-Moghaddam's volume illuminates the multi-faceted dimensionality of Khomeini, which has developed into Iran being one of the most modern progressive states in the Middle East as well as one that has yet to fulfill many emancipatory promises made by the revolution. As the book demonstrates, any attempt to formulate and create a functioning government, let alone a reworking of society, from the soil of Khomeini's thought and praxis, is bound to be littered with ethical, intellectual, and spiritual landmines. The geography that Khomeini left behind proves itself to be both fertile soil for both the nation's intellectual gardens as well as its invasive weeds.

The book itself consists of thirteen sizeable chapters which cover a wide variety of topics. From the discussions of Khomeini's relations with the Shah's government, to discussions of Khomeini's unique theories of Islamic governance, the political side of Khomeini is well represented. In this sense, the "Khomeini as revolutionary" occupies a large slice of the overall book, which to my mind is the most important portion of Khomeini's biography, as it demonstrates the development of his religio-political thought, long before the compromises that inevitably accompany the governing of a country saturated his way of thinking and his praxis. Although his post-1979 career is addressed in multiple chapters, especially in Ali Rahnema's "Ayatollah Khomeini's Rule of the Guardian Jurist: From Theory to Practice," the majority of the book centers around Khomeini as a revolutionary, not as a statesman. Additionally, there are some quality chapters pertaining to Khomeini's life outside of the explicitly political, such as Lloyd Ridgeon's chapter on mysticism and poetry and Azadeh Kian's examination of Khomeini and gender. Yet, if the reader is looking for information about Khomeini's private life, his thoughts on speculative theology, or his thoughts on the family, one may need to search elsewhere. Although it is usually the case, Khomeini is almost treated *solum quod est politicus* (solely as a political figure), almost as if he did not exist outside of the arena of politics. On the other hand, had he not broken the Shi'a clerical taboo about actively engaging in politics, he would most likely have only ended up as a footnote in history, being remembered as one among many brilliant Shi'a clerics who lived a long and uneventful life. Yet the reader is prepped for this political approach in Arshin Adib-Moghaddam's introduction, where he reminds the reader of the planetary—need I say "cosmic"—nature of revolutionaries; they are not here to reform the system, but to overthrow and rebuild society from the ground up, which is precisely what Khomeini attempted to do.

The book is not a difficult read for those with a background in Islamic studies and/or Iranian history. The mountains of details, especially concerning the many actors that participated within the Iranian revolution, would be too much for your novice student of Islam or Iran, therefore a hefty amount of background knowledge is necessary when embarking on a study of this volume. In that sense, I would have to state that it is only an “introduction” for those who have already been introduced to the subject matter elsewhere. An obvious attempt to overcome this problem, which isn’t unique to this work but is endemic to many “critical introductions,” can be observed in the front matter’s “timeline” of Khomeini’s life. While reading the text, I often found myself referring to this timeline to situate myself within the broader historical context so as to not get lost within the abundance of details.

The Hunchback in the Machine

One of the few weaknesses I felt hindered the volume was its overall lack of critique of Khomeini, despite the fact that the word “critical” is in the book’s title. Only a few scholars are willing to criticize Khomeini’s thoughts and actions, including his notion of *Hookoomat-e Islami*, and the *velayat-i faqih* and the most powerful of those critiques were concerning his, and the Islamic Republic’s, post-revolutionary policies on women (184-192). Most of the scholars seemed content to delve into a thick description of Khomeini’s life during and after the revolution, stopping at protocol sentences that do not penetrate into the realm of critical philosophy: was Khomeini right to do what he did; did he violate his own Islamic principles by engaging in certain actions; and did the post-1979 Islamic government fulfill the promises it made to its people or did the terror of the Iranian Thermidor—especially as the revolution retreated into a defensive posture during the Iran-Iraq War—set in abeyance its revolutionary goals? Khomeini, as one of the most powerful and influential men of the twentieth century, who led one of the most important revolutions of that same century, stands as a subject of critique, and history, now over thirty years past the revolution, serves as his inquisitor. As such, critical scholars must turn their skeptical attention towards the Islamic revolution and not be afraid to engage in a radical critique of his role in it, as Khomeini himself never failed to critique the Shah’s so-called “White Revolution.” However, as the book is meant to be an *introduction*, an evaluation of this sort may have been outside the purview of the project. Even without the criticism of Khomeini, the book stands as a major source for understanding the complex nature of the man and his work, his deficiencies and his greatness, his historical importance and the importance of his legacy.

Although Mojtaba Mahdavi briefly covered the subject in his chapter, “The Rise of Khomeinism: Problematizing the Politics of Resistance in Pre-Revolutionary Iran,” I found the minimal investigation of Ali Shariati’s influence in the revolution, and more importantly on Khomeini himself, also to be problematic. When so much of Shariati’s work prepared the way for Khomeini’s ultimate successful overthrow of the Shah, it seems that more scholarly resources should have been devoted to his thought. Of course, the book is about Khomeini, but Khomeini was deeply influenced by Shariati, even if it was nearly impossible for Khomeini to admit to such a thing within the social-political context and especially the confines of his clerical authority. I, and many others, for instance, have contended that Khomeini benefited greatly from Shariati’s saturation of leftist Third World liberation

theology, philosophy, and sociology into popular Shi'a thought.⁷ As Shariati injected leftist analysis into Shia Islam, and in doing so delivered the conceptual material necessary to reawaken the revolutionary potential within Shi'a Islam, Khomeini popularized that analysis in such a way that it became palatable to the Iranian masses, especially those who had no background in critical-liberational thought, nor where they accustomed to political pronouncements by clerics.⁸ As the book stands, this aspect of Khomeini's political biography is under-investigated but certainly not denied.

Shariati's and Khomeini's intertwining of Islam and leftist thought, albeit of the more philosophical trajectory as opposed to the "vulgar" Marxism of the Soviet Union, reminds this reviewer of a short thesis written in 1940 by the critical theorist Walter Benjamin entitled *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (*On the Concept of History*). In it, Benjamin sketches out a thesis about the necessity of religion to find its bride in historical materialism if it is to win the struggle against modern barbarity. Religion is incapable of rescuing itself from secular modernity but neither can historical materialism triumph over the catastrophe of capitalism and imperialism if it condemns religion to the dustbin of history. In an enigmatic and dialectical image invoking Wolfgang von Kempelen's 1769 invention the *Schachtürke* (chess Turk), he writes:

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called "historical materialism" is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.⁹

Given his historical context, the theology that Benjamin wrote of was limited to Judaism and Christianity, especially in their messianic articulation. Sadly, Islam was never a part of his philosophical lexicon. Nevertheless, the image is easily translatable in the matter of Shariati, Khomeini, and the leftist influence in the religiously-led revolution in Iran, as it expresses precisely the sociological, philosophical, and, most importantly, theological conflation that occurred within the revolutionary period prior to the overthrow of the Shah. Having studied sociology in France, where he was "radicalized" by the leftwing liberational thought of Franz Fanon, Che Guevara, Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Massignon, and other revolutionaries and intellectuals, he returned to Iran with a faith that was renewed and rejuvenated via the intellectual fervor of historical materialism.¹⁰ Shariati believed that Shi'a Islam had become stale and routinized, having abandoned its revolutionary potentials when it became the

⁷ Dustin J. Byrd, *Ayatollah Khomeini and the Anatomy of the Islamic Revolution in Iran: Towards a Theory of Prophetic Charisma* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 77-107. Also see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

⁸ Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 13-38.

⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 253.

¹⁰ While many Muslims today are radicalized towards "Islamism" in Europe, which often leads to their abandonment of all things Western, Shariati went in a similar but different trajectory. He was "radicalized" by secular leftwing Western thought, through which he would interpret Islam.

official religion of the state and society. He juxtaposed this “Safavid Shi’ism” or what he often described as “Black Shi’ism” with what he deemed to be the true Islam: Islam with its revolutionary potentials recovered, i.e., “Red Shi’ism.”¹¹ Shariati did not see this as an *innovation (bid’a)* in religion, but a recovery of Islam’s true nature—the same “true Islam” that Khomeini spoke of. It was not the religion of the powerful, the oppressive, or the status quo, but a religion that perpetually attempts to expand the geography of liberation, dignity, honor and revolutionary freedom. This Islam was not an Islam that chose sides with those who are the predators of history, but rather is on the side of those who find themselves in the ditch of history (*mostaz’afin*), just as ‘Ali and Husayn found themselves persecuted by the powerful Mu’awiyya and Yazid. For Shariati, social justice—especially issues of freedom (*azadi*) and equality (*barabari*)—was not just a matter of Marxist intellectual and activists, but was the concern of Islam from the beginning. As such, through his teaching and writings, Shariati attempted to recover the radical liberational qualities of early Islam, especially that of Muhammad, ‘Ali, and Husayn—all of whom fought against agents of social repression, degradation, and humiliation in their own times. In this sense, Shariati flips upon its head the analysis of Walter Benjamin: it is not historical materialism that “enlists the services of theology” in its struggle against modern barbarity, but rather theology that “enlists the services” of historical materialism to liberate the Iranian people from the barbarity of the US imposed Shah and his “White Revolution.” Marx’s dialectical materialism, in a way, becomes the active revolutionary agent within a Shi’a Islam that had previously lost its ability to resist the trappings of worldliness and had become content to simply “advise” the Kings. And as Mojtaba Mahdavi notes, Shariati’s radicalization of Shi’a Islam had a tremendous effect on laymen, whose turn towards “Red Shi’ism” detached their religiosity from that traditional clerical establishment, which wanted to remain safe within their quietist seminaries (59). This detachment from quietist orthodoxy served as the rift between the lay population and the clergy through which Khomeini introduced his revolutionary clerical Shi’ism.

Khomeini was not unaware of the influence Shariati and other leftist Iranian intellectuals had in Iranian society. Despite their connections with Western thought, and his frequent condemnation of Western meddling in Iran’s affairs, Khomeini himself studied and benefited from much of their analysis; so much so that much of the revolutionary leftist and anti-colonial vocabulary would appear within Khomeini’s speeches to the nation (228).¹² For example, the influence of Jalal Al-i Ahmad, who coined the phrase *garbzadegi* (“occidentosis” or “westoxification”), would become increasingly evident in Khomeini’s anti-colonial rhetoric, as he stressed the need for Muslims—especially Iranian Shi’a—to emancipate themselves from Western ways-of-being beyond the realm of politics.¹³ Echoing Fanon and the Third World left, the colonized mind, for Khomeini, had to be emancipated along with the colonized body.

Despite the penetrating critique Shariati made against the clerical class, which Khomeini held dear, he was nevertheless influenced by the thought that religion, especially the Abrahamic-monotheistic religions, began as movements against the status quo (illegitimate and oppressive authority) as Shariati stated in his *Religion vs. Religion*. What was once

¹¹ Ali Shari’ati, *Red Shi’ism*, trans. Habib Shirazi (Tehran: The Shari’ati Foundation, 1979), 11-12.

¹² In his seminal political biography of Ali Shariati, Ali Rahnama documents the attempts by many Shi’a clerics to ostracize Shariati’s work, even calling for a prohibition on reading his books. However, Khomeini would not join them. Although he couldn’t endorse all of his thought, according to Rahnama, he was “doing [Iran] a service” (Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, 275).

¹³ Jalal Al-i Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, trans. R. Campbell, ed. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984).

revolutionary had betrayed itself by its institutionalization and routinization.¹⁴ Juxtaposing “Safavid Islam” against true “Shi’a Islam,” Shariati emphasized that the true nature of Muhammad’s religion, stemming from the “height of its purity and...lucidity,” was emancipatory, and that much of the clergy had regretfully become instruments by which the status quo found its legitimation; just as the concept of pre-determination, which he believed was brought into history by the Umayyads, reconciles the individual to the injustices of nature and history, so too did the clergy reconcile the masses to the status quo by refusing to oppose illegitimate authority—and all government authority was illegitimate post-occultation of the Mahdi.¹⁵ Said differently, Shi’a Islam, by abandoning its oppositional nature, had succumbed to the same fate as Christianity; where once it was prophetic, Socratic, and revolutionary, it had over the course of time reconciled itself to the power of the state—illegitimate governance—and the world-as-it-is. In doing so, it lost its “image of a perfect justice,” which served as its utopian and therefore revolutionary core.¹⁶ In doing so it no longer remained the “record of wishes, desires, and accusations of countless generations,” but rather became the *ideological* camouflage of illegitimate rulers, the predators, and the “winners” of history.¹⁷ Sometimes begrudgingly, Khomeini understood the truth of Shariati’s critique and instead of rejecting it as an illegitimate attack on the clergy he attempted to resurrect the opposition-revolutionary and prophetic nature of Shi’a Islam. No longer would the Shi’a cleric follow the model of Hassan into political quietism, but would rather embrace the spirit of Husayn who resisted illegitimate authority of the tyrannical Umayyads. As such, Khomeini urged his followers to resist the “new Yazid” of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi Shah. In almost apocalyptic terms, the modern struggle against the Shah was an act of historical *tauba* (repentance) for the 10th of Muharram—the day in 680 CE when Husayn was slaughtered in Karbala, Iraq, by the forces of Yazid ibn Mu’awiyya, the second Caliph of the Umayyad dynasty. For Khomeini, the new Yazid must be removed before he martyrizes the whole of the Iranian nation.¹⁸

Constitutional and Islamic Values

From the perspective of a Habermasian critical theory, what was most important in the Iranian revolution was Khomeini’s transcendence of pre-political foundations as the basis for nationhood.¹⁹ In other words, Khomeini was able to set race, language, shared history, etc., behind *Islamic* values that would be considered constitutional in order to create what Ali Shariati redefined as the *ummah*, or the ideal society.²⁰ The Shah on the other hand, through his emphasis on *Persian* history and the pre-Islamic monarchical-authority, did not have access to the linguistic and semiotic resources that could unify the Iranian peoples, as the legacy of Persia failed to produce the required social-adhesive. The Islamic state would not be predicated on a pre-Islamic notion of Persia, nor would it be exclusive to Farsi speakers, or

¹⁴ Ali Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago: Kazi Press, 2003), 31-32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶ Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 129-131. The term “utopian” here means the *sum of all oughts*, not that which is delusional or illusional in terms of political goals.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁸ Byrd, *Ayatollah Khomeini*, 43-45.

¹⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 494-496.

²⁰ Algar, *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, 95.

even Shi'a Muslims, but would rather posit Islamic principles as constitutional values for which the populace would ascribe both via individual acculturation and social adaptation. This setting of constitutional ideals as the guiding foundation of all subsequent legislation, which opens those ideals up to democratic deliberation, is one of the most abiding factors of Khomeini's Islamic Republic of Iran. Although heteronomic compliance with certain laws and dictates that are derived from revelation and not legislative discourse are still identifiable in Iran today, the opportunity to subject such values, principles, as well as Khomeini's legacy to democratic deliberation demonstrates the potential for Muslims and modern forms of democracy to enter into some kind of mutual cooperation, mutual respect, and mutual learning. The symphony of Muslim voices that permeate Iran today have more opportunities to debate the meaning of their faith and politics than in many other predominately Sunni nations, and certainly more so than under the Shah. This being the case, the fear of Khomeini and what he represents to the dominant powers in the West, i.e., an alternative to Western hegemony and the viability of a nation that is both modern and Islamic, attests to the power of the man most responsible for bringing into existence that new form of Islamic reality. This collection of scholarly essays edited by Arshin Adib-Moghaddam is a positive step towards understanding the world Khomeini left behind, not so that we in the West can understand the "other" better in an attempt to undermine the will of the Iranian nation for our own geo-political advantage, but so that we may increase the opportunities for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence rooted in respectful recognition.

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